



THE MURDER OF OLOF PALMER

The new Conservative party leader, Olof Palmer, had of course heard and read innumerable stories and jokes about himself because of his name. At the Conservative Party Congress there were many who did not want him to be appointed party leader because of his obstinate refusal to even change his first name. Among other things, the young conservatives thought that the very name Olof Palmer would harm the party. Unfortunately, only a small number of politicians had the required competence and of them the Swedish-American businessman, Olof Palmer, was considered the best.

So it was Olof Palmer who gripped the rudder of Sweden's next largest political party. And as a result of the Conservative's and Liberal's combined election victory two years later, it became his lot to be Sweden's Prime Minister. There was no risk that he would move the party to the left. On the contrary, there were clear indications of a pronounced right turn, and he himself had said that it was his ambition to see the American political model come true on Swedish soil.

Olof Palmer already had many enemies before he became Sweden's new Prime Minister. In the environmental movement they regarded him as a warmonger. And in the years after he came to power his enemies continued to multiply in step with the worsening poverty. Militant left-wing extremists sometimes remarked, half in jest and half seriously that a Palmer murder would not be such a bad thing. Interest in the murder of the Social Democrat Olof Palme in 1986, had declined considerably. The

truth about the conspiracy remained a secret just as the authorities had wished. Schoolchildren were taught that Olof Palme "had apparently been murdered by a solitary madman".

According to many social critics the emphasis on this aspect indicated greatly increased state control over textbooks. However, like the majority of Swedes, these critics had no power at all. Now, with Olof Palmer as Prime Minister, the tragedy in Stockholm in 1986 aroused people's interest again. But the physical safety of the present Prime Minister caused greater concern. Readers of the leading daily newspaper were treated to articles under headlines as "Are we going to have a new Olof Palme murder?" and "Who will be Olof Palmer's assassin?" And as a direct consequence of these articles, the Prime Minister received an increasing number of murder threats.

The Swedish people evidently liked superstition. Magicians and mystics of all kinds said there could be a curse on the letter combination "olofpalme" which meant that everybody with this combination ran a great risk of being murdered. Genealogists had found a remarkable and gruesome fact: Olof Palme had a close relative with the same name and he was also shot dead. This happened in Finland in 1918 during the social unrest. Of course, Olof Palmer was not related to the legendary Palmes but if there was a curse on the letter combination itself then he didn't live in safety. Furthermore, a prime minister's job is rather dangerous anyway. Olof Palme or Olof Palmer. How much does the small letter "r" mean for the safety of a statesman threatened with murder?

People's thoughts about a coming assassination began to seem like mass hysteria and mass psychosis. There was gossip about the murder of Palmer everywhere, despite the fact that he was alive and in the best of health. The exaggerations in the press had long since passed the permitted limits, with the result that there had been a number of legal actions. But nothing seemed to have any effect on the mass hysteria, and when the press chose to write about other things their sales crashed. People just wanted to read about the death of Olof Palmer. They wanted him to die!

Olof Palmer was no chicken-hearted person and he took the storm about his impending death with good humour. The Conservative's public opinion polls beat all previous records. It was as if people were afraid he would be degraded to leader of the Opposition. At the same time, the hatred of Palmer by the Swedish left grew much stronger. In the streets of

Stockholm the social outcasts and the homeless had increased in number and a hundred Swedish soldiers had returned in black bags from the EU:s war in Algeria. Then came February 2036 and soon February 28 would dawn. Exactly fifty years after the murder of Olof Palme. On that morning he could enjoy reading several amusing suggestions in the press on how to stay alive during the night: "This evening keep away from the place where Olof Palme was shot, Mr. Palmer!" and "You are sure not going to the cinema this evening?" But if Palmer had heard all the gossip going on everywhere at this time, you can bet he would have been in mental agony. On this winter morning everybody was talking about the murder of Olof Palmer.

He himself had taken the day off so he could stay at home with his wife and seven year-old son. The villa, which was his residence, was now guarded by the largest police force ever seen in Sweden. Large numbers of police trudged to and fro on the nearby streets and in the afternoon something very un-Swedish happened: two tanks came on the scene. Police dogs barked and the police radio was busy. The area around the villa had of course been closed to the public. All the residents in the entire suburb had been evacuated as if an attack with a nuclear weapon was feared.

When Olof Palmer looked at the day's TV program he didn't laugh. During the whole evening and night one channel had arranged to transmit a vigil which in bad taste was entitled: "This evening, Olof Palmer, you are going to die!" and a number of well-known Swedes would take part.

"What the hell!" Exclaimed the Prime Minister.

"Is this a joke? I must talk to my lawyer. There must be laws, which protect private individuals against this kind of treatment."

No sooner had he said this than his young son came rushing in firing a toy pistol.

"Bang! Bang! Dad, you are dead!"

The noise caused a score of policemen to rush into the villa and those who came to the Prime Minister first got a shock.

"No! No! We are too late."

"Damn it what a lot of bosh," hissed Olof Palmer.

"I am alive. I am not a bit dead!"

"Oh hell! Oh no! That this should happen, exactly fifty years after the murder of Olof Palme and we could not stop it," moaned one of the policemen.

Olof Palmer took a hard grip on the policeman's collar and shook him violently.

"Listen to me. Have you gone completely mad? I am alive and uninjured. Can't you see that?" He shouted.

"Olof Palmer is dead. He has been murdered," shouted a journalist.

"Damn you all. Get out of here! This is my home and you will leave me alone," roared the Prime Minister.

This outburst of anger had really tired him out and he dropped on to a sofa and panted. He was all right but he had to lie down. Several faces gazed searching at him.

"He is as dead as a doornail. There is no hope left. We are too late," said one of them.

"Can somebody ring the mortuary. His body has to be frozen. It may look bad if the Prime Minister began to decay."

"We can carry him into the garden I suppose?"

"That won't help. The temperature is too high."

"But I... I am not dead!" Gaspd Olof Palmer.

"Why don't you listen to me? Why do you pretend not to hear me? I don't like this foolishness."

The Prime Minister didn't really know what happened during the next few minutes. But he remembered he suddenly felt very tired. He remembered he had decided to sleep a little as all this fuss was no doubt only a nightmare. However, when he awoke he found he was locked in a cold storage box at low temperature. He started to kick and thump in the cramped space but nobody heard his desperate attempts to arouse attention. Or they heard, but pretended they did not and just stood there.

Two weeks later, statesmen from the whole world came to Stockholm. They gathered together at the funeral to take a last farewell of Olof Palmer.