

The Folly of Sweden's State Controlled Families

By Mrs. Siv Westerberg, lawyer

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Thank you very much for your invitation to come here and talk about the situation in Sweden. I am a founder-member of an organisation called 'The Nordic Committee for Human Rights', which consists of other lawyers like myself, university lecturers, doctors, teachers and many other professionals. We are all very worried by the situation in Sweden with regard to the family. We are doing our best to establish contacts with other countries where a similar trend, against the private family and in favour of the state-controlled family, seems to be developing. I want to tell you about it.

Sweden has, during the last decades, developed into a kind of socio-medical totalitarian state. A totalitarian state where families are deprived of the right to care for and educate their own children; and are deprived of the basic human right to both family life and private life.

The European history of the twentieth century has some horrible examples of how a democracy can turn into a totalitarian state. Mostly such a transformation is brought about by armed soldiers and policemen in uniform. Those soldiers and policemen use brutal physical violence against anyone who refuses to obey their orders. For every citizen in those states it is immediately obvious that those brutal servants of the state are their enemies. It is immediately obvious to the citizen that this is the end of freedom. From then on they know you are permitted just to say things or do things or even think things that the totalitarian state permits. Otherwise something very bad will happen to you.

But the development in Sweden towards a socio-medical totalitarian state wasn't like that. In fact the army and the police have very little power in Sweden. Instead, the government achieved their totalitarian power by using persons whom the ordinary citizen believes to be their friends. Where other European dictatorships once used policemen and armed soldiers to make the citizens obedient, the Swedish authorities use doctors, nurses, midwives, teachers, pre-school teachers and child-care assistants to do their dirty work for them.

The Swedish authorities chose to 'medicalize' a lot of different features of daily life and to describe various kinds of quite normal behaviour as 'pathological'. For instance, a fond and protective mother has been described as having an 'unhealthy, symbiotic relationship', with her child; it was enough to render her an unfit mother. Or take, for example, the fact that it is sometimes untidy in a house where a family where four small children are living. In Swedish court proceedings, that can be developed into a theory that the mother must have some psychiatric disease and that the children's health is jeopardized when the house is untidy; because an expert, a child-psychiatrist, says so.

And for the ordinary citizen such a method is almost more dangerous than using armed soldiers and police. If you were a Jew in the nineteen-thirties in Nazi-Germany, you knew very well that the Gestapo was your enemy. You knew that it was wise to avoid having anything to do with them. But in Sweden they use officials whom you, in the beginning, believe are your friends.

Because most people believe that the midwife in the maternity welfare clinic, the doctor you consult when you or your children fall ill, your children's teachers, the social officials that poor people meet when they have to ask for some economic support at the end of the month, - you believe that they are your friends, not your enemies. Initially these professional people are friendly; they seem to be really interested in you and your family's wellbeing.

They are so friendly and nice to you that you get confidence in them. So you confide in them concerning your family's life. You tell them that, as the mother of four small children, you are sometimes terribly tired and exhausted from all the jobs you have with the children. In that moment you can't even dream that a few years later you will get those words thrown back in your face in a court proceeding. A court where the Swedish authorities are going to deprive you of your right to care for your own children. Court proceeding where the Swedish authorities intend to take your children into forcible care and send them to a foster-home.

And often your words have been distorted. Now it is, " years ago Lisa Svensson told her doctor that she wasn't up to looking after her children". In a state that took the rule of law seriously, and followed court procedure, you would get the chance to cross-examination witnesses. The mother's lawyer would be given the chance to look seriously into the eyes of that doctor and ask him: " Did Mrs Svensson really utter those exact words to you? Before you answer my question, please, Doctor, remember that you are giving your evidence under oath". And than that doctor would very likely say: "Well, what she actually said was that she was very tired."

But in Sweden, cases concerning taking children into forcible public care aren't heard in the civil courts but in the administrative courts. And there you very often are not given the chance to cross-examine witnesses and experts. The proceedings in these administrative courts seem to me to be more or less a parody of impartial court proceedings. The proceedings are a mixture of oral and written evidence and 'hearsay' evidence is permitted. From the moment that I, as the lawyer of those unhappy parents who are going to lose their child to the Swedish State, enter the courtroom, I feel that not only the social authorities, but also the court, is against me. The judge and the officials from the social welfare centre are talking to each other in a very cordial manner. It is obvious that both feel that they are a part of the same very powerful authority system.

During the last twenty or thirty years Swedish families step by step have lost the basic human right to family life and private life. In thousands of families this has lead to thousands of parents losing their children. The Swedish State has taken their children into forcible care and placed the children in foster-homes; mostly very bad foster-homes too.

The biological parents are permitted to see their children for just a few hours, just a few times a year; even then, under close supervision by social workers and /or the foster-parents. If the children were very small when they were taken into forcible care, they will soon forget their parents. And children and parents will soon become strangers to each other.

The social workers and the foster-parents strengthen this situation. They regularly tell the foster-child what bad and dangerous people the child's biological parents are. If you tell a small child things like that over and over again the child will soon believe you.

Pretty soon the child will say that it doesn't want to see the parents anymore, because it thinks they are dangerous. And so the foster-parents and the social workers tell the biological parents that they are not permitted to see their child at all, because their child is afraid of them. To prove this, the social workers and the foster-parents take the child to a psychiatrist - who derives his or her main income from co-operation with the social authorities. It thus follows as night follows day, that the child psychiatrist will write a doctor's certificate asserting that the child's mental health will be jeopardized if the child is obliged to meet its biological parents.

All such theorising is pure nonsense. No scientifically acceptable method exists, whereby psychology or psychiatry can forecast what would happen to a child's feelings in these circumstances. It is a cruel lie. The question of how often a child should be allowed to see its parents after it has been taken into forcible care, is not a medical question at all. It has been 'medicalised' simply in order to make the decision seem reasonable and 'scientific'.

If there is a dispute between the biological parents on one side, and social workers and foster-parents on the other side concerning the access - and very often there is such a dispute - that dispute should be resolved by an impartial court - not by a child psychiatrist. There should be extremely strong reasons for deciding to prevent parents from seeing their own child less than once every week. And there should also be extremely strong reasons for supervising children and parents when they meet each other too. How is it possible to retain personal family bonds when somebody is listening to every word that children and parents say to each other? *And here I am sorry to have to tell that I have never heard of a foster-child in Sweden who was permitted to see its parents as often as once a week.* In most of the cases I have encountered, the parents are permitted to see their own child for just a couple of hours once every second month or still more infrequently.

In the very few cases I have heard of where parents and children were permitted to see each other slightly more often - it is never as often as once a week - all of those cases had a happy ending. That is to say, the child moved back to its biological parents and the family was reunited.

Neither is it typical for the foster-parents and the social authorities to accept that it is in the best interest of that child to move back home to its own parents. On those rare occasions when it happens, it is invariably for another reason. Namely, that the child escaped from the foster-home and ran home to its own parents. And when the child had done so a number of times, both the social workers and the police gave up forcibly fetching the child back to the foster-home.

Thus, it is my considered opinion that the reason the social authorities prevent parental access to their biological children, is because they know the child will escape back home if they are allowed to retain the bond with their family. Social workers and foster-parents know very well that if the child is given the chance to compare the care, grounded in true love, that the child gets from its own parents; with the care the child receives in the foster-home, the child would prefer to live with its own parents.

But when those enemies of the parents, the social workers, have a doctor's certificate as proof that a the child will suffer psychologically if they see their parents often enough to know them, the parents very seldom have any possibility of getting the court to change its decision. A *real* 'unhealthy symbiotic relationship' has developed where the courts are the willing slaves of expert opinion whilst the experts are dependent upon social workers for much of their livelihood.

The question at the front of your minds may be, why are social workers and foster-parents so eager to take children from their parents in this way? The answer, I am afraid, is largely financial. If the foster-parents lose the foster-child, who moves back to its own parents, the foster-parents lose the very high income they have from the fosterchild. What is more, a large part of their income is tax free which is a considerable benefit since taxes are so high in Sweden. A few years ago I calculated that in Sweden a fostermother having three or four fosterchildren will have a higher income than a university professor has after tax.

As for the motives of the social workers who provide the source of this lucrative income - other people's children - for the foster-parents, their motive is also largely financial. There simply would not be anything for social workers to do if they did not constantly 'talk up' the supposed problems of 'child abuse'. Sweden has no real poverty; a homogenous population and very few real social problems. Practically speaking, there should be very little for social workers to do - unless they make work for themselves. This they do by means of remorseless propaganda against ordinary families. They tell us in reports and surveys how people are neglecting or ill-treating their children on a hitherto undreamed of scale. And why didn't we hear about this in times past? Because we didn't have wonderful social workers then who could uncover these abuses!

It is a simple technique and effective. Unfortunately, it is also difficult to refute except by individual cases which, taken together, show beyond any doubt, that the principal perpetrators of family and child-abuse in Sweden are the social workers themselves.

But now some of you might be wondering whether all this forcible taking of children into care and sending them to foster-homes affects also ordinary middle class families in Sweden? Do those children who are forcibly taken into care by the state, have parents with severe mental illness; or problems with drugs or alcohol? The answer is, No.

I, and other Swedish lawyers who specialise in helping parents against the social authorities in child-care cases, have estimated that it is only in about ten percent of cases that the parents have problems with alcohol, drugs or mental illness. The remaining ninety percent are quite ordinary families who never had any such problems.

So how do they fall into the clutches of the social Services? Well, in Sweden, there is a special emphasis on targeting the so-called 'poor'; as well as a disproportionate number of immigrant families. The social support system for poor people has been so good for many years, that poverty is never a reason for a family being without food, clothing or a roof over their heads.

The process whereby poor, but steady and conscientious, families lose their children often starts in the following way. The father or/and the mother goes to the social welfare office to ask for some economic support. Usually they immediately get economic support. But at the same time they get a social worker into their lives. And that social worker starts mixing into the family's life, for instance asking why the wife is a housewife? Why doesn't she go to work in a factory and leave her four small children for eight or ten hours a day in the kindergarten?

Then those poor people feel hurt and humiliated. They might tell the social worker that it is none of her business. The social worker then gets annoyed. She is used to having power over those people to whom the social services give economic support. She is not used to opposition from them. So there is a

dispute between the poor family and the social worker. Finally the social worker takes her revenge by finding fault with the family's way of caring for their children and she arranges for the children to be taken into forcible care.

When uncontrolled power is given to almost any person, that power will be abused. Naturally enough, social workers would like to use their power against middle class families too. The reason they mostly confine their abuse to poorer families is that they are both more common and more likely to have asked for the economic help which brought the social worker into their lives in the first place

However, middle-class families in Sweden are coming up against the social authorities in increasing numbers. As you might know, Sweden has had a social-democratic government for most of the twentieth century. The social democrats do not like private schools, private hospitals, private kindergartens or private homes for aged people. So, for a long time, they have made different kinds of trouble for those who attempt to initiate business in any of these areas. The result is that Sweden has very few private alternatives to public care when it comes to both the young and the old; far less than in other Western European countries. That means that even the ordinary middle-class family has no choice but to turn to the social authority for a kindergarten for their pre-school child, or a home for their grandmother when old.

And so even the middle class family has to meet a social worker sometime. Every time you do that in Sweden there is a danger for your children because there is the risk of dispute. For instance, say you have a criticism to make of your child's teacher at the kindergarten she attends. Your child is unhappy there so you tell the school social worker. She will be annoyed because she works in a monopoly and isn't used to criticism. She strikes back. If your daughter doesn't like the kindergarten, there must be something wrong with your daughter, not with the pre-school teacher!

And the fact - it is immediately a fact - is that if there is something wrong with your daughter, it is your fault! You haven't given her the right care and education. The social authorities start an investigation of your family. In a few days two social workers come to inspect your home. They ask you and your husband the most personal and intimate questions about your life. If you tell them it is none of their business, those social workers will strike back.

They will write a report that you and your husband don't understand what is in the best interest of children and that you refuse to co-operate with the social authorities. And in another few weeks you get a letter calling you to a meeting in the social council. They will meet and decide then that your children should be taken into forcible care and placed in foster-homes.

So, for the last few years it has not been only poor people asking me to represent them. Amongst my clients there have been teachers, nurses, doctors, engineers and managing directors who have all had their children taken into forcible care. I have taken nine cases to the European Court - more, I believe, than anyone else; and have won seven of them. However, it has had no effect on the authorities or on their policies. They have not even complied with the intention of the European court to return the children to their parents.

So, when I tell you that the Swedish authorities deprive families of their right to rear and to educate their children as they want, you must remember that the ordinary middle class family in Sweden is

living under a real threat that if they do not do exactly what the authorities tell them. They risk losing their children.

But now you might say, why can't you appeal such ridiculous and wrong decisions to a court in Sweden? Well, you can appeal, but your chances of winning are very small.

If a child psychiatrist or psychologist told the truth to the court, that there is nothing wrong with a child who doesn't like school, that particular 'expert' would never again be invited to work for the social authorities. Thus the major part of their career would be terminated. Neither could they hope to make up the deficit by private practice since most of their clients would not be able to afford to engage them. Catch 22.

How about the judges then? you ask. Do they really believe all that bogus science about the damage parental love can do to a child's health? Well, the Swedish state orders judges, policemen, social workers, teachers and so on, to go to lectures and conferences where they have to listen to lectures from psychologists and child psychiatrists. They have to listen to a load of pseudo-scientific rubbish, spiced with Freud and phoney theories about normal childish behaviour. Unfortunately, even quite intelligent people can be propagandised in this way by those whom they believe are better qualified to know these things.

About five thousand Swedish children are at present in forcible care in foster-homes and institutions. Add to that about ten thousand children who are taken "voluntarily" into care. That is to say, their parents are told that unless they sign papers which say they gave up their children voluntarily, they will never see them again.

Thus Sweden has about 15,000 children in care out of a population of 8 million. Britain has 40,000 in care out of a population of 58 million. If Britain took children into care at the same rate as Sweden, there would be more than 100,000 children in care and, I hope, a big fuss made.

So this taking of children into care is a big business in Sweden. And for the persons who execute this care it is a financially very good business too. So, lots of foster-parents, social workers and child psychiatrists would lose their income if this terrible policy came to an end. Therefore, all those people who depend financially on this system, will use every legal and illegal means to allow this business to continue.

When I say 'illegal' I mean, for example, that it is not unusual in Sweden for social workers and foster-parents simply to refuse to give a child back to its parents even after a court has decided that care should cease. It sounds incredible, but it happens.

The Swedish government also uses more subtle methods to ensure that it retains an ideological power over the education of every child in Sweden. One method is the financial system in Sweden.

During the last thirty years the tax and benefit system has, step by step, been changed so that today it is more or less impossible for a family to live on just one income. That is a fact both for people with a low income, for middle class people and also for families where the husband has a rather high income. Swedish law requires that every adult is responsible for his or her own support. So a few years ago, Sweden abolished widow's pensions in general social security insurance. Nowadays a housewife whose husband suddenly dies, is obliged to go out to work.

For some time now, the Swedish courts in divorce cases have not awarded the wife any maintenance from the ex-husband. Not even if she has been a housewife and mother for twenty years. With a very high divorce rate, who would be a housewife in such a country?

Therefore every woman in Sweden is more or less forced to have gainful work outside the home - even if she is the mother of seven children. What do you do with your small children, their care and education, if you have to work away from home eight hours a day? This terrible system, that forces every woman to be away from her home and children all day, was completed around 1975.

As for what happened before 1975, the system was much the same as everywhere else in the civilised world. A woman with children was a housewife with a family that depended on the husband's income. It was husband and wife who decided their children's care and education and also the question of who should look after their children if they decided to work. That is impossible today. They don't have the right and, besides, all the grandmothers who were once so much part of the family unit, are now having to work themselves, to earn a living.

Before 1975 a well-qualified person, even after tax, had a good living and could afford to employ a nanny or an au pair to take care of the children and the housework while they worked. Today in most Swedish middle class families, it is impossible to have domestic help. Taxes have been raised and there has been a levelling of all salaries. So after tax there isn't so much difference between the salary for a qualified job and the salary for an unqualified job. So, for instance, a teacher or a young doctor, paying tax, would not be able to afford the services of paid domestic help.

So both people with low incomes, and professionals have no choice. You have to leave your small children for eight to ten hours every day in state governed care. In statistical terms, a child is in a day nursery from the age of one year till the age of six years, will encounter, on average, 275 different grown up people who care for them. As for their own parents - they are lucky if they see them for more than one or two hours a day.

By this means, everybody is delivered into the embrace of the state and its servants. By this means too, the state has succeeded where many other tyrannies have failed, in controlling the family. That is to say that power over the most important aspect of their lives, has been taken out of the hands of ordinary men and women and has been invested in employees of the state.

It is a tyranny which ever way you choose to look at it. Like the forced sterilisation programme pursued by the Swedish government, unnoticed, for forty years so this one will run and run, unopposed by a Swedish public that is too intimidated to protest.

It is in the hope of alerting educated opinion outside of Sweden that I come to speak to you today. You may not be able to do anything for us in Sweden since that is our responsibility - but, at the very least, I hope that you will recognise the simple techniques by which the state can seek to gain power over its people. In resisting such moves here, you may be able to isolate and shame Sweden into putting her own house in order.