

Book review: Science for Welfare and Warfare. Technology and State Initiative in Cold War Sweden; Per Lundin, Niklas Stenlås, Johan Gribbe (eds.), (SHP, 2010)

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Science for Welfare and Warfare: Technology and State Initiative in Cold War Sweden.

Edited by Per Lundin, Niklas Stenlås, and Johan Gribbe. Sagamore Beach, Mass.: Science History Publications, 2010. Pp. 324. \$49.95.

This edited volume addresses an important subject in postwar European history. The studies explore the role of technology in the construction of Sweden's internationally modeled welfare state. Individual chapters examine state initiative in fields including technological knowledge production, the computer, space, and nuclear industries, but also agricultural rationalization, food preservation, the scientization of laundry work and public housing, and—importantly—the development of military technology. Each of the chapters contributes a Swedish perspective to ongoing international debates about technology, state, and society in these domains. Together, they paint a compelling picture of the mutual shaping of state initiative, science and technology, and the Swedish welfare state between 1945 and 1975.

One of the most intriguing and convincing arguments of this book is reflected in its title. Military spending became an integral part of the Swedish welfare state. By 1960 the defense sector attracted over half of all government R&D expenditures. Saab factories gave Sweden the world's fourth largest air force, in addition to cars and computers. State engagement with nuclear power, computing, and the food supply served the goals not only of economic reform and public welfare, but also of national defense, through a nuclear weapons program (abolished only in 1968), work on ballistic-missile guidance systems and nuclear attack simulations, and attempts to make the nation self-sufficient with regard to food. To integrate civil and military technology projects, the government collaborated with a few large business conglomerates, most prominently the Wallenberg group that controlled Saab, Electrolux, LM Ericsson, Scania, SAS Airlines, and many other companies.

The chapters amply illustrate the multiple collaborations between state, industry, and (often) military actors in their respective technological domains. In their stimulating general introduction, Per Lundin and Niklas Stenlås provide two explanations for the rise, form, and stability of the Swedish welfare state. Following Tony Judt's exploration of the postwar search for new myths, they argue that Sweden emerged from the Second World War with a combined passion for economic modernization and (morally superior) military neutrality by means of technology. A second explanatory factor is the rise of a new generation of economic and social reformists, the "reform technocrats," who came of age in the 1930s. They saw science and technology as a lever for socioeconomic change, and saw alliance with the state as vital to working that lever. The causal relations

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among mental constructs, actor processes, and technological reform remain unclear, however. The analysis perhaps could benefit from the concept of sociotechnical regimes as a way of framing inquiry into the mutual shaping and interlocking of actors, myths, and technologies, without privileging any one of these. Also, a number of chapters lack sufficient detail to assess the claim that reform technocrats generally prepared and executed the government's technology reforms, though they clearly were active in certain areas, such as food supply, laundry rationalization, and public housing.

Swedish technocracy ran into crisis in the 1970s. State connections to big business, arms exports, and the United States military became subject to open critique. In the final chapter, Per Högselius explains the decline of technological state initiative from an economic policy perspective. He discusses the economic problems of the 1970s and '80s, neoliberalism and technological optimism in the '90s, the implications of the financial crises of the 2000s, and Sweden's current attempt at a sustainable knowledge-society profile. He does not compare his economic explanation to the role of counterculture values that, according to existing historiography, produced similar technological stagnation and revival in the United States and the Netherlands.

This existing historiography leads me to two final questions. First, the volume explicitly positions Sweden's technology-centered modernization path and myths as historically novel, and highlights the Second World War as a major historical breaking point. How does this compare to earlier studies on technology-based modernization in nineteenth-century Sweden by authors such as Arne Kaijser and Mats Fridlund? Second, I wonder how this book's unreflective nation-centered focus connects to a decade of internationalizing the European history of technology—in which many of the book's authors took active part! Surely the main argument of a Swedish science and technology *Sonderweg* would benefit from comparison with, for example, Robert Millward and John Singleton's 1995 anthology on state initiative in British industry or Dick van Lente and Johan Schot's work on Dutch technocracy. Beyond nation–nation comparisons, a transnational perspective could address how local, national, and international technocratic reforms were aligned and became mutually constitutive. This is a story that still needs to be told.

ERIK VAN DER VLEUTEN

Erik van der Vleuten, of the School of Innovation Sciences at Eindhoven University of Technology, has a special interest in technology's transnational history. He coedited *Networking Europe: Transnational Infrastructures and the Shaping of Europe, 1850–2000* (2006) and *Europe Goes Critical: The Emergence and Governance of Transnational Infrastructure Vulnerabilities* (under review).