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THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF SWEDISH  
CONSUMER POLICY\*

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**College of Commerce and Business Administration**  
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by

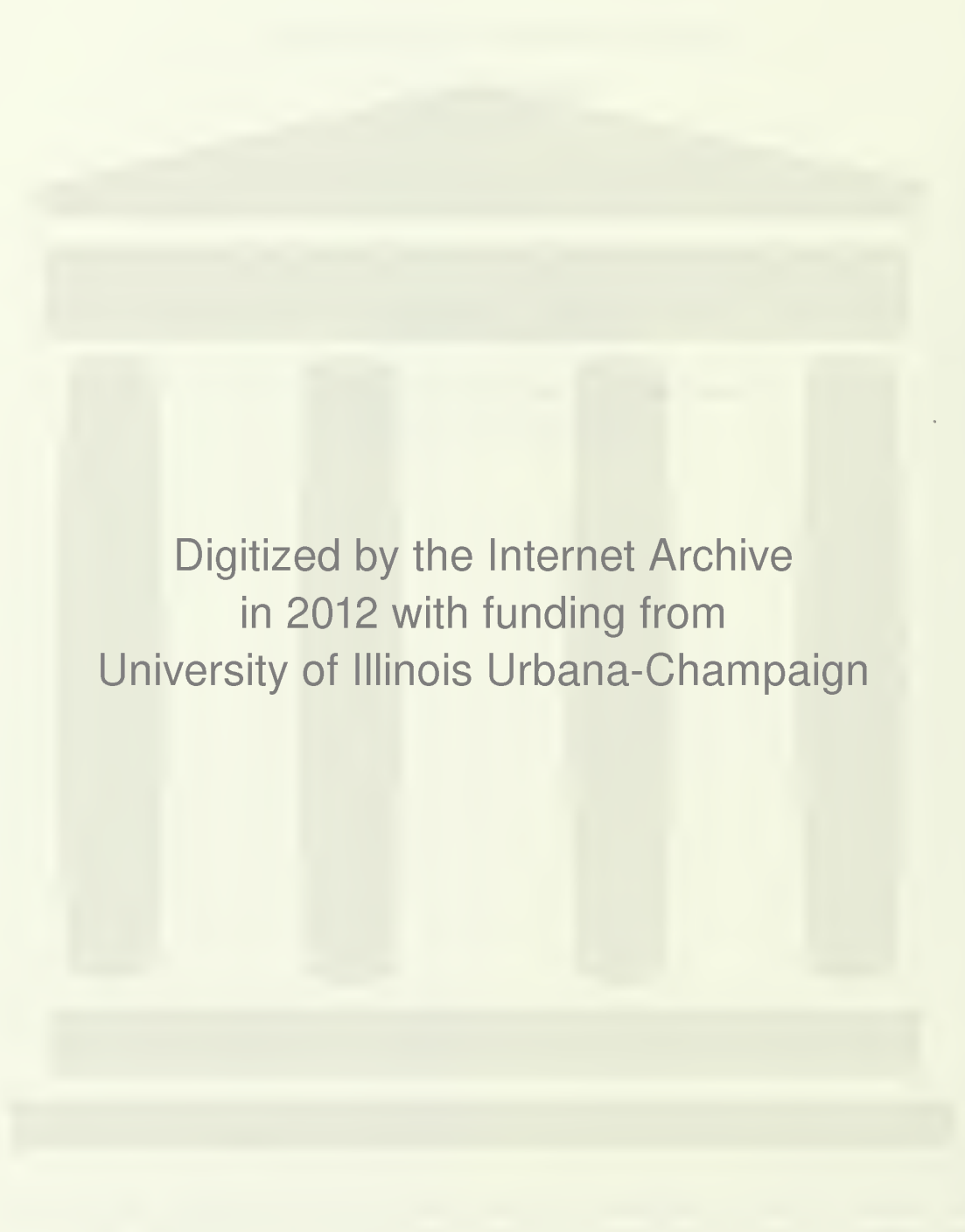
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# THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF SWEDISH CONSUMER POLICY

by

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## Introduction

The Swedish Welfare State has often been the subject of much study and intense debates. Within the integral parts of the Welfare State system, the subarea of Consumer Welfare has in the past occupied a relatively minor role, but at least one article by Thorelli (9) has discussed the consumer information policies in Sweden. Since there have been a number of recent developments in this area in Sweden, an updated view of the consumer policies in effect and contemplated, seems desirable, as it provides some perspective on similar efforts here in the United States.

## The Theory of the Weak Consumer

Although still professing to a market economy, the current thinking behind consumer policy in Sweden is based upon the premise that the consumer is weak relative to the powerful producers (4, 6). Not only is this a reflection of the Galbraithian thesis of manipulated consumers, which is basically accepted (4, p. 49; 7, p. 25) but, more fundamentally, even in the absence of propagandistic exposure the consumer is seen as a very limited decision maker. This stems from the premise that the household decision makers in their purchase deliberations are always severely constrained by time, income, and other limited resources. In defining a "household"-centered economy where the consumer/household is seen as the basic unit of analysis (as opposed to the firm-centered micro-economics), these resource constraints are the subject of considerable



investigation and analysis (5, 8). A clear identification and definition of the constraints operating upon the consumer within different segments of the total market will presumably directly indicate avenues for improvement in consumer decision making. This identification and definition has not been carried out yet on any large, systematic basis, but (as will be seen later) several efforts of informing, and educating, the consumers have been initiated. The basic income constraint is relieved at least partially by the welfare payments to needy recipients.

The effects of a stronger (or at least less constrained) consumer in the marketplace is not only seen in terms of individuals as better decision makers, making better purchase decisions. In addition, the strong consumer will lead to a "cleaning up" of the market, eliminating undesirable product alternatives. According to the usual market economy theory, such a process will come about by the workings of the competitive pressures in the market. Because of the manipulative power of the big firms, however, such a process can not only be resisted by these firms, but the pressure can be eliminated. The net effect upon undesirable products is often nil, and even in the cases where the pressure is maintained, there is a long time span before actual changes will take place. In addition, there are a number of changes which will not automatically be taken care of by the market mechanism, chiefly the one of developing newer and better products.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of these considerations, Swedish consumer policy has taken some direct action into the product offerings on different markets

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<sup>1</sup>The need to rely on the entrepreneurial instincts of the Swedish business men for desirable new products is a hotly contested question in the current consumer discussion. (3, 7).





eliminating certain products from the markets (2, 11). In addition, there are under contemplation more direct contacts with the producers directly, especially focusing upon their new product policies (6, 12). In fact, some of the more radical of the consumer advocates in Sweden (although so far not supported by official policy) are demanding direct access to the product decision making process. In terms of market research they argue for "producer behavior research" as opposed to the current "consumer behavior research" carried out by firms and in universities (7, 18).

#### The Theory of the Ignorant Consumer

But newer Swedish thinking, although not yet quite in the laws, goes even further. When a direct purging of the product markets is carried out it is clear that some consumers will feel their rights impinged upon. In defense of the actions it is argued that in certain cases the consumers do not know where their best interests lie (8, 12). When some interviews were carried out by the Consumer Policy Investigation of old age pensioners, findings were that to a large extent these older people were rather content with their lot (11). The more radical consumerism advocates, appalled at these findings, took the stand that these people clearly exhibited much too low levels of aspirations in terms of their living standards (8). As a consequence, a theory development of the "ignorant" consumer was initiated. Although as mentioned formal legislation has not yet quite encompassed these ideas there are at least three good reasons for presenting them here. For one, they tend to indicate where further developments might occur. Two, since the enforcement personnel to some extent is motivated that way politically, these further thoughts might have some impact at the levels where the laws are being applied. Three, the theory development



is of interest in itself as it indicates some possible avenues for the integration of behavioral science concepts into economic theory.

First, following the World Health Organization, the goal of society's economic activity is defined as the "physical, social, and psychological well-being" of the consumer (8, p. 2:3). This is closely related to the economist's "need satisfaction", but those particular words are not used. Second, it is argued that at least as physical well-being goes, this goal is fairly easily determined by objective (i.e., non-subjective) standards (8, 16). For example, the food eaten by an individual during a normal day should have certain amounts of different nutrients. Third, it is argued that because so many people will claim (subjective) contentment although their well-being (their food's nutritional value, for example) is quite low according to these objective standards, care has to be exercised in accepting the individual's claim to satisfaction (8, 12). In fact, there will be many cases where the individual's opinions will have to be dismissed and he/she will have to be protected from him-/herself, as it were.

The reason for this discrepancy between subjective contentment and objective well-being lies according to the theory in the distinction between the "real" needs of an individual, and the levels of aspiration that the individual has. The subjective contentment is largely determined by the levels of aspiration--and in the cases where these aspiration levels are "too low", the subjective satisfaction will occur before the "actual" well-being sets in. Accordingly, there is room for individual "improvement". This improvement will have to be initiated from the outside, as the inner drives are impassive due to the subjective contentment.





The improvement, eliminating the discrepancy between subjective satisfaction and objective well-being is handled in two ways. On the one hand, the too low levels of aspiration can be pushed upwards, through education in problem solving (8, p. 3:11). The theory here quotes findings to the effect that people with higher education tend to have higher aspiration levels. There is no mentioning of the role of other factors such as income changes (for which case not only aspiration levels might change but also the possibilities of entertaining the higher level would be made more feasible). On the other hand, the product offerings might be supervised, allowing only products that fulfill the more stringent requirements of the objective standards to remain in the market. Then of course, the consumer simply cannot go wrong.<sup>2</sup>

One might argue that it would be difficult to develop precise definitions of the objective criteria for need satisfaction, even in the case of physical well-being. This becomes, however, mainly an empirical question, and in some cases attempts have been made at defining rating scales for product performance (e.g., for furniture and for shoes, with more to follow)(4, 10). There should be little wonder at the fact that the present discussion in Sweden concerns the desirability of forcibly eliminating those products whose ratings are below certain levels. Judging from some official viewpoints, such elimination is seen

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<sup>2</sup>There are cases where such direct market actions of the government would seem less than controversial. Thus, for example, when both the subjective and the objective criteria are unsatisfied, the actions will have clear justifications. Similarly, where both are satisfied, no action is necessary. Furthermore, although subjectively dissatisfied, many individuals might find no government action forthcoming where objective criteria are fulfilled. This will occur especially where the dissatisfied consumers belong to the economically and educationally stronger groups. The emphasis is upon "weaker" consumer groups. (12).



as highly desirable (12, 16). Again, such product performance ratings might yield good indications of the amount of physical well-being produced by the product in use, whereas the social and psychological effects are a bit more difficult to predict.

As one result of this thinking the role of the demand concept has been largely discredited as an indicator of what makes for the consumer's well-being. Not only is the actual demand as expressed in the market very much a function of the amount of buying power the individual has-- and thus no real indication of desires is received--, but also, flowing directly from the argument of the ignorant consumers, these very desires might be quite inappropriate themselves. Instead the analysis hinges on the objectively determined, "real" needs of the consumer, as indicated.

Probably because of this preoccupation with where the consumers' real interests lie, another integral part of the theory argues for the importance of product decisions as opposed to brand decisions in purchasing (7, 8). The brand choice research very common earlier in Sweden is dismissed as focusing upon a very minute, unimportant, and relatively simple decision process from the consumer's point of view. The focus should rather lie with the bigger decisions of, for example, what type of foods to buy, what type of products to acquire for one's transportation needs, what kinds of home entertainment equipment to buy, etc. It is for these kinds of decisions that the consumer is especially badly equipped, and where the amount of guiding information from any source is severely lacking. Accordingly, research is being undertaken into the questions as to what alternative means of satisfying the needs in a broad sense are, and how they stack up against one another (5). As a result, daily food menus can be acquired from your local authorities; the consumers'



cooperatives have developed non-fashionable clothes covering the woman's basic needs and produced in large series; analyses of the insurance needs of the average citizen have been published; and so on (2, 10, 13, 17).

It is interesting to note that the present state of marketing analysis in the U.S. often advocates the use of more structural or systems analysis where market opportunities and hazards are concerned. The occupation with diversification and life style research are only two expressions of this concern with the basic needs of the firm's consumers. From this perspective it seems clear that the Swedish focus on consumer's larger choices will be emulated by the U.S. with a consequent move away from brand choice to these choices between alternative life styles, for example. The effects upon competitive theory might be drastic, however. True, the economists' competitors tend all to produce the same product in the sense of satisfying the same need, and as this need is more broadly defined, the set of competitors will be simply enlarged. On the other hand, the fragmentation of competition into several levels (call them "specific", "generic", "entrepreneurial" or whatever) will considerably weaken the argument of pro-market forces that the product proliferation at the brand level is necessary for freedom of competition.<sup>3</sup> In other words, perhaps one brand will do for everyone, and we will all drive Volvos; competitive benefits accruing anyway because the public transportation system provides a gallant contender.

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<sup>3</sup>As for freedom of choice at the brand level, the insignificance of this choice allows a considerable reduction in the number of alternatives without substantially lessening the freedom, according to the Swedish framework.





It is clear, however, that within the newer Swedish theory not much of a role is accorded competition anyway. First, the very idea of direct purging of the product markets implies a discrediting of the competitive mechanism as we have already seen. Second, by emphasizing levels of aspirations rather than preferences (the latter concept is hardly encountered in any writings), the focus is naturally less upon choice between competing alternatives, and more upon absolute levels of performance or quality: if more than one alternative is of acceptable standard, the choice becomes a trifling matter. What matters is that at least one choice of such acceptable standard exists.

#### Some Possible Extensions

That is a brief summary of the current state of the discussions on the theory of consumer policy in Sweden. It might be interesting to indicate some possible extensions of this theory. First, it is clear that the treatment of the subjective contentment on the part of the consumers is very rudimentary. Even if levels of aspiration are important, they hardly alone determine the state of contentment. Other factors of interest would be income levels (enabling a high level of aspiration to be reached, for one thing), and the availability of the product (not the least important and very critical considering the purges), as well as other behavioral variables, such as personality factors and motivational factors.

Even given the major role of levels of aspirations, however, one could clearly develop a much more sophisticated understanding about what determinants of aspiration levels are operative in a consumer's environment. Clearly it is too simple to allot to education alone the formation of aspirations -- as stated before, income would certainly again play a role, and so would mass communication, advertising perhaps



especially, as well as interpersonal relationships. From a public policy formation viewpoint, the identification of what factors actually help determine levels of aspiration will naturally lead to a larger arsenal when it comes to affecting changes in these aspirations. In addition, such an analysis would be able to point out areas where the lack of advertising and a concomitant high educational level would make direct actions unnecessary. With a sufficiently detailed theory, one would even be able to develop criteria for choosing between alternative means of raising levels of aspirations.

Finally, it would be interesting to see a more thorough treatment of the theory of the ignorant consumer versus the rationale of the market system. On the surface it seems quite clear that under this theory the only logical economic system would be a totalitarian (centralized) one. That is, the consumer is seen as basically unable to cope. Hence, he/she has to be guarded for, and only in a few relatively unharmed cases will he/she be allowed to follow his/her own biases. This approach contrasts naturally with most of what we take for granted in the U.S. market economy. It might be however, that there exists a middle position which retains somewhat more of the individual's freedom without subjecting them to too much danger. It seems that one natural starting point for such a theory would be to advocate that all factors which determine aspirations levels of the individual be closely controlled, screening out "undesirable" influences. Then with the dangerous infections eliminated, the markets would be allowed to operate freely, since everybody knows what is good for him/her. Individual producers would not be allowed to influence the purchasers unduly (no advertising), and interpersonal relationships would be kept within the proper perspectives and social circles so that no sharp changes in aspiration levels towards a detrimental state again could occur.





This seems perhaps too drastic a picture to be a realistic one of Sweden now or in the future. One would still have to argue that basically such a theory should provide the rationale through which individuals can achieve at least a minimally acceptable life. What they then do over and above that is what could easily be left for the market mechanisms to decide. The problem still is, then, who will determine the minimally acceptable life -- the person him-/herself, or somebody else?

### Consumer Policy Institutions

Although the theory in Swedish consumer policy in some regards is ahead of the practices -- as opposed to many other countries in which existing practices only later get their theoretical rationalizations-- several developments have occurred in recent years. The basic consumer agency at the governmental level, the newly established National Board for Consumer Policies, incorporates three previous separate agencies concerned with labelling, product testing, and consumer information. In addition to taking over these activities, the Board is charged with broader investigations of products and markets and the relaying of the uncovered information to consumers via pamphlets and training seminars. Furthermore, the Board carries the responsibility for the producer contacts that might be deemed necessary. Presently, the law provides no legal basis for making the producers adhere to the Board's views on particular products. However, if considerable difficulty in producer cooperation is encountered, such legislation will be initiated. The National Board also incorporates a Public Complaints office through which are processed consumers' complaints about faulty products.

The Board's plan of operation for the fiscal year 1973/74 (it started operations on January 1, 1973) was recently released. Since it



would tend to indicate the current official government views on consumer policies, some translated excerpts might be of interest here. On the basic aim of the activities, the plan states: "The purpose of the Consumer Policy is to support the consumers and improve their position in the marketplace.....Behind the formulation of the purpose lies an acceptance of the economic market system, but also a clear realization of the deficiencies in this system from the consumers' viewpoint. The Consumer Policy and thus the work of the National Board will be directed towards the elimination of these deficiencies. The starting point for this work is that the individual consumer occupies a weak position relative to producers, distributors, and marketers. The consumer needs active support from the society to get his and her interests considered in the marketplace." (5, p. 1).

With regard to the Board's activities related to the market offerings the report says: "Market supervision - protect against dangerous and functionally unsatisfactory products; watch over the effects of consumer protective legislation; watch over the adherence to the norms of informative labellings; test the products in the market." (5, p. 4). Finally, on the producer contacts work: "The producer contacts have been divided as follows. 1. Information - inform firms, trade organizations, etc., on results from investigations undertaken by the Board; marketing of informative labelling. 2. Negotiations - influence producers, importers, and distributors to change their products/their market conduct. 3. Other contacts - e.g., gather experiences and viewpoints from a certain industry or a certain firm." (5, p. 4).



The National Board is mainly a so-called regulatory agency -- it does not implement any particular piece of legislation. This task falls instead on the Consumer Ombudsman, whose responsibility it is to enforce two laws. One is the law against unwarranted claims in advertising and other marketing efforts. This includes deceptive packaging and certain home selling methods. The other law concerns standard buyer/seller contracts, with the purpose of helping the buyer against contracts which improperly favor the seller.

A third government agency, National Price and Cartel Office, has as one of its main tasks the introduction of unit pricing. In this work it attempts to develop comparable prices for varying sizes of package, as well as for alternative brands, and even for alternative "need satisfying units". Thus, for example, different breakfast menus with equivalent nutritional value are developed and priced. So far, however, the stores "unit pricing" is confined to the package sizes and the alternative brands, and covers only food products. (14).

These are the three main consumer policy institutions. Several smaller agencies as well as sections of larger agencies are charged with enforcing other laws of relevance to the consumer policy area -- much like here in the U.S. the total effort is spread out on a considerable number of institutions. One task confronting the National Board of Consumer Policies is the coordination of these different activities.

How do these institutions avoid losing contact with the consumers they are supposed to serve? One, they are open for direct contacts with any consumers who approach them. This has worked particularly well for the Consumer Ombudsman, who dealt with 4500 cases during 1972, 75% of which came from such outside sources (1, p. 5). Two, through their





own investigations the institutions uncover undesirable situations -- the impetus to such investigations might come from the consumers, or other institutions, government as well as private. Third, the Public Complaints office serves as a problem detector, especially useful for the National Board. Fourth, through the so-called Home Consultants and (voluntary) County Consumer groups, whose main purpose is to help the consumer's decision making, feedback on situations in need of correction is obtained.

How successful these institutions will be in keeping track of consumers' needs remains to be seen. Judging from the Ombudsman experience, however, the Swedish consumer is becoming increasingly militant and willing to exert some effort to get things changed. Such an attitude seems a necessary prerequisite for the successful working of these institutions.

In what follows a brief list of examples of actions taken by the institutions will be given. In accordance with the theoretical discussion, the presentation will be divided into two subsections. One section will cover actions that are directly related to the betterment of the consumer as a decision maker. The other section will deal with actions that go against the producers directly.

#### Actions Helping the Weak Consumer

Many of the actions designed to assist the consumer in his/her decision making resemble similar actions over here in the U.S., but has perhaps gone further. Most of the product information is made available through product labelling, disclosing contents of the product (for most foods, chemical products, and textiles), and also indicating the characteristics of the product in use. Thus, for example, the stretchability, fire resistance, and "hard" use characteristics of as diverse products



as teddy bears, women's dresses, and children's clothes are often indicated (10, 17). The labelling is still voluntary although very much adopted as a competitive tool; a new investigation which has just been completed will probably lead to some obligatory labelling as well as the introduction of minimum standards (10, 11, 12). In addition, the emphasis is shifting towards information specifically dealing with the product in use. This is exemplified by the furniture and shoe industries, where informative labelling has gone furthest (4, pp. 56, 209). Here elaborate classifications of alternative product uses have been developed, and each single product is classified into one class of use. Then the product is given a set of ratings along several dimensions deemed to be of importance in the particular use category. Thus, for example, leisure shoes can be rated on resistance to water and paint etc., hill and mountain climbing, as well as more simpler endeavors such as long walks (11). Most of this information will not appear directly on the label, but can be asked for in the store, and access to the ratings will be given there. On the label only a few summary scores (summed ratings) will appear.<sup>4</sup>

Some confusion as to the interpretation of the label ratings does naturally occur. For example, the use of the classification will in many instances be quite arbitrary. In such cases, it can happen that one table, say, classed as a working table will get low durability ratings, whereas a quite similar table, which happens to be classified as a more evanescent piece of furniture will score high on durability, although the former table clearly is more durable. The choice and

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<sup>4</sup>It should perhaps be noted that nobody opposes these detailed ratings as such, but their probable detrimental effect upon exports and imports is emphasized by producer organizations (10, pp. 136-179; 11).



weighting of dimensions will differ between classes, so that durability might not be an important dimension in the second class, but these distinctions become quite difficult for the consumer to appreciate.

In order that the consumer may avoid a costly trial and error learning procedure in regard to the use of this product information, a considerable educational effort is taking place. Consumer textbooks for school children are being prepared (1, 12). Local chapters of countrywide organizations long active in the labor movement are carrying out grass roots seminars on select consumer problems (5, 16). The radio once a day spotlights some new consumer development, including product testing. TV is used for short "fill-ins" on some crucial consumer aspects, such as the dangers and handling of fast boats (these fill-ins, incidentally, often made possible and necessary by the empty slots left open after the American programs are presented without commercials). At the county level the home consultants are charged with the responsibility of informing the local consumers of new products and other information. This activity sometimes takes the form of exhibitions, where a set of products related to some particular use category -- such as "back-to-school" clothes -- are displayed with concomitant product ratings (4, 17).

In addition, many stores -- particularly the Consumers' Cooperatives -- feature sections ("Consumers' Corner") where product information and test results will be available with respect to some product areas. Here one will often find copies of the Swedish government test reports, for example, as well as other test information. In addition, at certain times during the week, a home economist will be there to assist the inquiring consumer (17).





### Actions Directed Against the Producers

The actions designed to eliminate undesirable product alternatives and other efforts to affect the producers directly have also their counterparts in this country, but again Sweden has probably advanced further. Only a few examples can be offered here, but an attempt has been made to select the examples so as to give a picture of the comprehensiveness of the undertaking.

Only very recently did the consumer in Sweden receive the opportunity of buying a tumble dryer. Although washing machines have been on the market a long time, the government testing institute found that the tumbling activity of the dryer tore clothes, and made sheets and similar textiles difficult to fold (11). Accordingly, no tumbler was allowed into the market. As no foreign producers made any attempt at modifying their products to fit the Swedish market (presumably because of its small size), a kind of cabinet dryer was invented and serves now as the dryer in most Swedish homes. It is cheaper than the tumble dryer, but lacks its speed. After the recent introduction of the tumble dryer, the Swedish consumer, having been without any alternative, is now paradoxically faced with a greater array of choices than his/her American counterpart.

The lemon-scented washing detergent introduced here in the U.S. not so long ago, made a brief appearance also on the Swedish market. It was argued, however, that its package similarity to certain soft drinks made a repackaging necessary. The importer argued that several factors prohibited any injury to consumers: the products were presumably stored in different areas of the kitchen, an initial taste of the detergent would tell anyone to stop drinking, and, finally, even if a child drank it all





no harm would be done. The outcome, however, was to eliminate the lemon washing detergent from the market (11, 16).

Several actions have been directed against advertising. In general, when a product is advertised its more important features -- from a consumer standpoint -- are supposed to be exhibited most prominently. Thus, for example, if a food product contains some artificial ingredient -- such as some juice (although the powdered orange juice of this country is completely banned in Sweden) and other soft drinks -- this artificiality should be clearly communicated to the consumer during a 5-seconds long exposure time to the advertisement (11, 15). These five seconds are supposed to represent the "normal" exposure time for the consumer.<sup>5</sup>

It is quite likely that cigarette and liquor advertising will be completely banned in the near future -- an investigation is currently pondering that question (2). The rule so far allows for such advertising in magazines and newspapers but in the advertisements no human beings can be portrayed (foreign magazines and newspapers are exempted). (15).

The Kellogg Company's packaging practices are currently challenged by the Consumer Ombudsman -- the problem is well known and discussed over here and refers to the fact that packages are much bigger than their contents justify. Although the outcome is not yet clear, the odds are that Kellogg will have to indicate on the package exactly what portion of the package will be unfilled after the settling of its contents (15). Such a development might either drive Kelloggs out of the Swedish market, or

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<sup>5</sup>It should perhaps be noted that in terms of the regulation of advertising, Norway has proceeded further than most other countries. In Norway an advertisement can be faulted simply on the basis of not providing adequate information (11).



else make for similar packaging practices elsewhere (assuming the company will go ahead with the same package at other places -- as always, this type of forced product modification could easily be turned into a differential advantage).

Although pollution controls for the automobiles are not as advanced as those of, say, California, safety standards have long been a model for other countries, including the U.S., and other developments are likely to come. For one, used cars will soon have to be inspected at the sellers expense, and warranties extended (6, p. 26). Furthermore, there probably will be a right-of-return for the buyer in the case the car does not perform according to road and safety standards (16). As for new cars, one future development might be the development of more easily repaired cars -- the argument being that repair costs are high only because the basic engineering design does not take into account future repairs but could do that at very little extra cost and without major design changes (2, p. 8; 13). Since such a development will probably be supported by the big insurance companies, odds are that it will go through. Overall, one can perhaps say, however, that automobiles (especially new cars) have come under less attack in Sweden as compared to over here. Part of the explanation might lie in the role of the automobile as a status symbol which still seems strong in Sweden relative to the U.S. Another part lies perhaps in the fact that the smaller cars of Sweden might leave less to criticize than their bigger American counterparts.

The travel agencies in Sweden that organize charter flights to other countries -- there are many of them, especially active in the summer -- are obliged to deposit security with a government agency to be used for customer remuneration in case something goes wrong (2, p. 34).



As we all know, such mishaps can be very frequent, and in several cases the travellers have been reimbursed for their actual outlays as well as opportunity costs.

### The Future

Looking to the future it seems quite likely that the Swedish consumer will get a general "open" purchase law, that enables him/her to return a purchased product within one week and receive the money back (16). This would clearly not work for all products, but the law would specifically exclude those goods, the rule applying unless excluded. One reason why the passage of such a law is probable is that many private retailers favor it -- the Consumer's Cooperatives are the major stores featuring such a week now, and the competitive effect has hurt the independents.

It is also probable -- and has been legally enforced in a few cases already -- that advertising claims have to be adhered to in actual product performance (2, p. 16; 15). Thus, not only will claims have to be substantiated once and for all to a government agency as here, but any user of the product can use the claims when legally establishing a divergence between expectations and actual performance.

The regulations pertaining to over-time payments for consumer durables are presently under intensive study. Two probable future developments are, one, the imposition of a minimum down payment possibly as high as 30% of sales price, and, two, an enforced limit on the length of the contract, the limit set perhaps as low as 18 months. One reason for the probable passage of these regulations is the support given them by the big labor unions (16).

These are, then, some of the developments in Swedish consumer policies as they have taken place over the last three-four years. It is





perhaps fair to say that during these years the main concern of the well-established Swedish welfare state has been with consumer welfare. Although one might think that this state of affairs would change in case of a possible change in governing party this does not seem very likely. For one, the labor unions have developed a very strong interest in these questions -- to some extent one might even argue that the impetus came from the unions. Any governing political party -- much as here -- will have to reckon with politically strong unions. In addition, the center party and the liberal party who together would make up the most probable alternative government are both pushing these and other consumer initiatives very strongly, and there is no particular reason to assume they would stop doing so after being given a governing mandate. To all extent and purposes, therefore, the Swedish consumer welfare state is here to stay.



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