

The exceptions in the law were four (§§163). Everything was allowed to print, except for: challenges to the Evangelical faith; attacks on the constitution, the royal family or foreign powers; defamatory remarks about civil servants or fellow citizens; and indecent or obscene literature.

These qualifications might seem far-reaching, but except for religious matters the very same limitations, translated into twentieth-century language, are in fact accepted in the European Convention on Human Rights, adopted in 1950.³ An important provision for all limitations to free speech is that they are clearly defined in law, just like in the Swedish Freedom of Print Act.

However, the freedom to print was not the most remarkable feature of the 1766 law. In the eighteenth century there was a fairly extensive de facto freedom of print recognized in, for example, Great Britain and the

division of the Council of the Realm acting as Supreme Court). In both cases, the minutes would include any reservations to the majority vote expressed in the minutes, but it is not clear whether this would also include verbatim accounts from the proceedings. It is a fact, however, that minutes from both the government and the Supreme Court

Swedish politicians had an advantage compared to their colleagues elsewhere in Europe. During the eighteenth century Sweden had a peculiar political system that made it possible to actually put many of the radical ideas *en vogue* into practice.

Between the death of the absolute King Charles XII in 1718 and the death of King George III in 1772, supreme power in Sweden was exercised by the Diet, which was composed of four estates: the nobility, the clergy, the burghers, and the peasantry. Political discussion took place within the four estates, but also within two competing parties: the Hats and the Caps. Roughly sixty percent of the adult male population was allowed to participate, directly or indirectly, in the elections to the Diet, which made it by far the most widely participatory political system anywhere in Europe. Executive power was exercised by the Council of the Realm, which had to answer to the Diet, whereas the king was reduced to a mere figurehead, whose personal signature was occasionally replaced by a dry stamp. This era was referred to as the Age of Liberty ó *frihetstiden* ó even by contemporaries.⁷

It is true that the same grand ideas will not be found among Swedish eighteenth-century intellectuals as among the French. Where French philosophers had to argue on a general level because their influence on actual politics were virtually non-existent, Swedish authors could actually put their ideas into practice through the Diet. Swedish authors did not write any eloquent *Traité*s *sur la tolerance* that people still read today, but they did formulate detailed ordinances on freedom of print and on freedom of information, whose core values have transcended down through the centuries. Even though minute legislative regulations rarely display literary qualities they may nevertheless contain radical ideas and be pioneers for change. The Freedom of Print Act achieved the immediate result that was intended, and the political climate severely intensified. About 75 percent of the Swedish political pamphlets from the eighteenth century were printed in the years 1766-1772, and there was at least a twelvefold increase in annual production compared to the immediately preceding years.⁸

Not only were the political discussions considerably invigorated by the freedom of print, they were also radicalized. Most important was the increased emphasis on civil rights, including freedom of trade and equality before the law. The aristocracy came under fierce attack and the noble

7. See MICHAEL ROBERTS, *THE AGE OF LIBERTY: SWEDEN 1719-1772* (1986); Michael F. Metcalf, *Parliamentary Sovereignty and Royal Reaction, 1719-1809*, in *THE RIKSDAG: A HISTORY OF THE SWEDISH PARLIAMENT* (1987).

8. There are no proper statistic computations of print output in these years. These figures
ctg cp guvkocvg dcugf qp vjg pwodgt qh ctejlxg ecruwngu4c Y u _ x _7wnj e t _g e v

rtkxkng i gu ygtg cnn dwv cdqnkujgf kp c hgy {gctuo vk o g. Sgxgtcn dknnu hqt gswcn civil rights for all citizens were drafted. The first was presented to the Diet in 1770 by Alexander Kepplerus, representative of the town Lovisa in Finland. The noble privileges were placed on a level with constitutional law and could therefore not be altered without the consent of the nobility. The solution found by the commoners was to make them redundant by extending them to all citizens ó a privilege pertaining to everyone is no longer a privilege, but rather a general law. Kepplerus, therefore, wanted the clergy, the burghers, and the peasantry to be able to enjoy, on equal hqqvkpi ykvj vjg pqdknk{, vjg tkijvu cpf nkdgtvkgu yjkej jcf õcnc{u belonged to Swedish men and inhabitants of the realm as freeborn from time immemorial.ö⁹ His draft affirmed that:

all non-nobles, regardless of status, age and sex, will be under the protection of the law and not by other subjects or any one private person, and they should be free from all force regarding their persons, their business, and their property, so that each and every one, by consent and free will, may enjoy the liberty of himself and his person, as far as the writtenists ec-4(a0.000 1 ll 1 3)-64(p)-0.000 1

was inclined to autocracy and was dethroned and expatriated in 1809. Proper freedom of print was once again introduced and the access to public information was extended to all citizens. The Freedom of Print Act of 1776 was issued in 1810 and revised in 1812. This was to be in force, with consecutive amendments, until 1949, when the present Freedom of Print Act was adopted. Even if there have been ups and downs during these years the right to public access has formed an integral part of state administration in Sweden from 1809, and it has been vital in shaping a culture of rational bureaucracy with a low

