This is the published version of a chapter published in *Class, Sex and Revolutions: A Critical Appraisal of Göran Therborn*.

Citation for the original published chapter:

Hort, S., Olofsson, G. (2016)
A Portrait of the Sociologist as a Young Rebel: Göran Therborn 1941-1981.
In: Gunnar Olofsson & Sven Hort (ed.), *Class, Sex and Revolutions: A Critical Appraisal of Göran Therborn* (pp. 19-51). Lund: Arkiv förlag

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published chapter.

Permanent link to this version:
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-57095
The emergence of a global Swedish intellectual and social scientist

He belongs to the unbeaten, a survivor of a merciless defeat sublimated by many in his generation. This book is an interim report, and the pages to come are an attempt to outline the early years and decades of Göran Therborn’s life trajectory, the intricate intertwining of his socio-political engagement and writings with his social scientific work and publications. In this article the emphasis is on the 1960s and early 1970s, on Sweden and the Far North rather than the rest of the world. We present a few preliminary remarks on a career – in the sociological sense – that has not come to a close, far from it, hence still in need of further (re-)considerations and scrutiny. Writing about people you feel an intellectual affinity with, as Perry Anderson (1992) once remarked, is a daunting task.

During the period leading up to 1981, Göran Therborn established himself as a Marxist intellectual, at first in the Swedish setting through his writings in the Zenit journal and other publishing activities during the 1960s and the early 70s. Concurrently, he also entered the international scene where New Left Review and New Left Books served as his key springboards. This was the time when

Before Therborn achieved such a high reputation for the quality of his work, he had a period of mixed blessings, where he was recognized as both a leading Marxist theoretician and as an *enfant terrible* in respectable Swedish *öffentlichkeit*. In this text we will sketch some of the major early phases of GThs (his final Zenit abbreviation) socio-political activities and engagements which at first came to influence and later to be subordinated to his social scientific intellectual ambitions and projects. Years before Göran in the terminology of Michael Burawoy (2007), became a critical and professional social scientist he was actually a public sociologist, even then with a globalist perspective.

In spring 1960 Göran graduated from the classical Gymnasium, the senior high school in Hanseatic Kalmar, and went to Lund, Scania, for university and an academic life that so far has spanned five and a half decades and an equal number of spatial-territorial worldly continents.

In the pages to come the pre-amble to this double trajectory will be traced in some detail, until 1981. This comprises the zone of engagement between (student) politics and social sciences in Sweden, and the interpenetration of Global-European and Swedish developments in the early writings of Göran Therborn – before 1981 when he left Sweden for a professorship in political science at the

1. A first version was printed in Sweden in 1974.
2. Simultaneously a summary of his 1972 Swedish class analysis was included in an English reader together with a fair number of articles by mainstream Swedish social scientists: *Readings in the Swedish Class Structure* (Scase 1976).
Catholic University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands, before his rise to European and international fame in the wider sociological and socio-political community. This was a twenty-year period in which there was a left-wing revival amid continuous changes and transformations in the political arena as well as in the social sciences.

From family to academic life and student politics

Göran Therborn grew up in a rather remote and poor part of Southeast Sweden. He was born in 1941 and the only child in a successful landowning family on the rural countryside to the south of Kalmar. At the age of seven, he went to the local parish primary school. In 1952, after the fourth grade, Göran entered the junior high school in the nearby small town of Kalmar, once one of the major medieval cities around the Baltic with an impressive Vasa-castle.

In one of his self-presentations, Göran states that he received a lot of attention from the grown-ups in the household, and in particular, he focuses on his teenage conversations at the time of Suez and Hungary (1956) with his politically conservative father. Ragnar Therborn was a self-made man and a successful gardener-entrepreneur who married upwards into a larger landowning clan. Göran’s mother Karin worked in the office of the family business, and probably had a powerful influence on her only offspring. Culturally, the parental couple shared an interest in the decorative arts, and they built an impressive mansion in a classical style, later inherited and from the new Millennium occupied by their son after his retirement from Cambridge.3 In brief, this was the atlas of the young Therborn’s family.

These social and regional beginnings most likely opened Göran’s eyes to existing inequalities,4 but there was as well a radical literary

---

4. In the years 1929–1931 a major and long-lasting labour conflict pitted the farm workers against the tightly knit large landowners in exactly this area of Sweden. Moreover, in the late 19th century, Kalmar was the birthplace of the leading Swedish speculative industrial-capitalist, Ivar Kreuger – global match-monopolist and symbol of the ‘Second Swedish Great Power era’ – who in 1932 dramatically passed away in Paris.
edge to his interests. During his high school years Göran also read contemporary literary works on the ongoing social change in Sweden. In 1956 Göran went from junior high school to the classical gymnasium in Kalmar, where he studied humanities and languages; not only English, German and French but also Latin, which later made his acquisition of Italian, Spanish and Portuguese easier. During the latter part of senior high school Göran took out a subscription to the New Statesman, and the young bookworm ordered new volumes from Paris and Germany from the local bookstore.

In 1960 he left rural Ljungbyholm for Lund, the latter still a rather sleepy academic centre with some twelve thousand students and a fairly small number of tenured professors. In what once had been the ecclesiastical centre in Hamlet’s kingdom of Denmark later transformed into a Swedish peripheral royal colonial-educational outpost, the newcomer chose to take a course in political science. Göran wrote his first term paper on Spanish anarcho-syndicalism, and his candidate thesis on Gustav Landauer, the German revolutionary anarchist. These were not the typical subjects for political science students of the day. Choosing these themes was a reflection of his political, extra-curricular activities and engagements. After arriving in Lund he almost immediately entered into intellectual and political student activity, staying away from mainstream Swedish politics. Together with a few other like-minded students, he founded a tiny libertarian anarcho-syndicalist study group which within weeks became a recognised student club within the Student Union in Lund, with Göran as chairman.

Why this choice? Göran had, during his high school years, happened to come in contact with the small Swedish syndicalist milieu (SAC), its daily paper (Arbetaren, ‘The Worker’), the quarterly journal of its youth organisation, Zenit – its name was inspired by the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist journal Cenit – and the writings of their iconic hero, the celebrated modernist author Stig Dagerman (1922–54). Choosing neither official social democracy and its career-

5. Dagerman was a prominent figure in the early post-war generation, once an editor of the cultural page at the anarcho-syndicalist daily Arbetaren, and still read and translated into the major languages. He committed suicide in 1954, at the age of 31.
advancing student club at Lund University, nor the left-leaning *Clarté*, with its mix of left-wing social democrats and traditional Communists – and where the latter group was dominant in 1960 – he selected the small syndicalist tradition, having an honourable and ‘clean’ relation to the Powers of the State, the Swedish and the Soviet. This was an understandable choice for an intellectual rebel coming from a conservative, rural bourgeois background.

The early writings of a political and social science student in *Zenit*

In the spring of 1961, at the age of twenty, a brief version of his thesis on social and economic democracy in civil-war Spain was published in *Zenit*, in an issue which memorized the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936, with a drawing of Picasso on its front page. This was Göran’s first major article, appearing in a working class cultural youth journal based in Stockholm, with a limited but nationwide circulation, having less than 1 000 readers. *Zenit* was an open-minded journal advocating human emancipation, equality, and global neutrality between the two geopolitical blocs, against narrow-minded collectivism, militarism, the bomb, and racism (South African Apartheid in particular) and with an interest in modern culture, including cinema, and criticisms of commercialism and mass consumer society.

1961 was Göran’s first year as a contributor to *Zenit* and altogether he published two major articles – the second one on ‘modern syndicalist experiences’, a review of a French syndicalist author Louis Mercier’s *Syndicalisme vivante* (translated to Swedish that year). On top of that, one letter to the editors and a few translations (on English anarchism and Polish worker’s councils, both signed), plus a joyous note on ‘Political literature’ in a Stockholm antiquarian bookshop – he had acquired Landauer’s *Die Revolution*. At the end of the year he was a member of the editorial committee, representing Lund.⁶

In 1962 Göran served a year of compulsory military service, although with civilian duties, in the capital of Sweden. He came to

⁶ The last issue of the year carried a drawing by Paul Flora, the father of renowned sociologist Peter Flora, on its cover: the Berlin wall and its two non-communicating sides.
live in a small room in Sveavägen 98, Stockholm, the headquarters of Swedish syndicalists, the tiny national trade union federation SAC, an internationalist working class association on the fringe of Swedish working class movement. Moving to Stockholm Göran also left behind political science a period of twenty years. This year he also extended his horizon beyond the European scene and produced a major overview of the anti-colonial revolt in Africa. 1962 was also the year when he established himself as the most productive contributor to *Zenit*; from now on, he wrote editorials, lead articles, polemics, travel reports, book reviews, etc. either under his own name or various signatures such as the *nom de plume* Bernt Land. In 1963, he moved back to Lund and soon the journal’s centre of gravidity had shifted southwards. As a side-track he gradually started studying sociology.

Working together with a few friends in Lund, over the coming years Göran took command and produced a journal that attracted new readers on the emerging left of centre but also estranged the die-hard syndicalists. The journal gradually became explicitly socialist, not only anarcho-syndicalist. It connected with a variety of young left-wingers. From now on, Marx and Proudhon were published interchangeably. While the flow from Göran’s pen and typewriter continued – on subjects such as alienation and industrial democracy – the review also introduced and translated major European radicals, such as Antonio Gramsci, André Gorz, Ernest Mandel, Herbert Marcuse, Tom Nairn (on Labour’s Imperialism) and a young Robin Blackburn on the Cuban revolution. Moreover, important international issues such as the war in Vietnam were covered in the pages of the journal; in the latter case through the first Swedish translation of the program of the National Liberation Front. *Zenit* opened up its pages to a broad spectrum of Swedish society from young left-leaning liberals and social democrats to anti-Stalinist communists, feminists, peaceniks, provies and other youngsters on the outskirts of Swedish politics.

---

7. The SAC building was, located only a few blocks away from the more spacious administrative-political office of the Social democratic party.
8. One of these was Gunnar Olofsson, another his later Swedish translator, Gunnar Sandin.
From an old to a new ‘third force’ of the Left

The first half of the 1960s witnessed the break-up of the cold war stranglehold on the minds and thoughts of people and nations. The transformation of Zenit during this period, and Göran’s crucial role in this process fit into the larger international social, cultural and political convulsions. Göran’s intense trips to European left gatherings, in particular in the British Isles, but also his honeymoon in Algeria in the summer of 1963 (!), is visible in the pages of the journal.

Through his efforts and those of his close comrades-in-arms Zenit became of equal standing to the old left wing student magazine Clarté. With a history back to the 1920s, Clarté had been the most important journal to promote an ecumenical Left perspective between Social Democracy and traditional communism in a country where no independent and unorthodox party of that kind ever had existed after World War II.

Since the early 1930s Social Democracy had cemented its domination within the working class as the governing national party, while the Comintern-affiliated Communist Party since the late 1930s had been able to occupy a small but stable space to the left of Social Democracy with no other political party in between the two blue-collar organizations. However, in 1964 the CP was shaken by the change of leadership. The old leader belonged to the ‘1929 generation’9 and a younger cadre, the editor-in-chief of its national Stockholm daily, C.H. Hermansson, replaced him. He was the party’s ‘single most important asset’ according to a statement by Göran in late 1965. That year Hermansson published Vänsterns väg (‘The Road of the Left’) in a paperback series published by Rabén & Sjögren (a publisher owned by left-of-centre Swedish Coop), which markedly deviated from previous publications from the party. Hermansson opened up for a modernisation of the party’s organization as well as policy. In neighbouring Denmark and Norway two independent Left Socialist parties had largely replaced old-time CPs, and intense

9. In 1929 the party leadership broke away from the Communist International and formed a ‘national’ Communist Party. A new Communist Party, affiliated to Comintern, was born in 1929 (Kennerström 1974).
contacts began to evolve across open borders between these parties and the new leadership of the Swedish CP. In Lund Zenit organized Nordic meetings and similar events took place in Copenhagen. Also in Helsinki the effects of the splits within the Finnish working class movement were felt among a younger cohort that for a brief moment oriented itself towards the West European scene.

It was in this conjuncture that Göran together with three co-authors in spring 1966 published *En ny vänster* (‘A New Left’, in the pocket book series of Rabén & Sjögren). This book had an instant and major impact in the Swedish political and cultural debate of the day, and rapidly ran into a second printing. It appealed not only to the nascent broad non-organized left community in Sweden but also to left-leaning social liberals, left-wing social democrats as well as to modernizing communists. It was a book that gave rise to comments and bitter criticisms in journals and in book-form. The Maoists and orthodox Marxist-Leninists, by now dominating *Clarté*, were very hostile; the same applied to the book length critique of the ‘new left’ from two younger liberals who attacked it in *Den nygamla vänstern* (‘A New-Old Left’, published by Bonniers 1967).10

1965 was the year when the independent and youthful Swedish anti-Vietnam-war movement got on its feet, and the incoming PM Olof Palme, already a member of government and the heir-apparent, began to attack the injustice and immortality of the US occupation. Thus, with Social Democracy there was a generation within reach of New Left thinking, in particular in its student association.11 But this was also the year when the first Maoist tendency saw the light of day on the fringe of the CP, within the emerging anti-war movement and in particular within the student association *Clarté*12 and from

---

10. One of them (Daniel Tarschys) became a professor in political science, MP and Secretary-General of the European Council, while the other (Carl Tham) first became party secretary of the liberal party and then twice a government minister, first for the liberals, and then, after his conversion, for the Social Democrats.

11. In a companion to this book, published simultaneously in Swedish as a *Festschrift*-section of the journal *Arkiv: Tidskrift för samhällsanalys* (no. 6, 2016), Olle Svenning writes about this moment.

12. Publisher of the journal with the same name.
this strand of thought the most critical voices against *En ny vänster* were mounted. While *Zenit* became less attached to anarcho-syndicalism, the majority in *Clarté* moved towards the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist pole while a minority later joined forces with Göran and his collaborators. Apart from publishing, political mobilization at this time became a major activity and concern for Göran.

An organisational interlude – the route into, within and through organized political activity: 1965–1970

Göran Therborn’s career over more than 50 years can be summarised as an intricate and dynamic relation between ‘the political’ and ‘the scientific’. ‘The Political’ has three dimensions: First, a basic and continuous relation to left-wing politics, although with shifting allegiances over time. Secondly, and this is the crucial anchor point, an analytical focus on power and the political struggles and transformations that have shaped not only relations between social classes, and nation states but the world order as a whole. But there is also a third dimension to Göran’s relations to the political, a rather brief period of actual organisational involvement in political activism, complementing his posture as a socialist and Marxist intellectual. The social scientific dimensions will be identified later, but throughout the 1960s the Department of Sociology was turned into an ‘operation-base’ in Göran’s words.

In 1965 the political Göran became a member of the (large) governing board of the Social democratic student club in Lund. This student club was an important recruiting ground for the social democratic government – the Prime Minister at the time (Tage Erlander) had made his political debut in Lund and returned annually to meet the student association in a large and open debate in the imposing Student Union building. Erlander was in the early 1960s often accompanied by the club’s former chairman Ingvar Carlsson (who in 1986 succeeded Palme as PM). This student club was thus an important springboard for those aiming for a political-administrative career in Sweden at that time. However, in 1965 and 1966, a broad left coalition, including members of the *Zenit* team, was elected to
form the new governing board of the Social democratic student club in Lund.

After marrying in 1963 Göran had moved to Malmö but had stayed outside local politics until 1965/66 when he became involved with a group of independent Social Democrats, most of them employed in the city’s municipal administration. Simultaneously he joined the Social Democratic party in Malmö. On the cover of the political manifesto *En ny vänster*, Göran was listed as a social democrat. But his period as a *bona fide* social democrat became even shorter than his affiliation with the syndicalist movement.

From late 1966, he took an active part in the creation of the Socialist Association (SF)\(^\text{13}\), a small and independent socialist grouping consisting of left-wing social democrats, modernising communists and some unaffiliated left-wing activists, that aimed to launch a ‘new left’ political vision of and for Sweden.

*Zenit* had a close relationship to domestic politics in Sweden during the run-up to the 1968 national election. Some members of the editorial committees in Lund and Stockholm were on the lists of the new Socialist Association, founded in 1967, which campaigned in cooperation with the Left Party Communists. This association also produced a programmatic platform outlining a ‘new left’ radical vision of Swedish society and the steps needed to bring it to reality. Göran was the main author of this document, *Program för socialism* (*A Program for Socialism*, published by Bonniers and appearing in the late autumn 1967). This association had its origins in the Stockholm area but also acquired some following in the south of Sweden. It was seen, not without good reason, as a way for the Swedish CP to broaden its political appeal. This had two effects. First, the Social democratic party did not accept double affiliation and some leading members of SF left the social democrats or were expelled; Göran one among the latter. Secondly, in the run-up to the coming election in September 1968 there was an electoral agreement between the small SF and the much larger CP. This made it possible for SF to have leading members topping the ballot paper in a few

\[^{13}\] ‘Socialistiska förbundet’ (SF) in Swedish. For its background see Christer Hogstedt’s chapter in *Program för socialism* (1967).
constituencies. Göran Therborn was the first name on the ballot paper in the Lund-Malmö constituency, and was very active in the election campaign. In late August 1968 the Soviet Union and five other Warsaw pact countries invaded Czechoslovakia. In this situation the CP and its affiliate was dealt a severe blow and the CP just barely survived as a parliamentary force. Göran, as many others in SF, later joined the Swedish CP and he also for a period participated actively in the local organisation of the CP in Malmö, e.g. in writing for a workplace sheet – Kockumknogarn – together with workers from the city’s large shipyard.

The university as a red base: 1962–1981

Göran’s incursion into the organisational side of local politics was not successful. However, there is another organizational dimension to his restless activity: the university and its potential mobilization of students. From a sleepy beginning in the early 1960s tertiary mass education became a hallmark of Lund University as the years passed by during this decade. New students arrived, often from families without a traditional academic background and gradually came to dominate the student corpus. Lund was no exception to an international pattern. In the last years of the 1960s the situation in Sweden for a moment became explosive, if in no sense revolutionary in an utterly left-reformist society.

In June 1968, at the end of the May events in Paris, Lund University celebrated its 300th anniversary under the guard of a similar number of riot policemen, and a slightly fewer number of horses, despite that the town was rather empty as the students were on vacations. However, the previous month had seen some violent

14. The constituency also included two major industrial towns in the region, Helsingborg and Landskrona. Malmö was the third largest city in Sweden, Helsingborg among the top ten; both heavily industrialized since the late 19th century.

15. Gesser (1971) shows that the number of students in the humanities and social sciences at Lund University had increased fivefold from 1960 to 1968. And it was among these students that the left found its audience.
demonstrations in nearby Båstad where the Davis Cup match between Sweden and Rhodesia caused a lot of criticisms against ‘the white game’ and had to be moved to the French Riviera. And in Stockholm left-wing students had recently ‘occupied’ their own Student Union building.

In Lund, part of the tercentennial events was an international multidisciplinary colloquium on scientific research and politics with some 200 participants from more than ten countries under the joint auspices of the University and its student union. Among those present were three sociologists, the North-American Amitai Etzioni, the Latin-American André Gunder Frank and the French-Greek Nicos Poulantzas. Göran was the host and official commentator for this session.

The conference proceedings went wild when the issue of scientific responsibility reached top of the agenda. The Vietnam War fuelled the discussions, and when it became known that the US ambassador to Sweden had been invited to the anniversary in Lund, an overwhelming majority of the conference participants decided to send a telegram in which they expressed their disagreement with this invitation, ‘as long as the war continues the US Ambassador is not a welcome guest in our academic community’. At the end of the meeting a proposal was made that the participants should sign the 1967 ‘Appeal of Havana’ to the intellectuals of the world; in this case only a minority did so – 56 out of 200.

Thus, the university and its main campus around the Dome were temporarily turned into a red base for a few days. Otherwise, throughout the 1960s it was the Faculty of Social Sciences, and especially the Department of Sociology, of the University of Lund which

---

16. The Swedish director Bo Widerberg made a documentary about these events together with a large group of young film-workers – *Den vita sporten* (‘The White Game’) – that was released in the autumn 1968.

17. Göran had participated in the Havana conference but his exact role during these two days of hot and intense debate in Lund is not detectable from the conference proceedings. He may have been ‘one of the participants in the symposium’ who went forward with either one of these proposals whether it was the telegram or the Havana Appeal (Dencik 1969: 5–6).
provided a room and the necessary facilities from which to operate both on campus and also globally. Sociology may have had its domestic origins in Lund (there seems to have been an association as early as 1901) but from the late 1940s it was first taught there in a homespun Parsons-Lundbergian fashion, and a decade later its first professor was inaugurated. Göran started out as a sociology undergraduate after completing his draft and returning to Lund. In 1965 he wrote his BA-thesis on mass media and the Tonkin incident, which was to appear as an article in *Zenit* the same year. At that time he was already a teaching assistant, soon to become an extra lecturer teaching in particular economic sociology. He introduced Andrew Shonfield’s *Modern Capitalism* as well as Karl Polanyi’s famous 1957 chapter on ‘The economy as an instituted process’ to undergraduates eager to learn more about the society they lived in and were supposed to work for.

Göran became a PhD-student under the supervision of Gösta Carlsson who went from Stockholm and joined the tiny Lund department as full professor in 1958. Carlsson was a key member of the first generation of Swedish sociologists, and an active contributor to its Nordic community, visible through its jointly run English-language journal *Acta Sociologica*. Carlsson’s significance is overlooked in most chronologies of Swedish sociology, though Göran has stressed his importance as a role model. After a decade in office Carlsson gave up his chair at Lund University in protest against academic bureaucratization and streamlining, as well as the student protest activity. Carlsson’s role as supervisor was taken over by his younger co-worker Bengt Gesser, a specialist in the field of sociology of education; ‘the only intellectual at the Department’, Göran once caustically remarked.

19. *Acta* was originally published by Munksgaard in Copenhagen and dating back to 1956 (Swedberg 1993).
20. Carlsson later returned to academic work through a special senior research position financed by the National Science Council and located at Stockholm University.
Göran’s sociological interventions in *Acta Sociologica* had to wait until the 1970s but his contributions to *Sociologisk Forskning* – the domestic academic journal edited from Uppsala by the rising star Johan Asplund – began already in 1967 with a review of a major theoretical textbook edited by Asplund. Göran did not conceal his critical instincts. This book focused on the sociological canon from Comte to Weber while the young reviewer considered the selection as ‘arbitrary’ missing such key sociological figures as Spencer and Tönnies. In a characteristic mould Göran concluded that ‘viewed as a whole, this book is a fairly uninteresting textbook for students who are and will remain disinterested in sociology. What we need is a textbook for those who are interested in sociology’ (quoted from Larsson and Magdalenic 2014: 43–44). Nevertheless, it was soon on the Sociology 101 reading list at the Department of Sociology in Lund.

His first major article in *Acta Sociologica* presented a project initiated in late 1976 after the end of more than four decades of uninterrupted Social democratic rule. In a special supplement of this journal aimed for the 1978 Uppsala International Congress of Sociology Göran together with three collaborators – among them Anders Kjellberg, a future specialist on trade union mobilization, as well as Staffan Marklund, a future social policy expert – outlined a framework for an analysis of the transformation of Sweden as a social formation – ‘before and after Social Democracy 1932–1976’ (see Olsson 1978 and Hort 2010). Through its critical appraisal of policy and power, this joint article sets itself apart from much more rosy, enthusiastic hopes for the transformative potentials of Swedish social democracy articulated by mainstream Swedish sociologists at the time. The tone was cautious in the *Acta*-article – measured socio-political achievements and shortcomings were far from the idea of the irreversibility of the welfare state later to appear in Göran’s writings on the similar Dutch experience. It is pertinent to add that absent among the authors of the *Acta Sociologica* article

21. This is visible in the works by e.g. Bengt Abrahamsson and Anders Broström (1980), Ulf Himmelstrand and his collaborators (1981) and in particular Walter Korpi’s internationally successful and more solid work, *The Working Class in Welfare Capitalism* (1978).
was the project’s only research assistant, Bo Rothstein, who at age 24 may have been too young to be fully included. In the late 1970s, he was still a left-wing student politician in Lund, on his way into editorial work at Zenit. However, in this research project he took on, with great success, the jewel in the crown of the Swedish model, the active labour market policy and its high-profile administration. In this volume the nowadays by far the most cited Swedish political scientist – since early 2016 an Oxford don – contributes with an article on corruption, institutions and social trust.


In the aftermath of En ny vänster, in late 1966 a new Zenit was launched by left-wingers from the four Nordic countries. Ten years after 1956 a major organizational transformation of Zenit began as ownership of the journal was transferred to an independent association with individual membership outside the control of the SAC traditionalists. At the end of the year a manifesto for a new Nordic and socialist journal got off the ground. The manifesto was written by the Göteborg literary giant Kurt Aspelin and signed by 43 individuals from four countries who were listed in its first issue; five women, the rest men, most of them in their twenties and thirties, Göran among them.

Hence, intellectuals from the four Nordic countries as well as from various sections of the Left joined forces to create a New Left Review of the Far North. In 1966 in the last issue of the ‘old’ Zenit Göran Therborn published the first part of an article entitled ‘The crisis of Social Democracy and the possibilities of Socialism’. In the

23. New Left Review was the most obvious international reference. The nucleus of the Zenit group even tried to strike a deal with the International Socialist Journal in Rome, to make Zenit into a Swedish version of ISJ. Other important references were Les temps Modernes and Partisans in Paris, the German review neue kritik, and the US journals Studies on the Left as well as Monthly Review.
new journal – no. 1, 1967 – its two parts were merged and printed together with the same heading.

The first issue of the new Zenit also marked the start of a completely new endeavour, a brief spell of a ‘Left Scandinavianism’. From 1967 and for a few years ahead, Zenit became a truly Nordic socialist journal with editorial committees in six cities: the four capitals Copenhagen, Helsinki, Oslo and Stockholm plus Göteborg and Lund in Sweden. The Copenhagen committee was dominated by social historians while the Helsinki crew had a tilt towards the country’s Swedish minority. In Oslo it included key intellectuals such as the Sartrean philosopher-sociologist Dag Österberg. In Göteborg two senior social science and history lecturers, Lars Herlitz and Rita Liljeström, joined Aspelin, all of them belonging to a pre-1956 generation. In 1967 the October uprising in St Petersburg was 50 years old, and this was highlighted in Zenit with a special issue devoted to the Russian Revolution, edited by and with major articles by Aspelin, Herlitz and Agneta Pleijel.

The Lund committee was revitalized and a few new people added, while Zenit never gained a foothold in Uppsala where at that time there was still a vibrant Social Democrat cohort dominating the campus left though an emerging Maoist faction soon challenged it from the far left. Nor was the journal able to recruit collaborators in the far north of Umeå – since the early 1960s a new and ‘red’ Swedish university town. Apart from change of contents and style many at the time well-known Scandinavian intellectuals supported the new journal, the non-Swedish more academic than the large Swedish cohort.

24. A variant of the kind of Scandinavianism that on and off had occurred since the coming of the public sphere in the 19th century, whether bourgeois or proletarian.

25. Among the first of these were Lennart Berntson and Gunnar Persson, both of whom were inspired by the American Monthly Review. They published a very successful pamphlet on imperialism and aid to the developing countries (U-hjälp och imperialism, Bonniers 1968). Gunnar Persson later became an internationally acknowledged economic historian.

26. Including Leif Thollander’s advanced modernist design of the journal, in all its aspects. For decades Thollander was a leading designer of books in Sweden, and a member of the Stockholm editorial committee 1967–1973.
Zenit covered culture, history, politics and theory. The centre of gravity moved to Stockholm from which city fifteen issues of the journal were produced during 1967, 1968 and 1969.27 Despite a considerable input from Göran over these crucial years, he was not alone in putting his mark on the new journal. Although his influence remained strong there were those who took issue with Göran’s ambitions, for instance Iréne Matthis – a founding member of Group 8, the Stockholm feminist-socialist avant-garde – and her husband, the late Tomas Gerholm (1942–1995), an anthropologist and former editor of Clarté.28

At the end of 1969, the main editorial office returned to Lund, and the links to the other Nordic nodes gradually became somewhat diluted.29 In Norway, the young left became Maoists, in Helsinki Breznevites, while the young student left in Copenhagen turned Hegelian. In Göteborg Aspelin was able to inject new energy into the running of the journal.30 The Stockholm editorial team never fully recovered. The repercussions of ‘1968’, its deployment and retraction, were felt in many respects within and outside the new journal. The Nordic New Left in early 1967 was not the same as in late 1969 when a two month-long miner’s strike shook the Swedish establishment, the newly elected PM Olof Palme included.

Between 1969 and 1971 Zenit published a series of reports on wildcat strikes. The first one dealt with the dockworker strike in Göteborg and the second analysed on the three-months-long miners

27. The late Eva Adolfsson (1942–2010) was soon a key member of the editorial team. From 1968 she was the managing editor of the journal together with Bernt Kennerström.
29. The Oslo group, Österberg an exception, went with the rapidly growing Maoist camp. The Danish left developed their own publishing channels, while the Finnish left began to drift either into a peculiar pro-Soviet ‘Breznevite’ direction, which had an impact on some members in the Helsinki group, or became prominent Social Democrats, even prominent ‘Swedish liberals’ (Nils Torvalds, in the EU Parliament from the late 1990s).
30. Elisabeth Özdalga in this volume is a representative of this (1970-) generation.
strike above the Polar circle, in Kiruna, Gällivare and Svappavaara. This report was published in a special issue of the journal, numbered 16½. The latter report was to a large extent written by Göran, and parts of it translated into German, *Spontaneität und Massenaktion im ‘Wohlfahrtsstaat‘*, appearing half a year after the publication of Zenit 16½. The late sixties also saw the Vietnam anti-war movement growing by the day, despite internal fights and quarrels. Into the early seventies these were the years of a triumphalist Left with the coming of new communist parties – even prospective Internationals – in the waiting: Marxist-Leninist-Maoists, Luxemburgians, Trotskyists, workerists, etc. etc.

In retrospect the culmination of Göran’s Zenit writings is probably the analysis of the Swedish class structure, which completely dominated its 1972 May Day issue. A decade later it was turned into a full-length book, his last written in the local vernacular. Inspired by the works of Nicos Poulantzas, and underpinned by his theoretical criticisms of mainstream stratification research, Göran undertook a major statistical investigation of the historical development of main classes and ‘special categories’ in Swedish society from the 1930s onwards, their boundaries, and relationship to each other, the state, the forces and modes of productions. The empirical scrutiny of Swedish administrative statistics – job positions and institutional power – proved successful and challenged both academic research and left-wing politics. The Nordic sociological and especially the Swedish level-of-living investigations had caused a lot of unrest within the governing social democratic party. Therborn’s intervention in Zenit made its impact felt in the intersection of academia and politics, the social and the scientific.31

Göran remained on the Zenit editorial board for some time but moved to Stockholm for a few years, out of touch with the internal workings of the journal, though contributing with a lengthy article on the Portuguese revolution in 1974.

31. In 1979 a new and updated version of his analysis of the Swedish class structure reached an English audience (Fry 1979).
Göran goes international

Neutral Sweden belonged to the Far North and had been cut off from the European scene of the early post-war period, US was the preferred chosen land to the defeated continent – Europe – and an empire – the British – going astray. A younger Swedish generation turned their eyes towards the ‘third world’ including China. Göran followed in these footsteps, was a subscriber to *Accra Evening News*, and travelled extensively during the first years of the 1960s. On behalf of *Zenit* he soon made contact at first with anarcho-leftists throughout Europe. This was at the birth of the new left of the 1960s. From 1963, in *Zenit* there are reports in a special section developed by Göran: ‘Outsides’. This is where for instance Perry Anderson first appeared in the journal, in a report from the Alderstone march. Quite soon, however, Göran’s writings also moved beyond the local language. In 1965 he went international with one article – ‘Power in the Kingdom of Sweden’ – in *International Socialist Journal* edited from Rome by Lelio Basso, assisted by Peter Wollen (at the time also a member of the *New Left Review* editorial committee). At the end of that year another article appeared in the London-based *New Left Review*: ‘The Swedish Left’. The *ISJ* was an episode in the history of the European new left, the *NLR* is still going strong – both as a respected non-mainstream journal and from 1970 also a prospering publishing house (New Left Books/Verso) – and has had lasting effects on Göran’s life and letters. Altogether he has so far published 26 articles in this journal, three during the 1960s, six in the 1970s, etc. (see the archive on *New Left Review*’s homepage).

Power in the Kingdom of Sweden did, according to Göran, not rest with the royal household, but rather, the country’s economically successful bourgeoisie. Sweden was an industrial latecomer that overcame the Great Depression and benefitted from closeness to the German market during Nazi rearmament. Thus, the hegemony of the bourgeoisie continued despite an increasingly strong trade union movement and many years of Social Democrats at the helm of cabinets and in other significant state administrative positions.
The *ISJ* article was an overview in Gramscian language of working-class influence under a continuing latent bourgeois dominance, with definite opportunities for an open-minded socialist left to the left of the left in power. The *NLR* article painted a formidable but bleak picture of a ruling national working-class party which after the Petrograd shockwaves and the coming of Swedish Parliamentary rule had never experienced a serious crisis, no moment of fundamental rethinking, no Resistance movement against Fascism, or a ‘moment of truth’. Göran ended with a characteristic comparative note: ‘the SAP is monolithic to a degree almost unprecedented in (European) Social Democratic history’.

The year 1956 figured pre-eminently in this portrait of Swedish Social Democracy but ‘the crisis of NATO, the Bomb and Imperialism were for the Swedes only distant dramas to be viewed from outside, since Sweden was not directly integrated into the imperialist system.’ Moreover ‘programmatic discussion in the fifties on the whole came down to seeking theoretical ornamentation for the prevailing political routine’.

Göran also noted the parochial intellectual isolation and the integration of fragmented radical intellectuals in the big media ‘which has not favoured the development of any coherent social and cultural critique’. After this picture of the established Left, Göran entered with two forces at hand to the left of the established polity: Swedish communism, and – surprisingly given the picture already mentioned – the Social Democratic Left. Traditional communism is ‘in a static perspective … by far the most important force of the Swedish Left’, and Hermansson ‘its single most important asset’. The latter judgement was not to last long.\(^{32}\)

---

\(^{32}\). Before the decade had come to a close Göran also took issue with the defeat in Sweden of the modernizers within the Left Party Communists (the formal name of transformed CP) at its Twenty-Second congress: ‘Swedish Communism – end of an interlude’ (*New Left Review* 58, 1969).
The global breakthrough: Vietnam 1968

Of outmost importance for his international future was, however, another *NLR*-article from the year before. In March–April 1968 Göran published a worldwide survey of the political and theoretical implications of the internal struggle inside the country and global opposition to the War in Vietnam: ‘From Petrograd to Saigon’. The *NLR* editors introduced it as a commissioned article saying that ‘the Swedish Left has pioneered militant actions against the American War in Vietnam; the quality of Therborn’s theses reflects this experience’. Göran is presented as the editor of *Zenit*, ‘our Swedish counterpart’ – not Nordic! In this volume it is scrutinized separately by Anders Stephanson.

With this article in the *NLR* Göran laid the foundation among young future social science and history professors for his present esteem and established himself as a global revolutionary dialectical thinker and writer. Although this article to our limited knowledge was not published in any other major language in 1968 it established Göran as a fully recognized member of the internationalist new left intelligentsia. His reputation as a dialectician of global revolution would be further reinforced by his critique of the academic delusion of Western Marxism.

During the 1970s Göran published six articles in *NLR*, producing perhaps his most important ones at the start of the decade. The first two of them had already been printed in Sweden in 1969 – a critique of the Frankfurt school in *Häften för kritiska studier* (‘Cahiers of Critical Studies’) leading to a major setback for the influence of the ‘Frankfurt school’ among the student radicals in Sweden.

In 1970–71 this article appeared in two issues of *NLR*. They were later to reappear in an edited volume by the *NLR* on New Left Books: *Western Marxism: A Critical Reader*.33 Therborn’s critique was translated into Italian as mentioned at the start of this article.

---

In 1977, moreover, his remarkable essay ‘The rise of democracy and the rule of capital’ was printed in NLR, to become his most cited article.

As important as the number of articles is the triplet of his major books written from a decidedly Marxist standpoint which were published by New Left Books/Verso between 1976 and 1980. Apart from his reworked dissertation, *Science, Class and Society* (1976), he launched the imaginative *What Does the Ruling Class Do When it Rules?* in 1978. He then took upon himself to investigate the Marxist theme of the day in *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (1980), which included a critical discussion of Louis Althusser’s conception of ideology.

With these works, which will be scrutinized by other contributors to this volume, he was able to get out of the position as a Swedish civil servant and into the tenured world of the universal academy, far from the limits of the nation-state.

Nijmegen and after – finding a way back to the central concerns of sociology

Göran left Sweden for a chair in political science at the University of Nijmegen in 1981, at a time when his international fame and credentials were already well established. We will not go into any detail about this later and more glorious part of his career – we will only point to some of the major stations on the way.

In this volume Robin Blackburn gives an international account and assessment of Göran’s work in particular after the publication *Why Some Peoples Are More Unemployed Than Others* (1986). Moreover, during the 1980s Göran participated in several international research projects, and produced a fair number of articles and papers for numerous journals and conferences visible in the list of his publications, to be found on his homepage (www.therborn.com).

34. In Nijmegen he gathered a group of young research students who left their marks on Dutch and Flemish social research and practice but also made an input to Peter Flora’s never finished comparative welfare state project *Growth to Limits* (see volume IV, 1987).
In 1987/88 Göran went back to Sweden to take up a chair in sociology at Göteborg University – where he immediately initiated a major research program on social steering. At the end of the decade, two of his papers intended for the international scene were collected into a Swedish volume on *Borgarklass och byråkrati i Sverige* (‘Bourgeoisie and Bureaucracy in Sweden’), essays that to our knowledge never appeared in English (or any other language). A little more than a decade later Göran joined SCASSS – Scandinavian Collegium for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences – in Uppsala from which he retired as a Swedish civil servant only to join Cambridge University for another three years of intense activity as its chair in general sociology. Throughout these decades he travelled extensively: Africa, Asia, Australia, North America, and of course what was to emerge as the new Central and Eastern Europe. Two Swedish institutions of higher learning would again become his base camp from which he reached out to the international social scientific community.

During the 1990s and first decade of the millennium he continued to tour the world but he also managed to publish several articles in many different languages. Organizationally he became heavily involved in the sociological community of the Far North, first as president of the domestic Swedish Sociological Association, the publisher of *Sociologisk Forskning*, later as chairman of its joint Nordic Association, the publisher of *Acta Sociologica*. He was in charge of the annual or bi-annual meetings of these associations, and even managed to invite – and finance its travels – the Board of the International Sociological Association to one of these meetings close to the Polar circle long before he was elected a member of the latter’s executive. In the early 1990s, he took an active part in the set-up of the first European Sociological Association, which spanned the previously divided continent; though he never became a board member. Twice, in 1998 and 2002, he tried, but failed narrowly, to become the President of the ISA. However, in 2011 at

35. See Therborn and Olsson (1991). The Swedish King came to town to listen to its first major public presentation (through his ‘adjutant’ his royal highness asked far-sightedly how many beds there were in Sweden).
the age of 70 he agreed to become the editor-in-chief of *European Societies*, the main journal of ESA, for a four years period with the Sociology Department of Linnaeus University as a major node of production.

From the late 1980s in Göteborg he wrote what is now considered his major sociological works, on the one hand *European Modernity and Beyond* (1995), on the other hand *Between Sex and Power* (2004). These books have so far had an impressive impact on the scholarly world (see the appendix below) but they have not been seriously discussed in Scandinavian or Swedish sociology. The exception is the article by Anita Göransson and Karin Widerberg in this volume.36

His influential global sociology synthesis *The World: A Beginner’s Guide* was published in 2011 and *The Killing Fields of Inequality* appeared in 2013. The impact of these books, especially his continuous work on inequality, can be seen in the articles below, especially in the chapter by the Brazilian scholar Lena Lavinas.

From an intellectual perspective there is peculiar lacuna in this success story. *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?* (2008) – a collection of three previously published essays – is probably the most neglected of all the books Göran has written in the later decades. Despite the book’s appearance at a time of soul-searching among traditional macro-economists and a revival for Marx and ‘Marxisant economics’, and more generally societal crisis theory, no serious international discussion seems to have followed in its footsteps.37 There was neither a Poulantzas-Therborn exchange, as Blackburn remarks,38 nor an exchange of ideas similar to the one that came to the fore

36. Göransson and Widerberg’s article is simultaneously published in Swedish in the above-mentioned *Festschrift*-section of the journal *Arkiv: Tidskrift för samhällsanalys* (no. 6, 2016) – the same journal that in 2014 (no. 3) published Swedish versions of his *NLR*-articles on classes in the 21st century and the new masses.

37. That year (2009), after the Lehmann Brothers crash, *Das Kapital* was a best-seller for instance in Germany.

38. An allusion to the famous debate in *New Left Review* between Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas on the Marxist theory of the state.
after the publication of *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology.* From Marxism to Post-Marxism? is in any case also the book where Göran advanced the idea of a global ‘intellectual sociology’. Maybe Burawoy’s idea of a public sociology had closed the market for another new global sociology? Limited space for competition, or signs taken for wonder of an ideological crisis of the market for post-Marxist thought?

Göran’s route from sociology to Marxism – and onwards: his specificity as a social scientist

Especially in the early stages of his career, Göran was regarded primarily as a ‘theoretician’. He has certainly made his mark in this field and put forward forceful critiques of different theoretical traditions during his long career, spanning from his M. Phil.-thesis in the early 1970’s, criticizing the suppositions of the key stratification theories in American sociology, to his inclusive and incisive overview of the current ideological and theoretical landscape of critical leftist thought in his 2008 book on *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?*. There are thus very good reasons for regarding Göran first and foremost as a social theorist.

This is in our view a too limited assessment of his work. Yes, he certainly masters social theory to an extraordinary degree. But he is not a system-building theorist. He should be regarded and valued as a highly sophisticated and theoretically informed comparatist. He is able to use large masses of data for demonstrating the validity of his theoretical arguments and conceptual elaborations (e.g. family systems, modes of state interventions etc.). His broad comparative approach, underpinned by an astonishing erudition in many languages, combined with inventiveness in finding simple indices for his arguments are central to his key contribution to the social sciences as a comparative and empirical social scientist. Even when he dealt with theories, as in his dissertation, theories were dealt with comparatively and empirically.

He is a methodologically adept social scientist, but has not written methodological recipes or handbooks – they are present in his practice. His use of smart and simple indicators to make his points are visible in definition such as ‘a state is a welfare state when more than half of its expenditures are devoted to welfare measures’; or in his empirical argument, in terms of a threshold index, for stating – in his 1977 *NLR*-article ‘The rule of capital and the rise of democracy’ – that the USA became a full-fledged bourgeois democracy only in the 1960’s. This aspect becomes ever more present in his later books and articles.

In the early and mid-1960’s we find that Göran was among the first in Sweden to discuss and reflect on the contributions of Herbert Marcuse (*One Dimensional Man*) and Jürgen Habermas (*Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*), as well as deeply well-read in Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* (the six Italian volumes from Einaudi). Quite early in the 1960s he read and absorbed Marx, not only *Das Kapital*, but also *Grundrisse* (the 1953 edition from Berlin), without falling into the Hegelian and historicist abyss that came to characterize large parts of the Danish and the German intellectual left in the 1970s.

He is, from almost the very beginning, explicitly non-Hegelian in his view of social theory and social reality. His early embrace of the historical Marxist tradition was Sartrean-Gramscian (applied in the useful Nairn-Anderson mode), later his methodological position was sharpened by absorbing Louis Althusser’s epistemology for breaking with historicist and unilinear assumptions of historical development and the acceptance of the different forms of social and ideological power in distinct apparatuses and fields of influence, not being subsumed under an overarching historical subject.

Seen from the near outside it could be argued that Göran had two early role models – Perry Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm. Both in terms of their erudition and analytical ambition, broad sweep in terms of languages, sources and materials they mastered – but also as models for a basically respectful attitude towards the inheritance of the revolutionary traditions of the 20th century, at times explicitly Leninist in its formulations and in analytical terms, but later and over time more attenuated and rethought within a broader macrosociological tradition.
In short, Hobsbawm had a much larger attraction than either Hegel or Habermas, (Perry) Anderson and (Louis) Althusser rather than (Theodor W.) Adorno, (Barrington) Moore and later (Michael) Mann a more lasting impact than (Herbert) Marcuse.

His book from 2008, *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?* can be seen as sequel to the dissertation from 1974/76, which in a sense told the history of the life and times of the academic discipline of sociology, seen from the perspective of its eloquent opponent, the Marxist tradition. In this collection of essays he reviews the challenges to the Marxist traditions of the 20th century, coming from an impressive array of new non- and post-Marxist intellectual traditions as well as from revitalized academic disciplines. The Marxism Göran once enthusiastically embraced as the natural alternative to traditional sociology and political science has lost its primacy as the sole challenger in social theory. However, it remains a fertile component in the emancipatory social thought, which has come to the fore in Göran’s publications both his later books and most recent important articles in *NLR* on the new global masses of the 21st century and the current state of social progress.

‘Before the Eagle ascended’ – a preliminary summary

The Swedish ascendancy of an *enfant terrible* has been sketched in some detail above, however, only extremely tentatively the domestic repercussions of the international establishment in a broader republican of letters of a radical global intellectual.

Arriving in Lund at the age of 19, its university and student corpus offered an arena for public involvement which rapidly extended northwards to include the tiny anarcho-syndicalist youth movement in Sweden. However, his early outward activities culminated in 1968 with the publication of ‘From Petrograd to Saigon’ while his domestic political fortunes ended abruptly a few months later with the failure for his bid to become an MP.

After 1970 his activities and ambitions gradually shifted to critical intellectual work within social sciences, in his case the field of sociology. The balance gradually moved from his activities as a left-wing political intellectual to a role as a critical, *Marxisant* sociologist. This
led in a quick turn first (1971) to a M.Phil. thesis that combined an analysis of the post-war stratification debates within sociology and an overview of the literature on economic systems, and then to his impressive doctoral\textsuperscript{40} thesis \textit{Science, Class and Society} in 1974, later published by New Left Books in 1976.

Together with a sense of distance from the national culture went his independence of mind. Economics and politics intertwined at the heart of his writings, history always present. Philosophically the 1960s were Sartrean-Gramscian, the 1970s Althusserian. For most of this period, almost from the start, he was close to \textit{New Left Review} and Perry Anderson. Göran was a card-carrying Swedish party Marxist after his own fashion and outside the precincts and prescripts of the domestic CP. In the 1970s academic work took precedence for Göran, in particular after the English release in 1976 of his 1974 dissertation. Two major works followed in due course: \textit{What Does the Ruling Class Do When it Rules?} (1978) and \textit{The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology} (1980). In French, together with Christine Buci-Glucksmann he published \textit{Le défi social-démocrate} (1981) which could be considered as a summary of the previously mentioned ‘before and after Social Democracy’ project in a comparative European perspective.

In Sweden, \textit{Zenit} survived but ran gradually out of steam. By the time the Left Party Communists dropped its ‘C’ to become simply the Left Party, this journal ceased to exist. Since long ago Göran had disappeared from the streets of Lund to become a political science professor in Nijmegen. However, already in 1987 he returned to Sweden, this time as a tenured professor in sociology at Göteborg University.\textsuperscript{41} A decade later he moved to join SCASSS in Uppsala.

Hence, as the final song of a conventional research paper use to end, more research is needed. There are German, Italian, and Spanish publications, at the end maybe also Dutch publications

\textsuperscript{40} The classic Swedish doctoral degree, of which Göran’s was one of the last in Sweden, corresponded to a \textit{doctorat d’État} in France or a \textit{Habilitation} in Germany.

\textsuperscript{41} In the late 1980s he had for a short while become an op-ed columnist in the main Swedish daily (von Platen 1996: 281).
that have eluded us, as have some Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Korean and other translations. Until 1984 Göran had published twelve articles in *New Left Review*, which together with his three books being published by New Left Books/Verso was his most important forum before the mid 1980s. In 1986 he published *Why Some Peoples Are More Unemployed Than Others*. Through the *New Left Review*/New Left Books he became an institutionalized social scientist. His growing output has increasingly gone into the academic or semi-academic press – into journals and edited volumes. His major books from 1995 were published by Sage, Routledge and Polity Press. At the end of the first decade of the third millennium he returned more frequently to *New Left Review*/Verso with *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?* and comparative articles on social classes and mass revolts around the world.

At the age of 75 he is still going strong, participating in several international social scientific and socio-political endeavours, from Cape Town to New York. Not to speak of Berlin, Cambridge, Kalmar and Ljungbyholm – to and through global modernity.

**References**


**Books by Göran Therborn, referred to in the text**


Appendix: Göran Therborn’s impact as a ‘public’ and as a ‘professional’ sociologist

There are a couple of ways to measure the influence world wide of Göran Therborn’s books and articles. If we phrase it in the terms of Göran as a ‘public sociologist’, the number of languages his books and articles have been translated into is a relevant measure. His books and articles have appeared in twenty-four languages (Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Finnish, English, French, German, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Greek, Slovene, Serbo-Croat, Hungarian, Polish, Belarussian, Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Chinese, and Korean). Using this indicator he has no equal among his Swedish colleagues in the social sciences.
If we turn to Göran Therborn’s impact in the academic social scientific community, in the English-speaking world and circles, his impact as a ‘professional sociologist’, to continue using Burawoy’s conceptual scheme, we will have to use a simple measure such as the number of quotations and references counted by Google Scholar. These data are easily available but they are also heavily skewed towards the English-speaking world. According to the counts in Google Scholar, Göran’s presence in the scholarly literature is significant but not remarkable. The figures below date from spring 2016.


His first book in English, *Science, Class and Society* has noted 363 in all, while his work *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?* has until now only reached 109. His book on social democracy published in French together with Buci-Glucksmann reached 127 citations in their French and German editions, indicating the Anglo-American bias in the Google Scholar measure.

His most cited article was the text on ‘The rule of capital and the rise of democracy’ that has been referred to 609 times. He has published many articles that have been cited more than 100 times.

This indicates that his books and articles have been read and used by a large number of people. To put this figures in a proper context we can note that Walter Korpi’s book on *The Democratic Class Struggle* (1983) has been quoted more than 2 000 times. Esping Andersen’s book on *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990) has been cited more than 24 000 times. Perry Anderson’s *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (1974) reached almost 3 000 citations. But all this is a far cry from the astonishing impact of Bourdieu and Foucault (respectively more than 450 000 and 620 000).

---

42. His 1978 book on the *Ruling Class* was translated into Arabic. According to the translator Abdulhadi Khalaf, this book is still widely used in the Arabic-speaking world. But we have not been able to find a single reference to that edition in the Google Scholar database.
Combining the public and the professional aspects

Most of the impact Göran’s books and articles has had in their translations (more than twenty languages outside the English and Scandinavian orbits) is simply not visible when we use an indicator such as Google Scholar.

To get an adequate measure of his impact we must add his accumulated presence in the conference and lecture circuits, his proficiency in many languages, his role as journal editor, as editor of a number of books, his organizational presence within the Sociological associations – the Swedish, the Nordic, the European and other continental as well as the International on sociology and nearby disciplines.