

# Sweden Retrains Workers—Government Pays the Bill

By FREDERICK H. TREESH  
United Press International  
Stockholm, Sweden - (UPI) — Per Lindquist was 46 years old, married with two children and unemployed. He had been ill for several years and was unable to resume his former occupation — trucking — because of his health.

With his personal funds exhausted and no other skill, Lindquist might have been at the brink of economic disaster had he lived in Chicago or Pittsburgh. But welfare-minded Sweden believes society has an obligation to put people like Lindquist back on their financial feet and the cost, however high, is less than allowing a good man to be idle.



**LEARN NEW SKILL**—This group of adult Swedes is learning a new skill, office machine operation, as part of the Swedish government's retraining program. (UPI)

At government expense, Lindquist was enrolled in a 72-week course which qualified him for a job as an instrument repairman. He completed the course March 15 and went to work the next day at the Royal Institute of Technology. During his retraining, the government paid Lindquist enough to meet living costs of his family. Had it been necessary to relocate to another part of Sweden, either for retraining or employment, the government would have paid the moving expenses too.

**Sweden Retrains**

Per Lindquist's story is typical of Sweden's vast retraining and relocation program which helps the country keep unemployment to the barest minimum and allows the nation's industry to

automate rapidly without undue hardship for workers displaced by machines.

Health was the key factor in Lindquist's case. But the state is equally swift in helping those who lose their jobs through technological streamlining.

Sweden's labor policies have attracted attention in the United States for several years. This week, Ernst M. Michalek, undersecretary of state in the Swedish Ministry of

Labor and Social Affairs; Bertil Kugelberg, managing director of the Swedish Employers Federation, and Arne Geijer, president of the Confederation of Trade Unions, are testifying before the U. S. Senate Labor committee.

Swedes believe Americans could learn something from them but they acknowledge their system works easier at home than it would in American society.

First, Sweden is an un-

crowded, homogeneous nation with little unemployment (20,000 unemployed out of a work force of about 2.5 million, or less than one per cent). U. S. joblessness amounts to nearly 5 1/2 per cent.

**All Trainable**

Second, Sweden has virtually no one who is untrainable and unemployable because of his low educational level, such as is prevalent in parts of the rural south and urban areas of the north in the United States.

Third, the Swedish economic system operates with an overlay of social welfare with the state controlling employment and labor mobility. With such programs as retraining, the government has given labor little cause to foster featherbedding or other undesirable practices. A calm atmosphere of mutual trust exists between the state, employers and labor. There has not been a major strike since 1945.

The Swedish view of labor economics and social welfare was pretty well summed up by a government official who said:

"The training is expensive but it is much more expensive to have people doing nothing. The point of view of the labor market board before parliament has been that adults who through unfortunate circumstance are forced to change jobs should be taken care of by society during retraining. That is part of the price the nation has to pay for industrial and technical progress."

**New Skills**

Last year, 30,000 persons were taught new skills in Sweden's government-financed retraining program. More than 1,000 courses were

offered, the largest number preparatory to jobs in the growing metals industry. Others were trained for jobs in the forest products industry, in textiles, commercial and clerical fields and hundreds of other specialties. The government said its program was adequate to meet the present need but it envisions expanding to retrain 40,000 persons a year in the future.

Courses run from a few weeks to two years. The average is eight to 10 months. They are open to any unemployed person or anyone in danger of becoming unemployed.

More than 35 per cent of the trainees are women — single, divorced or married women who find a second income is needed.

Half of the trainees are over 45 years of age, said Hankan Hankansson, chief of Bureau of the Swedish Labor Market board, the agency which administers the retraining program. Another 20 per cent are in the 35 to 45 age bracket.

"Older persons are shy and sometimes reluctant to begin a course but once having done so they do a good job," Hankansson said. "Last year the oldest trainee was 63. He did a good job in a course in mechanics and found a job after completing it."

**Operate 3 ways**

Hankansson said the retraining courses are operated in three ways:

1. Trainees can be placed directly in existing vocational schools. This most often is done in the case of disabled workers.
2. Special classes are arranged. Any suitable building is converted into a training facility with the government paying for remodeling and installation of machines and equipment. Sometimes a new building is constructed.
3. Industrial firms conduct classes under contract from the government. The firms are paid fees to manage the classes and provide on-the-job training. Most of the trainees remain with the company following the course.

The instructors most often are persons with management experience in the industry for which the workers are being trained.

Automation is not a scare word to Swedish labor. In

the context of Sweden's social welfare system and an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence with industry, organized labor finds it benefits too when the economy expands and factories can produce more cheaply.

**Accept Idea**

"Sweden is one of the few countries which completely accepted the idea of 'rationalization' (a term Swedes prefer to automation but meaning about the same thing)," said Tore Karlsson, an official of the Swedish Confederation of Labor Unions, known in Sweden as the "LO". The Swedish labor movement never attempted to crush the machine."

leaves these programs a "the better way."

Gunnar Lindstrom, section chief of the Swedish Employers Confederation, known as the "SAF," said that a few years ago, in a period of economic recession, Sweden was forced to go to a huge public works program to quell unemployment and shore up the economy. There was at the time little capacity for retraining workers.

"We discovered this was very expensive," Lindstrom said. "So we say now that retraining is the better way and we cannot say it is too expensive because we have to compare the cost with that of public works and unemployment."

Another point Lindstrom emphasized was that Swedish industry makes a conscious effort not to dismiss workers when a factory automates rapidly. Sometimes it is necessary, of course, but the effort is made to reduce the payroll solely by not hiring new workers.



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