

# 1968: A Global Perspective

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## **What Was China's Role in the Creation of a Swedish Maoist Movement and for the Radicalisation of Sweden after 1968?**

From the mid 1960s until the end of the 1970s there existed in Sweden a small but well organized Maoist movement. It was influential on many levels of society. Mass media, the universities, and the political parties were all influenced by ideas from the extreme left. The massive popular movement against the war in Vietnam was initially also orchestrated and run by a Maoist constellation. With all this in mind it is surprising that almost no research has been made on this movement.

The purposes of this project are first to explain the rise and development of the Swedish Maoist movement in the 1960s and then to map the reactions and changes it brought about in Swedish foreign, and domestic policy. Swedish Maoism is usually explained as just being part of a broader western wave of revolution, rebellion, and solidarity with the poor: with the "spirit of the time". Instead of these vague references to structures and mentalities the present project searches for the real agents behind this history. The hypothesis is that the Peoples Republic of China was actually the main actor in bringing about a Swedish Maoism. All leading Swedish Maoists were invited to China, and it was there, after travelling, talking and discussing with the Chinese interpreters, guides and "real people" all well trained and instructed on how to handle the foreigners, that the Swedes turned Maoists. This might not sound like such a radical assumption, but in the dominant Swedish version of this history China has, in what resembles an orientalist fashion, been reduced to a place that at best inspired the Swedes who travels there *after* their conversion to Maoism. A more radical hypothesis connected to the first one is that if China consciously did inspire the Swedes it was not to prepare for a revolution in Sweden but instead to serve Chinese interests, by creating a Swedish "united front" directed at China's main enemy the USA. This was initially the real function behind the Swedish anti Vietnam War movement. My hypothesis is that the Swedish China-communists' main objective was to create an anti American sentiment among the Swedish population and to alienate the anti-American youth from the leading Socialist Democratic Party.

At about the same time as the Maoists grew strong, Sweden, under the dominating Socialist Democratic Party's new leader Olof Palme traded its good relations with the USA for the support of socialist liberation movements and governments in countries like Angola, Cuba and Vietnam. The explanation for this major turning point in modern Swedish history mentions Olof Palme's personal convictions. I will suggest instead that the direction the leading Socialist Democratic Party took under Olof Palme from 1968, and that Sweden would follow more or less up to Palme's murder in 1986, was a consequence of, and a reaction to the provocations of the Maoist movement and its united front strategy. My argument here is that it was not just Palme's convictions that led him to walk side by side with the North Vietnamese ambassador in an anti-American protest rally 1968 – the action I mean set in motion the series of events and decision that propelled Sweden towards the left in both domestic and foreign policy. Palme did this, I set out to prove, in order to gain power for himself and for his party.