

British
Diplomacy
and
Swedish
Politics,
1758-1773

Michael Roberts

British Diplomacy and Swedish Politics, 1758-1773

Jag känner icke så noga alla då varande omständigheter, men hvar och en bör känna, at omständigheter mycket verka och göra mycket intryck: ty att sitta uti lugnet och derifrån utfärda hårda domar öfver dem, som seglat uti svallande haf och imellan fördolde bränningar, utmärker liten kunskap om sakernas lopp här i verlden, liten om människans krafter emot lycka och olycka, liten billighet och kärlek . . .

A. J. von Höpken, *Äre-Minne öfver . . .
Tessin, 1771*

**Published with assistance
from the
David H. Willson Fund**

British Diplomacy
and
Swedish Politics,
1758-1773

Michael Roberts



© University of Minnesota 1980

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1980

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
without permission

First published in the USA 1980

First published in the UK 1980

Published by
THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
London and Basingstoke
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

ISBN 978-1-349-05678-1

ISBN 978-1-349-05676-7 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-05676-7

for

Michael Metcalf

Contents

| | | |
|--------------|--|------|
| Preface | | xi |
| Introduction | The Tranquillity of the North | xiii |
| Chapter I | The Road to Stockholm, 1758-1764..... | 3 |
| Chapter II | A Diplomatic Revolution, 1762-1764..... | 38 |
| Chapter III | The Overthrow of the “French System”, April 1764-January 1765..... | 64 |
| Chapter IV | Lord Sandwich in Search of a Policy, 1765..... | 111 |
| Chapter V | The Caps and the Court, 1765 | 139 |
| Chapter VI | The Rockinghams and Goodricke’s Treaty, 1765-1766 | 179 |
| Chapter VII | The End of the Cap Diet, 1766..... | 213 |
| Chapter VIII | Drift, Deflation, and Defeat, 1766-68..... | 233 |
| Chapter IX | Lord Rochford and the Hat Diet, 1769-1770 .. | 275 |
| Chapter X | Interlude, 1770-1771 | 326 |
| Chapter XI | Failure of a Mission, 1771-1772 | 349 |
| Epilogue | Tranquillity Preserved, 1772-1773 | 404 |
| Notes | | 417 |
| Bibliography | | 497 |
| Index | | 515 |

Preface

This book has been a spare-time occupation for many (too many) years, attended to only in intervals between other and more immediate demands. It was Sir Herbert Butterfield who long ago remarked to me that “all historians should at some time or other try to write diplomatic history: it is a discipline,” and thereby launched me on what at the time seemed a rash enterprise. Once begun, it could not have been continued without generous assistance, for which I now make grateful acknowledgment: to the Senate of The Queen’s University, Belfast, for grants for research; to The Leverhulme Trust, which elected me to a European Faculty Fellowship; to Svenska Institutet för kulturellt utbyte, Stockholm, for repeated kindness and financial help, as so often in the past; to Professor Sten Carlsson and Historiska Institutionen at Uppsala University, who gave me a warm welcome and a base from which to work; to Professor Jeff Opland, Director of the Institute for Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, who provided me with an ideal milieu in which to write, and made generous typing assistance available to me; to Mrs. R. Vroom and Mrs. V. Ochtman, for the patience and accuracy with which they undertook the task of typing and re-typing; to Dr. Roger Bartlett, for help with translations from the Russian.

But my most important obligation is to Professor Michael Metcalf. Professor Metcalf not only excerpted for me from the manuscripts of

Russian diplomatic correspondence now preserved in microfilm in Riksarkivet, Stockholm; he generously permitted me to read his own book on a closely related subject, chapter by chapter as it was written; and he gave me the advantage of his comment and criticism at every stage as I proceeded. In stimulating conversations, and in correspondence extending over the last five or six years, he provided a challenge (at times a corrective) to my own interpretations; and it is proper that this book should be dedicated to him.

M. R.

Introduction

The Tranquillity of the North

The language of diplomacy, as it developed and achieved consistency from the seventeenth century onwards, acquired a precision appropriate to the binding character of the international agreements toward which its efforts are directed; but it combined this (at least until our own time) with a highly stylized diction, designed to give dignity and weight to trifling dispatches, to put a gloss of amenity upon protests which might otherwise appear unduly sharp, and to clothe even menace in the decent forms of courtesy. Diplomacy, in short, like other professions, has created its own jargon. And one useful and timesaving element in that jargon has been the employment of a kind of international shorthand to describe concepts too familiar to need explanation, or problems too complex to be set out at length. The men of the seventeenth century knew quite well what was meant by *partes principales paciscentes*, or *libertates Germaniae*, and they bequeathed to their successors the notions of the Dutch Barrier and the Maritime Powers. The eighteenth century saw the emergence of such conveniently elastic phrases as the Balance of Power, or the *systeme copartageant*. In the nineteenth, the Principle of Legitimacy covered a multitude of sins, and the Eastern Question a congeries of problems. And the twentieth, for whom a classical orotundity has in any case little charm, satisfies its compulsive urge to save time by the invention of an international vocabulary of acronyms.

It is to this type of locution that is to be referred that deceptively reassuring expression "the Tranquillity of the North," which, in most of the languages of Europe—"Die Ruhe des Nordens," "La Tranquillité du Nord," "Nordens ro"—was an internationally current verbal counter in the chancelleries throughout the period which lies between the Peace of Utrecht and the first partition of Poland.

The phrase expressed not so much a state of affairs as an aspiration, an objective: the desire, shared at one time or another by all the major European powers, to prevent the outbreak of war in the Baltic region, and in particular between the Scandinavian states. In the seventeenth century this had been a part of the world where the peace had been notoriously fragile, and where, thanks to the eruptive force of Swedish military might, disturbances had too often entailed wider involvements on the Continent, besides producing recurrent disruptions of the trade between Eastland and the West. After 1713, and especially after 1721, there was a strong feeling that it would be better for all parties if it could be arranged that the North be somehow politically frozen in its native ice; and it seems in fact that it was just in this period that the phrase "the Tranquillity of the North" first became current among statesmen. However, this laudable objective proved easier to formulate than to attain. Between 1721 and 1790 the Tranquillity of the North was thrice shattered by war (in 1741, 1757, 1788), and it was in addition seriously threatened in 1726-27, 1743-44, 1749-51, and 1772-73.

For much of the period, the slow-burning fire which defeated efforts to keep the region cool was generated by friction within the Oldenburg dynasty. Indeed, the idea of the Tranquillity of the North arose in the first instance out of the formidable complexities of what a later age would call the Schleswig-Holstein question; and its original purpose was to prevent, if that were possible, the involvement in that question of the non-Scandinavian powers. In course of time this limited objective came to embrace other and larger issues. It was not only to avert trouble about ducal Schleswig that the major powers were anxious to keep the North at peace. Their interpretations of what constituted the Tranquillity of the North differed from time to time and case to case; but when they intervened in the North, as occasionally happened, their interventions arose from much weightier causes and much broader considerations than a concern for the fate of a handful of Danish territories. Moreover, there were limits to the desire of some of them to keep the region in a state of perfect political passivity. When in 1741, in a misguided moment, Sweden launched an unprovoked attack on Russia, that attack was the work of a political party