A Looking-glass of Modernity: Satire and Post-war Politics in Sweden

Abstract

Traditionally the study of satire has been pursued mostly by scholars in literature and, perhaps, art historians, and students of media – considering the role not only of written texts but also images in satire. Today, however, satire should also be mentioned as an example of how historians explore non-traditional sources to approach and renew their understanding of past societies; surely, the theoretical debates associated with the ‘linguistic turn’ among the arts, and, in the 1990s, the ‘pictorial turn’ has been important catalysts in that respect. Nevertheless the use of satire – whether in form of written texts, or comics et al. possible expressions – as historical sources raises a number of methodological issues. It is, reasonable, however to consider satire as a reflection, although an inverted one, of the author’s/artist’s views and opinions about society, i.e. as a distorted and exaggerated mirror image. From that point of view it also becomes worthwhile to explore whether Swedish post-war satire has the potential to add to our understanding of the role of politics during this period. Needless to say the post-war period is characteristic not only because more and more aspects of society gradually became the topic of political intervention and governance after 1945, but also because it has been extensively dealt with by historians using conventional approaches and sources. By way of example I focus on texts published in the satirical journal ‘Grönköpings Veckoblad’ during the 1950s.