CHAPTER NINE

MAO AND THE SWEDISH UNITED FRONT AGAINST USA

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Most narratives of the Cold War revolve around the two superpowers dominating or being used by smaller nations, with China lurking in the shadows, ruled by an unpredictable and power-hungry dictator whose goal to lead a world revolution failed spectacularly. However, Mao’s foreign policy held both domestic and long-term geopolitical goals. Peering behind the screen of day-to-day politics we find that Mao had other aims besides world revolution. This is evident in his support of Maoist organizations in the West.

This chapter is a case study of Maoism in Sweden in the 1960s. It describes what happened when China, with money, propaganda, political schooling and “techniques of hospitality,” won over a number of promising Swedish individuals to the Chinese side in its conflict with the two superpowers. As part of a covert united front against the American war in Vietnam, the most important Maoist organization set up in Sweden was the United NFL-Groups in Sweden (DFFG). China’s support of this and other Maoist organizations in Sweden had little to do with communist revolution. China’s interest had more to do with creating a third front of European and other countries inside the non-communist-bloc that could be allied with China in criticism of the USA. As this article shows, Sweden came to play exactly this role. In early 1968, after a year of popular anti-US protests, Maoist provocation forced the ruling Social Democratic Party (SAP) to react. With new leader Olof Palme at the helm, SAP entered the anti-war movement with a parallel protest organization. As a result of this decision Sweden became the most anti-American, pro-socialist nation in the West.

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1 I would like to thank T. Wandel and P. Windahl for help with editing.
2 This history of Swedish Maoism has been largely ignored by historians. The exception is a recent Ph.D. dissertation by Anne Hedén. Very little has been written on the Swedish Vietnam War movement besides Kim Salomon’s Ph.D. dissertation,
China in the Cold War

By the early 1960s China was under threat from both of the world’s superpowers. As a result of tension over the Great Leap Forward and Mao’s criticism of Soviet engagement with the US, Khrushchev withdrew all technical support and stopped helping China develop a nuclear bomb. Mao felt betrayed by the Russians. This new world order was clearly dangerous for China but as the deft guerrilla tactician he was, Mao knew how to profit from this seemingly disadvantageous situation.

Having withdrawn from day-to-day leadership after the Great Leap Forward, Mao turned to foreign policy to pave his road back to power. The Vietnam War gave him the opportunity. With American troops now just beyond China’s borders, Mao could argue that China was encircled by reactionary forces and must prepare for war against both outside and inside enemies.\(^3\)

The Chinese shared the American view that the Vietnam War could have a domino effect. In September 1963, when communist leaders from Vietnam, Laos and Indonesia met their Chinese comrades in Guangdong, Zhou Enlai announced that Southeast Asia had become the scene of a confrontation between international revolution and the reactionaries.\(^4\) The big difference from the Korean War was that China now stood opposed to the Soviet Union. Rather than this making him more cautious, Mao decided to up the ante. As the Chinese explained, the Russians had left the revolutionary path and become traitorous revisionists negotiating with the enemy. Mao therefore assumed the

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\(^4\) Ibid., 208.