



'In those days, it was fun
to be a Swede'

The first decades of The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation

Sven Hamrell in conversation
with Thomas G. Weiss

Prof. Thomas G. Weiss, Presidential Professor of Political Science at The City University of New York Graduate Center and director of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies interviewed Sven Hamrell, the foundation's longest serving executive director, on 5 and 6 June 2001 in Uppsala for the United Nations Intellectual History Project at The Graduate School and University Center, City University of New York. Ron Nerio transcribed the exchange. Excerpts are reproduced in slightly edited form below. We are grateful to Sven Hamrell, Tom Weiss and Tatiana Carayannis for enabling us to publish parts of this conversation for the first time. The editing has been limited to shortening and style, but the present tense has been retained.

TGW: How do you explain your own interest in Africa, and Sweden's interest?

SH: In my case, it was partly the American experience, because I lived on 118th Street in New York, and it was not so far to go down to Harlem. I could go to Harlem and dance at the Savoy. I had already read Richard Wright in school in Sweden, and so on. Then I think the missionary factor is very important. There are missionaries in many villages who came home. That meant a lot.

Then, of course, it was also Hammarskjöld, and Hammarskjöld's death. There are many books about Hammarskjöld, but there is one by the Russian Victor Lesiosky. He was one of the highest officials in the secretariat in New York. Brian Urquhart knows him. He is an old-

Sven Hamrell was
the Foundation's
Executive Director
from 1967 to 1994.

fashioned Russian. There were many good people in Russia before the propaganda state developed. He devoted himself to studying the death of Hammarskjöld and he has written a book called *The Enigma of the Death of Dag Hammarskjöld*. He believes that there was more to this than an accident. We are not trying to solve the enigma in any way, but he has an interesting chapter on why Hammarskjöld became so involved in the Congo. Hammarskjöld was the son of the prime minister; he lived in the castle over there. That's his boyhood home. Lesiovsky says that one of the reasons Hammarskjöld involved himself so much in the Congo was that he felt that now he was, so to speak, living up to the heritage of his ancestors. He became, for a while, a provincial governor, not of Uppsala, but a provincial governor of the Congo. What a beautiful way to write it in this book. It shows how Hammarskjöld was very interested. He went on a tour of Africa. Hammarskjöld had quite a lot to do with the active interest we took in African affairs.

TGW: Other than dancing at the Savoy, what was your first experience in the Third World – your first living and active experience? What kind of memories do you have of that?

SH: Thanks to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), I was enabled to go to Dakar to attend the first conference on 'Ways to African Socialism'. Yes, this is how the CIA worked in those days. It was an interesting conference in Senegal, on Gorée Island. That's where I met some other CIA-funded people. Of course, I met Senghor, the president. But I also met a fellow who played an important role in those days, namely the British Labour Party politician John Strachey. He was very influential when it came to trying to work for nuclear disarmament.

TGW: This was in which year, this conference?

SH: It was 1962, I think. There I met a very close friend of mine, who comes here every summer and sits here and writes. His name is Joseph Ki-Zerbo. He is the last in line of the UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) *General History of Africa*. He was also on the board of the international advisory committee of the UN University (UNU) in Japan. He has also been on the board of UNESCO for a long time.

TGW: What do you recall from the African nationalist movements in the 1950s and 1960s? How were these treated either in the press or in university texts in that period? Our own sense is that very little was known about Africa and African economies, certainly in the US and in



Joseph Ki-Zerbo during a visit to the Foundation in 2001.

other universities. I am just curious as to what kinds of things you were reading, how you got your information about Africa.

SH: We got quite a lot, for instance, from the British newspaper *The Observer*. Colin Legum was the head of the Africa section. That was the most important newspaper. Actually there was a strong interest in Africa on the part of the Swedish newspaper *Expressen*. That is an evening newspaper, a tabloid you might say, but of high quality in those days.

Sweden had been isolated since the Second World War, and now the world was opening up. We had people like Olof Palme, and so on, in the forefront. Then we entered into the Vietnam debate. Maybe we felt a little bit lonely up here, so we wanted some friends to embrace. I remember when I was a kid, for instance – I was 10 years old or something – there was a Negro who came to our town up north and we all got on our bicycles and went down to watch him. Then, of course – maybe I shouldn't go into this – my wife's oldest known ancestor was a Sephardic Jew, who was colonial governor of the Gold Coast and lived in Christiansborg Castle in 1660. So we have had relations here in the family. He was a slave trader.

I was so upset by this CIA business. I was lecturing in political science. I gave the first course on the politics of the African countries at the University of Uppsala in the 1960s. There was a fellow who came here to Uppsala; he was going to write something about Hammarskjöld. So I met him, and I said, 'You are going to write about Hammarskjöld. I don't know if that's worthwhile. Why don't you come and lecture in my course?' And he came and it was a marvellous lecture. It was on American foreign policy, and it was about how reactionary America was, and how dangerous America was.

I said afterwards, 'Why don't you write a book, expanding your lecture into a book?' He said, 'Well, I might do that.' Then I said to him, 'I can organise for you a place where you can live.' We found a house actually, a bit on the outskirts of Uppsala. He sat down there and started to write. He wrote for a year and a half. In the end it was a huge volume. He went to the London School of Economics (LSE) and finished the book. Then the book was published – it's dedicated to me – as *The Free World Colossus*. This fellow was David Horowitz. I managed to have a Swedish translation of it also.

TGW: You mentioned your contacts with other prominent Swedes who went into the government. What led you to take a different route to the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies and eventually the Dag

Hammarskjöld Foundation? Did you ever think about working in the government or in the private sector? What attracted you about this alternate route?

SH: This organisation, when I joined it, was almost in a shambles. We almost collapsed. Everybody thought that it would come to nothing. In those days, actually, the Hammarskjöld Foundation had just a single room as an office in a bank in Stockholm. So when the Hammarskjöld Foundation came to Uppsala, we had the very same vice chancellor of Uppsala University. But his father was the leading anti-Nazi editor in Sweden. He was a fantastic person, and an enormously talented writer. He wrote about Hitler and Nazism in such a way that I think one could edit and translate his articles from the 1930s and 1940s.

He gave the speech here when Hammarskjöld died. He said that he wanted the name of Hammarskjöld to be preserved. So he called the board – originally the Hammarskjöld Foundation had a huge board of 18 members or something, Ralph Bunche and many people like that. So he called those who could come and he said, ‘If you move to Uppsala, I will put this house at your disposal.’ It’s still one of the most famous houses in Sweden.

Originally, Alva Myrdal was the chairman of the board – Gunnar’s wife. But then she felt that she couldn’t cope. So they made Ernst Michanek chairman. Michanek was also anti-Nazi. I think he asked me because he knew that I was also from this group of people. There were many Nazis in Sweden: you must not forget that.

TGW: In looking back at the 1950s and 1960s and the first wave of African independence, how did you think it would proceed? What kinds of thoughts were going through your head and other people’s heads when Ghana became independent, sort of at the front edge of this big wave? How did you see Africa developing, and how quickly?

SH: I thought it would develop in a better way. I saw some of the failures of Nkrumah, of course. But still, I didn’t think it would develop the way it did, especially since Ghana has many people of talent.

TGW: Speaking of history, what about the First Development Decade? As you look back on that first snapshot of where Africa and Asia and Latin America should go, and the role of outsiders, Western powers, donors, as well as UN agencies, what do you recall of that moment when that decade was launched?

Patrick van Rensburg at the Foundation in 2003.



We had plenty of seminars with Patrick van Rensburg. He has been extremely important for the Hammarskjöld Foundation.

SH: We were, so to speak, bilateral in a way. We felt that actually the UN is behind, and it is better that we start with our aid programmes and guide the way for the UN. It might have been a good thing, actually, but we put much greater emphasis on bilateral relations and we thought that could start something off.

TGW: Once you took over at the foundation, what was the role of Swedish orientations, or bilateral relations, versus multilateral relations in your work programme, in your own conference schedule? How did you conceptualise these two spheres?

SH: It was more, so to speak, bilateral. Recently, it has changed a bit in the foundation. We knew that education, for instance, mattered. You know that we had plenty of seminars with Patrick van Rensburg. He has been extremely important for the Hammarskjöld Foundation. He was a Boer. He was once a diplomat. He shared an office with Pik Botha. Then he decided no more apartheid. He went to England. When he went to Europe, people were marching and demonstrating against South Africa.

Here he said, 'I can't go around as a demonstrator in London.' So he more or less hitchhiked to the closest he could get to South Africa, Botswana. Then he established a friendship with Seretse Khama. He said, 'We have to organise a new education system for Africa.' He started up a secondary school in Serowe. He started up some more secondary schools also. But he said, 'We can't have just diploma courses. We have to have a new kind of school, education combined with production.' He started this at Swaneng Hill in Botswana. Then he also started a workers' brigade.

The money came from the Swedish Committee on Humanitarian Aid. He has written many books. He started not only a builders' brigade, he started also a printers' brigade. And the printers' brigade established one of the leading newspapers in Southern Africa, *Mwegi*. Working with this kind of thing was more important than working with UN plans of a global nature.

TGW: You mentioned him as an example of somebody who wandered through the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. What was your conception of what this institution should be, and how did you carry it out? In one interview you said, 'We have a good cash-flow of ideas.' This project is about ideas and intellectual history. How did you stimulate ideas and why did you think that the stimulation of more practical or more theoretical ideas was useful and had value? Why did you want to push ideas, and where did these ideas come from in the Hammarskjöld Foundation?

SH: Ideas matter, as you say. What we have done in the Hammarskjöld Foundation was that we have been very careful in trying to find people who can make ideas matter. That is, I think, in a sense, the secret of the success of the foundation. When it comes to that, this foundation has only had five paid employees throughout its history – no more than five at any time. We have almost no resources. We have commissioned from the government very little money.

So we have had to rely on people who had good ideas. But if you were established and had good ideas, you don't work for a foundation like this. But if you are in trouble ... We tried to get people who are in difficult situations. For instance, this Van Rensburg, he had no money. He started from scratch. He had to hitchhike to Botswana. Then he managed to build up this big foundation. The Foundation for Education and Production is active in Zambia, Mozambique and so on. It's a working enterprise. We looked for people who were in difficulties. Sometimes we take a government man, like Gerry Helleiner, but they were established.

There was, for instance, a refugee who didn't have very much money, who couldn't stay in his country. We heard about him and we said, 'Come and help us a little bit.' It was Juan Somavia. The programme for the Latin American Institute of Transnational Studies he wrote here, in this room, over there. Then we had a seminar in Mozambique that was partly financed by us. But when we needed help, we found another person, a minister of education who worked with him, Graça Machel. And when it came to Latin America, we found another refugee who couldn't be in Chile, Manfred Max Neef. We said, 'Come here.' And he wrote a book here, called *From the Outside, Looking In*. Then he helped us to organise this seminar on development in Latin America, which became quite well-known. And Ki-Zerbo considered that it would help him also through the years.

Come to think of it, a friend that we benefited a lot from is the former finance minister of Tunisia, Ahmed Ben Salah. He was a trade unionist, a very important political leader in Tunisia. But then President Bourguiba became afraid that he would be unseated. So Ben Salah was imprisoned, but he escaped from prison and went to his friend in Austria, the chancellor, Bruno Kreisky. And Kreisky called on his parliament because, he said, 'Ben Salah is not safe here. You will have to help.' Parliament called Michanek and said, 'Ben Salah is out of prison, and he needs help. He has to be somewhere in Sweden, or somewhere. Can you help?' And Michanek called me. I said, 'OK. He can be on our farm in southern Sweden.'

So he came, and it was a big hullabaloo – 50 policemen all around the airport. They took him in a car. The police were watching and nobody could follow. They switched cars up at the castle there and then took him to my farm. There I was responsible for him. In order to see to it that he could survive, he had to re-establish his political existence. To re-establish his political existence, he needed to make a political statement, and somebody had to be found to take down that statement. Marc Nerfin was asked to do that. So he also stayed on our farm. He interviewed Ben Salah for a whole week, and then a book was published and translated into seven languages – not English, though. This was how I established contact with Marc Nerfin – by offering to help an exile with a publication and rescuing his life. Marc Nerfin had been a high school teacher in Tunisia for a while and admired Ben Salah.

When Marc Nerfin decided, together with Maurice Strong, the follow-up to the Founex Initiative and the Stockholm Conference, Ben Salah became an important person. It shows what Marc did. First he organised money, because he had established his reputation as a master organiser in Stockholm. So he talked to Olof Palme. Olof Palme said, ‘I’ll talk to Michanek.’ We had a meeting in the foreign office. Then he intended to get money from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the Canadian SIDA, but that didn’t work. Then it was indicated to the Dutch that we needed money. And one morning I came here, and in the mail was a cheque for \$100,000 from Jan Pronk. Then Marc managed get something from the UN also.

This is how these things were organised. When they decided to organise the *What Now?* project, there was nothing new in the *What Now?*. But what was good was the way it was put together. There was no original research, although there were basic purposes and so on. But it was not a research project in the sense that the foundations wanted one to be. But it was a very excellent political summary of good thinking. And who became the principal advisors of *What Now?* It was Ahmed Ben Salah, Ignacy Sachs and Juan Somavia. We had a hell of a lot of good people here. Among them was also András Bíró. Then another fellow came, Fernando Enrique Cardoso, because he also couldn’t be in Brazil. Then we had Reginald Green. But even Ibrahim Kaduna – he was the vice chancellor of the University of Dar es Salaam. That was quite a crew. Many of these were here because they couldn’t operate in their own countries.

TGW: Betting on good people is always an important aspect of an institution. You said, ‘Have a good cash flow of ideas.’ But how do ideas matter? Specifically, how do you think they are used, or of what utility

are they? Out of all of the ideas you have produced here in Uppsala, why are they important?

SH: Well, this is such a big question. I would say that there are ideas that we have produced. There are three, actually. We have dealt a lot with education, primarily education with production. We have another thing that we have been dealing with a lot. We have had two areas where we have had an impact – maybe more – and that is health. Health is an important thing in *What Now?* Health for all was an idea that we felt. We had a very good Swede who helped us, Göran Sterky. He has been very important. He was originally a medical doctor at a hospital in Ethiopia, a paediatrician. I met him there. He had been dealing with refugees. He said, ‘Sven, you know, we have to make noise about children.’

That was how the whole thing started – ‘We have to make some noise about children.’ So what I did then was to say, ‘Couldn’t we organise a meeting in cooperation with the ECA (Economic Commission on Africa) on childcare in Africa?’ We contacted paediatricians from many parts of Africa, called them together in Ethiopia. They felt a great deal of self-confidence afterwards. And we published a book called *Action for Children: Towards an Optimum Childcare Package in Africa*. We had another of a similar title.

Then Sterky gained a reputation and he suddenly became head of the WHO (World Health Organisation) unit on maternal and child health. Then he came to us again and said, ‘There will be a conference on health. You are in favour of alternatives. Can’t you organise something?’ So we organised a seminar on other developments in health.

TGW: So once an idea crystallises in a publication, it is acted upon by governments and NGOs. Are there other ways that you think that ideas make a difference? What causes an idea to be acted upon by an intergovernmental organisation, by a government, by an NGO? Is it the quality of the idea? Is it the political circumstances surrounding it? Is it the salesman who came up with the idea? What are the factors that influence the acceptance of an idea, however good?

SH: We could look at *What Now?* as an example. We had a number of good ideas, but then we were very careful in selecting people to, so to speak, promote these ideas and also internalise them, because it is not just ideas. They have to be internalised. They have to become moving forces. This I think the UN has difficulties doing, in a way, because they are country representatives, and so on. But here you can select the people, if you can just pick the right people.

You know the three systems that Marc Nerfin formalised, in his so-to-speak political philosophy? He said, 'We have to deal with the three systems. They are the princes – that is the government; the merchants – that is trade and industry; and the citizens – the civil society organisations.' If one is to really work on building ideas, one has to have people from all three systems in a reasonable mix.



Marc Nerfin and Sven Hamrell in 2002.

TGW: Then when does the UN pick up the idea?

SH: Well, it didn't pick up *What Now?* But they may.

TGW: They may?

SH: This is what is so interesting, that even if they are not picked up, they are sort of dormant. But they can come to life. That is what makes this kind of work so interesting.

TGW: Amongst all the people whom you've mentioned, and who have been associated here, as academics and practitioners, what is the balance, the most effective people with ideas in the international arena?

SH: You know the three systems that Marc Nerfin formalised, in his so-to-speak political philosophy? He said, 'We have to deal with the three systems. They are the princes – that is the government; the merchants – that is trade and industry; and the citizens – the civil society organisations.' If one is to really work then on building ideas, one has to have people from all three systems in a reasonable mix. You are thinking a little bit along these lines, aren't you?

TGW: We're hoping to. Would you say that there are thinkers or conceptualisers within all three of these groups?

SH: It is very difficult with the business people. You feel that when you read *Ahead of the Curve?*

TGW: What is the role for academics in this enterprise?

SH: I was struck when I read *Ahead of the Curve?* that you mention very often 'the Nobel laureate,' constantly emphasising the role of the academics, in a way. I sort of like it. Do you know that there are also these economist Nobel laureates that are not so good, apart from Amartya Sen. But there is something called the Right Livelihood Foundation. It is the alternative Nobel Prize. I have been on the jury for that for many years. Actually, there are quite a number of alternative Nobel Prize winners, for instance, Patrick van Rensburg, Johan Galtung, András Bíró and Joseph Ki-Zerbo. This is quite a good collection. They are better than the economists – except Amartya Sen. But what I mean is that academics will be increasingly important. They will have an enormous importance in the future.

It was a fantastic lecture by a young fellow, Pat Mooney, whose eyesight was failing him. But he was a beautiful speaker. He spoke about the gene banks and gene depositories. I felt that this was a major issue, which was not given enough attention. So I told this fellow, 'Come to Uppsala.'



Pat Mooney in Uppsala in 2006.

I will tell you just a little story that ends in a bigger story. When I had organised a conference on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – I handed out copies all over the UN – I went to Washington to a small meeting of NGOs. There was a meeting on the power struggle for plant genetic resources. It was a fantastic lecture by a young fellow, Pat Mooney, whose eyesight was failing him. But he was a beautiful speaker. He spoke about the gene banks and gene depositories. I felt that this was a major issue, which was not given enough attention. So I told this fellow, 'Come to Uppsala.' It was the first time I saw him, but I was fascinated by his view of these things. And he came. Then I said, 'Why don't you write a book about these things?' He said, 'Yes, I will.' That was the first book on plant genetic resources that the Hammarskjöld Foundation published, *The Role of the Seed*. It was excellent. I wrote a sort of editorial introduction. Then I said, 'I have to know the academic qualifications of the author.' So I called him up and said, 'Pat, I am writing this introductory note. I must end by giving your academic qualifications.' You know what he said? 'I flunked out of high school.'

How the hell are you going to be able to manage anything in the future with all the threats coming – the ocean, and technical training, et cetera – without the academics? You need them more than ever. And the UN is behind the curve, because they haven't instilled that properly.

TGW: I thought we might return to your evaluation of the role of *Development Dialogue* in the dissemination of ideas. What is the importance of this journal, and how does it get into people's hands?

SH: I was inspired during my stay in New York when I read the *Partisan Review* and *Commentary*. I wanted somehow to establish something similar, a small magazine that had an impact on a selected number of readers whom we could provide copies free of charge. Then, of course, it was a problem of identifying those readers. We tried to find our way. Hammarskjöld was quite well-known when he died, and afterwards. So we received letters from people, and if the letters seemed interesting, we sent the journal to them. Then we also wanted to make the journal – the foundation was small and had limited resources, but we wanted to give it a sort of soul. So the journal became the sort of soul of the foundation. Without the journal, the foundation would have been just another foundation.

We could do this because there was aid money. Aid money paid for the printing. Then we could send it on His Majesty's postal service. So we could distribute it all over the world at the expense of the government. That was, of course, a great thing for us. The Hammarskjöld Founda-

tion is supposed to deal primarily with problems that confronted Hammarskjöld in the Third World. So that is why we really aimed at sending it to lead people in the Third World – policy-makers, ministers, but also civil society leaders. There weren't so many in those days as there are now. But it became a very important instrument in our activities.

We invited, for instance, Mahbub ul Haq to give a lecture here. We printed that in one of the first issues. Then Marc Nerfin came, with Ben Salah. Then we did the *What Now?* project. That was, so to speak, a contribution to a special session in the United Nations General Assembly in September of 1975. It was non-partisan – well, partisan in a way. But it was not a government contribution. It was the result of a collective reflection, primarily but not only by people from the Third World.

Then, of course, when it came to making a mailing list for *Development Dialogue*, it hit people of importance. But when we did that, we found that dissemination, generally speaking, of the ideas in *What Now?* has a very strong civil society component – dissemination was extremely important. And, of course, *Development Dialogue* couldn't do the trick. We had to also promote dissemination in wider circles. That is how we came into contact with an Italian service that was concentrated on the Third World – the Interpress Service (IPS). It became an organisation with which we cooperated.

Then what we did in addition – and here the UN comes in – the IPS found a very good Indian journalist, Chakravarti Ragavan. He was the Indian correspondent at the UN in Geneva. He started up something called 'The Special United Nations Service (SUNS),' which sent out news about what was happening in the Third World particularly all over the IPS network, and supported later by the daughter organisation to the Hammarskjöld Foundation, the International Foundation for Development Alternatives (IFDA).

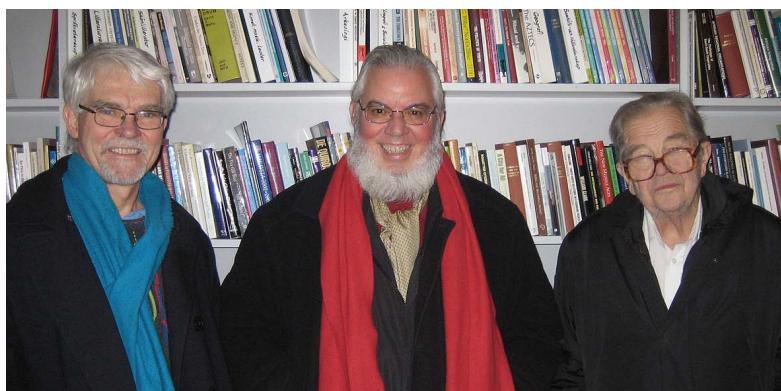
So the world dissemination effort grew in a natural way out of our work. Very significantly, and not to be forgotten, is that when we presented *What Now?* to the members of this special session on Development and International Cooperation in New York, we did not have press conferences. We decided to invite a number of Third World journalists to the UN. So they came to the UN, and we paid for their hotels and we assisted them in transmitting the news to their respective countries. Ragavan was one of those who reported to India, for instance. But there were many other journalists.

This was the beginning of an effort at international dissemination of development news to the Third World in order to create, so to speak, an exchange of views between North and South. This was also reflected, of course, in the title of *Development Dialogue*. We also tried to follow this up on a governmental level. That is interesting, because we had, among the leaders of the planning group, Juan Somavia, who was active in the Andean Pact, and so on. He had a friend, whose name was Echeverria, and he was president of Mexico.

So when the proposal for the New International Economic Order (NIEO) came up, we decided that we should make a contribution to the New International Economic Order by elucidating the dissemination problematic. What happened then was that Echeverria was also interested in this, because he was also interested in the special session. We did a seminar in 1976. It was held in Mexico and had many good contributors. One of them was Juan Somavia, who spoke about the transnational power structure and international information. Then there was a fellow by the name of Fernando Reyes Marta, who spoke about the ‘information bedazzlement’ in Latin America. Then Chakravarti Ragavan was there and spoke about the new world communication information structure. There was also a fellow from Sri Lanka, whom I admire very greatly. His name was Fred de Silva. He was editor of the *Ceylon Daily News*, which was a leading newspaper in Sri Lanka. But he was also a little bit reluctant to embrace English: the Third World languages also had to be given prominence. So he gave a very good speech in Mexico, entitled, ‘The Language of the Oracle: English as a Way of Our Dependence.’

We tried also to organise some kind of cooperation for the advancement of the development issues and the dialogue on these issues. We tried to organise some kind of foundation for that, at a meeting actually in Malta, where Gabriel Valdez came. But there was also a fellow

We did a seminar in 1976. It was held in Mexico and had many good contributors. One of them was Juan Somavia, who spoke about the transnational power structure and international information.



Olle Nordberg, Juan Somavia and Sven Hamrell in 2005.

who was becoming close to us, and who later has become rather well known. He is a Maltese – Michael Zammit-Cutajar. He was involved at the early stages with these problems too.

We used the *Development Dialogue* for other causes. They had not played the role that they should play, and have to play. So we developed a relationship with Marie-Angélique Savane, who was the lead feminist, in quotation marks, in Senegal. We organised a seminar in Senegal in the early 1980s on development for women. There were many very good women there. We also published a French translation, which was distributed, I think, at the second women's conference in Nairobi.

TGW: As you look at these issues of *Development Dialogue* that are stacked here, you have mentioned *What Now?* as being an important one. What are the other two or three that stick out in your mind as having made the most original contribution to ideas?

SH: I would say, in a sense, part of the idea of *Development Dialogue* was also to cut living standards a bit in industrialised countries, not to allow this constantly expanding growth. The first person who drew attention to this was Johan Galtung, the philosopher and peace researcher. Actually, we said, 'Why should Sweden become such an enormously rich, influential country? Couldn't we come down a little bit? Couldn't Sweden be shrunk?'

We thought about that, and it was quite a debate. In *What Now?* we had a chapter, 'How Much Is Enough?' Then, I think, if you ask me what stands out in my mind as important in *Development Dialogue*, it is our attack on the IMF. Because in 1980, we published material from two meetings that we organised on the International Monetary Fund, and what happened, it's effects. We tried also to call for reforms. This was done, actually, in cooperation with the government of Jamaica and Michael Manley. So we had a planning meeting in Jamaica with him and his close collaborators. The first and most important one was Norman Girvan, who was a planner. Then, of course, we decided to organise a conference on this subject, this IMF seminar.

Then other representatives came into the picture. So this caused an uproar, and I was personally afraid. I thought, 'Well, I will do it and I will be sacked, maybe. But I will take the risk.' But the quality of the seminar and the papers and recommendations was such that they had to recognise that this was an important contribution. In the end, Mahbub ul Haq wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs* on global economic policies, and he quoted *Development Dialogue*. Then I knew they couldn't sack me.

TGW: That raises an interesting question. Did you ever come under pressure from the government? You mentioned that you do have an infusion of aid funds, and I presume other kinds of contributions. Was pressure ever exerted on you by the government to tow whatever line was being towed, or to behave other than you behaved?

SH: I will be perfectly frank with you. No foreign government has ever tried to influence the activities of the foundation. But when we decided to do this seminar, I was afraid. I was a little bit afraid of my own chairman. I admire my old chairman, Michanek. I think he is probably an absolutely outstanding international activist and administrator. But he is very democratic. So I suspected that he might say that if we organise this, the IMF should be heard. And we didn't want the IMF to be present, for the very simple reason that the IMF is present everywhere and you can't avoid them. We felt that for once they shouldn't be present. So then the trickiest thing I have ever done in my career – I went to the chairman, and I said, 'You know, we also want to be heard. We propose this seminar on the IMF. But we also would like to see the finances of the UN improved. Couldn't you possibly take on the task, yourself chairing a seminar on what was then popular – the automatic mobilisation of resources for development?'

So that was decided at the same time by the board – the IMF meeting and the meeting on the automatic mobilisation. And the chairman was asked to head that. Then he knew that we had so much work that he couldn't possibly get involved in the IMF thing. I told himself so, afterwards. But it is the only time that I was a little bit afraid that a government might feel that we were poking into things.

This issue of *Development Dialogue* was read in many places. It was also read carefully by Susan George, the vice chairman of Attac. And she said that 'the Hammarskjöld Foundation told me that from *Development Dialogue* when I wrote my book *A Fate Worse Than Death*'. So it had an influence, and you can see that.

Then we did a seminar on other developments in health with Debabar Banerji. That was very influential in setting the agenda for a conference on health, resulting in the Program for a Healthful World. That was a very beautiful issue of the journal. We continued this work on health in two issues on pharmaceuticals. The more philosophical one is on the developments in pharmaceuticals, which deals with the role of pharmaceuticals, both in a strictly medical sense but also in a social sense, and so on. It had as its aim the creation of a healthy pharmaceutical industry replacing the criminal organisations. We had been, of course, a little bit

afraid when we went on with the seminar on national job policies as a development priority.

TGW: You mentioned the quality of people and the quality of the work itself. Under what circumstances do you think – assuming you have good, quality people and decent quality work – that publications such as *Development Dialogue*, or the ideas that are in *Development Dialogue*, under what circumstances do they have the most impact? do people pick them up? are governments, NGOs, and others, particularly prone to what you have to say and do something with them?

SH: I am not so sure about governments, but I know, for instance, that foundations sometimes read *Development Dialogue*. We asked for money from one of the big American foundations for a seminar on the People's Health Assembly. A representative of the foundation replied, 'No book has meant more to me than your book on an optimum childcare package for Africa. You can be sure that we will support you.' But I don't have any examples of the governments, except when it comes to Nyerere. But of course, he felt that we were underpinning his stand.

TGW: My guess is that Ujamaa, in Sweden, is probably not a very good idea to try to sell. But you mentioned the importance of information sharing and journalism and communications in the Third World, and the foundation has spent a lot of time on that. I think one of the ideas that some people would say was one of the worst ideas of all time grew out of some of this, that is the New International Information Order (NIIO). How do you look back on that period?

SH: We were not instrumental in promoting the New International Information Order. We wanted to develop the more development-oriented ideas. But, of course, we did agree that there was a need for a new information order, not a New International Information Order. That, of course, we never wanted – we wanted free exchange of views. Others feared it was used to oppress a free press.

TGW: That's right, it was the control of information, making sure you have the right kind of information, not access to information.

SH: But that has been against the Hammarskjöld Foundation from time immemorial, ever since we started. Sweden has an almost unique constitution where freedom of access to public documents is guaranteed. Sweden was never in favour of any kind of controlled information.

TGW: What about the New International Economic Order? How do you look back on that? You mention this as being one of the key documents. Do you think we will come back to the New International Economic Order, or is this something that was a cute historical artefact, and we won't see it again?

SH: We would like to see a great economic equality. We said that we would like to reduce consumption in Sweden: it was also partly because we wanted these goods to go to the Third World in our aid programmes, preferably multilateral aid programmes. But we saw sometimes that they did not work, so we felt that maybe we should show how they should work.

TGW: I wonder if we could take a different tack for a moment and look at one of the important transmission belts for us for ideas: global ad hoc conferences. I wonder whether we could just go back a moment to Stockholm in 1972. I think we are not the only ones who see this as launching a kind of a new emphasis on the environment, or the environment and development, but also launching a whole period of conferences in which different problems came up. So I wondered whether you could tell us what your own judgment is on global ad hoc conferences, and perhaps using the Stockholm meeting as one illustration of when these things work and when they fall flat.

SH: Recently, as you know, since 1995, I haven't been so intimately involved in the foundation activities. But I would say that one such ad hoc conference that must have been important was the WHO conference in Alma Ata. That I think was an important conference. It was important partly because it was so carefully prepared, and it was a truly global conference. This is the one that comes to mind for me, but this is of course because I have been involved in other particular things and I have not been able to follow properly.

I think the world is confronting an enormously critical situation, particularly with genetic problems and the rapid technical transformation going on and the corporate concentration. A world conference on this subject is really needed. But if it is to be successful, you must have a UN organisation that really works. As Brian Urquhart says, 'All the UN agencies should be in the same place, and they should be cooperative.' Unless you have a structure of that sort, a special session will not meet the needs of the times. But still I would like to see a special session on this subject.

TGW: I wondered if we could just go back, because you mentioned Marc Nerfin a lot, and also the importance of meetings before Stockholm, and how the notion, which is quite commonplace today, of a link between

levels of development, and sustainability, and protection of the environment. When this idea first got off the ground, it was really much more oriented towards conservation of resources, stopping pollution. How do you recall that set of ideas being developed before Stockholm? I think most people point to Founex.

SH: Founex was key. It was Marc's idea. I think Maurice Strong did not think quite along the lines of Marc on this issue. I think he was right in emphasising the centralised nature of development. Of course, the environment – that came in just as a little thing. Development should be economically sound.

TGW: Part of that process is the role of civil society, and within Stockholm or other meetings, the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). How, precisely, do you believe that civil society and NGOs have contributed to the world of ideas? What has been their role, side by side with the UN system, in pushing ideas and concepts?

SH: In Sweden civil societies have played an extremely important role during the past 100 years. So we have popular associations, civil society organisations of different kinds – agriculture, professional – that played a very important role. That's why I liked Marc. He was such a free-wheeling person that he was excommunicated from the Communist Party. That's why he went to Tunis and became a high school teacher. At the same time, he knew – he had worked at the post office in Geneva – he knows what ordinary work is like. And his wife was also an activist. She's famous, because she's a character in a book by an American writer, Erdman: *The Crash of 1989*, or something. It's a famous sort of thing. There is a woman there who throws, I don't know, a bottle or something at the Shah of Iran when he comes to the Geneva airport. So Marc had that kind of background. But at the same time, he was a true Swiss democrat. He's thoroughly democratic.

TGW: Do you see a growing role for civil society?

SH: Yes. At an early time the state and the governments were the important things. But at the Stockholm Conference, there were NGOs. They were in the meeting, and they also had a forum outside. Now we have to see that all social actors can participate. That's when Marc developed this idea of the prince, the merchant and the citizen. And they all have to cooperate, they have to come together in meetings of all sorts. Do you know that the number of citizen organisations has increased at a tremendous rate? I think it is one of the truly significant developments in the world – one of the few things that make you hopeful.

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TGW: One of the other techniques that we are interested in exploring your views about concerns the role of eminent commissions, or the role of visible groups of people coming together around an idea. We could take the Stockholm Conference and the Club of Rome report, or subsequently the Brundtland Report on the same sort of topic. Or you mentioned at dinner yesterday Pearson and Brandt and a whole series of reports. Do these matter? If they matter, what makes them important? When do they have an impact?

SH: I think they matter. In a sense, one thing about *Ahead of the Curve?* is that it is the first time I have seen an attempt to gather the ideas developed in these reports and turn them into a part, maybe, of the university curriculum. Only by doing that, if you achieve that objective, will you have a great impact on developments in the future. But when I think about things, also, somehow these groups are still rather small. There are many, but the number of participants in a group is not so big. I don't know how to handle this. The Hammarskjöld Foundation is strong, in a way, in influencing thinking because of the network. But I would like to see more organisations like us.

TGW: These reports of eminent commissions are a little different. You get people with household recognition. If we look at the Brandt Report, Willy Brandt, a former German chancellor, and people on it like Sonny Ramphal and Ted Heath, looking at a topic like development. But the question is whether visible groups of people, focusing on an issue, have a greater impact than large numbers of people looking at the same issue.

SH: I am afraid that visible groups are without very much influence.

TGW: I was curious that when the Hammarskjöld Foundation wanted to look at a particular issue – UN reform – you didn't choose a large group of people. You chose Brian Urquhart and Erskine Childers.

SH: And Stéphane Hessel.

TGW: In some ways, perhaps the impact of a couple of ideas in those reports has gone farther toward implementation than ideas by large groups of people. Why did you choose this vehicle of Brian and Erskine getting together?

SH: Because we knew them. I hate to say this, but I believe a little bit in the role of families.

TGW: In Brian Urquhart’s interview on this topic, he actually said it was important to have fewer people. One, it was cost-effective. Two, they could also write things in a sharper fashion. But three, the factor that he pointed to that was most consequential was trying to get the report into the hands of a few people who mattered, and therefore sponsoring a set of discussions in capitals in New York was probably the most important element in his dissemination and discussion strategy.

In looking at the United Nations system over your own lifetime, which people stick out as having been particularly important to the world of ideas about economic and social development? And which particular Secretaries-General, in your view, pushed development, and why?

SH: I would say that Hammarskjöld was unique. He was an economist and a mystic and a very good historian. He was very well aware of the family traditions. Also, he was not in agreement in every respect with Palme. Then, I think, Ralph Bunche must be considered an extraordinarily important person, because of his wide knowledge and his unpretentious behaviour. He came here also. He was a remarkable person. Then, a person I liked a lot was Prince Sadrudin Aga Khan. He wrote for *Development Dialogue* also, his critical views on nuclear power. He was in charge of a group on that in Switzerland. These are people I worked with. I also admire Kofi Annan.

TGW: That’s sort of at the pinnacle of the international system. At a more working level, do you have any impressions about the quality of the international civil service? How do you compare them with your own colleagues at the foundation and the academic world here in Sweden?

SH: I haven’t seen too many. I have told you about my friend Peter O’Malley from Ghana. He was an absolutely outstanding civil servant, absolutely. Also those I worked with in the ECA. Then, of course, I guess Richard Jolly. He’s quite an important figure. I never met Brad Morse, for instance. He was for a long time in the ILO (International Labour Organisation). And Gilbert Jaeger in UNHCR, he was also very good. Conor Cruise O’Brien – but he’s a bit on the mad side. He was an early person, but I don’t go for these theories about Hammarskjöld that he holds, you know.

Alva Myrdal – she was very able in the UN. And Gunnar Myrdal. They were very able. Hans Blix, who was a schoolmate of mine. He’s a nice fellow. Mary Robinson, I think. But you know, she came here actually when she was in the government, as president of Ireland. She said, ‘I want to go to the Hammarskjöld Foundation.’ She is an able person.

Hans Blix at the occasion of his Dag Hammarskjöld Lecture in 2005.



She could be Secretary-General, maybe. There is a need for a woman to be Secretary-General, but she has to be very strong.

One person whom I know also is Martti Ahtisaari. I have known him for 40 years. He is very able. But he is also at a high level.

TGW: I wondered if you might say a few things about Sweden's role in the North-South dialogue, or the so-called North-South dialogue, in bridging capacity. What was the significance of not just Sweden, but the like-minded countries who tried to play this role in bridging the most extreme parts of the North, the West, and the more extreme parts of the South?

SH: We played a role, as you know. There was a lot of talk about the Like-Minded Countries in the *What Now?* context, of course. The chairman of the board of the foundation for many years, Michanek, played a very important role because he listened to people and he had a good mind. So he played a role. And, of course, Olof Palme played an important role. Everybody knew about Olof Palme. And Sweden played a role in Chile because we had a very good ambassador. Harald Edelstam saved many, many Chileans from execution. And, of course, Alva Myrdal played an important role, also, when it came to the Third World issues and bridge-building. Alva Myrdal was important in that respect. But, of course, Palme's successor, also. He had great support in Swedish public opinion, because we felt that we had developed so well that we owed the world a debt. We should do something. So in those days, it was fun to be a Swede.

TGW: To use Nerfin's image, what about the merchant in all of this? It seems to me that certainly the disappearance of the Cold War has made the market a far more important variable in development discourse and in government policy. How do you look back on the 1980s and the 1990s, and the infatuation with market forces? Isn't this one big element that has come out of the Cold War?

SH: I don't have much contact with the merchants. I come from a peasant family, and we have not been involved in industrial activities up north very much, except for up north in mining. I would like to reach the merchants more. Actually, we should do that. But it is not easy for me. There are some good merchants. There was a banker, the head of the biggest bank here. He was a great admirer of Hammarskjöld. He reads *Development Dialogue* religiously and he writes every time he gets a new issue. So there are a few merchants who are people you can really respect and want to be with. But I have very few contacts with them.

TGW: Actually, how has your own thinking about development changed over the last half century? How did you look upon development at the outset of your career and how do you look at it now? What has changed most in your thinking?

SH: We have not spoken about that, but I think, so to speak, intellectual assistance will increase in importance. For instance, at the Hammarskjöld Foundation we have a programme in support of indigenous publishing in Africa. I don't think we can build roads and so on. They have to do that for themselves in Africa. But we have developed a loan guarantee programme for indigenous African publishers in Kenya. We were also promoting the freedom of the press in Southern Africa. One organisation, MISA (Media Institute for Southern Africa) is devoted to safeguarding the freedom of the press. Then, of course, we have to see to it that the genetic resources of Africa are protected and properly utilised. Personally, I would like to see a closer relationship with the development of foundations in Africa, like the Nyerere Foundation and other foundations.

TGW: So your own views about the role of basic needs, or the social factors in development, were primary at the outset. That was a minority view at one point, but it became a majority view. And now it seems to have slipped out of favour again.

SH: Yes. I am in favour of assistance for habitat and health and food, and so on. But our contribution must be, so to speak, intellectually stimulating about resource-providing. I am not so sure that it is much use sending volunteers into the bush.

TGW: What about your own views toward the role of the state as a factor in development in the Third World? Has that evolved at all over the last half-century – the role of the state, the appropriate role of the state, the appropriate balance between the state and the private sector?

SH: I have not been up against these problems in this practical way. I am a little bit reluctant to enter into these things. I would like to see people building the social development section of the ECA. They will go into business and build something like this. But should we?

TGW: I totally agree. You know that Bernard Chidzero's children are mainly in the private sector, after Bernard spent his life by running ministries of finance.

SH: But you are suggesting actually an interesting project for the Hammarskjöld Foundation – the princes and the merchants.

TGW: You might get Nerfin out of retirement to come back and do this!

SH: We tried, of course, a little bit on urban development in Lesotho, and so on. But there are these new things, also now, with genetics and the power struggle between the big industries. They are really looking for medicine plants everywhere in Africa. Personally, I would like to see the OAU get a very good director succeeding Salim Salim. I think regional efforts are very important, because New York cannot run things. The regional organisations will be increasingly important.

TGW: Yes. But I mainly look at the security around them, and the economic and social as well.

SH: It is obvious that the UN has to have stronger leadership. The UN has to be reorganised, and how do you go about that? You make people think, and think, and think. In the end, they might try to find out their own way. But on the other hand, I think that our little booklet, *A World in Need of Leadership*, puts the issues rather well. I am a little bit proud of that. It was so difficult – all the things the secretary handles, the very curious way in which he is elected, and then the heads of the departments moving in all directions uncontrolled. This is a very curious situation. I was wondering – would you like to see regional organisations considerably strengthened, with the agencies more or less concentrated in cabinet fashion?

TGW: That's what I would want if I were redesigning it myself. And that volume of yours that looks back at the origins of the system. It is in *A World In Need of Leadership*, and looks at the importance of a somewhat more structured, centralised system. It seems so obvious, but at the same time it seems so politically unrealistic at this juncture. One of the things that I think does come out in *Ahead of the Curve?* is the fact that strengthening civil society and citizens, and strengthening the merchants are important tasks. But the role, not so much of the princes but of the 'inter-princes', the intergovernmental system, is indeed crucial, and it's the part of the debate that is always set aside. So I think presently folks are quite enchanted with the notion of the market solving lots of problems, and proliferating NGOs solving social problems. Too little thought is given to this other leg of the stool, which is seemingly getting shorter and shorter, while the other ones are getting longer. The balance is not right.