

Preface

In the spring of 2004 I was a visiting researcher in the United States. As a Swedish economist, I noticed a great deal of interest in Sweden among foreign academics. The knowledge of our small country is often impressive. The Swedish phenomenon is the source of admiration as well as surprise, and occasionally also criticism and scepticism. I quickly realized the value in being able to look at one's own country from a distance – and how difficult it is to convey an accurate and encompassing image of Sweden to social scientists from other countries.

This book is an attempt to shed light on Sweden as a 'capitalist welfare state', despite the seemingly contradictory nature of that description. Many Swedish achievements are the result of a clear line of demarcation between market and politics, while Sweden's problems often stem from blurring the line between the market sphere and the political sphere.

This is the third updated version of the book, and also the first version to be available in English. The number of people who have helped me at various stages in the process has become too large to list, but I do want to thank Assar, Daniel, Henrik (several Henriks actually), Magnus, Mi, Niclas, Nils, Pernilla, Pontus, Stig-Björn and Therese for friendly help and suggestions. At various times, Torsten and Ragnar Söderbergs Foundations have provided financial support.

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