

CESIS

Electronic Working Paper Series

Paper No. 133

Rational Solution to the Laundry Issue: Policy and Research for Day-to-Day Life in the Welfare State

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May 2008

In our lifetime, laundry work was one of a woman's most arduous chores in the home. The majority of laundry work in Swedish households was carried out by hand, with no technical aids, until the middle of the 20th century. In 1948, less than one per cent of households had their own washing machine. Thirty years later, this figure had risen to approximately 75%, and 90% of the population had access to a washing machine in various kinds of collective laundry room.ⁱ This process was implemented through a number of interested parties, of which, apart from women's representatives, the Swedish state was one of the more driving forces; representatives of industry and the academic world were also involved. In this article I will be looking at the collaboration between the interested parties on this issue.

When the 'laundry issue' started figuring in political population discussions in the 1930s, washing by hand was presented as a woman's chore in the home that was well suited to simplification and rationalisation. The first concrete proposal was put forward in a report into making the work of women in small country homes easier.ⁱⁱ The measures were initially intended to improve the living conditions for rural people, but the 'laundry issue' gradually came increasingly to be viewed as a housing issue, and the measures that were being discussed were then to include people living in built-up areas and towns as well. This process entailed both government and a municipal involvement in work carried out by women in their personal lives, but it is also an example of the government initiating research into (in this instance) laundry technology, textiles and household economics, as well as cooperation with representatives of industry. The solution to the 'laundry issue', with the developing of a strong public sector, meant that the boundary between public and private spheres was altered. This occurred both through trials in respect of moving laundry work out of the home, as well as through knowledge about household tasks being converted into scientific terms before being conveyed back to households (the women) through information and training in order to influence their values and attitudes regarding laundry work. Through a study of the collaboration between the state, local authority, industry and the individual, it is possible to do an analysis of how the Swedish welfare state was firmly established in various circles and who, at various levels in society, were involved in implementing the welfare.

The 'Laundry Issue' in Brief – The Framework

In 1939, the Swedish Government issued an ordinance regarding state subsidies to collective laundries in rural areas (SFS 1939:911). The introduction of the ordinance was part of the state's endeavour during the latter part of the 1930s to make women's work easier in small rural households (SOU 1939:6). The state gave grants totalling up to a quarter of the cost of premises and equipment for laundry rooms that were run by co-operative societies. The grants were handled by Egnahemsstyrelsen (The Home Ownership Board) in consultation with the local Egnahemsnämnderna (Home Ownership Committees). As the venture was primarily targeted at people in rural communities, it became possible after 1944 to acquire loans for mechanical equipment from the National Machine Loan Fund, which was actually intended for agricultural machinery.ⁱⁱⁱ These loans were managed by the agricultural societies.

In 1941-42, it was considered essential by both society and the state to evaluate the efforts that had been made to date, which had started off as trials. The Second World War also helped to clarify the socio-economic importance of laundry.^{iv} The 1941 Population Commission presented a report entitled 'Collective Laundry' (SOU 1947:1) in 1947, in which a continued and increased investment in various forms of collective laundry was advocated. The possibility of state grants and loans from the Machine Loan Fund was discontinued, and replaced in 1948 with state loans for up to 80% of the initial costs (SFS 1948:566).^v These were managed by the newly established National Housing Board. In the 1939 ordinance, the support had been restricted to rural areas, but in the 1948 ordinance it also became possible for co-operative societies in towns and built-up areas to receive loans. By the end of the 1940s, there was still uncertainty regarding the solution to the laundry issue, for example with regard to whether the state's investments should be targeted at units where washing was handed in or at laundries, and a new commission was appointed. One of the reports from the 1948 Public Housing Committee, 'Laundry' (SOU 1955:8), advocated a continued investment in developing the potential of various types of collective laundry. The option of handing in washing would remain, but the report advocated a stronger link between the home and the possibility to do laundry. The loan activities were therefore divided into two types – laundry house loans and laundry group loans.^{vi} The laundry group loans financed smaller units and can be viewed as an extension of the financing provided to various kinds of co-operative society. The conditions for these loans assumed municipal control and, ideally, active municipal participation (SFS 1956:334). The laundry house loans were targeted at larger and commercially run units. The ordinance was amended in 1961 (SFS

1961:153) when the laundry group loans were discontinued, and the laundry house loans were discontinued in 1967 (1967:557).

The state involvement between 1939 and 1967 was formulated so that laundry work was to be carried out outside the home. The co-operative laundry houses and laundries that had been established for this purpose were relatively short-lived, however, and few of these operations continued in the same form after 1967.

With the involvement of the local authorities in this issue, the demographic arguments were toned down and the interest shifted towards housing design. The number of interested parties increased as a result, including representatives of the construction sector. The laundry issue as a housing issue was investigated by the Public Housing Committee, which was appointed in 1948. The Committee's task was targeted at jointly owned facilities, such as various types of meeting place, kindergartens and laundry centres, although it also included boiler rooms and heating plants.^{vii} The rational solution to the laundry issue was one element in the development of the Swedish welfare society, where the state's control and participation as well as collaboration with industry and the academic world were very clear.

The 'Laundry Issue' as a Population Issue – Three Perspectives

In a more detailed examination of the discussions that were initially held in the social debate on this issue, at least three different perspectives emerge.

Laundry work was one of the most arduous chores that women did, due both to the manual treatment of the textiles and to the handling of the large volumes of water that were required. It was considered a pressing issue and one that was well suited to simplification and rationalisation. Laundry work was manual and was generally performed outdoors, all year round. Before the existence of water pipelines and water piped into the houses, it was easier to carry the washing to a watercourse than to carry water to the house. For obvious reasons, women at that time only did washing a few times each year, although, on the other hand, it was an extensive, collective task on these occasions.

The conditions under which laundry work was performed had to change; a point of view maintained by some participants in the debate:

If you have travelled out into our countryside and seen women in the winter, in extremely cold weather, lying and rinsing clothes in a hole cut in the ice, you don't need to be a

health expert to understand the harmful aspects of their work. It is absolutely amazing that, even in towns and other communities where people hardly want to be talked about as being behind the times, they consider they can afford to treat the health and lives of their citizens as badly as they do through these often appalling laundry conditions (quote by Hanna Rydh).^{viii}

Hanna Rydh was a Doctor of Archaeology. She was the chair of the Fredrika Bremer Association between 1937 and 1949, as well as being a member of the International Alliance of Women during the same period. She sat in the second chamber of the Swedish Parliament for the Liberal Party, and was active in issues relating to women's day-to-day lives.^{ix} In addition to this, she was a co-owner of one of Sweden's largest companies, which had been manufacturing, among other things, laundry equipment since the beginning of the 1900s. The company Värmelednings AB Calor was perceived by many during the 1920s and 1930s, not least by the company itself, as a company with social responsibility. The social debate during the 1930s and 1940s, in which Hanna Rydh participated, meant that this profile was strengthened. Those who pushed for changes to women's laundry work with arguments in line with those of Hanna Rydh did so primarily from a *social and humanitarian perspective*. Women's living conditions should be improved.

Making laundry work easier entailed a somewhat reduced workload for women.^x With the focus on what this could mean for women, one of the reports by the Population Commission in 1938 maintained that:

Means must be sought to facilitate the combining of motherhood and necessary gainful employment.... In this respect, society should naturally intervene as far as possible in order to make the work of women and mothers easier, and individual initiatives for this purpose are also an important task. Many suggestions exist already. The simplification and rationalisation of all housework through the development of technology are consequently a factor of the utmost importance in this respect, as well as, on the whole, facilitating modern developments in the matter of women's changed attitudes towards work.^{xi}

Alva Myrdal was one of the members of the Population Commission. She was one of the most prominent government feminists during the 1930s and 1950s, advocating a new social order in

which there was also room for women. The above quote includes an undertone of wanting to create a new society with emancipated women, i.e. women with the same civil rights as men and whose expertise is utilised in the building of society, not only in their reproductive role. In order for women to participate actively in social life, their housework had to be made easier.^{xii} Arguments in favour of *women's emancipation and equality* were also reinforced by the legislation prohibiting the sacking of married or pregnant women that was adopted by the Swedish Parliament in 1939.^{xiii}

With the influx of experts into the state bureaucracy during the inter-war years, the problem could be put in a scientific context, with links to both time studies and economic calculations:

A calculation on the basis of the 1937 study, from which it emerged that almost half an hour per household per day was spent doing laundry work, produces more or less the corresponding result. If the number of households is put at 1.5 million in round figures, this would mean that approximately 225 million work-hours per year are spent doing laundry. It is clear to anyone what eliminating the majority of this work would mean from an economic perspective.^{xiv}

This quote is taken from the Population Commission's report 'Collective Laundry' (SOU:1947:1). The members of the Commission were all experts in their particular fields. They included Alf Johansson, an economist and an expert on housing issues, Signe Höjer, an officer of the Social Democratic Women's Association, and the above-mentioned Hanna Rydh. The Secretary Nils Halla was an architect on the Home Ownership Board, where he participated in processing applications for state grants for collective laundry rooms. The engineer Nils Cederquist, who was employed by Värmelednings AB Calor, was called in to provide an expert perspective on 'operational issues'.^{xv} A network of experts of various kinds was in the process of being developed.

Even without mentioning the word 'woman', nobody can misinterpret the message that this is female labour that, from an *economic perspective*, will be 'released'. This was written shortly after the end of the Second World War, when there was a labour shortage for industry. By releasing female labour in the home, it could instead be utilised by industry outside the home. This was not so simple, however, and the withdrawal of the female labour force proceeded too

slowly to alleviate the acute situation to any great extent. Labour was recruited from abroad instead.^{xvi}

From a modern perspective, it is striking how unisexual this issue was. Responsibility for laundry was so obviously a woman's job that it appeared easier to move the work out of the home and/or to mechanise it than to change the gender division of work and to advocate the participation of men in laundry work. Men were willing to contribute with their technical expertise, however. Representatives of the various viewpoints were striving to achieve the same goal, but they had different arguments for how this should be achieved. On the matter of utilising technology to make women's housework easier, however, there was consensus. This consensus was aided by the fact that the process had been initiated by the state and that signals from the state legitimised the change process. As it was possible to justify the changes from many different perspectives, a number of different players cooperated with the state for the implementation of the process.

From Population Issue to Housing Issue

The state efforts to solve the 'laundry issue' were located outside the home in the form of laundry houses where the washing was handed in or laundries, either under private or local authority control, or co-operatively owned establishments. In the studies that were carried out into these ventures, one issue that was highlighted recurrently was that the mechanical equipment was not suitable to all kind of laundry, especially small-scale laundry.^{xvii} In these comments on the proposal, it was pointed out that the technical developments in the US were a role model and that small washing machines were being launched on the American market for use in the home. The response from the Swedish Co-operative Union regarding the 'Collective Laundry' report states:

In those countries where the washing industry has made the greatest strides and where the machine technology has been designed, namely the United States and the United Kingdom, the good results have not been achieved through standardisation, but rather through the efforts of engineers and industries acting in competition to achieve the best results. In America, technology for washing in the home has also been developed in recent years, which means that we must be dubious about an excessively far-reaching centralisation and industrialisation of household laundry.^{xviii}

Swedish housewives were obliged to take care of small-scale laundry exclusively in the home and as a rule without any aids. The washing was boiled in a pan on the stove and hung out to dry in the apartment (Picture 1). Moving the laundry work out of the home consequently only solved part of the 'laundry issue', as a considerable amount of washing was still carried out manually in the home. Opinions such as these contributed to the 'laundry issue's' link to the home being reinforced.

The directive to the Public Housing Committee included studying so-called communal facilities, which included laundry rooms equipped with machines. The cost of the machines, a strong tradition of co-operative ownership within sectors such as agriculture and, not least, the fact that laundry work had long been a collective task justified the state continuing to advocate collective solutions located outside the home. As the only machines available on the Swedish market were larger machines suitable for wash loads in excess of 20 kg, this also contributed to the state launching collective laundry forms to solve the 'laundry issue'. The broadening of this issue to include housing contributed to housing interests coming into the picture.

State control of the production of new housing increased during the 1930s. Through government loans and regulation of loan support, the government influenced the construction of housing, although it did not yet have the impact on social planning that it would achieve a couple of decades later.^{xix} In a report from the Public Housing Committee, it states:

It is now common for entire residential areas to be built by large municipal or co-operative companies. This transition from small businesses to large businesses has entailed, for example, that many technical installations that previously had to be fitted in each building can now be centralised. Residential areas consequently often incorporate a central laundry facility, where housewives can either do the washing themselves in modern machines or can have the work done at cost price.^{xx}

In the newly built apartment blocks that were constructed in the 1940s, particularly by the co-operative housebuilders, premises were made available for shared laundry rooms, which were generally also equipped with machines. Municipal housing built during the 1940s was also equipped with mechanical laundry rooms. Katarina Larsson has studied the establishment of the first co-operative laundry room in Örebro in 1943 in her doctoral thesis *Andrahandskontrakt i*

folkhemmet (Subletting in the Swedish Welfare State). It was started with the aid of the co-operative movement and the Fredrika Bremer Association.^{xxi} The co-operative movement came to be a major player, not just in Örebro, in making laundry work easier for women. Larsson also demonstrates that when the local authority formed a property company, they built residential areas with central laundry rooms.^{xxii}

During the period 1940–1948, government grants were paid out to 103 co-operatively owned laundry rooms amounting to a total of slightly more than SEK 900,000.^{xxiii} The archive of the Home Ownership Board contains details about significantly more applications. Many were rejected because the requirements stipulated for being awarded grants were very stringent.^{xxiv} After the regulations were changed in 1948, support was provided in the form of loans. During the period 1948–1951, loans to the value of SEK 2,750,000 were given out. During the same period, however, SEK 8 million was paid out in housing credit for financing various kinds of residential laundry room.^{xxv} However, the rules regarding the financing of housing were such that up to 1957 the proportion relating to laundry equipment did not cover mechanical equipment. For owner-occupied homes, the support was calculated at SEK 600. The Public Housing Committee proposed an increase to SEK 1,700.^{xxvi} The newly built apartment blocks that were established from the middle of the 1940s were generally supplied with mechanically equipped laundry rooms, however, despite the fact that there was insufficient financing. The loan support was not increased until 1957, when the Housing Loan Commission (SOU 1957:44) proposed support of SEK 260 per apartment for the construction of a mechanical laundry room.^{xxvii} The solution to the ‘laundry issue’, in an economic form, therefore came to be ‘built into’ the housing construction policy at a relatively late stage. The housing construction companies, on the other hand, appeared to be aware of the need to focus on the housing of the future.

The Public Housing Committee sent a questionnaire in 1949 to the country’s 130 cities, 79 market towns and 208 municipal communities, which included questions about which public housing arrangements were considered both appropriate and necessary to ‘facilitate housework and looking after children’.

In the answers that were received, in which collective laundry rooms were discussed, the differences between newer and older buildings were highlighted. Most of the newly built properties were said to be equipped either with their own laundry room, or the residents had

access to laundry facilities. In the response from the city of Malmö, however, a follow-up analysis was carried out which clearly highlights an unexpected problem:

As regards the organisation of certain collective arrangements such as laundry rooms, these can have a preserving effect on the older housing stock and consequently postpone a much-needed sanitation of the buildings. It therefore appears that these facilities should in the first instance be arranged in conjunction with new buildings, and in the older housing stock only in areas with an owner-occupied character.^{xxviii}

When the ‘collective arrangement’ was located in a separate building, it was assumed that this hampered repairing older properties. Not everyone viewed this problem in the same way, however. For example, Solna submitted the following response:

As regards technical arrangements intended to supplement the individual homes and to make housework easier, it can be noted that mechanical laundry rooms are now generally being built in conjunction with new buildings. The city is focusing its attention on this area: i.e. that similar arrangements should also be established separately within the older housing stock, where mechanical laundry facilities cannot be supplied at a reasonable cost in any other way.^{xxix}

The responses from Malmö and Solna are in agreement that the cost of furnishing older properties with mechanically equipped laundry rooms is too high, but the impact analysis was different. This may be because the proportion of older properties varied, along with the repair requirements in the older properties. However, it is evident from the responses that the newly built properties were generally furnished with mechanical laundry rooms.

The transition of the ‘laundry issue’s’ solution from population to housing issue marked a materialisation of the problem. This may be an aspect of the research boom regarding both technology and materials that came to impact on the ‘laundry issue’. Representatives of technical research and technology companies were important players, with which the state also collaborated on other issues. A Commission on the Organisation of Technical Research was set up in 1940 under the leadership of Gösta Malm (SOU 1942:6). From the government’s perspective, it was considered necessary to use economic means in order to control the technical developments that were to be fostered. The proposals put forward by this commission resulted,

for example, in the establishment of Statens Tekniska Forskningsråd (The National Technology Research Council) in 1942 through an agreement between the government and industry. The same year saw the creation of Statens Kommitté för Byggnadsforskning (The National Committee for Building Research), and Svenska Textilforskningsinstitutet (The Swedish Institute for Textile Research) was established at Chalmers University of Technology in 1945.^{xxx} These bodies had at their disposal state funding that was awarded for research in this field to technology institutes, both state-owned and private. A number of institutes were also established that were partially state-financed. Institutet för Tvättekensk Forskning, IT (The Institute for Technical Laundry Research), and Hemmens forskningsinstitut, HFI (The Home Research Institute), can be mentioned in this context. Both were partially financed by the state, although they also received grants from interested parties from other areas of society.^{xxxii} However, there were a number of important differences between the HFI and IT. The HFI was established at the initiative of various non-profit women's organisations (including Husmodersföreningarnas Riksförbund [The National Housewives' Association]), and focused on issues related to the home; it was represented publicly primarily by women. The formation of IT was a result of the government investment in technical research, and was more firmly rooted in the academic world. IT was represented by men, was rooted in industry and focused on issues related to commercial laundry.^{xxxiii} Through the government's active involvement in the housing issue, these two organisations came to assist each other.

Between the State and the Citizen – Interested Parties in the Laundry Issue

The government established an organisation to reach out to those affected by the 'laundry issue'. The authority that initially managed the distribution of state grants for co-operative laundry rooms was the Home Ownership Board. These tasks were taken over by the National Housing Board when a laundry section was established. Information was sent out by these authorities to be distributed at regional and local level. A circular from the Home Ownership Board to the Home Ownership Committees in April 1940 stated:

Please find enclosed 5 copies of the brochure regarding co-operative laundry rooms as mentioned in the Home Ownership Board's circular dated 20 January. The Board requests that, after consulting with the domestic advisor, you submit information about the number of copies required in your area of operations.^{xxxiii}

A very important effort aimed at providing information primarily to women in rural areas was carried out by the domestic advisors employed by the agricultural societies. The activities of the domestic advisor were financed by state funds, although it was organised by the agricultural societies. Only women were employed.

A domestic advisor's activities generally consist of providing the agricultural population or the rural population in general with advice and instructions concerning, for example, cooking, baking, conserving, butchering, etc., as well as everything relating to looking after the home, and to promoting order, comfort and hygiene in association with sensible, economical housekeeping.^{xxxiv}

The government grant for the domestic advisors' salary contributed to them being viewed as an established part of the building of the welfare state. The domestic advisors were also a referral body, both in their position within the agricultural societies and as an independent interest group.^{xxxv}

In 1929, Ruth Wallenstein-Jaeger was employed by the Östergötland Agricultural Society. She held this position until 1966, and she describes her activities in the book *Ett husligt halvsekel* (A Domestic Half Century). Wallenstein-Jaeger had many duties, one of which involved distributing information about the opportunity to establish co-operative laundry rooms. The Medevi co-operative laundry association was established in 1946 after Wallenstein-Jaeger '... in an address demonstrated the advantages of a laundry facility incorporating mechanical equipment, as well as demonstrating that the presented cost calculation clearly showed that an association enjoyed the best conditions as regards earning capacity'.^{xxxvi} This is consequently an example of an advisor using state funds to communicate information about the government's measures aimed at raising living standards.

The commercial sector, represented, for example, by the mechanical engineering industry, the construction industry and the chemical engineering industry, was also interested in having an influence in this matter. It was of the utmost importance for industry to ensure that the product range it supplied corresponded both to that advocated by the state and to that desired by consumers. The mechanical engineering industry, which supplied the technical equipment, was

one such player. As early as the beginning of the 20th century there was a demand for large washing machines from public institutions such as hospitals. Within the Swedish engineering industry, there was a high level of expertise by the end of the 1940s as regards the production of large washing machines complete with equipment suitable for the collective facilities that were being advocated. On the other hand, there was no production of household washing machines, although this was established at the start of the 1950s as a result of influences primarily from the US.^{xxxvii} It is probably no coincidence that the engineer Nils Cederquist, employed by Värmelednings AB Calor since 1941, was hired by the Population Commission to produce drawings of collective laundry rooms, which were naturally equipped with the company's machines.^{xxxviii} As early as the agricultural meeting in Eskilstuna in 1935, the company presented suitable machinery for collective laundry rooms, and in a number of advertisements dating from the 1930s the company offered its services and its expertise regarding the formation of co-operative societies. It also published a book, entitled *Kollektivtvättstugan. Ett ekonomiskt behov för den svenska landsbygden* (The Collective Laundry Room: An Economic Necessity for the Swedish Countryside), which gave instructions on how to form a laundry society and presented proposals for technical solutions regarding buildings and machinery.^{xxxix} Another example of lobbying activities is a letter in November 1947 from Åke Nyberg, director of the washing machine manufacturer Fredsfors AB, to Statens Industrikommission (The National Industry Commission). Alluding to the 'laundry issue', he requested a licence to import machines for white laundry and dry-cleaning from the US, a credit of USD 600,000 and, in the long term, a permit for manufacture under licence. One of the arguments he uses refers to studies looking at the cost of wear and tear to textiles in old machines, carried out by the engineer Sigurd Köhler at IT in collaboration with Statens Provningsanstalt (now the SP Technical Research Institute of Sweden).^{xl} Both Åke Nyberg and Sigurd Köhler were members of the board of IT.

A third interested party comprises representatives of technical research. In a memo dating from 1954, the Chairman of the Public Housing Committee Yngve Larsson gives a general summary of the various research areas that the Committee should have contact with:

To start with it is clear that the entire laundry sector, due to changing technical and economic factors, is currently experiencing fluid development, that the assessment of these problems is therefore often uncertain, and that continuing advanced research, i.e. expert, objective investigation of laundry problems, is necessary.... The washing machine

sector is undergoing rapid development, however, which can alter the assumptions for the Committee's judgement. (Which meant moving away from large, industrial, central laundry houses in favour of medium-sized machines in small, local laundry rooms: author's comment) Similarly it is obvious that the rationalisation of after-treatment leaves room for new technical methods. The development of the washing detergent industry can simplify and change the types of washing. The development of textiles, the transition to new materials, is extremely important as regards the laundry issue. In various ways, the laundry problems will impact on the layout of housing and on the interior design of various types of housing.^{xli}

The HFI enjoyed a very close collaboration with the Public Housing Committee. The HFI carried out investigations of various kinds, as well as testing machines for household use. The activities conducted by the HFI were generally referred to in terms that excluded the word 'research'. Words such as test, trial and investigation tended to be used instead. The term research was reserved for the activities conducted by IT and that were described as follows:

both basic research concerning the state of various textiles during the laundry process, detergents and bleaching agents, etc., and above all control and consultancy activities on behalf of the associated laundry houses, primarily with the aim of ascertaining the impact of the washing processes on the durability and appearance of the textiles.^{xlii}

The 'practically oriented' research into women's day-to-day lives that was carried out at the HFI was, in other words, not as good as the activities that IT conducted on behalf of industry. Ruth Oldenziel believes that technology, in the sense of the study of technology, was created by men for men in the early part of the 20th century. Female engineers and technology targeted at a female sphere were not valued as highly as a male machine culture in the making.^{xliii}

It is consequently possible to see patterns of male and female networks that were established both in the government commissions and on the boards of various research institutes. Brita Åkerman was a driving force in the establishment of the HFI, and she was also one of the members of the Public Housing Committee. She was married to economist Alf Johansson, and the couple spent time with Alva and Gunnar Myrdal.^{xliv} Alf Johansson and Gunnar Myrdal were very active in housing policy issues, participating in a number of housing commissions both between the wars and after the Second World War. Alva Myrdal also participated in a number of commissions on women's policy. Brita Åkerman was the sister of Carin Boalt, who became the

head of the technical section at the HFI.^{xlv} The first chair of the board of the HFI was Karin Koch, who later became a cabinet minister within the Ministry for Supply.^{xlvi} I have also previously mentioned Signe Höjer, who was an officer of the Social Democratic Women's Association, and Hanna Rydh, who was active in the Liberal Party, the Fredrika Bremer Association and the International Alliance of Women, as well as having ties to the mechanical engineering industry. There were also networks around IT that consisted solely of men. One such network was illustrated in an article in the Swedish Employers' Federation's journal *Industria* (Picture 2). Hung up on the washing line in the picture are the government investigator, architect Nils Halla, Director of Fredsfors AB Åke Nyberg, engineer at IT Sigurd Köhler, and Director Holger Pettersson of the Swedish Co-operative Union-owned Calor. There are also representatives of the laundry sector.^{xlvii} Even though there was some overlapping, the focus of the female networks tended to be targeted at the application of the laundry work and at consumers, while the focus of the male networks was targeted at 'basic research' within technology and chemistry, as well as at technical developments within industry and commercial laundry.

Many of the issues surrounding social planning and collectivisation were reinforced by the rationing during the Second World War. This applied primarily to issues regarding access to goods and their quality. Even though the rate of a number of socio-economic reforms was slowed down by the war, on the other hand issues were given stimulus that strengthened the position of the consumer and that fitted in well in the ongoing development of the welfare system. In 1946, Minister for Trade Gunnar Myrdal set up a commission on quality research and consumer information. The report was published in 1949 (SOU 1949:18). This was an important commission that drew up guidelines for standardisation, quality and price control, as well as the labelling of goods. The commission was extremely important both for continued research and for the manufacturing industry.^{xlviii} For example, the standardisation of electrical appliances was proposed (Picture 3), which eventually led to the S-mark.^{xlix}

Public and Private – The Collective Idea

Government solutions that contributed to the solution to the 'laundry issue' were implemented with state support, initially in the form of grants and later through loans. The reforms took place locally, but organised at a regional level. The content of the reforms affected the private sector, but was based in the public sector. One distinguishing feature was the collective idea. In order to

facilitate changes at a local level that touched people's private lives, the local authorities in particular came to assume increased responsibility, with the result that the boundary between private and public spheres shifted.

In a conservative ideology that characterised central administration during the 19th century, only the government represented the public sector in its political activities. Local authority activities, as well as the affairs of families, belonged to the *private communities*.ⁱ Social and economic issues consequently belonged to the private sphere or spheres. They were perceived as separate and independent, and were also expressed in the municipal autonomy that had long been upheld in Sweden. Ingemar Norrlid believes that a process commenced at the beginning of the 20th century that resulted in more and more of the local authorities' activities being viewed as belonging to the public sphere. Norrlid calls this process integrationism. The state interacts more and more in the local authorities' activities, which then came to be viewed as a part of the public sector. Norrlid believes that this process assumed a transition to capitalist production methods, as well as voting democracy and parliamentarism.ⁱⁱ These changes were necessary in order that, as Sven-Erik Liedman puts it, the state could '... be viewed as a direct representative of the entire population, and the opposition that existed between public and private, general and individual was considered to have ended'.ⁱⁱⁱ In her doctoral thesis *Folkhemmet och kommunerna* (The Swedish Welfare State and the Local Authorities), Ulla Ekström von Essen attempts to identify a local authority ideology. One conclusion she draws is that an increasingly strong public sector meant that the relationship between the state and the individual was strengthened, and that the previously rigid boundary between private and public was relaxed. Government control remained strong, at the same time as the local authorities retained their autonomy. However, Ekström von Essen feels that this autonomy could be perceived as the capacity to administer government directives.ⁱⁱⁱ

Integrationism within the local authorities assumed a process of democratisation, which entailed closer relations between the state and the individual, communicated via the local authorities. The ongoing democratisation could be expressed in the formation of various associations.

The civil associations, which can also include co-operative societies for collective washing, were an intermediary link between the state and the individual.^{liv} This is confirmed, for example by Yvonne Hirdman and Helena Bergman, in actual studies on this issue with regard to local

authority activities.^{lv} However, this perspective can be broadened to also include the formulation of various welfare regimes.

In the US, which represents a liberal welfare regime, the state played a very small role in the growth of the welfare society. This is demonstrated, for example by Lena Sommestad, in a comparison of attitudes towards issues surrounding women's gainful employment in Sweden and the US. She feels that the Swedish state was much more inclined to try to influence the private sphere, and also assumed a more overall responsibility for the welfare of everyone, including weaker groups in society.^{lvi} The American Government allowed large parts of this responsibility to remain with the 'private communities'. As a result, the boundary between private and public in the US continued to appear very distinct, which created room to manoeuvre for various players without state involvement. In Sweden, the majority of such players ended up collaborating with the government in various forms instead.

The above-mentioned domestic advisors are an example for a comparison with the US. In the US, this professional group was known as 'home economists'. They were established entirely without state involvement, and there were courses, including at academic level, for women who wanted to acquire knowledge about all kinds of housekeeping, including physiology and nutrition. The services that 'home economists' could offer were utilised in the first instance by the private market. Well-educated female 'home economists' were first employed by companies during the inter-war years in order to provide information and demonstrate their goods.^{lvii} Their activities were directed outwards to a large extent, with demonstrations at societies and clubs in both private and public environments. They also utilised the radio as a means of communicating information.^{lviii} Carolyn Goldstein has demonstrated that the American producers, in this case of electrical home appliances, portrayed their activities as being in the service of society.^{lix} In the US there was significantly more latitude for companies to appear as socially oriented, because there were neither government directives nor government activities.^{lx} This difference with regard to government involvement is interesting, at the same time as the American home economists also came to constitute a role model for the Swedish domestic advisors and the information and implementation work that followed from the state investments, one of which was the 'rational solution to the laundry issue'.^{lxi} The forms of laundry that were developed in Sweden were based on a collective approach that was deeply rooted in the Swedish society. Two alternatives for household washing were established in the US. The first, as was

later the case in Sweden, was for people to have their own washing machine. The second was a form of public laundry, although in an entirely different format from that used in Sweden. Coin-ops or laundrettes were established, to which the person doing the laundry would take the items and pay using coin-operated machines.^{lxii} With this form of laundry, the person doing the washing is a customer, not a part-owner (Picture 4).

Collaboration between the State, Local Authority, Industry and the Individual

It is clear that the state's participation and its potential to exercise control was most successful with financial incentives. The establishment of co-operative laundry rooms, domestic advisors and apartment house laundry rooms are all clear examples of this. However, neither co-operative laundry rooms nor domestic advisors are still in existence today. Instead, the solution to the 'laundry issue' was conducted at many levels and in many sectors in society, which resulted in the coming together in the design of the housing environment. In tangible terms, this was manifested in the Swedish apartment house laundry room. This was an acceptable form of washing that represented a compromise between a private and a public solution. This form of washing is very rare in other countries.^{lxiii} With financial incentives from the state, interest in developing technical solutions to the 'laundry issue' grew within both industry and the academic world. The mechanical engineering industry played a tangible role in this process. The mechanical equipment they could offer at the beginning of the 1940s only made collective solutions possible. The market for household washing machines did not pick up until the 1970s.

One important, yet relatively invisible group of players were the municipal, co-operative and private housing companies that, without any regulations laid down, perceived that there was a competitive advantage in furnishing apartment blocks with mechanically equipped laundry rooms. This issue was also raised at a political level, where more studies are required to highlight the power game that was taking place.^{lxiv} However, we have been able to see that representatives of the housing companies participated in networks to reach the technical solution to the laundry issue.

The desire to solve the 'laundry issue' with the aid of technology preserved the established gender order surrounding laundry work. This gender order was also established and confirmed when the area was researched.^{lxv} Male networks strongly linked to both the academic world and industry developed and refined the technology, while female networks implemented

the technical solutions and maintained contact with the women doing the laundry. At the end of the day, it was women's day-to-day lives that were affected, although the women doing the washing had few channels to provide feedback to planners and decision-makers. A two-way communication channel was initially provided through the domestic advisors, who came into contact both with the women doing the laundry and with the powers that be.

The 'Laundry Issue' Today – An Equality Issue

In Statistics Sweden's time use study, *Tid för vardagsliv* (Time for Day-to-Day Life), published in 2003, it emerged that women still devoted more time to housework than men, and that laundry work, including ironing, was the most unequal.^{lxvi} This is surprising, bearing in mind that the technical innovations regarding laundry work ought to have attached little importance to ideas regarding men's and women's handling of clean and dirty things that had formed the basis for the gender division of work.^{lxvii} In combination with the general notion that technology is male, there should have been opportunities for men to become involved in the laundry work. Laundry has been simplified, and specific knowledge about how different textiles should be handled is no longer necessary, as it is simply a matter of deciphering the symbols on the washing instructions. These symbols were developed as part of an international collaboration that started in the 1960s, although it was not until 1991 that they were approved under the name ISO 3758.^{lxviii} They consequently now constitute a tangible relic of a quality system for welfare.

ⁱ For more information about the population policy debate, you are recommended to read Ann-Katrin Hatje, *Befolkningsfrågan och välfärden* [The Population Issue and Welfare] (Stockholm, 1984). Information about the Swedish population's access to washing machines can be found in Statistics Sweden's living standard surveys. Information about *personal* washing machines in the home has been available since 1990. Since then, 75% of people own their own washing machine. Others have access to a residential laundry room.

ⁱⁱ *Betänkande med förslag angående ordnande av den lägre lantbruksundervisningen* [Report with Proposals concerning the Arrangement of Lower Level Agricultural Education], SOU 1939: 6 (Stockholm, 1939).

ⁱⁱⁱ As early as 1940, the Parliamentary Committee on Agriculture had maintained in a pronouncement that washing machines for collective use should, from a loan perspective, be placed on an equal footing with agricultural machinery. *Hushållningssällskapet i Hallands län* [The Agricultural Society in Halland County], Report, 10 June 1940, § 118, Lund Regional Archive (LLA).

^{iv} Knowledge made it possible to save both detergent and energy in conjunction with washing. A concrete example of this is a course for the country's domestic advisors organised by the Agricultural Board and the State Information Agency in October 1940. *Kungliga Lantbruksstyrelsen* [Royal Agricultural Board], Educational Division, Series AI:8, CI:8, National Archives of Sweden, Stockholm (RA).

^v The grant element was scrapped, although the loan conditions, above all the repayment period, were negotiable. *Tvätt* [Laundry], SOU 1955:8 (Stockholm, 1955).

^{vi} Laundry house loans were targeted at larger facilities, while the laundry group loans were targeted at a maximum of 12 households that used laundry equipment jointly. SOU 1955:8, 107.

^{vii} *Bostadskollektiva kommittén* [Public Housing Committee], YK 1678, Vol. 28, RA.

^{viii} *Calor 1902-1942*, Jubilee Publication, Esselte Reklam (1942).

^{ix} Hanna Rydh was married to Mortimer Munck av Rosenschöld, who was Governor of Jämtland County between 1931 and 1938. Catarina Lundström, *Fruars makt och omakt. Kön, klass och kulturarv 1900-1940* [The Power and 'Non-Power' of Wives: Gender, Class and Cultural Heritage, 1900–1940] (Umeå, 2005), 47–57.

^x Researchers have demonstrated that technology did not reduce the amount of housework, as other jobs became more frequent instead. See Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother* (London, 1983/1989). For Swedish conditions, see Anita Nyberg, *Tekniken – kvinnornas befriare? Hushållsteknik, köpevaror, gifta kvinnors hushållsarbets tid och förvärvsdeltagande. 1930-talet - 1980-talet* [Technology – Women's Liberator? Household Technology, Purchase Goods, Married Women's Time Doing Housework and Participation in the Labour Force: The 1930s to the 1980s] (Linköping, 1989).

^{xi} *Yttrande med socialetiska synpunkter på befolkningsfrågan* [Pronouncements with Socio-Ethical Opinions on the Population Issue], SOU 1938:19 (Stockholm, 1938), 48.

^{xii} See also Yvonne Hirdman, *Det tänkande hjärtat. Boken om Alva Myrdal* [The Thinking Heart: A Book about Alva Myrdal] (Stockholm, 2006).

^{xiii} Renee Frangeur, *Yrkeskvinna eller makens tjänarinna? Striden om yrkesrätten för gifta*

kvinnor i mellankrigstidens Sverige [Professional Woman or the Husband's Servant? The Battle

for Professional Rights for Married Women in Sweden during the Inter-War Years] (Lund, 1998);

Silke Neunsinger, *Die Arbeit der Frauen - die Krise der Männer: die Erwerbstätigkeit*

verheirateter Frauen in Deutschland und Schweden 1919-1939 (Uppsala, 2001).

^{xiv} *Kollektiv Tvätt* [Public Laundry], SOU 1947:1 (Stockholm, 1947).

^{xv} Interview with Nils Cederquist, 29 November 1991.

^{xvi} Nina Almgren, *Kvinnorörelsen och efterkrigsplaneringen. Statsfeminism i svensk*

arbetsmarknadspolitik under och kort efter andra världskriget [The Feminist Movement and

Post-War Planning: State Feminism in the Swedish Labour Market Policy during and shortly

after the Second World War] (Umeå, 2006); Johan Svanberg, *Minnen av migrationen.*

Arbetskraftsinvandring från Jugoslavien till Svenska Fläktfabriken i Växjö kring 1970 [Memories

of the Migration: Labour Immigration from Yugoslavia to Svenska Fläktfabriken in Växjö around

1970] (Växjö, 2005).

^{xvii} In the comments on the proposal in SOU 1947:1, this opinion was put forward by, for example, the National Housewives' Association, the Fredrika Bremer Association, the Liberal Party's Women's Association and the Association of Swedish Domestic Advisors. *Befolkningsutredningen* [Population Commission], YK1671, Series F, Vol. 29-30, RA.

^{xviii} Comments on the proposal from the Swedish Co-operative Union dated 30 June 1947. Signed by Albin Johansson and G. Osvald. *Ibid.*, Vol. 30, RA.

^{xix} See Carina Gråbacke's and Jan Jörnmark's text in this anthology. Alf Johansson, 'Bostadspolitiken' ['Housing Policy'], in *Hundra år under kommunalförfattningarna 1862-1962* [A Hundred Years under Municipal Statutes,

1862–1962], a commemorative publication issued by the Swedish Federation of Rural Local Authorities, the Swedish Federation of County Councils, the Confederation of Swedish Towns (Stockholm, 1962).

^{xx} *Bostadskollektiva kommittén, YK1678*, Vol. 28. Investigative material under the heading ‘Planering av bostadsområden’ [‘Planning of Residential Areas’], unsigned.

^{xxi} During this period, the above-mentioned Hanna Rydh was the chair of the Fredrika Bremer Association.

^{xxii} Katarina Larsson, *Andrahandskontrakt i folkhemmet. Närmiljö och kvinnors förändringsstrategier* [Subletting in the Swedish Welfare State: Immediate Environment and Women’s Strategies for Change] (Örebro, 2004), 97, 102. The company Värmelednings AB Calor was purchased by the Swedish Co-operative Union in 1946.

^{xxiii} SOU 1955:8, 340.

^{xxiv} *Egnahemsstyrelsen* [Home Ownership Board], Allmänna byrån, Series D III:3, Series C Ib, Vol. 1, RA.

^{xxv} *Bostadskollektiva kommittén, YK1678*, Vol. 23, Memo No. 192, co-ordination of credit forms, written by Olle Melin.

^{xxvi} *Ibid.*, Vol. 21 a, Memo No. 198, 16. The laundry equipment comprised 1 washing pan, 1 rinsing basin, 1 washing bench and 1 floor duckboard. The cost of a ‘traditional’ laundry room was stated as being SEK 2,000.

^{xxvii} *Förenklad bostadslånggivning* [Simplified Provision of Housing Loans], SOU 1957:44 (Stockholm, 1957), Appendix 5, Standard for calculating the loan ceiling for apartment blocks.

^{xxviii} *Bostadskollektiva kommittén, YK1678*, Vol. 48, Memo No. 44.

^{xxix} *Ibid.*

^{xxx} Hans Weinberger, *Nätverkstreprenören. En historia om teknisk forskning och industriellt utvecklingsarbete. Från den Malmska utredningen till Styrelsen för teknisk utveckling* [The Network Entrepreneur: A History of Technical Research and Industrial Development Work: From the Malm Commission to the Swedish National Board for Technical Development] (Stockholm, 1996), 31 ff., 89 ff. and 144 f.; Annika Nordlander Finn, *Byggforskningen organiseras 1900-1960* [Building Research Organised 1900–1960] (Stockholm, 1994), 53 ff.

^{xxxi} For IT see SOU 1955:8, 118 ff.; Weinberger, *Nätverkstreprenören*, 91. For the HFI see Britta Lövgren, *Hemarbete som politik, Diskussioner om hemarbete, Sverige 1930-40-talen, och tillkomsten av Hemmens Forskningsinstitut* [Housework as Policy, Discussions about Housework, Sweden 1930s–1940s, and the Creation of the Home Research Institute] (Stockholm, 1993), Chapter 5.

^{xxxii} SOU 1955:8, Chapter 10.

^{xxxiii} *Egnahemsstyrelsen*, Allmänna byrån, Series B:II, Vol. 1, RA.

^{xxxiv} Pettersson et al., ‘Förslag rörande statens medverkan för anställande av hemkonsulenter å landsbygden m.m.’ [‘Proposal concerning the State’s Participation in the Employment of Domestic Advisors for Rural Areas, etc.’] (Stockholm, 1937), 1–2.

^{xxxv} In the comments on the proposal in SOU 1947:1, all the agricultural societies and Sweden’s Domestic Advisor Association were referral bodies. Many of the agricultural societies attached statements from domestic advisors. Prior to the report SOU 1955:8, a survey of the country’s domestic advisors was carried out.

^{xxxvi} *Medeviortens andelstvättförening Arkiv* [Medevi Co-operative Laundry Association Archive], VLA.

^{xxxvii} Ulla Rosén, *A Clean Century: How Electrolux-Wascator AB Washed the World 1902–2002* (Värnamo, 2002), 42 ff.

^{xxxviii} Interview with Nils Cederquist, 29 November 1991.

^{xxxix} Rosén, *A Clean Century*, 27–33.

^{xl} *Befolkningsutredningen, YK 1671*, Series F, Vol. 29, RA. Copy of the letter sent to, for example, Gustav Möller, minister for health and social affairs, which came to the attention of the Population Commission, probably via the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs.

^{xli} *Bostadskollektiva kommittén, YK1678*, Memo No. 199, Vol. 21 a, RA.

^{xlii} SOU 1955:8, 118–9.

^{xliii} Ruth Oldenziel, *Making Technology Masculine: Men, Women and Modern Machines in America 1870–1945* (Amsterdam, 1999).

^{xliv} Brita Åkerman, *Alva Myrdal. Från storbarnkammare till fredspris* [Alva Myrdal: From Large Nursery to Peace Prize] (Stockholm, 1997).

^{xlv} Lövgren, *Hemarbete som politik*, 97–111.

^{xlvi} Kirsti Niskanen, *Karriär i männens värld. Nationalekonomen och feministen Karin Koch* [Career in a Man’s World: The Economist and Feminist Karin Koch] (Stockholm, 2007).

^{xlvii} The picture of the male network hung up on a washing line was used to illustrate an article in *Industria*, No. 3, 1949, with the title: 'Tvätt - en industri i blåsväder? Socialisering bakvägen eller fri konkurrens' ['Laundry – An Industry in Stormy Weather? Back-Door Socialisation or Free Competition']. The article discussed the changes in the laundry industry caused by the involvement of the state in the laundry issue.

^{xlviii} *Kvalitetsforskning och konsumentupplysning* [Quality Research and Consumer Information], SOU 1949:18, (Stockholm, 1949), 166 ff.

^{xlix} The S Mark is an EU-wide safety mark with regards electrical equipment.

¹ Sven-Erik Liedman, 'Sveriges rike måste vara det eviga...' ['Sweden's Realm Must Be Eternal...'], in *Den dolda historien. 27 uppsatser om vårt okända förflutna* [Hidden History: 27 Essays on Our Unknown Past], ed. Ronny Ambjörnsson & David Gaunt (Stockholm, 1984), 408.

ⁱⁱ Ingemar Norrlid, *Demokrati, skatterättvisa och ideologisk förändring, Den kommunala självstyrelsen och demokratins genombrott i Sverige* [Democracy, Fair Taxation and Ideological Change: Municipal Autonomy and the Breakthrough of Democracy in Sweden] (Lund, 1983), 2.

ⁱⁱⁱ Liedman, 'Sveriges rike måste vara det eviga...', 409.

^{liii} Ulla Ekström von Essen, *Folkhemmets kommun. Socialdemokratiska idéer om lokalsamhället 1939-1952* [The Swedish Welfare State's Local Authority: Social Democratic Ideas about the Local Community 1939–1952] (Stockholm, 1993), 54 f.

^{liv} Michele Micheletti, *Det civila samhället och staten. Medborgarsammanslutningarnas roll i svensk politik* [The Civil Society and the State: The Role of the Civil Associations in Swedish Politics] (Stockholm, 1994), 29 ff.

^{lv} Helena Bergman, *Att fostra till föräldraskap. Barnavårdsmän, genuspolitik och välfärdsstat 1900-1950* [Fostering Parenthood: Child Welfare Officers, Gender Policy and the Welfare State 1900–1950] (Stockholm, 2003); Yvonne Hirdman, *Att lägga livet till rätta. Studier i svensk folkhemspolitik* [Putting Life in Order: Studies on Swedish Welfare State Policy] (Stockholm, 1989).

^{lvi} Lena Sommestad, 'Welfare State Attitudes to the Male Breadwinning System: The United States and Sweden in Comparative Perspective', *International Review of Social History*, 42:5, 1997.

^{lvii} Carolyn Goldstein, 'From Service to Sales: Home Economics in Light and Power, 1920–1940', *Technology and Culture*, Jan. 1997, 38, 1, 121–52.

^{lviii} cf. Karin Nordberg, *Folkhemmets röst. Radion som folkbildare 1925-1950* [The Voice of the Swedish Welfare State: Radio as a Public Educator 1925–1950] (Stockholm, 1998), Chapter 9, and Sofia Seifarth, *Råd i radion. Modernisering, allmänhet och expertis 1939-1968* [Advice on the Radio: Modernisation, the General Public and Expertise 1939–1968] (Stockholm, 2007), Part 1.

^{lix} Carolyn Goldstein, 'Part of the Package: Home Economists in the Consumer Products Industries, 1920–1940', *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and Their History of a Profession*, eds. Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti (Ithaca, 1997).

^{lx} Following an enquiry in 1955 from the Public Housing Committee to the United States Department of Agriculture regarding time studies relating to housework, the official from the Home Economist Research Branch stated that no such studies had taken place, but recommended two smaller studies dating from the beginning of the 1930s. *Bostadskollektiva kommittén, YK1678*, Vol. 48, RA.

^{lxi} Domestic advisor in Halland, Elsa Lindström, went on leave during 1947 to conduct a study trip to the US. *Hushållningssällskapet i Hallands län, A1a*: Vol. 9, LLA.

^{lxii} This may possibly explain why the water was heated for longer in Sweden than in the case of the American washing method, where the aim was to keep down costs. In the US, the water temperature is considerably lower in washing machines and washing detergents have a slightly different composition.

^{lxiii} The US focused on laundrettes known as coin-ops, in West Germany the focus was on household machines and in Japan the focus was on private laundry houses. See, e.g., 'Tvättautomaten växer till ett fullständigt tvätteri' ['The Automatic Washing Machine Develops into a Complete Laundry House'], *Tvätt-Nytt Calor*, No. 3, 1952; 'Tyska intryck: Den starka ökningen av antalet hushållstvättmaskiner' ['German Impressions: The Strong Increase in the Number of Household Washing Machines], *Tvätt-Tidningen*, No. 1, 1956; 'En studieresa till Japan' ['A Study Trip to Japan'], *Tvätt-Industrin*, No. 9-10, 1970.

^{lxiv} See, e.g., Carin Gråbacke's and Jan Jörnmark's contribution to this anthology.

^{lxv} Oldenziel, *Making Technology Masculine*, 182 ff.

^{lxvi} *Tid för vardagsliv: kvinnors och mäns tidsanvändning 1990/91 och 2000/01* [Time for Day-to-Day Life: Women's and Men's Utilisation of Time] (Stockholm, 2003), 89

<<http://www.scb.se/Statistik/LE/LE0103/2003M00/LE99SA0301.pdf>>

^{lxvii} See, e.g., Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London and New York, 1966).

^{lxviii} Rosén, *A Clean Century*, 60.