

Women's struggle and media reform

The Swedish Women's Associations' Radio Committee, 1933–1940

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ABSTRACT

This article contributes to a social history of Swedish broadcasting through an analysis of a movement for media reform: the Swedish Women's Associations' Radio Committee, formed in 1933 and operating until 1940. The committee was a joint effort by many established women's organisations in Sweden, formed with the goal of strengthening the role of women in the developing public service radio, and especially providing a platform for women to raise demands on influence in the decision-making around the development of this new media form. In this article, I analyse the Swedish Women's Associations' Radio Committee and their work in the 1930s and ask what they did, how they did it, and with what effects? In what ways can their work be understood as a movement for media reform? The analysis builds on archival material documenting the Swedish Women's Associations' Radio Committee, as well as secondary sources such as memoirs and newspaper materials.

KEYWORDS: radio, media reform, media history, women's movement, public service broadcasting

Introduction

This article is about the Swedish Women's Associations' Radio Committee [Sveriges Kvinnoföreningars Radiokommitté] (SKFR), an umbrella organisation for Swedish women's associations that, from its formation in the 1930s and for about a decade until its discontinuation, worked to ensure that the new media of radio would serve the interests of women. This is thus an article about a movement for media reform: a political organisation with the purpose to effect, transform, and ultimately democratise the media. Furthermore, this is an article about a relatively successful media reform movement: a movement that during its short history won several important victories and that helped advance the position of women within the early Swedish public radio [Radiotjänst/Sveriges Radio].

There are at least two reasons to return to this historical event and recall the memory of SKFR. First, the example of SKFR contributes to new perspectives on the history of (Swedish) radio. In particular, a study of this kind contributes with a social-historical perspective on the development of what was then a new mass medium. The majority of previous histories of Swedish broadcasting has focused rather one-sidedly on Swedish public radio as a company and an institution and their operations, which means that a number of phenomena and processes have become more peripheral: radio clubs, radio amateurs, the development of radio technology, community radio, pirate radio, and so on. Not to mention the history of reception and listeners' perspectives (see Höijer, 1998 for an exception). However, this is not only the case for radio history, but the same can be said about much of media history, where studies tend to put less focus on the broad range of interests and organisations that contributed to the emergence and development of the media. Returning to SKFR thus becomes an attempt to broaden the historiography – from a too narrow perspective on the dominant institutions towards the wider field of social conflicts that helped to shape them, and which is also part of the history of the medium.

The second reason is related to the first but is more connected to the conclusions and lessons (if any) we can draw from historical events. Today, as in radio's infancy a hundred years ago, there is much that one could wish were different about the media. Old models of media policy and regulation are breaking down with digitalisation and the increased influence of large, international tech companies. The traditional media's problems with centralisation, monopolisation, and lack of representation persist and deepen. Inequalities between the sexes are still something that characterises the media, something that became clear not least during the so-called #metoo movement in 2017 and 2018. There is – then as now – a need for media reform. In such a situation, it might be a good idea to return to historical examples of movements for media reform, and especially those that were (at least partially) successful. What can we learn from these historical examples that can enrich our work here and now, for a more inclusive, democratic, and well-functioning media?

Against this background, my aim for this article is to describe and analyse SKFR and their work during the 1930s: what did they do, how did they do it, and what effects did it have?

Social history of the media and media reform movements

Swedish media history – and especially the history of radio – has primarily been an institutional history. A large part of the research in this area has dealt with the public service company. The company's history, as an institution, its culture and organisation, significant actors within this company, as well as to some extent programme policy, was, for example, at the centre of the research programme Broadcast Media in Sweden [Etermedierna i Sverige], which resulted in over twenty volumes with studies of various aspects of Swedish radio history. This focus on the public service company has led to research in this area taking on the perspective of the public service institution and seeking models of explanation for the development of radio within the company as such, in what can be called an institutional history. Although it is often stated in this research that the public service company and its development has been “embedded in broader societal and institutional contexts” (Djerf-Pierre & Ekström, 2013: 14), the company as such has been the prism through which such “embeddedness” has been studied (see also Drotner, 2011:131; Scannell & Cardiff, 1991).

However, the history of Swedish radio cannot be considered solely as the history of the public service company. Several other actors are also part of this history, for example: the international broadcasts on longwave over Swedish territory; IBRA radio and other religious actors and their radio operations in Sweden and abroad (Hallingberg, 2000); pirate radio from boats in the Baltic during the 1950s and 1960s (Chapman, 1992; Granly Jensen, 2015); FM pirates on land during the 1970s (Forsman, 2011); community radio during the 1980s (Stiernstedt, 2021); and commercial radio from the 1990s (Stiernstedt, 2013). Another type of actor, who also had an impact on the history of Swedish radio, is the various external organisations that did not themselves conduct radio operations but came to influence it in various ways. The clearest example of such actors is the political field and the public authorities whose task it is to establish frameworks and regulations. The interaction between political actors and radio organisations has been discussed in a number of studies (e.g., Engblom & Wormbs, 2007), and the focus of Swedish and Nordic media policy is a large area of research in its own right (see, e.g., Jakobsson et al., 2024; Nord, 2008; Syvertsen et al., 2014). The development of public service media in Sweden, as in the Nordic countries more generally, has also taken place through agreements and compromises between various other societal interests, where business and civil society organisations have also been included (Syvertsen et al., 2014). For a long time, as a result of how the public service company was constructed, these different spheres shared the responsibility and ownership for radio and television through the public service company. Civil society actors have thus had a relationship with Swedish public radio that can be described as having both an inside and outside perspective. At the same time, the relationship between civil society organisations and Swedish media history is the least explored in Swedish historical media research.

In this article, I discuss this dimension of media history. This also means that the perspective on Swedish radio history is somewhat decentred. With this article, I seek to add to the dominant strand of institutional history through exploring how this institution has been affected by, and developed in relation to, external civil society organisations. This highlights how the history of Swedish public radio was shaped not only by formal decisions or internal processes within the company, but also was chiselled out in relation to wider societal debates and in contacts and confrontations with interests and organisations that tried to push for reform.

Media reform

SKFR has not been widely acknowledged in previous research, with the exception of a brief discussion in Karin Nordberg's dissertation from 1998. Internationally, however, there is a growing body of research exploring the women's movement's relation to radio broadcasting in this period. Jeannine Baker (2017) has, for example, shown how in Australia, radio broadcasting in the post-suffrage era (1930s–1950s) became a space in which women could expand their sphere of influence and enact their responsibilities as citizens. In her case study, Baker demonstrated how women's programming took shape in Australian radio. In another recent study, Jenniffer M. Proffitt (2019) explored an example that is more similar to the development in Sweden, through The Women's National Radio Committee in the UK. They, like their Swedish sister-organisation, sought to affect the development of the new medium of radio in the 1930s through media reform activities. Their most successful strategy was giving awards to model programming, and hence to encourage change by highlighting positive examples.

If we understand SKFR as a movement for media reform, the question becomes how such a movement should be delimited and defined. The British researcher Des Freedman and colleagues (2016) have proposed a definition of movements for media reform which, first of all, includes that they are in some way movements that aim for an increased democratisation of the media and who work for extended "communication rights". Furthermore, they believe that a media reform movement is a movement based on three practices: "know the media" (knowledge and competence, criticism), "change the media" (change existing institutions and policy frameworks), and "be the media" (start their own media platforms and outlets).

Another aspect of media reform movements highlighted in the literature is the connections to wider social movements. Robert McChesney (2009) proposed, for example, that this is a central aspect of media reform movements and that it is only by being part of a broader struggle for extended democratic and social rights that such organisations can have both a justification for existence and success. A broader and more thorough reform of the media system presupposes, according to McChesney, an overarching social change towards an expanded democracy.

Materials and methods

The time period analysed in this article is the period during which SKFR was active: 1933–1940. This was a formative period in Swedish radio history. Swedish public radio celebrated its tenth anniversary in 1934, and at the same time a major government inquiry into the future of radio was launched, which would offer a broad overview of the medium and lay the foundation for discussions about continued expansion, and if so, in what form.

The primary sources used in the analysis are material from the archives of the Fredrika Bremer Association [Fredrika Bremer-förbundet], where documents relating to SKFR are preserved. Press material about SKFR, as well as material from the Fredrika Bremer Association's magazine *Hertha* and from the magazine *Idun*, where several of those active in SKFR published, have also been important in reconstructing the association's work. I have gained access to the newspaper material via the Royal Library's service Swedish Newspapers, where I used the keywords "Sveriges Kvinnoföreningnas Radiokommittee", "Ruth Stjernstedt", and "Margareta von Konow". Furthermore, via the Sigtuna Foundation's clipping archive, I have gained access to newspaper clippings about the radio committee and the leading people in it, as well as clip material around the subject word "radio" during the analysed years, which offered a valuable contextualisation. The two leading figures in SKFR, Ruth Stjernstedt and Margareta von Konow, have also subsequently written about their experiences in autobiographies and other texts, which have also been useful in the work. von Konow and Stjernstedt are in many ways typical representatives of the liberal and bourgeois women's movement of the early twentieth century: Both came from the Swedish nobility, both had the opportunity to study at the university (which was still very unusual for women), and both had professional careers as well as political engagements in the Liberal Party (Stjernstedt) and the Conservative party (von Konow) (Andersson, 2018; Lundgren, 2020). Their class positions and professional network, as well as the professional networks of their husbands and friends, were important resources in their struggle for women's rights, as was their education and general habitus, points I return to in the analysis.

The Fredrika Bremer Association's archive on SKFR mainly contains meeting minutes as well as letters and correspondence with politicians and with the public service company. Due to the nature of the documents, they reflect SKFR from the perspective of the *members* – and above all the leading members and the board. The material says very little about how the association and its work were perceived by those with whom they had contact. Through the Worker's Movement Archive, I have had access to the personal archive of the then president of the Swedish public radio, Yngve Hugo, but here there are no traces (such as correspondence, memory notes, or the like) that tell about the contacts between him and SKFR during this period, even though it appears in other sources that such contacts existed. Another valuable source would have been the working material from the 1933 public investigation on radio, but this has been lost within The National Archives of Sweden, and I have therefore only had access

to the published reports from the investigation. The material from the press and from magazines and journals has been a way to find descriptions of SKFR that they did not generate themselves. On most occasions when SKFR appears in the press, it is in relatively concise and factual accounts of their work, and only in some instances are there critical or polarising texts regarding their activities.

All quoted material in this article has been translated to English by the author.

“Women’s influence over radio operations as a whole”: SKFR is formed

SKFR was formed as part of the Fredrika Bremer Association in 1933. The Fredrika Bremer Association itself had been founded in December 1884 and had initially gathered people mainly from liberal and educated circles and had from the beginning had the ambition to work with women’s liberation on a broad front (Manns, 1997: 63). The association was mainly a middle-class or even upper-class association, gathering women such as von Konow and Stjernstedt around the issue of full political and suffrage rights for women. The organisation, however, also worked with other issues. In the period between the World Wars, the question of disarmament was, for example, an issue that joined both the social democratic and bourgeois women’s movements, and so were social issues, issues of public education and literacy, as well as reproductive and sexual rights (Flood, 1960: 180f). The Fredrika Bremer Association had previously also worked with issues of media and communication. As early as 1927, they had run a campaign called “The Expression of Opinion” [“Opinionsyttringen”], where the aim was to influence the press coverage of crime and punishment. The association believed that the press was too sensationalist and engaged in naming and shaming criminals in a way that was harmful both to them and to their families, and they wanted to influence the newspapers to take greater ethical responsibility. They had also, since the end of the nineteenth century, organised a book review committee with the aim of analysing and critically reviewing the publication of books for children and young people in Sweden.

What prompted the formation of the radio committee was the appointment of a public investigation of radio in 1933. Radio had been introduced in Sweden during the 1920s and organised within the framework of a public service company. The rapid development of the radio medium (less than ten years after the start of broadcasting, roughly 700,000 licences had been signed) prompted the appointment of this investigation. The investigation was given broad instructions by the government and resulted in a report, published in 1935, in which technical issues as well as issues of programming and financing were discussed.

Within the Fredrika Bremer Association, there was a strong reaction against the composition of the members of the radio investigation, which turned out to consist only of men. The focus area of the feminist organisation was – and still is – “more women where the power is”, and the radio investigation was such a place where there was power over the new mass medium of radio.

Although radio had made a broad breakthrough in the latter part of the 1920s, the new medium was, as Birgitta Höijer (1998) has shown, “a men’s medium”. According to Höijer, there are several explanations for why it was predominately men who used and listened to the radio in this period. The first is that early radio was technically challenging: The radio receivers that were available required some technical competence and interest and tended to appeal mainly to the male audience with a “playful interest in new technology” (Höijer, 1998: 41). The content of the broadcasts is also a partial explanation, as most voices in early radio were male and the broadcasts consisted of content produced by men and primarily of interest to other men. Finally, the fact that radio became, as Höijer (1998: 53) wrote, a “men’s medium”, can be explained by the fact that for women at this time, the home was to a large extent a place of work and not, as for men, a place of relaxation and free time: Women simply did not have time to listen to the radio, but spent most of their time at home doing household chores for which they usually had the main responsibility at that time.

On 29 June 1933, the Fredrika Bremer Association sent a letter to the newly formed radio investigation stating that “female experts should be hired to assist in the investigation concerning the broadcasting operation” (Swedish Government Official Reports, 1935: 5). The investigation replied that it would be impossible since the experts had already been appointed by the government, but they invited representatives of the Fredrika Bremer Association to present their views on the investigation before the committee’s experts (Fredrika Bremer Association Archive, 1933: 1). It was against this background that the Fredrika Bremer Association decided to form a special committee to be able to push its interests towards the radio investigation with greater strength. The association was formed on 14 November (see Figure 1). Many Swedish women’s associations had been invited to the meeting: the Central Council of Women’s Union Associations, the Swedish Women’s Civic Association, the Swedish National Association of Women, the National Association of Swedish Housewives, the Professional Women’s Club, and the Fredrika Bremer Association. At the constituent meeting, it was decided that all Swedish women’s associations, apart from the political women’s unions (i.e., the women’s organisations connected to specific political parties), would be invited to participate in the organisation. This also marks the distance between the liberal and bourgeois women’s movement and the other main force for women’s emancipation at this time: the labour movement and especially the social democratic women’s union. The separation between the two stemmed from their opposing views in the issue of women’s right to vote, where the bourgeois women’s movement had advocated women’s rights within the graded right to vote, while the social democratic movement had advocated equal and universal suffrage (Bokholm, 2008: 27).

FIGURE 1 Photograph from the founding meeting of the Swedish Women's Associations' Radio Committee, November 1933



Source: The Fredrika Bremer Association archive, Riksarkivet. Volume: Miscellaneous Committees 1896–1937. F8a:1

At the constituent meeting, the purpose of the committee was discussed, and it was explicitly emphasised “that what was intended was to work for women’s influence over radio operations as a whole, not to organise or lobby for special women’s programmes” (Fredrika Bremer Association Archive, 1933: 1). The aim was thus both to gain influence over the medium’s future development and – in the long run – to get more women in leading positions within Swedish public radio. The aim was *not* to ensure that special programmes for women were produced. This was because, as SKFR argued, women are not an outside interest group, but “part of society itself” (Fredrika Bremer Association Archive, 1934a).

But at the same time as this attitude existed in large parts of SKFR, the organisation also had the idea that “contact with the female listeners”, which would result from increasing female representation among the staff at the public service company, would lead to programmes being more appealing to female listeners and which would take up so-called female themes to a greater extent. Margareta von Konow, who was secretary and later chairman of SKFR, published – in the magazine *Idun* – an article in relation to the formation of the committee in 1933: “Why only men in the radio management? – when more than half of the listeners are women?” In the article, the tension between these two positions is clearly present, and a large part of the article is devoted to explaining that women are needed in the radio’s management and in programme operations:

[Not to] be set to rule over some women's "practical quarters" and thereby inform the country's housewives about the absolute best way to pickle cucumber or remove coffee stains [...] Not to have the sphere of interest limited to a narrow area for special women's issues. (von Konow, 1933: 808)

But at the same time, she wrote that this "might also be necessary", and she approvingly cited the motion put forward by a female member of the parliament who suggested that women should be given a place in the programming of Swedish public radio so that the radio can thereby be used to "teach women a lot of things, that is in matters of home care, health care and the upbringing of children" (Gillner-Ringensson, quoted in von Konow, 1933: 808). It also becomes clear in the following that the questions of *why* women should be given a place in the radio organisation, *how* they should accomplish this, and *what* they could contribute would be handled and discussed in slightly different ways in SKFR's work during the 1930s, and that in this regard they often adopted a pragmatic stance.

After the constituent meeting in November 1933, the membership of the committee grew rapidly. Soon the country's 14 largest women's organisations were members, and the committee had 42 member organisations (Stjernstedt 1956: 123). The lawyer Ruth Stjernstedt was elected chairperson, and among the other members of the board was also Margareta von Konow, who at the time was editor of the Fredrika Bremer Association's newspaper *Hertha*, and who over time became a very important representative of SKFR.

"Abundant opportunities for sharp discussions": SKFR's activities

Immediately after the constitution of SKFR, the committee sent its first letter to the government to reiterate that female experts should be given a place within the ongoing radio investigation in order to attain "the cultural factor that radio is, the general human form, which in the committee's opinion only can be achieved through the joint work of both men and women for a societal purpose" (from Letter to Radioutredningen, quoted in Stjernstedt, 1956: 123). But once again, this demand was not met.

Instead, at the beginning of 1934, SKFR carried out a survey in which the member organisations were asked to submit their views regarding both the radio's technical and organisational dimensions, as well as questions about the radio's programming and content. The answers they received, or any summary of them, are not preserved in the archives. But the rather voluminous questionnaire has, however, been preserved, where it appears that SKFR collected data concerning many different aspects of radio in Sweden. Although it is unknown how the various women's organisations responded to the survey, or whether they responded at all, the committee's continued work can perhaps provide an indication of what the various organisations highlighted as important and central issues.

In the spring of 1934, the members of the radio investigation informed SKFR, through "underhand contacts" (from Letter to Radioutredningen, quoted in

Stjernstedt, 1956: 124), that they wished to meet with SKFR to let them present their views and “the content of the [carried out] survey” (from Letter to Radioutredningen, quoted in Stjernstedt, 1956: 124). No such opportunity was realised, however, and it would not be until June 1934 that the radio investigation formally requested that they would like to take part in SKFR’s views regarding the future of radio in Sweden. They then asked to receive a written summary of the demands put by SKFR by the first of August of the same year at the latest. SKFR’s chairperson and the board members, however, believed that the time frame was too tight: SKFR wouldn’t have time to gather for a meeting, and even less for formulating a joint letter or a written statement in such a short time. Instead, the chair and the secretary jointly wrote a letter to the radio investigation in which they expressed that SKFR was disappointed with how the radio investigation had handled the contacts between them and presented as the main demand that female members should be offered seats on the board of the public service company (Fredrika Bremer Association Archive, 1934. In yet another letter, a month later, SKFR once again presented their demands that women should be given places on the broadcasting company’s board, but also in their so-called programme council (responsible for programming matters) and to be considered for senior positions, for example, within the Swedish public radio’s management (Fredrika Bremer Association Archive, 1934).

In September 1934, SKFR was finally invited to the radio investigation and was given the opportunity to present the results of the completed survey and their demands and views. During the meeting with the radio investigation, the opinions were expressed that more female voices and speakers should be offered a place in the broadcasts, and a direct consequence of the “individual deliberations” between SKFR and the radio investigation was that SKFR’s secretary Margareta von Konow was offered a radio lecture.

In addition to trying to influence the work of the public radio investigation, SKFR also during this time tried to directly influence the public service company. A series of letters were written in the spring of 1934 and sent to people with leading positions within the company. SKFR was careful to state that they did not want “female” content as a “special interest”, but what they demanded was that a female perspective should, together with the prevailing male perspective, permeate the entire output. Concretely, however, they often addressed specific forms of programming that SKFR had views and opinions about, and these topics must be said to mainly deal with themes and types of content usually considered more female than male: for example, children’s programmes and the school radio, radio devotionals, and that public radio should make more programmes about the benefits of married women entering the labour market.

The attempts to get women’s issues heard within the Swedish public radio also took place in more informal ways than through the publicly sent letters. Ruth Stjernstedt, who was SKFR’s chairperson in the early years, wrote in her memoirs:

A task that fell particularly to the chair of the Swedish Women's Associations' Radio Committee was to conduct personal negotiations with those who were primarily responsible for the radio operations. This was initially the programme director Anders Dymling. And he was not a particularly compliant negotiator. On the contrary, I got ample opportunities for sharp discussions here. He was later succeeded by Yngve Hugo, who was a softer type and easier to get along with. (Stjernstedt, 1956: 122)

Margareta von Konow also testified that SKFR had a good collaboration with the programme director Yngve Hugo, even before he became the director of the Swedish public radio. Hugo then worked as head of the radio's lecture section and gave von Konow the task of "acquiring female presenters" (von Konow, 1975: 43), which she also did. In this way, early on, SKFR gained a certain influence over the actual programming, without having any immediate success in their efforts for women to also be placed in leading positions within the company (von Konow, 1975: 43). In this respect, it is also important to consider the specific possibilities that von Konow and Stjernstedt had. Their class background, as well as their educational background and professional networks (Stjernstedt a lawyer and von Konow a journalist) not only opened doors for them, but it is also reasonable to imagine that they could speak and be listened to by men in power. They were not only used to, but – it seems from their autobiographical writing – also found pleasure in "sharp discussions". In summary, it can be said that already during its first year of operation, SKFR carried out several different activities aimed both at the ongoing radio investigation and directly at the public service company.

"Opportunities for opposition and troublemaking": The breakthrough of SKFR

During 1935, the committee had something of a breakthrough. That year, the public investigation of the Swedish public radio, which had spurred SKFR's formation, was completed and presented to the government. The investigation went, as is customary, to referral, and SKFR's referral response was sent on 10 February 1935. The issues that dominated the investigation were organisational and technical, and it was also mainly these areas that SKFR's statement concerned. They, like the public investigation, leaned towards nationalising the radio, but they preferred an order in which the public service radio should be organised as an independent company under the state so that it could be kept "free from party political currents" (Fredrika Bremer Association Archive, 1935c). The other central point they highlighted was that women should be part of the management at the public service broadcaster, and they pointed to the so-called programme council:

The council is dealing with issues of a wide variety and will not be able to fulfil its task in an all-round and fully satisfactory way if it is composed only of men, any less than it would be able to do so if it consisted only of women.

What has been stated here regarding the composition of the radio council obviously applies to the same extent to the composition of the extended board proposed by the investigation in the likewise proposed state-owned company. (Fredrika Bremer Association Archive, 1935c: 3)

In addition to these two main points (nationalisation and women in management), SKFR also in its response to the government report highlighted the importance of rapid expansion in the countryside, expansion of school radio, and of more women being allowed to participate in the programmes.

In the same year, SKFR was invited to a conference with the programming department at the Swedish public radio to discuss the programme selection and to have the opportunity to present ideas for changes and additions to the planned programmes. Several proposals for themes had been drawn up and presented to the radio management, such as: “Product knowledge for housewives”, “Better sleep culture”, “The rural housing issue”, “Citizen knowledge”, “Microphone visits [reportages] to social institutions”, “Psychological upbringing issues”, “The child’s character development”, and “The maid question”. According to what the secretary von Konow reported at SKFR’s board meeting in May, the proposals had been well received and several of them had been implemented, and she emphasised the importance of acting “smoothly” in relations with the broadcasting company (Fredrika Bremer Association Archive, 1935a).

Perhaps it was these successes in the contacts with the management at the public service company that prompted SKFR to set up its own subcommittee at the end of 1935 “with the task of preparing proposals for entertainment programmes for children and young people on the radio” (Fredrika Bremer Association Archive, 1935b). Children’s programmes had previously been noticed by SKFR as a particularly neglected area, dominated by male programme makers with a lack of pedagogical competence. The committee prepared a seven-page report with a series of suggestions for improvements to the children’s and youth programmes and concrete ideas for programmes, as well as a two-page list of suitable people (mainly women) to contact who could plan and carry out this type of programme. They also highlighted the importance of children’s programmes being broadcast regularly and at fixed times so they would be easier to find and that informative programmes aimed at parents (“mothers”) should also be broadcast in connection with the children’s programmes.

The successes that SKFR enjoyed during 1935 hence mainly concerned the content of the programmes. It seems that the employees at the public service company (at least some) gratefully received this help in programme planning from the women of SKFR – particularly when it came to input regarding programmes on more “female” themes or aimed primarily at a female audience. Such a role was exactly what SKFR had claimed that they did *not* want. They had been clear from the beginning that their main interest was not to ensure that special “women’s programmes” got a certain part of the broadcasting schedule, but to achieve gender equality in the leadership, work, and control of the new radio medium.

During 1936, an organisational change was carried out at the public service company, and the “programme council”, which had previously had both an

advisory and reviewing role in programme planning, was replaced by a radio committee. With this, a woman also came into a leading position for the first time in the history of Swedish public radio. In late 1935, Ellinor Lilliehöök, one of the women who had been involved in SKFR from the start in 1933, had been asked to sit on the new committee. Even though this must count as a clear success for SKFR, the board was not entirely satisfied with the outcome and had wanted the “radio committee” to have more than one woman among its members. Perhaps they also had some concerns about the specific choice of Lilliehöök as a member. The board wrote a letter to the public service radio company and thanked them for the appointment, but at the same time suggested a long list of other names that they also thought should be given a place in leading positions within the company. The chair of SKFR, Ruth Stjernstedt, wrote in her memoirs:

What made me a little apprehensive [with the choice of Lilliehöök], but not surprised [...] was that I also knew that Mrs. Lilliehöök was a very kind and accommodating person whom the gentlemen had every prospect of counting on as the one who would never come to cause them any inconvenience in the cooperation. It also happened that she never caused them any trouble, and for Margareta von Konow and me it was probably just as well that neither of us was appointed to the programme council. We would certainly have had a lot of opportunities for opposition and troublemaking. (Stjernstedt, 1956: 127)

However, it would take until 1938 before there were more women in leading positions within the public service company, and even then, none of the women suggested by SKFR were elected for service within the broadcasting company. However, it was definitely not a “kind and accommodating” person who was appointed in 1938: It was Hulda Flood, who was the party secretary of the Swedish Social Democratic Party and agitator and pioneer in the women’s movement in Sweden (Swedmark, 1993). Flood was appointed as the first female board member of the public service company and stayed in the post for ten years, during which she put a lot of energy into “increasing the female influence in radio” (Swedmark, 1993: 12).

With both Lilliehöök and later Flood taking their place in the management of Swedish public radio, some of what SKFR fought for had come to fruition, at least in some first and staggering steps. At this time, the committee widened its focus to also influence women in other countries to take similar initiatives. Contacts had long existed with Norway, and at the large ICW (International Council of Women) congress in Dubrovnik in 1936, SKFR was represented by its secretary Margareta von Konow, who met with representatives of women’s organisations from other parts of the world (von Konow, 1936: 188). The ICW Congress worked in several committees, and one of them was a radio committee. von Konow reported to the board of SKFR on her return:

At the congress in Dubrovnik, on a Swedish initiative, a proposal was made that within the women’s associations of the affiliated countries, radio committees should be formed with the aim of making the women’s views more heard on the radio and getting the women themselves in management

positions within the radio companies, as well as taking measures for richer international cooperation. This initiative found support and was passed as part of the resolutions of the congress. (Fredrika Bremer Association Archive, 1936)

During the latter part of the 1930s, SKFR's operations seem to have stopped. The last protocol preserved in the archive is from 1940, but according to an article written by Margareta von Konow (1975: 43), the committee worked "actively for four years", that is, until about 1937.

Effects of SKFR's work

If we follow Des Freedman and colleagues' (2016) definition of what media reform movements do, we can say that SKFR worked more with one of the three dimensions: They worked above all to *change* the media, and not so much with knowledge production or developing their own media content. SKFR's attempts to create change was directed at three aspects of the radio medium: governance and management; content and content production; and conditions for use.

A clear demand from SKFR was that more women should be given a place not only in the politically appointed investigation into the radio medium, but also in its more direct management. The main victory they won here was the appointment of a female member to the so-called programme council/radio committee and to the company board. It is, of course, difficult to prove that these appointments were direct effects of the demands put forward by SKFR, but given that the association's demands received fairly large attention among the Swedish public, and also among leading people in the public service company, it is reasonable to assume that these appointments were at least to some degree influenced by the work of SKFR.

In terms of the programme activities and the content of the programmes, SKFR succeeded quite well in influencing them. The male dominance mainly persisted, but the demands put forward by SKFR also led to direct impact, when members of the association were invited to appear on the radio and to develop ideas for programmes. Also, regarding the radio lectures, children's programmes, and religious content, SKFR seems to have achieved some success in changing the perspective of the public service company and enabling more female voices to be heard on Swedish public radio.

The other aspect of media reform that Des Freedman and colleagues (2016) addressed is "know the media", which is somewhat less prominent in SKFR's operations. The association did gather some knowledge about the development of radio in other countries, mainly the BBC, but it does not seem to have taken place in any systematic way. The association also worked with several subcommittees on certain concrete issues, where they brought in experts from different areas, though they generally found these experts among their own members. The association's members also participated, as mentioned above, in international conferences and in international discussions where knowledge about the media and about the practical work of changing the media was exchanged.

In the Fredrika Bremer Association's journal *Hertha*, very few articles on

media issues were published during the 1930s. At the same time, the magazine itself, and other newspapers and publications from the broad women's movement at this time, are of course examples of the fact that all social movements must also "be the media". SKFR had no ambitions, however, to start or run radio operations themselves, which would also have been an unrealistic goal at the time. However, several of those active within SKFR came to appear on the radio themselves, and they also delivered, as discussed above, suggestions for programmes and ideas about how the radio's genres could be developed, which were also realised by the public broadcaster. In this way, it can be said that SKFR also took steps to become media producers themselves, even if they could not, or did not want to, start their own radio station.

Conclusion

SKFR was a movement for media reform that was formed in relation to a specific historical event (the 1933 public investigation about radio) and which came to have relatively large success as a catalyst for change in Swedish public radio. Although gender inequalities within the public service media company regarding both the organisation and the nature of the content persisted, SKFR's work contributed to starting the process of change and ending the complete male dominance in the public service company.

The example of SKFR thus illustrates how media history, and more specifically the history of Swedish public radio, is not only formed by technical, political, or internal organisational processes, but is also shaped by wider social events where different interests and interest groups affect the development.

As a movement for media reform, SKFR was successful in spite of, or perhaps because of, the fact that it was a relatively pragmatic movement that won a series of minor victories and that adapted its strategy to changing conditions. When the demands for representation in the public investigation on radio could not be met, they found other ways to influence both the investigation and the broadcasting company in a more direct way. And when it appeared difficult to effect appointments of management positions, SKFR instead focused on influencing programming content more directly, even though this had from the outset been said explicitly to not be the purpose of their reform work.

In the case of SKFR, there were also personal networks and alliances between leading people within the movement and people with power and influence within Swedish public radio. Both Ruth Stjernstedt and Margareta von Konow could have direct contact with the directors of the public broadcasting company, and they were invited to personal meetings with important decision-makers. This fact is probably also the basis for the relative success of SKFR. This testifies to a different time and a bygone media landscape, where such direct contacts were easier to create and maintain. That this was the case is most likely also connected to another factor: The Fredrika Bremer Association, like SKFR, was part of the bourgeois women's movement. The board members of SKFR were all part of the upper strata of society. This fact, and the networks and opportunities that

these women's social position gave them, were most likely a prerequisite for them to be able to establish the networks that they did, and to have the direct access and opportunity to influence decision-makers.

The example of SKFR also highlights something that is often pointed out in media reform research: the fact that successful media reform movements are generally rooted in and linked to broader social movements. In this case, SKFR was part of a wider women's movement and gained much of its strength and impact from the basis that it was a broad movement that could claim to represent "the women of Sweden". If anything, this should be an important reminder for contemporary media reform movements to enter alliances with and collaborate with other and broader social movements. During the period examined here, the 1930s, there were also other similar movements that dealt with similar issues of representation and power over the central institutions of society (such as the broad labour movement). It was furthermore an era that saw struggles for human development on several levels, with public education and the emerging system of community colleges, and in which inclusive "education for the masses" was considered an important democratic question. SKFR's work for an increased level of education in matters of, for example, childcare and civic issues, and their demands for improved programme quality can be linked to the broad debates that raged at this time about the need for raising the cultural level of popular media. In this way, SKFR also had the zeitgeist on its side in the fight for representation and influence in the new medium of radio.

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