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## The inhuman face of Swedish wind power

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**A**head of December's UN climate conference in Copenhagen new superpower dreams have emerged in Sweden, which on 1st July took over the presidency of the EU. New winds are blowing in Sweden, and this time it is superpower dreams in the energy field, which are to lift up the country to new heights politically, economically and commercially.

One of the heavyweights in the Swedish energy rearmament is wind power at a cost of 180 billion Swedish crowns (SEK) for wind turbines alone. Money will also be spent to improve hydro power capacity and other energy sources, which is to substitute wind farms when the wind is not blowing. Including the cost of expanding and upgrading the electrical network, changes to the roads and other infrastructure, plus the financial and other costs, the total comes to a staggering 500 billion SEK (47 billion Euros) until 2020.

It is a baffling aspiration at a time when an ever increasing doubt is mounting about the blessings of wind power. On top of that it has become known that the Uppsala University wind maps, which caused euphoria in pro-wind circles when they were published in 2006 (revised 2007), prove to be over-optimistic. The wind does not blow quite as much as we are told by the university's man-fed computers.

"We Moderates will use the EU to make Sweden strong in Europe, and Europe strong in the world" proclaimed Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt in a full-page paid election advertisement in the days leading up to the EU elections. A few days later a report from the Moderates party suggested a big increase in nuclear power so that Sweden can export electricity to its eastern neighbours in order to minimise CO2 emissions and the use of fossil fuel in these countries.

But Sweden has a coalition government, and a firm decision on nuclear expansion hasn't been made. The coalition has agreed, however, that existing nuclear plants will be replaced by new ones as they age.

"Wind power can lift Sweden" was the splashing headline of a debate article in the Swedish newspaper Aftonbladet of February 3rd by the secretary-general of the Nature Protection Society, the director of the state institution Swedish Energy Agency, the head of Vattenfall Norden and three other heavyweights of the Swedish business community having vested interest in wind power. The authors support the EU's energy policy. In Sweden, they say, wind power will create jobs, produce clean energy, bring in revenues from export, and benefit the environment.

They further wrote: "The authorities should contribute through an efficient approval process; Government and the Legislature through clearer rules; agreements should be negotiated with other countries willing to buy efficient wind power from Sweden; but first and foremost, we should build the infrastructure of a sustainable electricity distribution system".

The article, and the authors behind it, show beyond any doubt the magnitude of the vested interests in Swedish wind power. The partly state-owned Vattenfall is ready to invest billions in British wind power and has offered approximately 600 billion SEK to a British energy company that was given permission to build several wind farms in Wales : one at sea, and five on land where the population is outraged, much like what is now happening in many places in Sweden.

In Sweden the declared goal of the government, as advocated by the Swedish Energy Agency, is to produce 30TWh of electricity from 6000 wind mills by the year 2020. The green-industrial complex wants to build twice as many. The aim of the wind industry is, ultimately, not climate change, but profits on an unprecedented scale. For the man in the street wind power will be a very costly affair. Every single Swede must be prepared in future to budget for very big extra expenses in electricity.

Wind power will divide the population into two groups – a small minority that will become rich on subsidised wind farms, and the vast majority that will become poorer as it foots the bills. In addition, many will lose a substantial part of their savings when wind farms are built near their homes, affecting negatively their value.

With unparalleled eagerness and greed, energy companies in all sizes have fallen upon the virgin Swedish market. The most wind-swept counties have been carpet-bombed in the last two years by applications from big companies like Eon, Vattenfall and Stena Renewable, plus a number of small and medium enterprises. There is no restraint shown regarding the siting of wind turbines. Natural parks and nature reserves are not spared. As stated by the Swedish newspaper *Sven Razorblades*: wind power is supposed to save the climate, it can thus destroy valuable nature.

People too don't matter: a mastodon like Eon has no qualms in erecting a wind turbine of 150-200 metres in height only 500 metres from a home.

No surprise either that behind the article in *Aftonbladet* we find: businessmen, a top Government official, and the secretary-general of the society that is supposed to protect nature. It is abundantly clear that politicians, public administrations, and business people are working tightly together and are co-coordinating their efforts against protests from nature lovers and local residents who object to having their nature turned into industrial areas for negligible benefit.

The population, 'come hell or high water', is forced to accept expensive wind-power and to live with 150-200 metre-high wind turbines in their immediate surroundings. The government has four 'wind power coordinators' to clear obstacles out of the way. Formally they are neutral public servants. In reality they are merely the tools of the wind power business.

The ambivalence of interests reaches the very top of Swedish society. In a small, exclusive society of wind power investors and players we also find the major banks (except one), a huge insurance company, other financial institutions, and 3-4 of the country's biggest firms of lawyers.

The Swedish Energy Agency is a very active participant in the expansion of wind power, and is starting to look like a Ministry of Propaganda. It sends out an electronic news letter about wind power that is systematically white-washed from any hint of criticism or problem. The latest is from June 18th and is about the first Global Wind Day; it says: "On this day there are fairs, lectures, and films shown in no less than 35 countries where the importance of wind power is highlighted".

Read again: "... *where the importance of wind power is highlighted*". This is neither information nor communication, only pure and simple propaganda on a scale not seen since the days of the twentieth century totalitarian ideologies.

The Swedish Energy Agency also runs an information/marketing network to promote wind power, which is a free lunch for the industry. Furthermore it is behind an educational program called *Vindval* – meaning the wind choice. The very combination of the word is biased, as we are not given any choice. There is no hiding at all that the aim is the increased use of wind power by eliminating obstacles to the expansion of wind farms.

The *Vindval* program is to provide biased science and arguments to help assess how wind power influences the landscapes, interferes with neighbours and people's perception of wind power. The idea is also to spread (one-sided) information about wind power at Swedish universities, colleges, institutes, and companies as well as counties and other authorities. The program committee is comprised of a number of Swedish authorities, and representatives of the wind power business.

This commingling of interests extends all the way to universities. On September 8th last year a report was published about "Experiences of setting up wind power – anchorage, acceptance and resistance" by two researchers at the Lund University. This report, which is passed off as impartial scientific work, is part of *Vindval's* programme to pave the way for acceptance of wind energy in Sweden.

“A project that is forced through despite resistance can result in strong resistance groups that stay active for a long time after the end of the process and obstructs future development of wind power in the area” the report states. “The analysis has clearly shown that it is very important that the local population and the local authorities see the possibilities in a wind power project in order that the process can be properly anchored” the researchers write; and they put forward some very direct suggestions on how to meet resistance: for instance through the promise of sharing financial benefits in a co-ownership scheme.

In conclusion the two researchers recommend: “*Do not force projects on areas with big resistance*”, and they warn: “Although this can be effective in the short term perspective, forced establishments undermine future wind power development possibilities. It can be detrimental to the confidence in wind power, sustainable energy, energy companies, authorities etc. It could put a halt to wind power development in the area for a long time”.

These words could come straight out of a political manual, but the publication is called “scientific report”. In Sweden, wind power is thus imposed on the population whether they want it or not. All methods are employed – from blatantly disregarding people’s protests, paying people to move, and offering financial sweeteners, to commissioning biased research at university level.

To the outside world the Swedish government is saying: we will save the planet. And at home it joins forces with big business, serves their financial interests, and puts a stranglehold on all resistance to what it presents as being “Salvation”. Lately, on June 9th, Swedish television informed the public that three Scania councils have joined forces, planning to minimise the risk of protests where new wind farms are to be erected.

The approval process is now speeding up. Starting August 1st wind power is to be considered according to environmental laws only, and no longer needs to obey building and planning laws. That gives an even freer hand to the business interests that, in Sweden, control the popularly elected government whose job it is, among other things, to protect citizens against encroachment and violations, wind turbines included.

### **Conclusion:**

Wind farms are being increasingly questioned in countries that have many of them, for they did not permit to close a single nuclear or fossil fuel plant, and failed to reduce CO2 emissions. With time they will also increase sharply the price of electricity; and this will further hurt European industry, already beleaguered by competition from emerging economic giants like China.

It stands to reason that wind farms’ perceived climate change benefits should be measured by independent scientists before Sweden ploughs huge amounts of tax money into their development. Likewise, we need an objective assessment of the collateral damage their expansion will cause to people, the economy, and the environment.

In any event, the raw power of big money should not be allowed to trample people and their lives. Sweden is a democracy founded on the rule of law, and throwing away this principle is a risky proposition. Once this democratic safeguard is gone, the door will be open to all kinds of abuses, including totalitarian practices.

**Peter Skeel Hjorth**