

Abstract

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This dissertation deals with the creation of Swedish transoceanic liner companies in the beginning of the 20th Century and the development of these shipping companies to the mid-1920s. This process occurred in three separate periods of development. During the first preparatory period, 1890-1904, ship owners, industrialists and bankers collaborated to achieve state support for Swedish transoceanic liner shipping. The group argued that Sweden was lagging behind in this area and that it was crucial for the dynamic Swedish export industry to have direct contact with transoceanic markets through domestically owned shipping lines. Two government enquiries were set up in the 1890s, the last of which strongly recommended public financial support for new shipping lines.

During the second period between 1904 and 1913, five new shipping lines, connecting Sweden directly with all distant continents were established. Early on, Parliament made a decision to support these new companies with direct state subsidies to cover some initial costs. A conclusion of this dissertation is that these subsidies played an important role for the companies during their initial starting up of years and probably were instrumental for the initiative to start the lines. In this respect, shipping was included in the new, industrial Sweden for which the State took an overall responsibility.

The economic foundation for the Swedish liner shipping industry was the domestic production of exportable staple products such as steel, paper and pulp as well as products from the modern engineering industry. Thanks to these export products, Swedish shipping companies were eligible for membership in the international shipping cartels, the so-called conferences, which regulated much of the traffic between Europe and the rest of the world.

The third period, 1914-1925, includes World War I and the severe post-war depression. Nevertheless, for the Swedish shipping lines this was a period of consolidation. As a result of the extreme high freight tariffs, the companies were able to accumulate resources to refurbish and expand their fleets and start the transition from steam to motor tonnage. In the mid-1920s, when the study ends, the Swedish shipping lines had achieved a structure that remained virtually unchanged during the following fifty years.

Compared to similar processes in other nations, the creation of the Swedish liner shipping industry was a rapid process. The combination of accelerating industrialisation and active government policy made it possible for Sweden to catch up to Denmark and Norway and to successfully compete with traditionally dominating liner fleets from Germany and Great Britain.

Key words: economic history, transoceanic liner traffic, shipping history, state policy, industrialisation, subsidies, maritime history, merchant marine, trade, shipping conferences.