

**'In England, we led an extremely frugal life'**

## **An international network of contacts in the archives of Alva and Gunnar Myrdal**

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Two of social democracy's more prominent personalities in the 20th century, Alva and Gunnar Myrdal were scientists and politicians. To them, science was all about society and social welfare policy. Thanks to their work in the 1930s they have come to be known as the principal representatives of the art of social engineering. In his 1930 work, *Vetenskap och politik i nationalekonomi* [ Political Element in the Development of Economic Theory], Gunnar Myrdal wrote:

*Our scientific goal must be to acquire sufficient knowledge of the world in which we live to be able to predict future development trends as well, and thereby to make it possible to implement rational measures in order to change these trends and thereby to realise our aspirations. However, establishing what these aspirations should be lies beyond the scope of science.*

'Acquiring sufficient knowledge of the world in which we live' presupposes access to and the exchange of information on the latest results of scientific research. And this in turn presupposes access to works of reference and contact with other researchers the world over. How an international, scientific network of contacts was built up and what it looked like can be investigated in Alva and Gunnar Myrdal's papers.<sup>1</sup> In what follows, I want to use a few examples to point out the opportunities that exist for carrying out a study of this kind. Their papers, which have been available at Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek ARAB [ Labour Movement Archives and Library], since the mid-1970s, contain extensive series of correspondence. All in all, these fonds contain some 400 volumes, or somewhat more than 120,000 letters. The letters from the 1930s and 1940s have been used in research to some extent but much of the information in them has not yet been exploited. This is particularly true of the most extensive collections dating from the 1950s to the 1980s.

*A famous photograph of Alva and Gunnar Myrdal, wearing matching, striped suits. The couple is en route to the USA in September 1938. Photo: Reportagebild.*

### **London, Kiel and the USA**

When he were studying economics under Gustav Cassel, at that time the most famous economist beside Keynes, it became obvious to Gunnar Myrdal that he should be looking abroad. As a doctoral postgraduate, he and Alva

together spent many months in London and Kiel. In his partly autobiographical book of 1982, *Hur styrs landet?* [How is the Country Run?] Gunnar Myrdal wrote:

*Then in the spring of 1925 I received a travel grant from Vetenskapsakademien, [Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences] amounting to 2,500 Swedish kronor, the highest award made up to then. When Gustav Cassel came home from the Academy's conference, he called me in the middle of the night to tell me the news. He knew what putting wind in my sails meant to me. [...] In England, we led an extremely frugal life and managed to stay there for more than six months on that money, plus a grant of 700 kronor that Alva received. We spent most of our time in the Reading Room at the British Museum, where all the literature of the world was there for the choosing. Alva followed up her interest in social psychology.<sup>2</sup>*

*krati?* [Why Democracy], was, like Gunnar Myrdal, greatly inspired by Axel Hägerström of Uppsala. How things went can be traced from the letters they exchanged from the late 1920s. The Ross couple may serve to represent their contact with Nordic scientists. Invitations to lectures, primarily in Denmark and Norway in the 1930s, meant that Alva and Gunnar Myrdal got to know a lot of Nordic researchers, not least in the discussions on the solution to the population issue.<sup>3</sup>

From 1926, Gunnar Myrdal also ended up working closely with Gösta Bagge, professor and principal of Socialvetenskapliga institutet [Social Sciences Institute], a venture largely financed by funds from the American Rockefeller Foundation. Gösta Bagge had had good contacts with American economists for many years, which would turn out useful for Gunnar Myrdal during the 1929-1930 academic year, when he spent much of the time at various universities in America as holder of a Rockefeller scholarship. Letters of introduction from Cassel and Bagge allowed him to get to know the top institutional economists of the time, such as Professors John R. Commons at the University of Wisconsin and Wesley C. Mitchell at

Columbia University in New York. For Alva and Gunnar Myrdal, the most important contacts made during that academic year were primarily those with the American sociologists. They became very close friends with W.I. Thomas, the father of American sociology, and his wife Dorothy S. Thomas. The Thomas couple went motoring through Europe and Sweden together with Alva and Gunnar Myrdal and spent a lot of time together with them during the summer of 1931. For many years, Dorothy S. Thomas was involved in a major research project in Stockholm under the direction of Myrdal dealing with population changes. The correspondence between the two couples occupies several hundred pages.<sup>4</sup> During the trip to America, Alva Myrdal visited many institutions of interest to her

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*Alva Myrdal, Director of the Social Affairs Department of the United Nations Secretariat (left) and Eleanor Roosevelt, of the United States, in Lake Success, New York, at the UN General Assembly 3 October 1949. United Nations Photo.*

In London, they got to know the Danish couple Alf and Else-Merete Ross. Alf Ross, later renowned among generations of students as the author of the book *Varför demo-*

fields: psychology, sociology and raising children. At Columbia University, Robert Lynd - who published the famous book *Middletown* in 1929 - took her under his wing (Alva Myrdal planned doing a similar book on Västerås on her return to Sweden.) Child psychologist Charlotte Bühler made a lasting impression on her. In Chicago, Alva and Gunnar Myrdal got to know the two eminent sociologists William Fielding Ogburn and Ernst W. Burgess.<sup>5</sup>

Gerhard Mackenroth came from Kiel, where Gunnar Myrdal had made a lot of friends during his visit in the mid-1920s. He spent some time at Stockholm University as a Rockefeller scholarship holder in the late 1920s. It was Mackenroth who translated Myrdal's *Vetenskap och politik i nationalekonomin*, into German, but he also translated *Der Gleichgewichtsbegriff als Instrument der geldtheoretischen Analyse* [Concept of Balance as an Instrument of Monetary Analysis], published in F. A. Hayek's *Beiträge zur Geldtheorie* [Contributions to Monetary Theory], Vienna 1933. In the extensive correspondence between Myrdal and Mackenroth (almost 300 letters) there can be found the origins of the terms *ex ante* and *ex post*, both important in economics.<sup>6</sup> Mackenroth's work brought Gunnar Myrdal into contact with other colleagues in Germany and Austria. In some cases – Rudolf Meidner, Rudolf Heberle, Fritz Croner, Theodor Geiger – it was he who gave them support and employment when they fled from Nazism to Sweden.<sup>7</sup> They too are represented in the collection of correspondence.

## Geneva and Stockholm

After his return to Europe in the summer of 1930, Gunnar Myrdal was appointed to a chair at the *Institute universitaire des hautes études internationales* in Geneva for the 1930-1931 academic year. Here, he would make the acquaintance of a number of lecturers and students who would later have important parts to play in other arenas, such as the Austrian Egon Glesinger, who was to become one of his closest friends and advisors right until his death in the mid-1970s. After the war, Glesinger took an active part in the FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in Rome. (It is possible to follow the work of Glesinger and Myrdal in several hundred letters exchanged between the two.) Robert B. Schwenger, another student in Geneva, who later worked for the American administration for many years, also became a close friend of the Myrdals. Hal B. Lary was to become a colleague of Gunnar Myrdal's in Geneva 20 years hence. Alva Myrdal continued her studies in child psychology, now under Piaget.

In the 1930s, as one of the economists at the so called *Stockholmsskolan* [Stockholm School], Gunnar Myrdal got to know economists from institutions such as the London School of Economics. One was David V. Glass and another Hugh Dalton, later the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Attlee government, when they visited Sweden. In the summer of 1936, Hugh Dalton and Gunnar Myrdal collaborated in writing a joint memorandum, 'The Financial Problems of the French Government', containing advice to Léon Blum's Popular Front government. It was found as an appendix to a Dalton letter during the work of organising the Myrdal archives in the mid-1970s.<sup>8</sup>

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*From the left: Gunnar Myrdal, 1947-1957 Secretary General of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Palamadi S. Lokanathan, head of the UN's Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, and Raúl Prebisch, Argentinian political economist and head of the UN's Economic Commission for Latin America. Photo from New York, 1954. Photo: Leo Rosenthal.*

## USA and Stockholm by turns

Between 1938 and 1942, Alva and Gunnar Myrdal spent most of their time in the USA where Gunnar wrote his most famous scientific work *An American Dilemma* (1944). The Carnegie Corporation, which financed the study, placed enormous resources at Myrdal's disposal and practically all qualified researchers in the field ended up working for the project in one way or another. Besides the minor parts of working papers and correspondence preserved in Gunnar Myrdal's archives, there are two rolls of microfilm sent to ARAB in October 1974 by the Carnegie Corporation.<sup>9</sup> Gunnar's staff included Ralph J. Bunche, who became Dag Hammarskjöld's right-hand man at the United Nations. Together with Richard Sterner, Arnold Rose, later a professor at the University of Minnesota, gave Gunnar Myrdal the greatest assistance in the final phase of this work. At the same time, Alva Myrdal wrote up for the American public her summary of the discussions on the population issue in Sweden in the 1930s. This was

published in 1941 under the title *Nation and Family*.<sup>10</sup> Alva Myrdal was active in the IFBPW, the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, and in the IFUW, the International Federation of University Women. In both organisations, she got to know many of the most successful women in the academic world of the time. With the help of the IFUW, she later acquired information from many countries for the book *Women's Two Roles*, which she wrote jointly with British sociologist Viola Klein. This was published in 1956. The correspondence between Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein is very extensive.

## *Gunnar in Geneva, Alva in Paris*

In the spring of 1947, when Gunnar Myrdal was appointed Secretary-General of the Economic Commission for Europe, the newly formed regional organisation within the UN, he decided early on to tie into it the most highly qualified economists in order to analyse the situation of a devastated Europe. He would work on the basis of those analyses in recommending appropriate options for action to the various governments. People such as Walt W. Rostow, later President John F. Kennedy's advisor on foreign policy, Charles Kindleberger and Hal B. Lary came from the USA. From Cambridge in the United Kingdom there came Nicholas Kaldor, later economics guru to the Wilson government, Albert Kervyn from Belgium and, from the Soviet Union, E.M. Chossudovsky. From a detailed series of documents in the Myrdal papers including memoranda and correspondence, it is possible to follow this work within the ECE. It stretches from the days of Marshall Aid in June 1947 through the most chilly period of the Cold War to the summer of 1957 when world politics were considerably more relaxed and Gunnar Myrdal resigned his post. The results of their work can be studied in the ECE's annual *Economic Survey of Europe*.

In 1949, Alva Myrdal became a director of the UN's Department of Social Affairs, where she worked directly under Trygve Lie and was responsible for social welfare, social policy and population issues. In this position, she had many opportunities for discussion with the world's leading scientists in their respective fields. The same year, she worked with Paul Vincent on behalf of Unesco and published one of the first studies of the future trend of world population: *Are We too Many?* Two years later, she became the head of Unesco's Department of Social Sciences in Paris. Here, she became the initiator of – and responsible for – work to ensure that international scientific organisations including those for sociology, psychology and political science were able to resume their work, which had been discontinued since the War. The collection of letters from this time bears witness to her extensive list of contacts. At that time, the situation of underdeveloped countries was coming under the spotlight to an ever greater extent. Alva Myrdal visited for the first time various scientific conferences in India and Japan on behalf of Unesco and made contacts that would be important later on.

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*Gunnar Myrdal, here together with the president of Cuba, Fidel Castro, participated as the only Nobel Price winner during the Second Congress of the Association of Third World Economists, in Havana, Cuba, 26.-30. April 1981. His address was entitled 'The Role of the Economists in Underdeveloped Countries'. (Cropped photo).*

In the autumn of 1943, Gunnar Myrdal once again travelled to the USA on behalf of the Swedish government in order to attempt, in discussion with economists in the administration and at the various universities, to clarify international economic development after the end of the War. Those he visited included the economists Alvin H. Hansen and Gottfried von Haberler of Harvard University whom he had been in contact with since the early 1930s.

## *The Third World – New Delhi*

From 1953 on, Gunnar Myrdal, like many of his fellow economists at the time, wanted to devote his efforts to studying developments in what were known as underdeveloped countries. It would be four years before he was entirely free of his commitments in Geneva and before he arranged

financing for the project, which would become the mammoth work *Asian Drama* fifteen years later (1968).<sup>11</sup> Therefore, until 1957, he worked in parallel with his ECE position and carried out a series of pilot studies and trips on which he consulted many of the scientific experts of the time. He did major initial work of this kind prior to a series of lectures for the 200th anniversary of Columbia University in 1954. Here, it is possible to look through the archives material and follow in detail the growth of the information that later became the book *An International Economy* (1956) with versions that many of his colleagues read and commented on. In 1955, he held a series of lectures in Cairo that became the book *Economic Theory and Under-developed Regions* (1957).

A number of trips to the regions around India and Pakistan, the Middle East, the southern parts of the

Soviet Union, and of course tours of India and Pakistan, led to much contact with researchers at various universities and at the various government administrations working in these fields. His opposite number in India, Dr. Palamadi S. Lokanathan, head of ECAFE, the UN's Economic Commission for Asia and Far East, helped him a great deal in getting in touch with the right contacts at the various universities in India. In the autumn of 1957, Heinz W. Arndt at the University of Canberra arranged for Gunnar Myrdal to have an extensive tour of Australian universities.

From 1957, when Gunnar Myrdal spent a long period in New Delhi - where Alva Myrdal had become the Swedish Ambassador in 1955 - his correspondence with colleagues all over the world grew. As a rule, he spent his summers at Balliol College, Oxford, where his friends, headed by Pro-

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*Alva Myrdal speaking at a conference arranged by the Quakers of New York, in June 1975. Alva and Gunnar Myrdal had close ties with the Quakers movement.*

fessors Thomas Balogh and Paul Streeten, took good care of him. At the same time, his speaking commitments as a guest lecturer grew, mainly at major American universities, but also in many other countries throughout the world, or – as he put it – ‘the world at large’. Gunnar Myrdal became a ‘jetsetter’ who flew all over the world, lecturing at major international conferences.

### *Between the World and Sweden*

In the spring of 1961, when Alva and Gunnar Myrdal returned to Sweden, they were both better established in the international arena than they were in Sweden. Over the following years, Alva Myrdal came into contact through her work on the disarmament negotiations in Geneva with the academic experts in the field, such as Henry A. Kissinger, Jerome Wiesner and Herbert F. York. However, her other positions – as a Member of the Swedish Parliament, a UN delegate, a cabinet minister and the chairman of, for example, *Att välja framtid* [*Choosing the Future*], the committee for future studies – also led to various scientific contacts until 1973, when she gave up her commitments in Sweden. Through his personal pro-

fessorial chair, at Institutet för internationell ekonomi [Institute of International Economics], a body recently started by him, and a number of other undertakings including the chairmanship of Stockholms internationella fredsforskningsinstitut SIPRI [Stockholm International Peace Research Institute] and Latinamerikainstitutet [Latin American Institute], Gunnar Myrdal was to remain in constant contact with scholars in other countries.

If we analyse the material in Gunnar Myrdal’s collection of letters for the period 1961-1973, we can, in brief, establish a few facts. This correspondence was so extensive that he (or his secretary) kept them in folders sorted initially by year, then by country. For each country, the letters were ordered alphabetically according to its author’s name or the name of the institution. During this period he received a total of over 15,000 letters and he sent almost 13,000 (copies of responses kept, as a rule dictated letters). Of these, around 11,000 came from abroad (and he sent around 10,000). Most of his correspondence was with the USA – from which he received around 5,500 letters (sent 4,700) – the United Kingdom (900 and 700 respectively) and India (450 and 400). He also enjoyed lively contacts with the Scandinavian countries: Denmark 200 (150),

## NOTES

1. For a description of the archives, see Stellan Andersson: On the value of personal archives. Some examples from the archives of Alva and Gunnar Myrdal – with a main focus on Gunnar, in *Nordeuropaforum* Berlin 1999:1, p 15-32.

2. *Gunnar Myrdal. Vägvisare* [Essential Gunnar Myrdal]. Selection and comments by Örjan Appelquist and Stellan Andersson, Stockholm 1998, p 37.

3. Cecilie Stokholm Banke: *Den sociale ingeniørkunst i Danmark. Familie, stat og politik fra 1900 til 1945* [Social Engineering in Denmark. Family, State and Politics from 1900 to 1945]. Roskilde 1999.

4. E Stina Lyon: The Myrdals and the Thomases 1930-1940. The Trials and Tribulations of a Cross-Atlantic Research Collaboration, in *Mirrors and Windows. Essays in the History of Sociology*. Ed.: Janusz Mucha. Torun 2001, pp 219-234.

5. For details on the trip to America and their contacts there, see: Jan Olof Nilsson: *Alva Myrdal – en virvel i den moderna strömmen* [Alva Myrdal – an eddy in the stream of today]. Stockholm 1994, pp 138 ff.

6. The translator of the English version of *Vetenskap och politik i nationalekonomin*, Paul Streeten of Oxford University, was also to play a significant role in Gunnar Myrdal’s life. The correspondence between them is very extensive.

7. See, for example, Rudolf Meidner’s introduction: Gunnar Myrdal – några reminiscenser och lärdomar [Gunnar Myrdal – some reminiscences and lessons], in *Gunnar Myrdal. Vägvisare*, p 14.

8. This memorandum came to be published in 1978 under the title ‘Un parallèle: le Front populaire (1936, le premier gouvernement Blum)’ [Orig. title: A Parallel: The First Blum Government 1936. A Footnote to History], in *Solutions socialistes. À propos de ‘La transition socialiste’*. Ed.: Serge-Christophe Kolm. Paris 1978, pp 143-146.

9. For information on the discussions which preceded the offer, see Gunnar Myrdal’s own words in *Hur styrs landet*, Stockholm 1982, chapter VIII, note 6, pp 280-281. See also the standard works on Gunnar Myrdal’s book by Walter A. Jackson: *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s conscience. Social engineering and racial liberalism, 1938-1987*. Chapel Hill/London 1990, and David W.

Finland 120 (120) and Norway 250 (200).

More or less every country is represented in the material. Most of his correspondence is with academic colleagues at various universities, with scientific journals, or with publishers responsible for the translation and sales of his books. If we look in more detail at, for example, the American correspondence, almost all the major universities are represented there, such as California (Berkeley, Los Angeles, La Jolla), Columbia, Harvard, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan State, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Stanford, Texas, Wayne State, Wisconsin and Yale. If we look at the fellow professors with whom he had most correspondence, we find it is with his old friends such as William J Barber, Kenneth E. Boulding, John Kenneth Galbraith, Alvin Hansen, Charles P. Kindleberger, the brothers Eugene V. and Walt W. Rostow and George E. Wilson. However, many younger people requesting advice on a variety of issues are also represented. Some of them, such as economists from other countries such as Alvin Hansen, also became involved in research projects jointly with Institutet för internationell ekonomi.

In the autumn of 1973, Alva and Gunnar Myrdal left Sweden to spend much of their time at American universi-

ties as guest professors over the years to come. Their first port of call was the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Santa Barbara - California, where Gunnar Myrdal once again took up the American racial issue. The intention was for him to write a book, *An American Dilemma Revisited*. Alva Myrdal worked there as well as at MIT, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Mass., on her book *The Game of Disarmament*. The following year, Gunnar Myrdal ended up working at City College of the City University of New York with Professor Kenneth B. Clark. One academic year was spent at the University of Texas in Austin. Of course, their continued academic work led them both to maintain their old contacts, such as that of Alva Myrdal with Elisabeth Mann Borgese on the militarisation of the oceans, and to the creation of new ones. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Gunnar Myrdal became ever more popular in Japan, resulting in a lot of correspondence and lecture tours. Both their Nobel Prizes - Gunnar Myrdal's Prize for Economic Sciences in 1974 and Alva Myrdal's Peace Prize in 1982 - also led to extensive correspondence. Not least their honorary doctorates - almost 40 to Gunnar Myrdal and over ten to Alva - bear witness to their unique international academic standing.

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Southern: Gunnar Myrdal and black-white relations. *The use and abuse of 'An American Dilemma', 1944-1969*. Baton Rouge 1987 (1994). See also the anniversary issue of the journal of the American Academy of Sciences, *Daedalus*, 1995, winter issue, which is devoted entirely to Myrdal's book. Original documents for the research project Carnegie-Myrdal study of the negro in America. *The negro in America*, is kept at the New York Public Library's Schomburg collection. These are stored on 13 rolls of microfilm published by the Kraus-Thompson organisation. Gunnar Myrdal himself writes about his work in the article 'Gunnar Myrdals 'An American Dilemma' - har det blivit löst?' [Gunnar Myrdals 'An American Dilemma' - has it been resolved?], in *I stället för memoarer* [Against the Stream]. Stockholm 1972, pp 296-309. See also the book by Gunnar Myrdal published posthumously: *Historien om An American Dilemma* [tale of An American Dilemma]. Stockholm 1987.

10. Translation into Swedish in 1944, entitled *Folk och familj*. In a new American edition published in 1968 by MIT Press, her friend Daniel P. Moynihan wrote an introduction.

11. The archives of the labour movement include some fifty volumes from Gunnar Myrdal's work on *Asian Drama*, and there are still more volumes held at the manuscripts department at the National Library of Sweden. Alongside the scientific correspondence, his correspondence with publishers the world over is of great interest here, as with all of Gunnar Myrdal's books. As of the end of the 1930s, Gunnar Myrdal wrote in English, but his books have been translated into many languages, from Arabic to Urdu. *Asian Drama* has recently been translated into Chinese.

*This contribution is based in the main on the material in Alva and Gunnar Myrdal's archives. To my knowledge, no research with the particular starting point described here and based on these archives has been carried out as yet.*

**Stellan Andersson is an archivist**