



The European Heart Project

Let's learn from history ...

Episode 5

Riot in Adalen

Authors

Susanne Linde and Klaus Linde-Leimer

Layout

Greek Universities Network

Declaration on Copyright:



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. You are free to:

- share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format
- adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material

under the following terms:

- Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.
- NonCommercial — You may not use the material for commercial purposes.
- ShareAlike — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original.



Picture: Photo taken by Pantelis Balaouras, CC-BY-NC-SA. Graffiti by Dream Victim.

Content

1	Introduction.....	1
2	Milestones in the history of mankind	1
3	How to use this booklet	2
4	The individual steps.....	3
	Step 1: Get familiar with the situation	3
	What you should know about this time	4
	The Situation	5
	Step 2: Choose a person in whose footsteps	6
	you want to step	6
	The involved Persons	6
5	Needs and Strategies.....	12
	Step 3: Instant History – Be the person	12
	Step 4: How are you?	13
	Step 5: What would you do now?	13
	Step 6: Stopover!.....	14
	Step 7: Now you have the choice.....	15
6	How the story continues	15
7	Learning from history.....	17
8	Literature.....	17

1 Introduction

Welcome!

Welcome! In this booklet you can put into practice what you have learned so far about basic human needs and about helpful and less useful strategies.

Here you have the opportunity to experience history in a completely different way: Historians from Austria, Greece, France and Sweden have worked intensively on the topic of what we can learn from the history of Europe. They have described exciting episodes from the perspective of the 5 basic needs. You have the chance to slip into the roles of the people involved and experience the scene from their individual point of view!

If you have not yet heard about the basic needs according to William Glasser's concept, you should first familiarise yourself with the booklet "Needs and Strategies", because this knowledge is already taken as a basis here.

Of course, you can always refer back to the booklet "Needs and Strategies" if you are not sure about one or the other question. This is not a test or a school assignment. You can also do your history experience in pairs with a friend and talk to him or her in between.

2 Milestones in the history of mankind



What do we mean when we say turning points?

A decision was made to leave the old behind and try something new and better.

So that you can experience these fundamental decisions as vividly and intensively as possible, historians from Greece, France (La Reunion), Austria and Sweden have come together and compiled their knowledge:

- How and under what circumstances people lived at that time

- What image they had of the world
- What they believed in

What we cannot know is how they personally felt and what they thought. And this is where you come in: The second part of this booklet is about bringing the people who acted at that time back to life by putting yourself in their shoes.



Do you want to join in?

3 How to use this booklet

Join us! Journey with us into the past and experience history from new perspectives! In this chapter you will find a selected episode in which the course was set for great changes.

First, familiarise yourself with the historical background of the episode (Step 1). Here you can find out about the living conditions of the people who lived in the place where the episode happened at that time.

In the chapter "The Situation" you will find a description of the challenge the people faced.

And now you can already take action: In the chapter "The people involved", different people who were at the place of the event at that time tell you about the situation from their point of view. Choose one of the people for your historical experience.

Of course, you will also learn how the story continued according to the historical records, but we ask you to be patient. After all, it would only be half as much fun if you knew everything in advance. Instead, go to the second part of this booklet, slip into the role of the person you have chosen and experience the story from his or her point of view. What is on your mind when you are in that role? How would you act?

Follow the individual steps and only at the very end look at how the story actually continued. If you want to know more about it, ask your history teacher, he or she will be happy about your interest and tell you more about it.

4 The individual steps

Ready?

Then, let's turn back the clock now and get into the story!



Step 1: Get familiar with the situation

Read the description of the episode and the situation carefully. Do not hesitate to ask your teacher if you are unsure or have further questions of understanding. You can also do further research on the internet if you are particularly interested in a topic.

Episode 5: Riot in Adalen



What you should know about this time

In 1930, there is great poverty in Sweden. Two years earlier, in 1929, the stock market on Wall Street had collapsed and the economic depression spread rapidly throughout the world.

Sweden is no exception. Demand is falling and unemployment is rising. Between 20 to 25 percent of people are out of work in Sweden and in some parts of the country, in the forestry and pulp industries, unemployment is as high as 80 percent. The workers and their families are starving.

In Sweden, the entrepreneurs try to save as much of their profits as possible by squeezing the workers' wages. As a result, 30,000 textile workers go on strike in the winter of 1930/31.

But the workers in the timber industry are hit hardest by wage cuts: forest workers, sawmill workers and raftsmen as well as workers in the match and pulp industry. Miners and seafarers also face severe wage cuts of 20 to 30 per cent.

The local trade unions support the workers' concerns.

Storkapitalet's leading newspaper, Svenska Dagbladet, on the other hand, calls for a tougher stance towards the workers.

In July 1930 the director, Gerhard Versteegh, decides to close parts of the newly built sulphate factory. People lose their jobs and those who are allowed to stay are offered a much lower wage.

For the workers, who already have a hard time getting their money's worth, it will now be even harder. Every single cent is important to feed a hungry family.

The Versteegh group, which also owns the factory in Ådalen, often stopped operations and tells the workers that operations will only resume when the workers "voluntarily" agree to the new lower wages.

In May, director Gerhard Versteegh hires about 60 strikebreakers through the Ångermanälven shipping company. Strikebreakers are workers who, contrary to the union's decision, do not take part in a strike but continue to work. Director Gerhard Versteegh now hires precisely such strikebreakers to make the strike go nowhere.

The hired strikebreakers travel by train to Härnösand and are then transported to the "Villan" in Lunde in Ådalen. Many of the strikebreakers are professionals, others students who want to increase their cash.

The employers' side and the bourgeois press choose the term "willing to work" instead of strikebreakers.

On the night of 12-13 May, the cargo steamer "Milos" sails up the coast of Ångermanland and docks at the pulp shed in Sandviken. The "Milos" is loaded with pulp. The strikebreakers now go to Sandviken to help unload the "Milos".

Many of the strikers are outraged and angry! Some manage to get onto the steamer "Milos", where several strikebreakers are beaten up by them. Some strikebreakers are also forced to accompany Kramfors to Ådalen under threats.

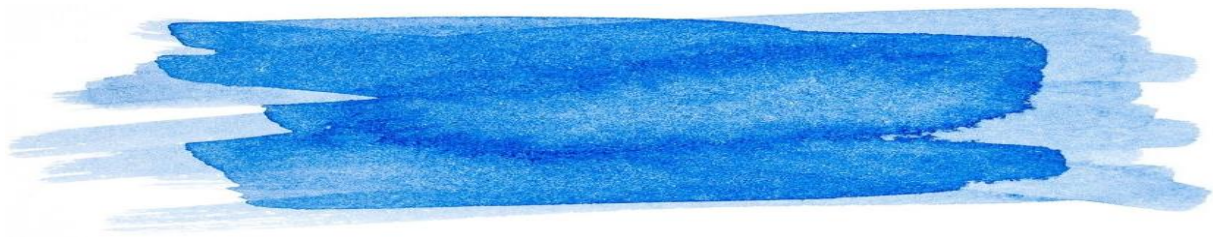
The conservative Svenska Dagbladet, a Swedish daily newspaper, reports on 15 May 1931 that in the last few days "a veritable mob rule has taken hold", not least because of "communist incitement". The authorities were practically powerless to prevent the mistreatment of those willing to work. Those willing to work were forced to march ahead of the communist demonstration with their hands tied. The police had to watch powerlessly.

The Situation

As a result of the above-mentioned incident, military forces from Sollefteå are called in: 60 men of infantry and a squad of mounted troops under the command of Captain Nils Mesterton. The departure of the military is accompanied by riots and stone throwing, in the village of Sprängsviken as well as in Lunde. The soldiers responded with untargeted gunfire and smoke grenades.

On 14 May, the Transport Workers' Federation holds a protest meeting against the strikebreakers at the Frånö People's Home, in the presence of several trade union representatives from the valley. A decision is taken to call a general work stoppage in the sawmills and paper mills of the Åtäl. Meanwhile, 3000 to 4000 people have gathered in front of the People's Home. The demonstration procession also includes flags from organisations affiliated to the Social Democracy. Ten soldiers and 20 horses have already been injured by stone throwing. The Sedition Act has been read out three times.

When the demonstration procession arrives in Lunde and the protesters are less than 100 metres from the strikebreakers' barracks, it happens ...



Step 2: Choose a person in whose footsteps you want to step

Each of the persons described has written history in his or her own personal way. With their decisions and strategies, all the people involved have had an influence on future events.

Of course, many, many more people were involved. We have chosen these four for you because it is important to us to give a voice not only to the rich and powerful, but also to those who have had less of a voice in the historiography up to now. After all, everyone bears the consequences of the decisions made at this time.

The involved Persons



Elsa Nilsson, Daughter
of Oskar Nilsson



Oskar Nilsson, Worker
in the sawmill

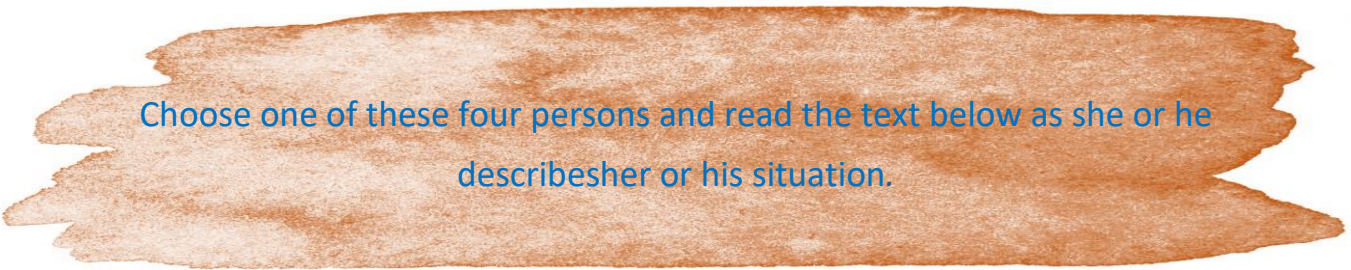


John Adams,
Strikebreaker



Nils Mesterton, Officer
of the Swedish Army

Whose footsteps you would like to step into?



Choose one of these four persons and read the text below as she or he describes her or his situation.

Attention! Please read only the text that belongs to the person you have chosen and then go on to step 3

■ **Person 1: Elsa Nilsson, daughter of Oskar Nilsson**



Hello, I am Elsa Nilson. My father is one of the workers gathered here. It's a mean thing to do, my father said. He was angry when he left home today. He is also taking part in the strike, like so many others! And that these strikebreakers had no decency and would let themselves be exploited by the capitalist exploiters. And they would harm the entire working class, which would barely make ends meet anyway. My father is right! How often have we had hardly anything to eat at home lately.

Because everything has become so expensive and we simply don't have any money left.

And the newspaper only writes nonsense anyway, my father said. We are supposed to be a mob rule? My father was stunned when he read that in the newspaper. We are the oppressed, the exploited! And the rulers are the others, the ones with a lot of money, who can fix things for themselves. But surely not us, my father said. And the newspapers, they only spread lies anyway! You can't believe them, because they're only bought by the rich and only write what pleases and is useful to the rich. But all that has nothing to do with the truth, my father said.

And now he is standing there with the other strikers and I have followed him. My mother shouted at me to stay there. But I couldn't help it! I just ran after my father. It's very threatening, the whole thing here. All the soldiers, the horses! And above all the noise! The military have already read out something three times. They want to stop the riot here. But my father and the others are much too upset. There! For God's sake! There's a brawl going on right now! Thank God my father is not there! But where is my father! He was there a moment ago! He was standing over there. The horses are getting restless! The horses on which the soldiers sit. And now the scuffle is spreading over there! The workers are attacking the strikebreakers!

No, this can't be happening! Shots! For God's sake! Shots! My father? Where's my father? What am I going to do now?

■ Person 2: Oskar Nilsson, Worker in the sawmill

Hello, I am Oskar. Oskar Nilsson is my full name. I am a worker. A worker at the sawmill. And I've been working at this mill for quite a long time. Fifteen years, to be exact! But what is



accurate today? Well, the rich, they are definitely very precise when it comes to watching their money! They only do what they want anyway! And then the papers say we're a mob rule! I mean, can you believe it? Us and a mob rule? We, from whom they have taken everything? We who can barely make ends meet? How am I supposed to feed my family? My wages were already quite low before! But now! Now it's really impossible! But of course that's not in the papers! They've all been bought by the rich, the newspapermen, and they're all saying what they want to say! They wrote that those willing to work were forced to march

ahead of the communist demonstration with their hands tied. For once they were right. Except that they are not willing workers, but miserable strikebreakers who have betrayed the ideals of social democracy!

And then these rich people come along and say we have to work for less money because times are so bad! But where are times so bad? Certainly not for them! They continue to have their parties, drink champagne and all that fine stuff and drive around in their expensive cars! While we have to look for dry bread somewhere. And when we go on strike, they say we are unwilling to work!

But now there are these scoundrels who are willing to work. They have been bought by the gentry and they are infiltrating our strike! They have no decency! They are against the values of social democracy. They let themselves be bought by the capitalists and go to work in our factory! But we showed them! When they wanted to unload the ship, we were there and gave them a good beating! But there are still enough of them. They're in the workers' barracks over there! But not with us! We'll show them that we won't let them do that to us.

And we certainly won't let the military stop us. The soldiers on their horses and the other soldiers. Even if they're armed! There! Now some strike breakers are coming out of the barracks again! And already some of our people are there. Now you'll get a good beating, you willing workers!

What!? Shots!? Right next to me! I thought they weren't serious. For God's sake! What am I going to do now?

■ Person 3: John Adams, strikebreaker



Hi, I'm John Adams. I'm an art history student in my second year. Of course I need money! What student doesn't need money? It's not exactly cheap to study! And my family isn't exactly wealthy now either. But it's certainly not the money why I'm here today! After all, it's not a safe job, as we've seen in the last few days.

I mean, after all, a few of my colleagues were attacked and beaten up by the workers when they tried to unload the freighter. I was there too, but thank God nothing happened to me. But now I feel quite queasy.

All those angry people out there, and all that military! The situation has become even worse in the last few days!

Why did I get hired as a strikebreaker? Our country has been hit particularly hard by the economic depression caused by the stock market crash. Many factories have had to close down. My father's company was one of them. But the workers only see their own fate! They think that only they have lost everything. But that's not true. We all have to tighten our belts a bit and try to overcome this crisis together. And going on strike is certainly the wrong way to go about it! I mean, what's the point. Times are not rosy and if there is no money, even a strike won't change that!

Instead, we must strive to get our companies going again. The work has to be done so that our economy can flourish again. And when our economy is thriving again, then we can also talk about higher wages again. But not now! And the newspapers are right when they write that a real mob rule has taken hold!", I don't know what to make of all these communist ideas that have been spreading more and more lately. Sedition! Yes, I think it's sedition, what they're doing. And the authorities have been practically powerless lately, when all the abuse of us on the freighter happened.

I'm really glad that the military is there now to protect us!

There! Now some workers are trying to break into our barracks! Now it's getting tight! For God's sake! Did I hear gunshots just now? There it is again! Loud screams! What am I going to do now?

■ Person 4: Nils Mesterton, Officer of the Swedish Army



I am Carl Fredrik Nils Mesterton, an officer in the Swedish Army and commander of the military unit that is here on the ground. These are quite difficult times we are living in at the moment. The economic depression has hit my country quite hard! Many people have lost their jobs. And there is unrest all over the country. Many companies have had to close and many people are on the streets demonstrating against the wage cuts. I also know some people who have lost their jobs.

It all happened so fast. The stock market crash and suddenly everything is gone. And not only here. All over the world the economy has come to a standstill, you read here and there.

Our press! It's quite one-sided, the way it's reported. I mean, I can understand that people take to the streets when they can no longer afford their daily lives. But the newspapers are right about one thing. It is absolutely unacceptable that these striking workers attack other workers who want to do their work. This is what happened the other day when a few strikebreakers wanted to unload a freighter. There has to be peace and order. Violence has no place there. And the police had no chance of intervening in the face of the angry crowd.

That's why my military unit has now been ordered to come here to offer protection to the strike-breakers and to bring the situation under control. But the people here are already quite upset. We have already had the Sedition Act read out three times. That should be warning enough. Still, the situation here just won't calm down.

Now stones are being thrown at us, the demonstrators are trying to get into the strikebreakers' barracks and a real scuffle is starting up ahead! I ordered my men to fire warning shots in the air. And that's what they're doing now. But for God's sake! What's happening right now? Complete chaos is breaking out?

I've got to get over there now. What am I going to do?

5 Needs and Strategies



Now it is your turn!!

You have already had experiences with the five basic needs and now it is a question of putting yourself in the shoes of people who were there at the time and were involved in some way. If all people have these basic needs, then we can assume that this was also the case back then, do you agree?

You now have the opportunity to help shape history as one of the actors of that time! The more you have familiarised yourself with the circumstances of the time in the previous chapter, the better you will be able to put yourself in the shoes of the person you chose and his or her circumstances.

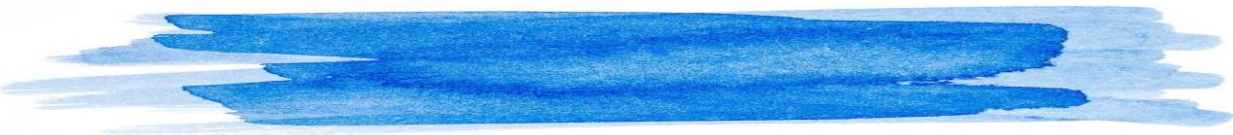
When you do this, simply follow the guide in this chapter. It will guide you step by step through your historical experience. At the end of the chapter you will find out how the people involved actually decided and acted according to the history that has been handed down to them and what the consequences were.



Step 3: Instant History – Be the person

Put yourself as much as possible in the shoes of the person you have chosen and imagine that you are that person for this experience.

Now answer these questions:

- *What does the situation you are in look like from your perspective? Describe in the first person what is currently on your mind. Start with: I am (e.g., Elsa, Oskar, ...)*
 - *Which people around you are in the same or a similar situation?*
- 

Step 4: How are you?

You are now still the person you chose. Now tell about your basic needs. Take time to think and answer these questions:

Freedom:

- *What options are there for you now?*

Love and belonging:

- *Who is in a similar situation as you are right now?*

Survival:

- *Is your life or safety endangered in any way? By what?*

Power:

- *What is particularly important to you now?*

Fun:

- *Do you find the situation rather boring or rather exciting right now? - Why?*

Step 5: What would you do now?

How would you act now? Which of your needs would you like to meet most urgently in this situation?

Freedom:

- *What could you decide right now to improve your situation?*

Love and belonging:

- *How can you gain the trust of another person?*

Survival:

- What can you do right now to feel safer?

Power:

- What could you do now that you would be really proud of?

Fun:



- What could you do to ease the situation?



Step 6: Stopover!

Wow, those were some turbulent times back then, weren't they?

If you want to know how the person you have now put yourself in the shoes of actually acted then, read on in the corresponding box:

Please read only the one box, otherwise the excitement of the other characters will be lost for you!

	<p>Box 1: Elsa Nilsson, daughter of Oskar Nilsson</p>		<p>Box 2: Oskar Nilsson, Worker in the sawmill</p>
<p><i>Elsa desperately tries to find her father in the ensuing turmoil. In the chaos that breaks out, however, she is soon swept away by the crowds. When she arrives home hours later, she finds her father unharmed.</i></p>		<p><i>Oskar has to watch as five people die right next to him from the shots fired. He panics, as do the people around him. In the chaos, he finally manages to get to safety and arrive home unharmed.</i></p>	

	<p>Box 3: John Adams, strikebreaker</p>		<p>Box 4: Nils Mesterton, Officer of the Swedish Army</p>
<p><i>John Adams hears the shots and sees some workers die in a hail of bullets in front of the barracks. Shocked, he remains in the shack, completely unable to do anything.</i></p>		<p><i>Nils Mesterton loses control of his troop in the ensuing chaos. The shots that should have been fired into the air now also kill some people and Nils Mesterton cannot prevent this.</i></p>	

Step 7: Now you have the choice

Did you find it exciting to dive into the story and put yourself in the person's shoes? If you have time and want to, you can now choose another person to play the role of. So go back to Step 2 at page 5 and choose who you want to be next.

If you are sure you don't want to try another role in this episode, you will find out how the story continues in the next chapter.

6 How the story continues

If you want to know how the episode continued according to history, read on here now. But only do so if you have either already been in the roles of all the characters described in this episode or are sure that you don't want to take on any more roles, because otherwise we would be spoiling here.

The protesters began throwing stones at the troops and tried to enter the area where the strikebreakers were. Mesterton orders to fire. Initially shots are to be fired into the ground. But ten people are hit, five of them die. Killed are the workers Erik Bergström, Evert Nygren, Sture Larsson and Viktor Eriksson and the worker Eira Söderberg.

Several hundred thousand people took part in strikes and protests across the country in response to the military's fatal shooting in Ådalen. In Stockholm, on 19 May 1931, there were riots in connection with a communist demonstration, which also had banners such as "Down with the murderer government!". All the workers in Ådalen had stopped work; it was not until 26 May that regular work resumed in Ådalen. The newspaper ny dag published a manifesto

on 15 May 1931, the day after the Ådalen tragedy, calling for protest strikes throughout the country against the Ådalen workers' murders. Stockholm's construction workers were among the first to strike on the morning of 15 May. The main demand of most of the strikes and demonstrations the day after the shooting was the withdrawal of the military and the strikebreakers. In some areas - e.g. Söderhamn - all workers stopped work for this demand, and in Kiruna even the schools remained closed.

On 15 May 1931 the military was finally withdrawn.

As a result of the incident, there were reshuffles at civil servant level, lenient disciplinary sanctions against some military personnel and the convening of a commission of enquiry, which, however, did not come to any clear conclusions, except that in such cases police rather than military force would be more useful in maintaining public order.

For his role in the shootings, Mesterton was tried by a court martial in Sollefteå, which sentenced him to eight days in prison without supervision. Several of the protesters were tried in civilian court and received harsh prison sentences.

The relatives of the victims received no compensation.

After the riots in Ådalen, Mesterton became the target of the demonstrators' anger. In the Swedish socialist press he was commonly referred to as the "murderer of Lunde". Mesterton himself is said to have taken the incident very badly and become a broken man.

The events in Ådalen in May 1931 - the Ådalen tragedy - were to become formative for the development of Swedish society. Thus, the 1931 Ådalen tragedy is the key event for understanding Swedish political culture and at the same time the path beginning of the Swedish model. The tragedy of Ådalen in 1931 had immediate consequences for the Swedish political landscape and the emergence of the Swedish Model: from a danger-prevention state to a caring welfare state.

Already during the events in Ådalen, a political battle of opinion began, which intensified immediately after the tragedy.

After the introduction of universal suffrage, the social democrats increasingly gained votes, although not as many as the bourgeois feared. Workers' turnout increased only gradually. It was only the tragedy of Ådalen that finally tipped the scales for the great electoral success of 1932, in which the Social Democrats won 104 out of 230 mandates and took over the

government together with the Peasants' Party. This coalition between the Social Democrats and the Peasants' Party marked the beginning of the social democratic era under Per Albin Hansson. The Social Democrats ruled from then until 1976, with a brief interruption in the summer of 1936.

The policies of the Social Democrats in the 1930s - under the impact of the economic crisis - were geared towards the elimination of unemployment, the stabilisation of agricultural prices and social and economic security. For this mindset, Per Albin Hansson coined the term *svenska folkhem*, which has become synonymous with a Swedish welfare state, the Swedish Model and the security that the welfare state was supposed to guarantee.

7 Learning from history

Now share your experience and reflections with your classmates:

- *How was it? Did you manage to put yourself in the situation and the persons' shoes?*
- *Can you understand why they acted the way they did?*
- *Would you have acted the same way?*
- *What could have happened, if one of the characters acted in a different way? (Luisson: ..., Pierre: ..., Clement: ..., Marie Antoinette: ...)*

Further questions to make the most of your experiences and insights with the episode

- *For whom did the solution (as described in the chapter "How the story continues" make life better?*
- *Were there also losers? Who were they? What did they lose?*
- *Are there situations similar to this episode of history in our world at the moment?*
- *What can we learn from this episode of history?*

8 Literature

Bengt Schüllerqvist: *Från kosackval till kohandel - SAPs väg till makten (1928-1933)*. Tidens förlag, Stockholm, 1992.