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FAGERSTABRUKENS HISTORIA 1957—1959

A PICTURE OF THE SWEDISH IRON AND STEEL INDUSTRY

During the 1920s the steelworks of Fagersta, Forsbacka, Horndal and Österby, with traditions reaching back to the great expansion of the Swedish iron industry in the 17th century, or even further, combined with Stjernsund and Kloster, famous in the history of manufacturing, to form the great Fagersta Concern, *Fagersta Bruks Aktiebolag*. The combination was a salvage-operation after the inflation of the First World War and the deflation of the early 1920s. Professor Ernst Söderlund has told the story of how this operation took place. Not only the iron-works concerned but also the bank which was most involved have unreservedly made their records available. This has made it possible for Professor Söderlund to present a contribution that throws new light on important problems in Sweden's latest economic history.

When the Concern was consolidated, Hjalmar Åselius, managing director from 1942 and since the mid-1930s one of the leaders of the reorganization, commissioned Söderlund to prepare a plan for a history of the Concern and its constituent iron-works. The commission was a complicated one. Each of the works had a fascinating history but before the Concern was formed they had had very little in common.

The source material for the history of the Swedish iron industry is abundant: the enormous records of the central administration from the time of the mercantilist planned economy and the often well-preserved records in the private archives of the iron-works. Those who have treated the general history of the industry, have usually been compelled to confine themselves to the material in the central archives though this

has implied that they have not been able to enrich their research by the close contact with everyday work and business management afforded by the local records. Since in this case the records of several works representative of various aspects were to be examined, Söderlund suggested that an attempt should be made to obtain the synthesis by using the results of this research for a reinterpretation of the general history. The interest in purely local history could be satisfied by taking examples mainly from records of the works belonging to the Concern, and by verifying the general presentation and giving body to it in monographic chapters on the individual works. The local material dominates, of course, Dr. P. E. Wretblad's account of the technical development within the Concern and also in the volume which deals with the history of iron-workers, charcoal-burners and other wage-earners within the industry from the early 17th century, a presentation laudably free from both patriarchal romanticism and anachronistic welfare-state ideology. A well-known author, Örnulf Tigerstedt, has had at his disposal a whole volume in which to relate episodes illustrating high-days and workdays, the unique cultural *milieux* and the destinies of men and women at the iron-works now belonging to the Concern.

The main exposition is the work of three professors of economic history: Karl-Gustaf Hildebrand, Artur Attman, and Ernst Söderlund. Previous research in the history of the iron industry has chiefly concerned the 17th and 18th centuries. Hildebrand, whose volume covers this period, has enriched the discussion by original contributions and demonstrated how the local