

In the wake of recession — economic hardship, shame and social disintegration

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Over a period of just a few years, Sweden changed from a country of full employment to one of mass unemployment. Although it avoided the severe crises that afflicted many European countries during the recessions of the 1970s and 1980s, which resulted in mass unemployment in these countries, when the crisis finally did arrive, everything happened very quickly. In just a few years, the overheated economy at the end of the 1980s (with an unemployment rate of less than 1% in some areas) was replaced by mass unemployment. Between 1991 and 1993, almost half a million jobs disappeared (1).

In a generation perspective, it was primarily young persons who were the major losers. Between 1990 and 1992, one-third of the country's teenagers disappeared from the labor market, while the loss of those over 35 years of age was relatively small (2).

In a class perspective, it is particularly the traditional blue-collar jobs that disappeared. Between 1991 and 1993, about 200 000 jobs in the manufacturing industry and over 70 000 jobs in the building industry were eliminated (1).

The major losers in a labor market perspective during the period were mainly young men and young women with relatively poor education or training (3) from the working-class families. They are concentrated in the old industrial areas and small communities (4). Immigrants, too, were among the group of major losers. In 1993, unemployment among immigrants was 28% (5).

The picture in the rest of Europe is the same as in Sweden. It is primarily working-class young men and women, with poor education or training, who make up the majority of the unemployed.

The objective of this paper is to discuss aspects of the societal change that we are undergoing. Many voices

claim that we are at a time of change between a declining industrial society and something new. This new (or incipiently new) society has been variously referred to as the information society, the service society, the knowledge society, the risk society, or, simply, the postindustrial society.

Unfortunately, the difficulties of assigning a name to this "new" society arise from the fact that it is in an empirical vacuum, of which we have no experience. The indicator of change is supposed to be the fact that the proportion of industrial jobs is falling and that the rate of decline has increased in recent years. Another sign is the present rapid rate of development of information technology.

The focus of this paper will be on what has followed in the tracks of the deep recession that struck Sweden at the beginning of the 1990s. The paper has been structured as follows. First, we describe two typical cases (Eva and Maria) who — in our opinion — illustrate what happened in the wake of the recession that so suddenly drove visible unemployment from about 1% to almost 10%. We then consider several other aspects. We focus on two conditions, namely, financial aspects and those associated with morals and values. We then turn our attention to the future and discuss what can be waiting beyond the horizon.

By starting in a small world — as expressed by the stories of Eva and Maria — and then attempting to relate it to the larger world of economic stagnation, we have followed the analytical procedure referred to as part-whole analysis (6). After a demonstration of the worries of our illustrative smaller world, we therefore approach the problems of the larger world. And our attempts to link the individual with the general are exploratory and tentative in nature.

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Eva — they don't understand — they don't know — they don't care

Eva is in her 30s. Recently divorced, she looks after 2 children. We interviewed her in the late autumn of 1994 as part of an investigation into financial stress (7). At that time, she was unemployed. She lived in one of the old, typical Swedish industrial towns — a town with proud traditions, built on iron, forest products, and steel, where the working class has always been strong and where traditional family solidarity and morals are still alive, where the inhabitants have been proud to belong to the working class. There are also cultural traditions, such as strong musical associations. For example, there is a wide mix of music — jazz and Swedish dance band music happily existing side by side.

Eva's house was old and small, with a floor area of only about 80 m². She stayed in the house after her divorce, despite the fact that it had been taken over by the court commissioners. It had been put up for executive auction and had been on the market for 18 months. "There's no market for it," said Eva tonelessly. But she and her children had been allowed to remain until she could find cheap accommodations to which to move. Both her children attended school during the day. Eva had been out of work for almost a year. As she previously had had only a part-time job (50%), she received only half of the normal unemployment benefits. In cash, this amounts to SEK 5000/month. She also received child benefit and advance on child benefit for her children. She had had financial problems for 2 or 3 years, but they had escalated and had become increasingly severe. She was concerned solely for her children's welfare. She could not pay all the bills that she received each month. Her bank would not give her any respite on her repayments because it saw no likelihood of her finances being any better in 5 years' time. In reply to how her financial worries had affected her daily life, she said:

I'm very worried and all that. It feels as if there's something churning away in my stomach all the time. As soon as I wake up in the mornings, it's there, my heart pounding. All that and I have to try and calm myself down. And I have to try and be bright and cheerful for the kids. They know more or less what's going on. They've had it pretty hard too. But you can't talk to them about everything — they don't really understand, because they're so small. It's very difficult to explain to them . . . They want this and that, and I have to say that we can't afford it just now. And then perhaps the oldest says 'my friend's got it'. It's this pressure from friends . . . Nevertheless, I try to make the best of the situation. The most important things are that they've got clothes and food . . . that I'm here . . . but it's hard when the bills mount up. Just when you start to think that you've caught up, new ones keep arriving. You never catch up. It's the constant uncertainty that's so hard.

We went on talking about her finances, and she said:

It's [my finances] the last thing I think of before I go to sleep and the first thing I think of when I wake up. It's hard. Even before I drop off to sleep, I'm thinking about it.

Eva was ashamed. She felt she was inadequate and incapable of meeting the expectations that she felt to be incumbent on a mother. She did not want to seek social security because it felt demeaning. She felt that she would be labeled as a social security case. As with all forms of shame, Eva's feelings of shame were a social feeling. They indicated the need to feel, to belong to a group, and to live up to expectations. They need to be seen in the light of current views and expectations of what is honorable. She had internalized views on the importance of being able to support herself, of having a job, and of being industrious.

One of life's characteristics is that we attempt to refrain from social contacts that we fear might be shameful. Eva said that, a little while ago, she started to experience feelings of panic when she was in the presence of groups of people, for example, when she went shopping and the shop was busy. "It felt as if everyone was looking at me and I just wanted to sink into the ground", she said. She saw her doctor, who told her that she was suffering from feelings of panic. She did not tell the doctor about her financial worries or how difficult her finances were. She did not want to talk about all her "unpleasantness", as she put it. She dropped her gaze and said, "You'd feel ashamed, too."

What made Eva's situation worse was the change in the social welfare system, for example, reduced unemployment benefits and reduced sickness benefits. We went on to talk about what happens with the various benefits. Eva said, "It's tough when they [the authorities] cut back on us who have nothing. They don't understand what it's like for us . . . they don't know what things are like . . . they don't listen to us." Eva is expressing something that is central to Christopher Lasch's book *The Revolt of the Elites* (8), the gap between ordinary people and the controlling elite in society, which, according to Lasch, seems to be growing because the elite increasingly tend to distance themselves from the day-to-day experiences of ordinary persons. Eva had had personal experience of this distancing. "They don't understand . . . they don't know . . . they don't care", said Eva.

Maria — I'd like to spit in their faces

It is February 1996, and we are on our way to another of Sweden's smaller industrial towns. We have arranged a meeting with Maria. The town used to have a mill which once employed 4000 people. But times have changed.

Only 800 work there now, and it has been many years since the mill took on new employees.

Maria is 26 and an immigrant from a southern European country. She speaks fluent Swedish, with no accent. Maria is unemployed and fed up. She tells us that she has mobilized others to protest against unemployment. And she protests for the following two reasons: to fight against the reduction in unemployment benefits and to show that the public's and authorities' view of the unemployed is incorrect.

Maria invites us into her light and sunny kitchen — to breakfast, because we are early. It's an early Saturday morning, so Maria's husband is also at home. During the week, he works as a junior member of staff for a public body. However, he has received his notice and will be out of work in a little over 6 months. Therefore the two of them are worried about the future.

Maria does not feel that she has any special qualifications, despite the fact that she has two sets, a diploma from a Swedish secondary school and its equivalent from her own country. "But they don't go very far", she says, somewhat depressed. She has not yet had any permanent employment, but only odd jobs here and there. She says that she would have liked to study psychology when she left school, but when she asked the employment office how to approach this, she was given a cleaning job "... simply because I'm an immigrant".

Maria has made ends meet financially — up to now — because her husband has had work. Nevertheless, things have been difficult for them and have not always been easy. "If we don't have to, we don't buy clothes and so on. We've had to be very careful with our money. We tend to wear old clothes", says Maria and almost gets angry. "Things aren't too bad, which is why that no one has really reacted yet. We're not quite into Destitute Sweden yet, but we're on the way to it and I don't think that people really realize this: that we're on the way to it."

What makes Maria's situation worse is others' views of unemployment. Maria says: "There are practically no opportunities for those [the unemployed] who want to work, but it seems to be that the politicians think that '... there's work for those who want to work.' It's plain bloody nonsense. It's dreadful. It feels as if ... I'd like to go and spit straight in their faces. It's demeaning ... But it's not just the politicians who've got this view; it's also the ordinary people round about who have work and who've got security, who also think so," says Maria.

Maria says that, as an unemployed person, it is really rubbed in that you have no value. We asked her what effect this has on her.

I feel as if this is in the back of my mind all the time. I don't see anything else ... you go and hope all the time and then finally you give up hoping. There's nothing there. Just a black hole. I've felt depressed ... when you start thinking

about it too much, which has made me very easily irritated and annoyed. Not about my family, but they're the ones who suffer ... you feel completely despairing. What can I do? You have to do something. You have to get somewhere in life. And yet I've nothing ..."

Eva's and Maria's stories illustrate a problem that is both more common and more worrying than we probably think. Of the two, Eva is the one who has suffered more noticeably from a crass and contradictory reality. At a time when the need for social and financial safety nets is greatest for Eva, she has been caught up in one of the greatest cutbacks of the social security system in Sweden in modern times. But this crisis not only affects Eva, but also her children. Maria is the one of the two who has more clearly felt a strong need to act and protest.

Eva's and Maria's stories are concerned with unemployment. But if we dig a little deeper, we find two sides to this unemployment — the problem of making ends meet and that of feelings of shame.

Modern research into unemployment has shown that unemployment is usually accompanied by social and health problems. But, with only a few important exceptions, it has not seriously considered the financial and moral aspects of having no paid employment. This lack of insight into the importance of the financial aspect has been pointed out by Paul Willis, who has said that a proper understanding of the social effects of unemployment requires an understanding of what has been lost, namely, the associated pay. According to Willis, pay is the only reward that many persons regard themselves as receiving for their work. At the same time, it is pay that empowers or enables other important social and cultural activities in life (9). Money is needed to stabilize and maintain an established life-style. It is also important for social interaction.

But money does not only give a feeling of status, control, and power. The second neglected aspect of unemployment has to do with the moral side. Besides providing monetary pay, work also generates a moral revenue. Actually earning one's own daily bread is regarded as honorable, while the receipt of unemployment pay or social security benefits is regarded as degrading and shaming. Money from sources such as the social security system does not seem to have the same moral value as money that one has earned (10). On the contrary, the public tends to regard it as degrading. For many persons, being in receipt of social security is associated with shame, humiliation, and degradation (11).

It is worth noting in this context, and by no means insignificant, that the English word(s) "embarrass[ed]-[ment]", with its [their] connotations of, and links with, the "shame" family of words, also has [have] a euphemistic meaning of lack of money (embarrassment = difficulty arising from the want of money to pay debts) (12). English thus has an interesting link between shame

and money. This link is also clearly expressed in Adam Smith's classical book *The Theory of Moral Sentiment* from 1776, in which he discusses the state of "embarrassment" of feelings in connection with poor finances. Adam Smith also uses another word in the shame group, that of "humiliation". He describes bankruptcy as "perhaps the greatest and most humiliating calamity which can befall . . . an innocent man" (13).

We can, in other words, note that money is not just money. If we go back into history, with the emergence of capitalism and the middle classes in the 19th century, it was particularly honor and esteem that became increasingly closely linked with financial success. Self-control, self-discipline, and strength of mind became guiding stars for the emerging middle class. Characteristics such as purposefulness, capability, and strength of mind became important ideological ingredients for this class and also formed the basis of an emerging individualism. They became central elements in the work ethic that developed and progressively achieved an increasingly dominant position. Honor and credit became associated with financial success. Failing in business was regarded as shameful. For some, suicide became the most dramatic way of rescuing both their own and their family's honor. With the growth of the workers' movement, new concepts of honor appeared, including those associated with work. The worker now sought to achieve respectability in other strata of society and in his own eyes (14). Being a skilled worker, doing a good job, and pulling one's weight were regarded as worthy and something of which the worker could feel proud. As a result, work came to be linked with self-esteem. The honorable worker became partly synonymous with the conscientious worker, and the conscientious ideal extended to include free time, as well as work. A respectable worker was expected to behave with dignity and humanity during his free time as well (15).

We can therefore regard the financial loss that occurs as a result of unemployment, and the moral concepts associated with work as two aspects of paid work as the dominating form of occupation (16).

Individual distress in the crisis of unemployment — financial hardship and shame

Between 1987 and 1995, the number of persons in Sweden who frequently felt themselves worried about their own or their family's finances during the future year approximately doubled. In 1995, no less than 32% of the population expressed this concern (17).

But it is primarily those whose finances are shaky, and who are at risk of losing their work or who have already done so, who are concerned about their finances.

Several recent investigations asked the question "What are you most worried about for the future?" "Making ends meet" was the most frequently quoted answer from young unemployed men and women (18), redundant iron and steel workers (19), and redundant women from the caring services (20). In round numbers, 6 out of 10 persons indicated their personal finances as the area about which they were most worried.

A person's financial situation is therefore important if we are to understand why unemployment can lead to social problems and ill health. Their importance has probably increased in step with the reductions in unemployment benefits, longer periods of unemployment, and the general increase in unemployment to a level that we are forced to regard as mass unemployment.

On the whole, research indicates that the risk of suffering from some form of ill health increases with the degree of financial difficulty (18, 19, 21–23). A survey of redundant steel workers showed that the extent of serious psychosomatic problems was nine times greater among those suffering from more severe financial stress than among those suffering less financial stress (19). Another investigation, of young unemployed men and women, found that the extent of various health problems was considerably more common among those living with a higher degree of financial stress than among those living under a lower degree of financial stress (24).

Shaming

Views are often put forward in the general debate on the causes of unemployment that the unemployed are lazy and unwilling to work. Last year was the 20th anniversary of the publication by two British social scientists — Marsden and Duff — of the results of an investigation into unemployed families. They claimed that, of all the welfare state's myths and apocryphal stories, those concerning the work-shy and scroungers have been the most poorly confirmed in terms of actual proof and, yet, have been the most stubbornly persistent (25).

A recent Swedish investigation shows that a clear majority of unemployed persons applying for social security assistance in order to survive believes that the public has a negative image of them as recipients of welfare help. Impressions such as "total failure", "worthless", "parasite", "lazy", "drunkard", and "rejected" were common (26). Another investigation found that about half of young unemployed men had experienced others as regarding them as lazy because they had no work; the corresponding figure for young unemployed women was over 40%. Over 40% of the young unemployed men, and almost as many women, reported that others had been irritated at them because they were out of work. One young unemployed

man in 4, and rather more than 1 in 4 of the young women, had experienced others regarding them as less capable because of their unemployment (24).

In his investigation, Eales has reported that feelings of shame are common among adult unemployed men, occurring in every 4th unemployed man (27). Eales found that shame was also linked to mental problems such as depression and worry. Shame can be seen as an interruption of the social links between persons, with feelings of shame arising from the need of having to feel associations with other persons (28–31). The feeling of shame is therefore very much a social feeling and is consequently a very interesting concept from a sociological point of view. Shame is linked with feelings of loss of self-esteem. Research into the relationship between shame and ill health could reveal that feelings of shame have a substantial and hitherto unnoticed significance in the development of heart disease (30), depression (32), suicide (33), and attempted suicide (34).

A recently completed Swedish investigation of young unemployed men and women found that being subject to more shaming was related to serious psychosomatic problems and feelings of powerlessness, depression, and nervousness or unease (18). The extent of both serious psychosomatic problems and other problems, such as feelings of powerlessness, depression and nervousness or unease, was considerably higher among persons subject to a greater degree of shaming than among those subject to a less degree.

The old deprivation theory in a new version — the finances-shame model

The economic recession that afflicted Sweden, and which changed full employment to mass unemployment in just a few years, has forcibly reawakened views on the im-

portance of the economy for public health. The old theory of financial deprivation associated with the depression years of the 1930s has therefore been given new life. However, the economic crisis has also provided fertile soil for the myths and legends concerning the unemployed as work-shy and scroungers. There are doubtless many reasons for them, but it is possible that the deeply rooted individualism that tends to see the prime sources of a person's problems as within him(her)self plays an important part (35).

Against the background of the reasoning that we have described, there is reason to assume that the increase in social and health-related problems arising from unemployment has much to do with the combination of financial pressure and shaming. This not only brings the deprivation theory back to life, but can also be combined with considerations of the importance of social processes in connection with shame and shaming.

Against the background of the empirical data that we have presented, we can expect to find a concentration of problems in the group that is both subject to greater financial stress and subject to more shaming. Our assumptions are supported by a recently completed investigation of young unemployed men and women (18, 24). It can be seen from table 1 that the extent of various types of problems is considerably greater among those young unemployed men and women who are both subject to greater financial hardship and subject to more shaming. Serious psychosomatic problems and feelings of powerlessness hardly occur among men suffering from less financial hardship and living in an environment with less shaming elements. As far as the women are concerned, the problems are more evenly distributed although, as with men, the greatest number of problems are experienced by those who are both subject to greater financial hardship and subject to more shaming.

Health problems, too, resulting from unemployment and as reported by the interviewees, are concentrated

Table 1. Extent of various types of problems of men and women as a function of financial hardship and shaming elements in the environment (18, 24).

Type of problem	Greater degree of financial hardship and a more shaming environment		Greater degree of financial hardship and a less shaming environment		Less degree of financial hardship and a more shaming environment		Less degree of financial hardship and a less shaming environment		Significance level	
	Men (N = 56)	Women (N = 45)	Men (N = 44)	Women (N = 42)	Men (N = 61)	Women (N = 48)	Men (N = 92)	Women (N = 114)	Men	Women
Serious psychosomatic problems	19	26	2	13	8	11	2	9	**	*
Powerlessness	28	51	19	15	16	11	1	10	***	***
Depression	36	54	16	22	22	31	8	20	***	***
Nervousness/unease	8	31	14	26	22	24	4	15	***	

*** P < 0.001, ** P < 0.01, * P < 0.05.

primarily in the group of men and women both subject to greater financial hardship and subject to more shaming (18). In addition, changes in life-style are concentrated primarily in this same group.

A view of the future — a victory for common sense or a breakdown of societal links?

We cannot, of course, say much about what awaits us in the future. Opinions diverge, some believing in a victory for common sense and the benevolent society and others forecasting the breakdown of societal links.

A victory for common sense

Historian Jan Larsson is one of those who foresees light on the horizon — a future in which common sense has won. He sets out these views in his book *Hemmet vi ärvde* (The Home That We Inherited), in which he makes an attempt to lift the lid on the “new” society (4). In this society of the future, the problems of social welfare have largely been solved. Equality has been largely achieved, through social and financial measures, implemented by such means as a broadly based social and housing policy.

Jan Larsson's citizens of the future have learned from history. No civilized society can grow when suffering from internal stresses caused by social imbalance, friction, and open antagonism. The society of the future will be based on a supragovernmental policy that will provide everyone with a meaningful place in accordance with his or her capabilities. If we fail to achieve this development, democracy and human moral values will again be threatened by social, cultural, and political decline (4).

In his vision of the future, Larsson sees a society that can withstand the lack of a paternalistic state — an essentially antiauthoritarian state. The conditions for this state, he claims, already exist. Many people in the old society had no more than 5 years' schooling. In the future, we can expect an average schooling of 13 years.

In Larsson's model, the new citizen stands in clear contrast to the old citizen. The latter obediently conformed with the collective, while the former is released from the collective. The new citizen does not want to be represented, but to act independently. He or she is shaped by the new multicultural society, in which the individual person both wants and chooses his or her own life-style. In other words, he or she has greater opportunity to be “different”. The new citizen wants freedom of choice and multiplicity, opposing him[her]self to standardization and centrally determined uniformity. The solid collectivism that featured the old society is now replaced by solid individualism, meaning that each is free (on his or her own responsibility) to construct a quality of life as

his or her own life project. But common undertakings will be available if needed.

The breakdown of social bonds

The Norwegian sociologist Ingvar Lochen foresees the breakdown of the bonds of society in his thought-provoking book *Den sociale forvitringen* (The Social Erosion) (36).

According to Lochen, we stand on the threshold of an epoch of modern history where our joint moral responsibility is tending to break down. If this breakdown occurs, what is perhaps the most important societal quality (ie, the prerequisite for, and indicator of, a healthy society) can be lost. Lochen gives the name “social erosion” to this process of societal breakdown. If the process continues for a sufficiently long time, it can result in major harm to both individual people and society.

According to Lochen, the process of social erosion and disintegration (ie, the process of breaking down the feelings of mutual reliance and common responsibility) is in full swing. Societal solidarity and loyalty with and to common objectives and duties are in the process of disintegration. This disintegration threatens the central societal integrative mechanisms, the purpose of which is to create common objectives and common responsibility for future duties. The institutions intended to hold society together and to bind the individual to society, and in which the emotional links have been strongest, as in the family, neighborhoods, local societies, workers' movements and the church, have been weakened without being replaced by anything else. On the contrary, institutions that are totally impersonal, such as banks, insurance companies, and the market, have increased their power. Social erosion is associated with circumstances such as tax evasion, bank scandals, and insurance swindles. The increased misuse of power is indicative of a social disintegration process in full swing.

Lochen's theory is that the breakdown of the common moral responsibility that we are now witnessing is a result of circumstances that were impossible to foresee but which are partly the result of developments that we ourselves have created.

Paradoxically, says Lochen, it is the very success of the welfare state that is undermining its continued success and contributing to the social disintegrative process. Establishment of the welfare state resulted in more and more being taken for granted, with the starting point for what was once done having been forgotten. When this vision is finally realized, the common movement will lose its direction as a result of lack of any new objectives.

There is an alternative future, however. The social disintegration process can create new openings. Disintegration involves erosion, but can also provide opportuni-

ty and renewal. New life can be created from the eroded, disintegrated mass. A new togetherness can be mobilized. Nevertheless, if the course of society's progress is not changed, it will result in the disintegration process continuing.

On the threshold of a divided society

In his scenario, Jan Larsson emphasizes the scope for stopping a worrying development on discarding parts of our inheritance from the old society and industrial society. Threats, in the form of very high unemployment, exist, but can be overcome by awareness, through learning from history.

Ingvar Lochen's view of the present is of disturbing trends. Society, in his view, is in the throes of social breakdown, characterized by a lack of solidarity, a lack of mutual trust, and a lack of faith in the future. The feeling of social togetherness between persons, which is one of the most important characteristics of a healthy society, is under serious attack.

In our own scenario, we do not discount the possibility of favorable development in accordance with Larsson's view of the future, but we do see a reality that may become worse before it becomes better.

There are many factors that indicate that we are entering a divided society — one that is now often referred to as a two-thirds society (37). The two-thirds society refers to a society consisting of two groups. A majority (two-thirds) will live in good financial, social, and health conditions. Economic development will mean that their conditions will steadily improve. However, a minority (one-third) will be living under difficult conditions, with increasingly severe financial, social, and health problems. In such a society, societal togetherness will have broken down.

The forces tending to split society are now strong, with the policies of cutbacks and control of inflation having become not merely the favored methods of attack, but also objectives in themselves.

A recent article in one of Sweden's larger daily papers claimed that lower unemployment in the United States resulted in higher interest rates for housing in Sweden. With the news that 700 000 Americans had obtained work in February, the New York Stock Exchange fell by 3% — the largest drop for 3 years. Unemployment below 6% in the United States is regarded as being against the interests of the stock market. The effects in the United States extended to Sweden, where mortgage interest rates were raised (38). This example illustrates society's contradictions and riddles. What one would reasonably have expected to be regarded as good news (that 700 000 unemployed persons have found work) is regarded negatively by the market.

There are thus many pointers that indicate that we are heading towards a divided society. It is therefore reasonable to assume that greater and greater numbers will encounter serious problems in meeting their needs. A divided society increases polarization and class differences between groups. It can be expected that these class differences will become steadily more apparent in area after area: work conditions, living conditions, consumption patterns, incomes, ill health, recreational activities. The proportion of the population suffering from persistent welfare problems will therefore increase. The situation is the most serious for immigrants and young working-class men and women, of whom a steadily increasing proportion is being rejected from the labor market and they thus risk ending up in financial and social crisis that can result in marginalization. The large towns are becoming increasingly segregated, with growing cultures of unemployed young persons becoming more problematic and difficult to control. These groups manage to eke out a living by a mixture of means: social security payments, the black market, criminal activities, and a few odd jobs. The young men tend to turn their frustration outwards, while the young women turn it inwards. This inward-turned frustration results in general mental and psychosomatic problems, while outward-turned frustration leads to greater aggressiveness with clear tendencies towards violence.

In the scenario that we have described, the welfare state will face severe tests. Social security systems have been weakened, and the safety nets that are supposed to catch people in need no longer break the falls of those in financial difficulty as well as they used to. In the future, the social aspects will become increasingly serious, causing problems that will have to be solved. We may see a repeat of what happened during the 1930s, that is, when problems become sufficiently serious, their solution becomes a matter for everyone. Unforgiving reality can overcome even the most resistant.

The economic crisis of the 1930s was a challenge to most groups in society. The answer to it was found in a changed financial policy and a changed social policy, together with full employment. Social security and public health care were seen as typical manifestations of solidarity. They generated a feeling of, and motivation for, a need for one and all to contribute to the shared financing. But they also received something in return when they were in need (39).

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