

Outdated Fraudulent Healing? Homeopathy on Trial

The Homeopathic “Pill Scandal” in the 1950s and Modernisation of Health Care in Sweden

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Introduction

In July 1951, news spread that certain manufacturers of homeopathic remedies in the Stockholm area had skipped part of the potentization process and had sold pure sugar pills under the false claim that they were homeopathic medicines. After extraordinarily time- and money-consuming investigations and legal proceedings, directors and others from Pharma-Drog AB and Drogon AB who were responsible for producing and selling the pills were charged with, convicted of and sentenced for fraud and tax evasion.

In court, the prosecutor maintained that homeopathy as such was a big fraud, since even correctly potentiated homeopathic remedies above D5 could not possibly have any therapeutic effect beyond that of suggestion.¹ This was a position also held by the Swedish Royal Medical Board, although homeopathic remedies above D6

1 According to the founder of homeopathy, Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843), medicines should be prescribed in minimum doses in order to enhance a positive therapeutic effect and minimise negative side-effects. The potentization principle for drug preparation with serial trituration and agitated dilution was standardised in 1816. For example, the potency of D1 (D = decimal) is diluted 1:10 (“1” being the original ingredient, e.g. belladonna, arnica or lachesis, etc., and “10” being e.g. lactose, saccharose, water). D2 is diluted another 1:10 from the preparation that was already diluted once, and so forth. After D6, none of the original substance can be found in the remedy by means of ordinary chemical analysis. Dilutions beyond D6 (often D12, D30, D60, D200, CM) are called high dilutions. Some homeopaths prefer low dilutions, other use high dilutions, sometimes also called infinitesimal doses. For theory and clinical studies of homeopathy in a historical perspective, see Michael Emmans Dean, *The Trials of Homeopathy: Origins, Structure and Development*, Essen 2004.

were sold at pharmacies.² Accordingly, manufacturing and marketing of homeopathic remedies was to be considered fraudulent.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, most of the accused individuals joined in this stance. As part of their defence in court, they claimed that it could not be considered criminal to sell pills already commonly known to be of no benefit. On the contrary, they contended, it had been their praiseworthy intention to disclose the humbug of homeopathy by this large-scale experiment with unpotentiated pills, used by homeopaths and patients for years without any noteworthy complaints of absent therapeutic effects. The accused manufacturers referred to rumours that conventional pharmacies also cheated in the production of homeopathic remedies, and that medical authorities were aware of this and in any case, potentization above D6 was unnecessary, as the contents above this potency could not be checked out chemically.³

The one person taking a different position was the most prominent representative of lay homeopathy at the time. To the very last, he denied accusations of complicity in fraud and claimed that he still believed in homeopathy, although he was sceptical toward high dilutions. In the homeopathic journal he edited, he published a declaration swearing to God and all people that he had not known of the fraudulent activities.⁴

The courts chose not to take a stance on homeopathy as therapy. Instead they confined themselves to declaring that it was fraudulent to sell packages the contents of which did not correspond to the labelling. People would not have paid the prices they had paid if they had known the packages contained only pure sugar.⁵ The lay homeopath who claimed that he was innocent of the charges never had to serve his sentence – it was suspended in April 1954 by the Minister of Justice, a decision commented on acidly in the press.⁶ In early May of the same year, a huge bonfire in

2 "[...] A direct therapeutic effect of essentially all homeopathic remedies with a potency of D5 or above that are taken in reasonable doses can be precluded. The Swedish Medical Board does not rule out the effect of suggestion, which in certain contexts any remedy can have." Report from the Swedish Royal Medical Board to the Office of the Public Prosecutor, Stockholm, 22 September (1951), pp. 1351–1366, in the preliminary investigation, F1:14 in Verdicts of Criminal Cases no. 115/1952, Stockholm City Court, Division 24. Stockholm City Archives.

3 See, for example, case no. B 295/1951, pp. 393, 405–413, 563, and appendix 161 in Documents from Criminal Cases, 1951, F1:149, Stockholm City Archives.

4 Herbert Kant in *Tidskrift för homeopati* (Journal of Homeopathy) 1 (1953), p. 1.

5 Verdict from Stockholm City Court, Division 8, verdict no. 6, B 295/1951, regarding DW, among others. Verdict from Stockholm City Court, Division 24, 25 July 1952, Verdict no. 115/1952, regarding LG, among others. Verdict from the Svea Court of Appeal, 8 December 1952, B 715 a-c 1952, regarding LG, among others. All documents Stockholm City Archives.

6 See, for example, *Sundsvallsposten* 6 April (1954); *Arbetet* 2 April (1954); *Dagens Nyheter* 25 April (1954); *Stockholms-Tidningen* 3 April (1954); *Skånska Dagbladet* 7 April (1954).

Figure 1. “Miracle Pills”. In May 1954 a bonfire containing confiscated homeopathic pills and handbooks represented the end of years of legal action against fraudulent manufacturing of homeopathic remedies. Photo from Bernhardsson, *Brottets krönika I* (1954), p 380.



a dump outside of Stockholm comprising tons of confiscated pills and homeopathic handbooks represented the spectacular end of years of legal proceedings.⁷

A Matter of Great Societal Importance

This so-called homeopathic “pill scandal” raises many questions on a number of different levels. The first – and for homeopathy as such the most precarious – being how it was possible for manufacturers of homeopathic remedies to sell pure sugar pills for years without, so it seemed, homeopaths and their patients noticing. Not all the pills that were sold were unpotentiated – it turned out that the number was

⁷ “Pillerskojarnas lager brännes på soptippen”, *Svenska Dagbladet* 26 April (1954); “Pillerskojarnas lager blev jättebrasa”, *Aftonbladet* 5 May (1954).

definitely smaller than initially claimed by the prosecutor – but there were enough to have made a difference (and in fact, some homeopaths had complained about not getting the expected therapeutic effect from some remedies).

According to medical authorities, homeopathy had finally unmasked itself and had been revealed as the self-evident quackery they had always declared it to be. Medical doctors regarded homeopathy as pharmacologically useless – the “pill scandal” being a gigantic disclosure experiment with blinded tablets – and hopelessly outdated. Any therapeutic effects were to be regarded as the result of self-healing or suggestion, functioning especially well in “the often somewhat childish and immature types of persons who, with their disposition for blind faith, miracles and mysticism, constitute the quack’s most rewarding clientele and best propagandists”.⁸

However, all of that had been said many times before. What was new in the early 1950s was that the trials of fraudulent manufacturers of homeopathic remedies were not solely considered embarrassing for homeopathy as such. Additionally, the “pill scandal” was turned into a matter of great societal importance and received a great deal of attention in the media. Politicians of different persuasions, the prosecutor, medical and pharmaceutical authorities, the media, as well as some of the prosecuted swindlers collaborated in the greater task of slandering and – hopefully – wiping out homeopathy from the Swedish medical marketplace. What will be discussed here are issues regarding why the homeopathic “pill scandal” got to be such a public affair, why it was considered so important to use this convenient opportunity to try to wipe out the most commonly used alternative therapy of the time, and how that was to be achieved. Homeopathic practice was not eradicated after the pill trials, but homeopathy was no longer to be discussed as a therapeutic alternative, and the topic vanished from the discursive level.

In this article, some general developments in society will be presented that I propose both directly and indirectly changed the prerequisites for homeopathic practice in Sweden. Discussions in the Swedish media – daily newspapers, journals, radio – concerning homeopathy in the middle of the twentieth century display some recurring themes that need to be discussed and analysed. Factors of importance include the processes of secularisation and modernisation, in parallel with an increased confidence in science. Growing State responsibility for the health of Swedish citizens, rapid expansion of hospital-based health care, and efforts to achieve political consensus for development of the welfare state were also significant factors. In addition, campaigns against sectarianism and fraudulent behaviour, especially economic fraud, in all areas of society played a central role regarding the

8 Gustaf Myhrman, “Om homeopaten”, *Svenska Dagbladet* 2 August 1951. See also Carl-Gustaf Thomasson, “Kvacksalveriet i Sverige: Några synpunkter och data”, reprint from *Social-medicinsk tidskrift* 3-5(1952), especially pp. 13–14.

fate of homeopathy in Sweden. With growing focus on consumers' rights, good value was demanded for the money spent on health care.

But this article does not deal only with the history of homeopathy in Sweden; the story can be told from another viewpoint. The history of alternative medicine is also closely linked to the history of conventional health care in Sweden. Homeopathy has played a central role for political decisions on legislation concerning health care and pharmaceutical products. Ninety years ago it contributed to the abolishment of the medical profession's monopoly on the practice of medicine, and has instead paved the way for the permission of lay healing that is still in force as a complement to state-supported health care. In the public debate, homeopathy incarnated the concept of "quackery", thereby meaning unauthorised practice of medicine. Homeopathy has thus played an important role in the efforts of conventional medicine and the state to define what separates modern scientific medicine from popular healing.

Homeopathy as an International Phenomenon

The principles of homeopathic practice were first presented by Samuel Hahnemann (1755–1843) in 1796 in Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland's *Journal of Practical Medicine*. In 1810 Hahnemann published his principles in the major work *Organon der Rationellen Heilkunde*. Homeopathy soon spread all around the world, in some countries to a greater degree than elsewhere, by means of German immigrants, journals, books, domestic self-help kits, patient networks, homeopathic colleges and hospitals and medical doctors trained in homeopathy.⁹ During the second half of the nineteenth century homeopathy flourished in many countries, only to decline after 1900 and then increase in strength again in the 1970s and onwards.¹⁰ Well-described factors influencing the position of homeopathy include support from patients from higher levels of society and/or with political influence, patient networks, support within the medical profession, institutionalisation with respect to hospitals and higher education, and the way in which the manufacture of homeopathic remedies has been pursued.¹¹

9 M. Dinges 1996.

10 Martin Dinges, ed., *Weltgeschichte der Homöopathie. Länder – Schulen – Heilkundige* (München 1996); M. Dinges, "The Contribution of the Comparative Approach to the History of Homeopathy", in R. Jütte, M. Clark Nelson & M. Eklöf, eds, *Historical Aspects of Unconventional Medicine. Approaches, Concepts, Case studies*. (Sheffield 2001), pp. 51–72.

11 Martin Dinges, „Von den persönlichen Netzwerken der Gründergeneration zum weltweiten Boom einer Therapie in der Postmoderne“, in M. Dinges, ed., *Weltgeschichte der Homöopathie* (München 199), pp. 382–419.

However, there are national differences in how homeopathy has developed. In Sweden, Hahnemann's theories of *similia similibus curantur*, like cures like, were briefly mentioned as early as 1797 in a Swedish scientific journal.¹² Homeopathy was introduced in academic teaching in 1826, but gained only weak support within academic medicine. In the mid nineteenth century, prominent representatives of Swedish medical science officially disassociated academic medicine from homeopathic theory and practice. It was deemed incompatible with the development of scientific medicine and was not to be used by the medical profession. In spite of this, some physicians, as well as laymen without academic medical education, continued to practice homeopathy.¹³ This healing method entered a broader public domain in Sweden during the early decades of the twentieth century, started to lose ground in the 1930s, was scandalized in the 1950s, and today holds a more discrete position in contemporary alternative and complementary medicine.¹⁴ As in the United States and several other countries, the period between 1930 and 1970 can be described as especially "dark years" for homeopathy¹⁵, a time period coinciding with "optimum growth" of the welfare state.¹⁶ Before dealing with events that occurred in the middle of this period, some mention will be made of processes that prepared the way for them.

12 Sven Hedin in *Vetenskaps-Handlingar för Läkare och Fältskärer* nr 2 1797, p 51.

13 Anders Burius, "Homeopatien i Sverige: 150 års kamp för erkännande", *Sydsvenska medicinhistoriska sällskapets årsskrift* (1979), pp. 16–53; Jonny Strandberg, "Läkarkåren och homeopatien – En yrkeskårs bemötande av en alternativ lära genom dess tidskrifter under 1800-talet". C-Student paper in history (Uppsala 2004); Sofia Ling, *Kärringmedicin och vetenskap: Läkare och kvacksalverianklagade i Sverige omkring 1770–1870* (Uppsala 2004).

14 According to a Gallup Poll in 1942, 18% of the Swedish population had visited a homeopath, traditional healer or a naturopath, and one out of 7 believed in homeopathy. ("Var 7:de svensk tror på homeopati", *Arbetet* 12/3 1942.) When a Parliamentary Commission on Quackery investigated those practicing what was considered quackery in the 1950s, homeopaths constituted by far the most common category: 305 of the 497 who were counted. (SOU 1956:29 *Lag om rätt att utöva läkarkonsten: Förslag avgivet av kvacksalveriutredningen* (Stockholm 1956). In the mid 1980s, it was found that 22% of the population had visited some kind of practitioner of alternative medicine: 13% had undergone some kind of chiropractic treatment, and 4% had undergone homeopathic treatment. (*Fakta och röster om alternativ medicin: En delrapport från alternativmedicinkommittén*. Stockholm 1987.) In the County of Stockholm in 2000, 7% had experienced homeopathy in a lifetime perspective, but only slightly more than 1% had used it in the last year. (*Stockholmare och den komplementära medicinen. Befolkningsstudie angående inställning till och användning av komplementär medicin genomförd under år 2000 i Stockholms läns landsting*. M. Eklöf and G. Tegern. Stockholm 2001.)

15 Anne Taylor Kirschmann, "Making Friends for 'pure' homeopathy: Hahnemannians and the Twentieth-Century Preservation and Transformation of Homeopathy", in R. D. Johnston, ed., *The Politics of Healing. Histories of Alternative Medicine in Twentieth-Century North America* (New York and London 2004), pp. 29–42.

16 Charles Webster, "Medicine and the Welfare State 1930–1970", in R. Cooter and J. Pickstone, eds. *Medicine in the 20th Century* (Amsterdam 200), pp. 125–140.

Early Homeopathy in Sweden

According to Swedish medical regulations (*Medicinalordningar*) from 1688, physicians had a monopoly on internal medicine, and practice in this field of medicine by other occupational groups or by laymen was prohibited. Homeopathy practised by anyone other than medical doctors was thus considered criminal, although fines for violating this regulation were low. In the period around 1900, the medical profession organised itself and demanded more effective laws against quackery. However, in 1915 the Swedish Parliament (*Riksdag*) instead chose to pass the Authorisation to Practice the Art of Doctoring Act, which allowed lay people to treat sick persons with only a few restrictions. Several reasons were given for this decision. There was still a shortage of physicians, especially in rural areas, and in the absence of conventional medicine, traditional folk healers were considered able to do some good. Certain Members of Parliament argued that people should have freedom of choice concerning whom to go to regarding matters of health, and that the only possible scientific stance was one that also permitted freedom of thought in medical science. Last but not least, some MPs had also had positive personal experience with homeopathic treatment where conventional doctors had failed, and they were not prepared to make the practice of lay homeopathy illegal. The principle of allowing lay healing instead of giving the medical profession a monopoly is still in force in Sweden, although laws and regulations have changed.¹⁷

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, homeopathy became the most widespread and widely discussed alternative to conventional medicine. The latter had problems in proving its superiority in practice over traditional folk medicine (still widely used in the countryside), natural healing and homeopathy. Patients, practitioners and a handful of homeopathic physicians – Swedish doctors and homeopaths with degrees from homeopathic medical schools in North America – joined together in study groups and organisations, started newspapers, and tried to get homeopathy tested by conventional medicine and more widely used in the population. Homeopathic remedies were either produced privately or imported from German manufacturers. According to regulations in effect in 1913, homeopathic remedies were classified as pharmaceutical preparations (*apoteksvara*) and could be produced and were to be sold in pharmacies.

In the 1930s times got harder for homeopathy in Sweden, as a result of various factors.

In the ongoing project of building up a welfare state, public health became a matter of great importance.¹⁸ Education campaigns aimed at getting the public to

17 Motzi Eklöf, *Läkarens ethos: Studier i den svenska läkarkårens identiteter, intressen och ideal, 1890-1960* (Linköping 2000).

18 Karin Johannisson, "Politisk anatomi", in K. Johannisson, *Kroppens tunna skal: Sex essäer om kropp, historia och kultur* (Stockholm 1997), pp. 219–257; Jan Sundin, Christer

turn to medical doctors instead of “quacks”, meaning unauthorised practitioners in the field of medicine. The provincial doctor was described as probably the most prominent reformer and revolutionary in the country, whereas it was thought that the priest was delaying progress.¹⁹ The new director general of the Swedish Royal Medical Board as of 1935, Social Democrat Axel Höjer (1890–1974), declared that he would launch an attack on homeopathy. There were several attempts by the Medical Board to deter the use of homeopathic remedies, including requiring a doctor’s prescription in order to obtain them, and prohibiting the import of these remedies, but these attempts did not receive sufficient political support.²⁰

One case after another concerning alleged violations against the Authorisation Act were tried in court, with mixed results.²¹ The press took the initiative in not publishing advertisements for homeopaths and other lay healers, and the medical profession even tried to prevent announcements of meetings of homeopathic associations.²² The Association for Swedish Homeopathic Physicians (*Svenska homeopatiska läkareföreningen*), founded in 1912, slowly died out when it did not succeed in getting conventional medicine to take an interest in homeopathy.

In addition, the course of events in other countries also raised concerns. Political developments in Germany in the 1930s, including Nazi interest in natural healing and homeopathy, were discussed in the Swedish press. Some vociferous medical doctors considered measures that were taken based on race biology to be quite adequate, but were definitely hesitant to support homeopathy.²³

After World War II, there were almost no physicians left in Sweden to defend homeopathy, and there was only one known homeopath with a proper education from a homeopathic medical school in the U.S. There were no private homeopathic schools in Sweden, no support from academic medicine, no homeopathic hospital, and no results from clinical trials to present. The private market was left to laymen; some of them had a full-time practice in the city, others travelled around and saw clients in hotels and restaurants in the countryside, a few hours here and a few

Hogstedt, Jakob Lindberg and Henrik Moberg, eds, *Svenska folkets hälsa i historiskt perspektiv* (Stockholm 2005).

19 Ludvig Nordström, *Lort-Sverige* (Stockholm 1938), for example p. 23.

20 *Specialitetskungörelsen och de homeopatiska läkemedlen jämte Homeopatiens ställning i Storbritannien och Tyskland*, Svenska föreningen för vetenskaplig homeopati & Svenska homeopaternas riksförbund (1954).

21 Motzi Eklöf, „Doctor or Quack: Legal and Lexical Definitions in Twentieth-Century Sweden“, in R. Jütte, M. Eklöf and M. C. Nelson, eds, *Historical Aspects of Unconventional Medicine: Approaches, Concepts, Case studies* (Sheffield 2001), pp. 103–117.

22 See, for example Homeopatiskt möte blev bojkottat. Biljettförsäljning och reklam stoppades. Polismästaren censurerade sandwichplakat”, *Homeopatiska Husläkaren* 6 (1937), pp. 144–146.

23 For this debate, see Motzi Eklöf, ”...ein staubiges Spinnennetz am frischen Baum der medizinischen Wissenschaft’: Homöopathie in Schweden“, *Medizin, Gesellschaft und Geschichte* 22 (2003), pp. 201–232. The Swedish Institute for Race Biology was founded in 1921.

hours there.²⁴ The more serious homeopaths were concerned about the low standard of practice of some of these “homeopaths”.

In spite of efforts to obstruct homeopathic practice and the non-existent academic support for homeopathy – or maybe partly because of this – public support for lay healing was still strong. According to a Gallup Poll in 1949, 18 percent of the population believed that “quacks” – meaning non-authorised practitioners like homeopaths, chiropractors and folk healers – were better at curing than medical doctors; another 6 percent were unsure.²⁵ Homeopaths received the most confidence: 16 percent believed them to be better than academically trained doctors, at least for some diseases. Confidence in quackery was reported to be slightly stronger amongst middle and working class people as compared to the upper classes, whereas it was considered noteworthy that people in rural areas believed in homeopathy to a somewhat lesser degree than the urban population.

When German manufacturers of homeopathic remedies had to start anew after the war, more Swedish firms began to produce and sell pills and tablets for the national market.²⁶ As early as the 1940s, rumours spread that some of the firms were cheating in producing the remedies. These rumours were mainly thought of as an element of rivalry between competing firms in order to gain market shares. In any case, the one homeopath who had been educated in North America raised serious concerns about the future of homeopathy in Sweden if the manufacturers did not act responsibly.²⁷ By about 1950, Drogon AB had managed to take over 50 percent of the market share for homeopathic remedies.²⁸ In 1951, the rumours of fraudulent activities were declared true, and the debate on the therapeutic basis for homeopathic practice was revitalised.

Religious and Medical Sectarianism

After 1945, the cultural debate in Sweden moved in new directions. The so-called “ideas of 1945” encompassed campaigns against fascism, communism, the monarchy, religion, the church, the clergy and systems of order. Sectarianism became a more general theme in the cultural debate. Fear of sectarianism, as well as the project of shaping a welfare state through consensus, played a central role in Sweden at

24 SOU 1956:29.

25 ”En på fem tror mera på kvackare än läkare”, *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* 6 April (1949).

26 Motzi Eklöf, „Läkekonst i motvind: Reklam för homeopati under svenskt 1900-tal“, in R. Qvarsell and U. Torell, eds., *Reklam och hälsa: Levnadsideal, skönhet och hälsa i den svenska reklamens historia* (Stockholm 2005), pp. 74–101.

27 Hjalmar Helleday, ”Ny redaktör för Homeopatians Seger”, *Homeopatiska Husläkaren* 6–7 (1947), pp. 103–105.

28 Interview with Bo Ramme, Göteborg, 6 September 2002.

this time: in politics (with the hunting down of communists during the Cold War), in religion (turning against the State church, but also against Free Churches, particularly with respect to faith healing), concerning sexuality (with male homosexual networks and conspiracies depicted as a great threat to society)²⁹, and medicine (medical cults, represented here by homeopathy). In the case of homeopathy in Sweden, some of these areas coalesced in one way or another. Sectarianism in this respect related not only to alternative theories or ideologies, but also to private and – as feared – subversive practices that lay outside societal control.

One of the most prominent exponents of the “ideas of 1945” was Ingemar Hedenius (1908–1982), professor of philosophy at Uppsala University from 1947 to 1973.³⁰ In the spring of 1949 Hedenius published his book *Tro och vetande*, (Belief and Science),³¹ thereby initiating one of the most intensive cultural debates that has ever taken place in Sweden, and exerting great influence on the general intellectual climate in the country.

In his memoirs, Hedenius later wrote that he had always wanted to disclose humbug and that he intended to prove Christianity to be false and incompatible with the modern ideal of education and Bildung. “Only science is worthy of being wholeheartedly believed in second-hand”.³² The current standpoint of science could be accepted in good faith, while one had to prove everything else. Real Bildung meant being rational and adhering to science. A person in good mental health safeguarded his freedom of thought, and religious fanatics could not be considered healthy.³³ It was thought that holistic world and life views did not hold up to scientific scrutiny. Supporters of these holistic views were described as “victims of pathetic belief”, willing to believe in the incredible, having a belief based on feelings, associated with passions, although not necessarily religious faith.³⁴

Both then as well as today, the book is considered the starting point of real secularisation in the country.³⁵ Hedenius’ views were in accord with the generally asserted “death of ideologies”, later a postmodern critique of the “master narratives”. They fit in well in the cultural climate of the time, dominated by strong

29 Göran Söderström, ed., *Sympatiens hemlighetsfulla makt: Stockholms homosexuella 1860–1960* (Stockholm 1999). See in particular articles by Söderström in this volume.

30 Svante Nordin, *Ingemar Hedenius – en filosof och hans tid* (Stockholm 2004), pp. 136ff.

31 The Swedish word ”tro” is used as both belief and religious faith, a fact which in this context gives the double meaning a third associative importance.

32 Ingemar Hedenius, *Tro och vetande* (Stockholm 1949), p. 29.

33 Nordin, *Ingemar Hedenius* (2004), p. 175.

34 Hedenius, *Tro och vetande* (1949), pp. 44ff.

35 Ingemar Hedenius was actively supported by the publisher Herbert Tingsten, chief editor of the liberal and culturally radical daily newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, considered the most important forum for cultural debate in Sweden. See Nordin (2004), pp. 178ff.

support for science and progressive development, whereas Christianity and the church represented something antiquated.³⁶

State religion was in the process of losing its cultural influence, as were the Free Churches, which were considered to be sectarian.³⁷ It became difficult for the State to require all citizens to adhere to the Christian faith and to be members of the State Church. In 1951, the Freedom of Religion Act was passed by Parliament. Thereafter, people were allowed to leave the State Church without joining another church, as was previously required.

The medical community considered homeopathy to be based on belief, if not on faith, and any therapeutic gains were considered to be the results of suggestion.³⁸ In the 1934 trial of a female faith healer, the Supreme Court stated that her method could be used to induce a hypnotic state in the patient, which was an offence against the Authorisation Act. According to this redefinition, her activities could be considered criminal, and the woman was fined.³⁹

In early 1950, the American faith healer William Freeman was invited to Stockholm by the Pentecostal Movement, and his public activities raised concerns about religious quackery. In February 1950, representatives of this movement and of homeopathy were invited by Swedish radio to discuss faith healing together.⁴⁰ In the same year, there were radio broadcasts of lectures on “Quackery and faith healing”, where medical doctors talked about “quackery under the cloak of religion”.⁴¹

Not only was homeopathy described in religious terms as a kind of faith healing; the Pentecostal Movement was in turn described using medical terminology as a “spiritual contagion”.⁴² Quacks were often identified as being former nonconformist preachers, when they were not portrayed as real criminals trying out new ways of making a living.⁴³ In fact, more than a few lay homeopaths in Sweden were mem-

36 Johan Lundborg, *När ateismen erövrade Sverige: Ingemar Hedenius och debatten kring tro och vetande* (Nora 2002), especially p. 301.

37 See, for example, Carl-Gustaf Thomasson, ”Kvacksalveriet i Sverige: Några synpunkter och data”, *Social-Medicinsk Tidskrift* 3–5 (1952).

38 Thomasson 1952 deals here with religious sectarian healers, with homeopaths constituting one group.

39 Eklöf, ”Doctor or Quack” (2001), pp. 103–118.

40 *Radiodebatten om helbrägdagörelse och homeopati. Det homeopatiska inslaget och pressens referat* (Stockholm 1950). Homeopathy had been debated on the radio as early as in 1943, but then only with representatives from homeopathy and the medical profession; this event was optimistically called “a milestone” in the history of Swedish homeopathy: “Homeopatien i radion. En milstolpe i den svenska homeopatiens historia”, *Homeopatisk Journal* 3 (1943) 10, pp. 43ff.

41 Svenska läkartidningen/Swedish Medical Journal (1950) 47, pp. 569–575.

42 ”Pam” (pen name) ”Pethri fiskafänge”, *OBS!* 8 (1951), pp. 45–48.

43 Arvid Wachtmeister, ”Kvacksalveriet och rättvisan”, *Svenska läkartidningen/Swedish Medical Journal* (1951), 48, pp. 354–367. On 20 February 1950, the newspaper *Expressen* reported that a minister of a Free Church, also a faith healer and homeopath, was being tried in court for

bers of a Free Church. They found support for their homeopathic practice in the Bible, and felt it was their duty to treat sick fellow human beings when they had found the means to do so. Further, the non-invasive character of this healing method suited their notion of the body as a temple of God that had to be handled with care. A prosecuted staff member of one of the homeopathic firms was a well-known member of the Pentecostal Movement. This led the press to declare that the connection between the homeopathic humbug and its “religious counterpart” in the circles around the leading figure Lewi Pethrus (1884–1974) had now become clear.⁴⁴

The conventional medical profession’s longstanding use of the terms “sects” and “sectarianism” in connection with alternative healing systems, as opposed to scientific medicine, has been well described by medical historians.⁴⁵ In the United States, a shift in vocabulary occurred in the 1920s and 1930s.⁴⁶ Those falling “outside” organised medicine were now designated as “cultists” rather than as “sectarians”. This new terminology suggested that these groups sought not only to convert patients to a belief in an alternative medical view, but also to dangerously and deliberately brainwash the public. The term “cult” linked different kinds of healers together such as practitioners of Christian Science, naturopaths and homeopaths. In Sweden, this notion of “medical cults” could also be associated with more serious criminal acts like murder, as in the case of the so-called “Sala-liga” in the 1930s.⁴⁷

violations against the “quackery” law; he was later freed. Another example: “Metodistpastor var kvackare, tbc-sjuka ordinerades massage”, *AT* 28 February (1951), he was also a homeopath.

44 Ed., “Pillertrillarna”, *OBS!* 16 (1951), pp. 3–5.

45 See e. g. John Harley Warner, “The 1880s Rebellion against the AMA Code of Ethics: ‘Scientific Democracy and the Dissolution of Orthodoxy’”, in R. B. Baker, A. L. Caplan, L. E. Emanuel and S. R. Latham, eds, *The American Medical Ethics Revolution: How the AMA’s Code of Ethics Has Transformed Physicians’ Relationships to Patients, Professionals, and Society* (Baltimore and London 1999), pp. 52–69; Paul Root Wolpe, “Alternative Medicine and the AMA”, in R. B. Baker et al, eds (1999), pp. 218–239; several articles in R. Jütte, G. B. Risse and J. Woodward, eds, *Culture, Knowledge and Healing: Historical Perspectives of Homeopathic Medicine in Europe and North America* (Sheffield 1998); Naomi Rogers, *An Alternative Path: The Making and Remaking of Hahnemann Medical College and Hospital of Philadelphia* (New Jersey 1998).

46 Rogers 1998, pp. 105–6; Rennie B. Schoepflin, *Christian Science on Trial: Religious Healing in America* (Baltimore & London 2003). In the *Swedish Medical Journal*, the term “therapeutic cults” was introduced as late as 1973 as an index term, following MeSH, Medical Subject Headings. For example, articles on naprapathy are commonly indexed under “therapeutic cults”, when not referred to “quackery” as was done in 1988. See Motzi Eklöf, “Kvacksalveriet – hett debattämne under hela seklet”, *Läkartidningen* 1–2 (2004), pp. 115–122.

47 The leading figure in the “Sala-liga”, Thurneman, started off as a hypnotist, practising yoga and organising a Magic Circle comprised of his accomplices. They were later sentenced to lifetime imprisonment for several brutal murders. Thurneman was considered mentally disturbed and was committed to a mental hospital. C-O Bernhardsson, ”Professor’ Thurneman”, in *Brottets krönika. II. Märkliga kriminalfall under 100 år/Annals of Crime* (Stockholm 1955), pp. 586–599.

In the 1950s, the question of homeopathy and sectarianism was not only discussed within the medical profession; now it had become a more general theme, engaging broader spheres of society. Sympathy for lay healing was said to be especially strong among Free Churches and other sectarians.⁴⁸ At this time, the connections made between homeopathy and faith healing definitely failed to give homeopathy more credibility and legitimacy. The debate on belief as opposed to science made support for homeopathy even more impossible on a discursive level.

Media and the Pharmaceutical Industry

In parallel with discussions concerning religion and the superiority of science, representatives of medical research and the pharmaceutical industry made efforts to gain stronger societal and financial support for their endeavours and more than once, the press made common cause with representatives of the pharmaceutical industry and medical authorities in this regard.

For example, in 1942, *Vi*, the weekly paper of the consumers' co-operation, published a special issue on "The researcher, the physician, the people", pleading for free medical research as a prerequisite for progress, arguing against quackery, and urging people to go to a (real) doctor in time.⁴⁹ Greedy homeopaths, earning millions from useless remedies, were the focus of a 1947 article in the journal *Folket i Bild*. According to an interview with the director-general of the Medical Board, more medical doctors and the prohibition of lay healing were needed in order to fight the problem.⁵⁰ In late 1949, two well-informed articles on homeopathy and the manufacture of homeopathic remedies in Sweden were published by a right-wing, bi-monthly journal called *OBS*.⁵¹ The author, using the pseudonym "Montanus", was Matts Bergmark (1912–1980), a graduate engineer working in the pharmaceutical industry. In the following decades, under his real name, he became one of the most productive and well known writers of popular medical history in

48 Thomasson 1952, pp. 6, 8.

49 "Forskaren, läkaren, folket", *Vi* 14 February, 7 (1942). Some of the authors in *Vi* were later active in the debate concerning homeopathy in the 1950s, like Georg Kahlson och Gustaf Myhrman from the medical profession, Håkan Rydin, head of the State Pharmaceutical Laboratory and Arne Tallberg, journalist.

50 Jens Capare, "Homeopaterna tjänar 7,5 milj. per år", *Folket i Bild* 5 (1947), pp. 8–9, 46.

51 According to one of the accused manufacturers, DW, the articles were based on previous published articles in the journals *Socialdemokraten* and *Folket i Bild*, written by a C. J., a friend of the company director of the other fraudulent firm (see note 50). Pretrial investigation protocol Wednesday, 5 December 1951, registration no. 115/1952, B no. 119/1952. Stockholm City Court, Division 24, Judgements in Criminal Cases, 1952, A1:2, pp. 1694–1695.

Figure 2. Cartoonist Poul Strøyer illustrated an article entitled “160 (Swedish) crowns for one kilo of sugar – 60,000 crowns for a headache pill: Homeopaths and the Swedish people” in the journal *OBS!* (1949), p. 10.



Sweden.⁵² The main argument in the articles in *OBS!* was that homeopathic remedies were sugar pills that were cheap to produce and that were earning a fortune for their producers, but that were totally worthless from a medical point of view. “Montanus” contended that the treatment of ill health always included irrational elements, but this did not legitimise the production and selling of useless homeopathic remedies.

The articles in *OBS!* were praised by a Social Democratic MP, Rickard Lindström (1894–1950).⁵³ Some weeks later he submitted a bill to the Swedish Parliament for a total prohibition of lay practice. The proposal became the focus of intense discussion, but was finally rejected in both chambers.⁵⁴ In 1950, Lindström

52 Montanus (pseudonym for Matts Bergmark), “160 kronor för ett kilo socker – 60.000 kronor för en huvudvärkstablett: Homeopaterna och svenska folket” *OBS!* 23 (1949), pp. 6–11; Montanus, “Frigjord atomenergi à 2:- per glas!”, *OBS!* 24/25 (1949), pp. 73–78. Bergmark later wrote articles in *OBS!* under his real name. He also criticised Social Democrats for almost abolishing compulsory vaccination some years earlier and for supporting the idea of a chiropractic school. In 1976 he became an honorary doctor in medicine.

53 Letter from Rickard Lindström to the journal *OBS!* *OBS!* 24/25 (1949), p. 79.

54 Also cited in the medical press: “Motion i första kammaren angående behörighet att utöva läkekonsten”, *Svenska läkartidningen* (1950), pp. 264–272.

also attacked the faith healing movement in Parliament.⁵⁵ Political support for the total prohibition of lay healing was lacking, but a committee – “*Kvacksalveritutredningen*” – was set up to investigate other possibilities.⁵⁶

In 1950, a reporter for the daily newspaper *Expressen* wrote a lengthy article on homeopathy together with Håkan Rydin, professor at the State Pharmaceutical Laboratory (Statens farmaceutiska laboratorium).⁵⁷ When the fraudulent manufacturing of homeopathic remedies had become a case for the court, the editors of the journal *OBS!* wrote to the State Pharmaceutical Laboratory and demanded that proper measures be taken against homeopathy.⁵⁸ A recurrent argument was that people were cheated out of their money when buying homeopathic remedies.

Medical and Economic Fraud

In the absence of political success regarding demands for restricted lay healing and homeopathic practice, legal proceedings against lay healers created new pathways. New legal tactics and new arguments in court focusing on the economic aspects of “quackery” resulted in convictions for violating the law.

In early 1951, the so-called Sulphur Doctor (Svavel-doktorn), as he was called in the press, was charged with – amongst other things – having prescribed and sold remedies consisting of washed flowers of sulphur. The preparations, which also contained other chemicals, were prescribed to hundreds of people for a variety of different ailments. Testimony by an expert from the Department of Pharmaceuticals at the Medical Board made it clear that a therapeutic effect from the oral intake of sulphur could not be expected. Although the products were considered useless (and unhealthy) from a chemical and medical point of view, quite a number of patients reported having experienced positive effects from the sulphur remedy.⁵⁹

Previously, lay healers had usually been charged with violations against the Authorisation Act, termed quackery that is dangerous to health (hälsofarligt kvack-

55 “Kvacksalveri är en trossak”, *Göteborgs-Tidningen* 28 April 1950.

56 SOU 1956:29.

57 Bernt Bernholm and Håkan Rydin, ”Svenskarna kastar bort miljoner per år på overksammas läkemedel”, *Expressen* 27 March 1950. See also note 45.

58 Ed., *OBS!* 1951.

59 Documents from criminal cases no. 390, 1951. F1:122 a and b. Verdict on 17 May 1952. Svea Court of Appeal, Division III: B 60. Svea Court of Appeal Court Archives. National Archives, Arninge (Stockholm). See, for example, pretrial investigation protocol, 19 June 1951, or p. 4397 in a letter from PJ to cabinet minister Gustaf Möller. In the latter it is reported that the police had confiscated J.’s patient register comprising 592 names. The police wrote to all of them to ask if the remedy had made them worse. 341 persons responded, 70% of whom reported that they had felt good, better or were recovered.

salveri). What was new in this trial was that this paragraph was not applied. Instead, the Sulphur Doctor was accused of fraud (bedrägeri). According to the law, the crime was considered to be especially heinous if the prosecuted person had misused public confidence.⁶⁰ The municipal court sentenced the Sulphur Doctor to three years' imprisonment with hard labour for having committed serious fraud, on the grounds that he had falsely claimed that his remedies were effective, thus getting people to pay for his preparations.⁶¹

The verdict in this case was considered a test case with respect to upcoming trials; for the first time a quack was convicted and sentenced for fraud, for knowingly having misled customers. The new strategy of charging lay healers with fraud instead of health quackery was successful, and was later identified as the winning concept in the coming homeopathic pill trials.⁶² The shift in focus from the practitioners, and alleged assaults against the Authorisation Act, to the remedies per se, and from what was considered medical fraud to economic fraud, met with success.⁶³ An ambitious prosecutor played a central role in this process.

The Prosecutor and the Scandals

In the 1950s, attention was drawn to several so-called “affairs” and “scandals” in which prominent representatives of the state bureaucracy, monarchy, church and legal sphere were accused of, and sometimes convicted for, having committed

60 Chapter 21, §1 in the criminal code at the time on “bedrägeri och dylik oredlighet”: “The person who uses deception to induce someone to commit acts or omissions that involve gain for the offender and injury to the person who is deceived or someone in that person’s place, is to be convicted of fraud and sentenced to penal servitude for a maximum of two years or to prison.” §3: “As stated previously in this chapter, if the crime is considered serious in view of the circumstances concerning the crime the person shall be convicted of serious fraud and sentenced to penal servitude for a maximum of six years. In judging whether the crime is serious, what should particularly be taken into account is if the offender misuses public confidence or makes use of false documents or deceptive bookkeeping, or if the crime is otherwise of an especially dangerous type, is of significant value, or involves extremely serious injury.”

61 Verdict announced on 7 May 1951 against PJ. Case no. B 309/1950. Stockholm City Court, Division 8. Verdicts in civil criminal cases in 1951, A1:8 DB no. 195. Stockholm City Archives. After a psychiatric examination the sentence was transformed into “imprisonment in a maximum security facility”.

62 “Mirakelpiller”, in C-O Bernhardsson, *Brottets krönika. I. Ur kriminalpolisens annaler* (Stockholm 1954), pp. 380–388.

63 Other criminal connections were also disclosed at the time of the trial against the Sulphur Doctor. The press wrote about a “huge homosexual tangle”, in which a homeopath and speech therapist was sentenced to one year’s imprisonment for criminal homosexuality with underage boys. “Homosexuell jättehärva, nära 500 barn inblandade”, *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* 10 April (1951); “Homeopat fick ett år för h-sex”, *Arbetaren* 11 June (1951).

Figure 3. “I don’t like people paying big money for sweets, prosecutor Lennart Eliasson declared, and tasted some of the confiscated sugar pills”. Photo from Bernhardsson, *Brottets krönika I* (1954), p 385. Eliasson was a member of the editorial board for this volume.



offences not only against the law but also against societal decency in general.⁶⁴ In the cultural debate, calls were made for a general “housecleaning” in the higher spheres of society – not the least because these “scandals” were considered to influence those at lower levels of society to behave in deviant, disloyal and anti-social ways.⁶⁵

At this time, prosecutor Lennart Eliasson became a well-known symbol of strong action against fraudulent and scandalous behaviour. His career began with the trial of the Sulphur Doctor, and continued with the homeopathic pill trials. All these trials were turned into mammoth events; one of the two pill trials was already being described as “one of the greatest criminal cases the Swedish justice system has ever

⁶⁴ Names like Kejne, Haijby, Enbom, Unman, Selling, Helander and Lundquist all became associated with the concept of “affair”.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Marie Cronqvist, “Fula fisken och stenansiktet: Spiontypologi och kallakrigsberättelse i 1950-talets folkhemsgemenskap”, in K. Salomon, L. Larsson and H. Arvidsson, eds., *Hotad idyll: Berättelser om svenskt folkhem och kallt krig* (Lund 2004), pp. 57–80, and in the same volume also Sara Kärrholm, ”Pusseldeckaren och folkhemmets bortträngda mörker”, pp. 81–109.

had”.⁶⁶ Eliasson was also a committed man outside the courtroom. In March 1952, on the very same day the municipal court in Stockholm announced its verdict in one of the two homeopathic trials, he wrote to the Swedish Medical Board and proposed measures to be taken against homeopathy.⁶⁷ After these trials, he proceeded with a case against a prominent representative of the Swedish justice system who was accused of having cheated people of their money. Several years afterwards, it became clear that Eliasson had lost 20 out of 25 charges in this case in the Supreme Court, but this was long after his morals, energy and skill had been paid homage to in the media.⁶⁸

Lennart Eliasson collaborated with police reporters and consciously made use of the media in order to spread his views of the events in question. Journalists paid tribute to the press as the institution that had made the greatest effort to enlighten people about matters concerning quackery.⁶⁹ In 1955, readers of the newspaper *Aftonbladet* elected Eliasson “Swede of the Year”, beating UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld by 10,000 votes.⁷⁰ The following year he was elected to Parliament as a member of the Liberal Party. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s he continued to be portrayed as the “Standard Bearer of Justice” (“Rättvisans Ryt-tare”).⁷¹ His ambitions were well in tune with the Zeitgeist of the 1950s.

Public Health and Modernisation of Health Care

In the early 1950s, lay homeopaths comprised three out of five “quacks” in Sweden.⁷² The so-called homeopathic “pill scandal” and the mass media attention surrounding it, can be seen as an important symbolic turning point in the carefully prepared process of transformation of health care that had started in the mid 1930s and continued until the 1970s. This was a publicly declared break with an older medical marketplace that was characterised by a relative shortage of physicians, therapeutic uncertainty, and an enforced and reluctant acceptance of rural folk medicine and lay healing. The time was now ripe for a rapidly expanding, modernised hospital-based health care system founded on solid scientific grounds under strong societal influence. In Sweden, medical expenditures nearly doubled in the

66 “Mirakelpiller”, in Bernhardsson 1954, p. 385.

67 Eliasson to the Swedish Medical Board 15 March 1952.

68 Sven Standar, “Lundquistaffären”, *Morgonbladet* 11 July (1957).

69 “Vi diskuterar: Bot mot kvackare”, *Expressen* 23 April (1951).

70 Börje Heed, “Årets svensk en ’rättvis karl’: Hela svenska folket tackar Lennart Eliasson”, *Aftonbladet* 19 January (1955).

71 Claes Sturm, “Lennart Eliasson, rättvisans ryttare”, *Dagens Nyheter* 22 August (1971); Bo Engzell, “Rättvisans ryttare stiger ur sadeln”, *Dagens Nyheter* 24 August 1980.

72 SOU 1956:29, p. 86.

ten-year period between 1950 and 1960.⁷³ Disclosure of the fraudulent nature not only of a few manufacturers of homeopathic pills and tablets, but also of homeopathy as such, was meant to get the deceived, yet now hopefully and finally enlightened people to support the authorities in the development of modern health care.

It had long been the case that labels of “sectarianism” applied to different types of alternative medicine by conventional medicine in Sweden had been considered mainly as a rhetorical expression of an intra-medical rivalry, and of little interest to practical health care. At the beginning of the twentieth century, politicians could justify allowing lay healing based on the principle of freedom of choice in matters of both therapy and scientific theories. Several decades later this was no longer possible. Medical science had advanced, new drugs had radically changed medical practice, and consensus was required regarding the project of economic growth and modern health care. Following World War II, medical science gained broader societal legitimacy, both in science and in therapeutic practice, for its claims of superiority – although not based only on its own efforts but also in conjunction with other processes in society. Medicine was supposed to leave behind the notion of a “healing art” in favour of “medical science”. Politicians were still not inclined to prohibit lay healing, but it was medical science that was to receive full support.

But societal support for science was and is not the same thing as the medical profession gaining legitimacy for its professional efforts. The Social Democratic director-general of the Swedish Medical Board, Axel Höjer, proposed reforms of Swedish health care that the Swedish Medical Association considered threatening to the autonomy and economy of the medical profession. The Association had much less success in negotiating with the State than was the case for the medical faculties.⁷⁴ In 1951 the Association finally adopted a written code of ethics in order to demonstrate the high moral standing of the profession – particularly in comparison with that of other healers – and its ability to make decisions concerning issues of its own, as an answer to threats to the profession emanating from both within and outside of the profession.⁷⁵ However, in the immediate post-war years the time was not yet ripe for all the radical reforms that were proposed, and which were leading to “socialised health care” according to the Medical Association, Nevertheless, this was not due solely to the resistance of the Association. It took some years, even decades, before the reforms were implemented, one after the other. In this process of

73 Webster, “Medicine and the Welfare State” (2000), p. 127.

74 Bo Bjurulf and Urban Swahn, „Health Policy Proposals and What Happened to Them: Sampling the twentieth-century record“, in: A. J. Heidenheimer and Nils Elvander, eds, *The Shaping of the Swedish Health System* (London 1980).

75 Eklöf, *Läkarens ethos* (2000); Motzi Eklöf, ”Kollektiva etiska regler inget för svenska doktorer: Först 1951 antog den svenska läkarkåren motvilligt en codex ethicus”, *Läkartidningen* 37 (2001), pp. 3930–3932.

reforming Swedish health care, support from the medical profession was needed. The measures taken against lay healers and homeopathic remedies in the years that followed can be seen as part of this policy.

In 1956, general sickness insurance made it necessary for patients to turn to conventional physicians in order to get reimbursement. The Authorisation Act from 1916 was divided into two sections in 1960: one concerning authorised practice by physicians, and the other concerning non-authorised activities with the addition of more extensive restrictions regarding lay healing.⁷⁶ Homeopathic remedies were excluded from Swedish pharmaceutical legislation in 1964, and were definitely no longer to be sold in the pharmacies that were nationalised ten years later.⁷⁷ With the new laws in the 1960s, the health care arena was split into two more well-defined sectors with separate regulations: not only authorised contra non-authorised practitioners, but also real “pharmaceuticals” contra homeopathic remedies, which were now “free trade goods” – in accordance with the view that they were pure sugar candies. The last of the reforms proposed earlier was implemented in 1970, when the so-called Seven Crown Reform radically lowered and equalised the costs for visits to conventional health care. Lower fees and a shortage of physicians were no longer to be reasons to turn to popular healers. The difference between what was considered “proper” medicine and not medicine at all was made clear through different legislative measures – the former getting societal support, the latter being tolerated but excluded from the health care system.⁷⁸

76 Some restrictions were desired by the homeopathic organisations, e.g. prohibition of itinerant practice and practice by foreigners. These paragraphs have in later years been deleted from the law.

77 This was a political strategy to “save” homeopathic practice in Sweden, also desired by the homeopathic organisations as the next-best solution, with status quo as the best alternative. The Medical Board still wanted homeopathic remedies to be included in the regulations for pharmaceutical specialties and to be judged by the same standards as for other pharmaceutical products. This would in reality have resulted in the homeopathic remedies being prohibited – which the Medical Board admitted was the whole point. Homeopaths regarded the new law as “a victory”. See S. H. Ramme, *Kommer de homeopatiska läkemedlen att förbjudas? Om läkemedelsutredningens framlagda förslag lagfästes kommer det att till sina konsekvenser medföra förbud för alla homeopatiska mediciner. Till Eder information överlämnas härmed en del uppgifter i detta viktiga ärende* (Göteborg 1961); ”Yttrande i anledning av 1946 års läkemedelsutrednings betänkande”, *Tidskrift för homeopati* 3 (1961), pp. 49–66; ”Läkemedelspropositionen inför riksdagens avgörande”, *Tidskrift för homeopati* 4 (1962), pp. 73–79; ”Ny homeopatisk lagstiftning. De homeopatiska organisationernas insatser”, *Tidskrift för homeopati* 1 (1963), pp. 1–3.

78 In 1993 a new law regarding pharmaceuticals stated that homeopathic “products” should be registered by the Medical Products Agency in order to be permitted to be sold on the Swedish market. No indication for use was to be allowed, nor was any judgement regarding efficiency.

Homeopathy and the 1950s – Some Concluding Remarks

Homeopathy, as practised both within and outside conventional medicine, had been under attack from the organised medical profession and the Medical Board since the nineteenth century. The relatively new and evolving scientific arguments and changing legal tactics in the 1950s were effective. Increasing societal support for medical science and reformed health care, in combination with a desire to get rid of reminders of old times were important factors regarding the almost complete extinction of homeopathy from the discursive level. In the rapid process of modernisation of Swedish society, official support for “old” medicine could not be retained.

The social and cultural associations connected to homeopathy at this time – not only belief and religious faith, but also deviant, fraudulent and criminal activities – facilitated the pronouncement of the end of this kind of healing. Homeopathy was designated an outdated dogmatic healing system based on belief and suggestion. It was considered unnecessary in modern society, where the whole population had sufficient access to rational medicine that was based on the results of scientific research. Claiming a “belief” in homeopathy in order to prove one’s innocence in the pill trials – as was done by a prominent lay homeopath – was an argument with absolutely no persuasive power at a time when scientific proof in terms of chemical analysis or clinical trials had become all that mattered.

In Sweden, there were no homeopathic physicians left to discuss homeopathy on an academic level, and no prerequisites for homeopathic practice to adhere to some extent to scientific standards, as was the case in other countries such as the US.⁷⁹ Nor was conventional medicine open to the assimilation or integration of any part of homeopathy into mainstream medicine. Articles critical of homeopathy were given much space in the press, whereas voices favourable to this healing system were published – if at all – only as short letters to the editor. For decades after the homeopathic trials, the *Swedish Medical Journal* did not even mention homeopathy.⁸⁰ The “pill scandal” was a symbolic event with great impact on the public debate. Homeopathy was eradicated from the discursive level in society.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that homeopathy was heavily discredited in public arena, it did not vanish from the scene. People relied on their own experiences of homeopathic treatment. The press reported on persons bursting into tears in pharmacies when they realised they could no longer get the remedies from the fraudu-

79 John S. Haller, *The History of American Homeopathy: The academic years, 1820–1935* (New York 2005); Naomi Rogers, “Ärzte, Patienten und Homöopathie in den USA”, in: Dinges, *Weltgeschichte der Homöopathie*, ed. (1996); Rogers, *An Alternative Path* (1998). In the US, criticism of the low standards at medical schools, both conventional and nonconventional, contributed as early as around 1900 to the closing of many schools – thus before the Flexner report in 1910 with its massive criticism – while with time, many homeopathic schools relinquished their homeopathic identity and were converted into conventional medical schools.

80 Eklöf, “Kvacksalveriet” 2004.

lent firms.⁸¹ In the northern region of Jämtland, pharmacies reported no decrease in the sales of homeopathic products.⁸² Sales figures for these remedies decreased only marginally for a year or so; the best economic results were attained in the 1980s.⁸³ As in many other Western countries at that later time, “alternative medicine” had become an issue in the public debate. Homeopathy has continued to exist, but in Sweden it has not recovered the more widespread and publicly defended position it held during the initial decades of the twentieth century. The number of medical doctors daring to articulate a positive interest in homeopathy can easily be counted. The Swedish Medical Board has not changed its judgement of homeopathy as being of no therapeutic use beyond a placebo effect.⁸⁴ As a consequence of political efforts to achieve a harmonisation of laws and regulations within the European Union, starting in May 2006 homeopathic products are – once again – to be classified as pharmaceutical products (although they are not to be sold at pharmacies). Continental medicine, with physicians openly practising homeopathy, has been criticised as being more “esoteric” as compared to supposedly more scientific Swedish medicine.⁸⁵ That homeopathy is more widely used by physicians within conventional health care in many other countries has never been an impressive argument in the Swedish debate.

The “pill scandal” of the 1950s is unknown to contemporary international manufacturers of homeopathic remedies, who are also represented in Sweden. Connecting the concepts of “fraud” or “quackery” with homeopathy is an unthinkable association for them.⁸⁶ The fraudulent activities of the 1950s may be forgotten, unknown or hushed up by homeopaths in Sweden today, but the effects of those associations with homeopathy at the time – with or without factual basis – remain. This emphasises the need for further studies in a wider socio-cultural context in

81 “Kvinna brast i gråt då hon nekades Drogon”, *Aftenposten* 5 January 1952.

82 “Pillerförsäljningen oförändrad i Jämtland”, *Dagens Nyheter* 5 January 1952. In the 1980s Jämtland was still the stronghold for homeopathy in Sweden. See *Fakta och röster om alternativ medicin* 1987, p. 47

83 This according to Bo Ramme, the son of the manager of another manufacturer of homeopathic remedies at the time, Drogcentralen in Göteborg, interviewed in Göteborg on 6 September 2002.

84 The National Swedish Board of Health and Welfare delivered an opinion to Uppsala University on 16 October 1986 regarding the Zetterling donation from 1874, intended for academic lectures on homeopathy. “Homeopathic remedies are nowadays not thought to be part of the therapeutic arsenal since they are no longer considered to meet requirements for active medical treatment.” The National Swedish Board of Health and Welfare found that a parallel to placebo treatment was of relevance. Regarding the Zetterling donation, see Motzi Eklöf, “Om vetenskapens gränser och kolliderande kunskapsintressen: Exemplet homeopati”, in I. Nordin, ed. *Rapporter från hälsans provinser. En jubileumsantologi* (Linköping 2004), pp. 221–235.

85 Bo Lennholm, “Intrikat fråga i dagsdebatten: Hur kan homeopatiska ge effekt i kliniska studier?” Interview with Bertil Fredholm, *Läkartidningen* (1997), pp. 156–157.

86 Eklöf, “Läkekonst i motvind” (2005).

order to enhance our understanding of what factors facilitate or counteract the existence or relative non-existence of alternative medical cultures in different countries.

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