

SWEDEN

The living conditions in Swedish urban areas at the turn of the century were similar to those in many other European cities; no running water, lice, overcrowding, outside lavatories, infant mortality of ten percent, etc. Every fourth worker was a lodger.

In Sweden, as in most other countries, the tenants associations descended from, or worked closely with, trade unions and temperance movements.

A meeting with tenants was held in 1899, in Göteborg on the Swedish west coast. The meeting was called upon due to the threat of drastic rent increases. During the meeting discussion starts whether it is possible for the tenants to get together and construct their own housing. These discussions led eventually to the formation of local groupings of tenants, and in 1907 several major tenants' associations were established in larger Swedish cities and towns.

In early 1909 the tenants association in Stockholm decides to form a co-operative housing association with the purpose of constructing a tenement house on a leasehold site just outside the city. In December the same year the first tenants move in.

Nynäshamn: 90 years of tenant protection

The oldest tenants' association still in operation is in the coastal town of Nynäshamn, some 50 km south of Stockholm. In 1911 the Stockholm city council decides to establish a new telegraph factory in Nynäshamn. Workers were talked into moving to Nynäshamn and new rental housing was erected by the telegraph company. Housing that very soon turned out to be of very poor quality. The winter winds blew right through the wooden walls and water froze even indoors. At the same time, the telegraph company chose to send out information about rent increases on up to 50 %. In 1915 the tenants formed a tenant association, and went on strike. The rent increases were stopped but the houses remained terribly cold and damp, particularly in wintertime.

First rent laws

In 1917 the Swedish government introduced the first law on rent control in municipalities with more than 5000 inhabitants. But, rents could be increased by maximum 10 % per year, when there was reference to real costs. Some say that this law reduced the construction of rental housing and worsened the housing crisis in the 1920's. But, on the other hand, when living costs rose by 160 % between 1915 and 1920, rents only rose by 30 %.



Demonstration in Göteborg in the 1940's " We want healthy housing – away with shacks and hovels"

One nation – One tenants union

In 1923, representatives from 13 regional tenant associations met in Göteborg to form the Hyresgästföreningarnas Riksförbund, National Federation of Tenants' Associations. The same year the National Association of Tenants' Savings and Building Society, now HSB, was established.

The main activity of the present Swedish Union of Tenants is to annually negotiate the rent for all tenants in Sweden, in public housing as well as for tenants in the private stock. Today the Swedish Union of Tenants has some 530 000 affiliated members and represent about 40 % of all tenants in the country.

The Swedish tenants has been dedicated their own museum; Hyresgästernas Hus (Tenants' House) in Hällefors. Open in summer, telephone: 0046 591-120 01.



Large families in 1-2 room unhealthy flats. Stockholm in the 1930's.