

# FEMALE UNEMPLOYMENT IN VÄSTERBOTTEN COUNTY

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In large parts of Västerbotten County, the number of available jobs decreased in the 1950's due to changes within the forest enterprise and the shutdown of farms. The consequences were grave, especially for women, as their employment opportunities were already limited within the county. The majority of people seeking employment or further occupation during the 1960's and 1970's were women.

Female unemployment varied for women in Västerbotten. Variations were greater within the county than between Västerbotten and the rest of Sweden. Many moved from the mountains and the inland regions to the coastal region during this period. More women moved to Umeå than to other coastal cities. Situated in Umeå were large public institutions, administrative authorities and educational institutions, giving Umeå the highest number of employed women.

During the 1960's and 1970's, the number of women in the Swedish workforce greatly increased: 60% were employed or seeking employment, and 40% of these worked part time. The lack of childcare made it difficult for many women to work even if they wanted to. The struggle for more and better daycare centers therefore became an important issue for the women's movement. Umeå's first daycare center opened in Berghem in 1966.

A large national manifestation against female unemployment was held in 1978 by different women's organizations in Sweden. In Umeå, *Group 8* arranged a campaign about female unemployment lasting an entire week. It featured an exhibition, meetings and a demonstration. The national struggle against female unemployment meant that activists all over Sweden came in contact with unemployed women and could call to account municipalities and companies over the high, and oftentimes hidden, female unemployment.

# THE STRIKE OF THE CLEANING LADIES IN UMEÅ

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During the 70's, many strikes and demonstrations were held in Sweden. One of the most famous actions taken by the women's movement is the strike of the cleaning ladies. It started in November of 1974 at Domnarvet's ironworks in Borlänge, where the cleaning ladies went on strike demanding five Swedish Crowns more an hour. They were supported by the ironworkers, who started a fundraiser for their cause. The strike spread to Svappaara, Kiruna, Malmfälten, Arlanda and Skövde. Support was organized and funds were raised. Solidarity for the cleaning ladies was wide-spread, and different groups within the women's movement organized an extensive work effort through a supporting committee. The strikes were given much attention in the media, both regionally and nationally.

The cleaning ladies were unhappy with their employer ASAB and having to do heavy work in poor hours at low pay. The company was a major employer in Umeå, with their staff members working in the hotels, the Volvo factory, shops and restaurants. When the cleaning ladies in Skövde were fired, Umeå's cleaning ladies called a wild strike as an act of solidarity. They demanded that Skövde's cleaning ladies get their jobs back and that they be given five Swedish Crowns more an hour, both as a unit wage and as an hourly wage. The strike in Umeå lasted five weeks before they came back to work.

The new deal gave them three Swedish Crowns more an hour and five more Crowns for the heaviest labors. No cleaning lady was fired in Umeå, however the Swedish Labour Court fined them. The fines were paid by supportive committees from across the country, enabling those who had gone on strike to receive wages for the time the strike had lasted. The surplus money was donated to a fund started by the miners in Malmfälten to be used in a similar event.

Cleaning ladies all over the country were given both higher wages and better working conditions after the strike. Cleaning for a living had long been looked down on, and many attested to an improved self-esteem and status as a result of the strike. The struggle of the cleaning ladies inspired other women from low-paying professions to go on strike, demanding better working conditions and the right to employment.

# A SEAMSTRESSES' STRIKE WITH NATION-WIDE SUPPORT

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In the 1970's, seamstresses from around the country went on strike. In the north of Sweden, this happened for instance in Gällivare, where the seamstresses from the Branson factory were on strike for almost three months in 1975, demanding higher salary. In Sollefteå, seamstresses from the Eiser factory occupied their work place from nearly nine months in 1981, resulting in some of the seamstresses forming a cooperative. Among the most famous actions taken by the women's movement is the fight for the jobs at Algots Nord in Skellefteå, 1976.

In the fall of 1972, the government signed a contract with Algots, a manufacturer of ready-made clothes, to create 1,000 new jobs in Västerbotten County. The aim was to solve the problem of high unemployment. The government contributed with 70 million Swedish Crowns in localization grant\*, in that day the biggest ever paid. Algots started a subsidiary company, Algots Nord AB, and the contract stated that the business would be working at full capacity in 1978.

In signing the deal, the government granted Algots 55 million Swedish Crowns, tax free, for educational purposes. However, the seamstresses were put to work without the promised training. Algots Nord was also given another 15 million Swedish Crowns by the government, the municipalities of Västerbotten and the National Labor Market Board towards building factories. Old sewing machines ready for the bin were sold from the factory in Borås to Skellefteå. In this way, Algots could transfer the governmental grants meant to be used by the subsidiary Algots Nord, to the factories in Borås instead. In 1976, the company determined that the factory in Skellefteå was unprofitable and the employees were given their notices.

The seamstresses of Algots Nord then started working hard to save their jobs. They sought help from the government and demanded that the union would take action. They threatened to occupy the factory and looked into the possibility of changing their production to, for example, workwear. Committees supporting the workers of Algots were set up across the country. The strike of the seamstresses was supported by the established unions, unlike that of the cleaning ladies. The entire section 11 of Kommunal (the Swedish Municipal Workers' Union) was part of such a committee. Aid was organized in different forms across Sweden.

The end result was that the government granted the seamstresses one million Swedish Crowns to develop an alternative line of production. Their ideas were never produced, however. The factory was closed and production was moved abroad. The union board then initiated a cooperative, Norrkläder, which was founded in 1979.

The remarkable thing about this strike is that the seamstresses of Algots had no previous experience of how a union operates. They did what they felt was necessary at the time. It was not only the jobs themselves that were important to the seamstresses, but the purpose and content of their work. Work was supposed to be meaningful and human dignity retained in all parts of the working process.

The seamstresses came up with ideas enabling a future production, making sure that what they produced would benefit society and only be made to fit an actual need. They also solidarized with seamstresses working for Algots in factories in Finland and Portugal.

*\*Localization grant: A grant given by the Swedish government to companies that create jobs in areas where the labor market is weak*

# A GARAGE IN HAGA – THE START OF UMEÅ'S WOMEN'S AID

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In the fall of 1979, a team was formed from the organization *Kvinnor och arbete i Västerbotten (Women and work in Västerbotten County)*, with the aim of starting a women's shelter in Umeå. The shelter would house women who needed to escape domestic abuse and also be a meeting place for women who wanted to become involved in the women's movement. The municipality was solicited in the matter, without result. The team split in two, where one group worked to form the public opinion in favor of a women's shelter. The other group, consisting of 30 or so women, started a women's aid awaiting the shelter. This group also read the few books to be found on the subject and shared their experiences with each other. Solidarity between women was the main focus, and the by-laws of *Kvinnor och arbete i Västerbotten* were held in high regard by them in their continued work.

A helpline was established in May of 1980 in one of the women's aid worker's remodeled garages. Those who could also temporarily opened their own homes to women in need. In 1982, the Umeå municipality decided to provide the first apartment meant as a sheltered accommodation along with a financial grant of 2,000 Swedish Crowns. That year, *Kvinnor och arbete i Västerbotten* was dismantled, and the women's aid became an organization of their own. The work with the women's aid was organized as a flat organization, without a board, and based their by-laws on those of sports organizations. They held monthly general meetings where decisions concerning everyone were taken, and jobs were assigned. The organization was open only to those who were active in the women's aid. Even today the Women's Aid in Umeå operates without a board of directors.

The *Women's Shelter Organization* and the *Women's Aid in Umeå*, opened their first collective house in Umeå in 1985. Not until 2003 they were given a larger house, which is still used by them as a base of operations.

# THE WOMEN'S SHELTER OCCUPATION IN UMEÅ, 1983

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In the 1970's and 80's women's shelters were established across the Western world. In Sweden, they were built in Stockholm and Gothenburg. *Kvinnohusföreningen* (*The Organization for Women's Shelters*) in Umeå worked to build a women's shelter in Umeå from the end of the 70's. In 1983, *Group 8* was evicted from the student's union house they were renting, and one night in April that same year, some 20 women from different women's organizations decided to occupy a house in central Umeå that was to be demolished.

During that time, much of central Umeå was being demolished. Umeå municipality had bought several properties in order to tear them down and replace them with car parks, among other things. The house known as "The Yellow Villa" had not yet been marked for demolition and was deemed appropriate for their action. Similar acts of protest had been carried out before in Umeå, like the struggle against raised rents in 1971/1972, and the Forest Riots in Ålidhem in 1977.

A journalist from the local newspaper was present when they reached the Villa, and the news spread quickly across Umeå. The initial plan was to occupy the Villa only for the weekend to create a debate and call attention to violence against women in society, but the articles in the local paper called more young women to action resulting in a prolonging of the occupation.

Many of these women had no previous experiences of politics or being part of demonstrations. Inside the Villa, important decisions were made in general meetings, where they also took turn talking about their experiences and voicing concerns. The action was entirely separatist feminist.

The occupation went through three phases. First, they debated if the occupation should continue or not, while preparing the house for the continued stay of the activists. During the second phase, the women worked on forming the popular opinion, to convince politicians to allow them to keep the Villa and use it as a women's shelter. This was done through various activities, like having an Open House and café. On Saturdays they organized different demonstrations in central Umeå. Flyers were handed out, street theaters were put on, flowers made from crape paper were handed out, petitions were signed and money was raised. The occupation gained popular support and many donated money to the cause. On June the 23, the municipal council decided that the Villa was to be demolished, which initiated phase three: the eviction of the squatters by the police, which took place on July the 20, 1983.

The main issue – men's violence against women and building women's shelters – was highlighted in a completely new way in public debate. This occupation and the work of the Women's Aid Organization led to men's violence against women being included on the political agenda and contributed to changing the outlook on society.

# MAGDALENA MATHSDOTTER'S SKI TRIP FROM ÖRNSKÖLDSVIK TO STOCKHOLM

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On the 4 of April 1864, Magdalena Mathsdotter arrived in Stockholm on skis, from somewhere between Åsele and Örnsköldsvik, where she and her family were herding their reindeer. She had two pressing political matters on her agenda. The first one was the cultivation line, the other was schooling for Saami children. When she reached Gävle, the snow had melted and she finished her journey via horse-drawn carriage. Having reached Stockholm, the news of her travels spread quickly throughout the city. Aftonbladet wrote about her achievement and Fredrika Bremer and her friends invited Mathsdotter for a visit the following day. She was met by a large party and together with Maria Månsdotter she told the group about their experiences as Saami reindeer keepers and taught them some words in Saami.

In the 1800's, it was becoming increasingly hard for the Saami people to live according to the borders set up by the Swedish government. The government implemented several amendments to the law, which gradually made it harder for Saami reindeer keepers to earn a living from their trade. Fishing and reindeer pastures were pushed aside in order to make room for forestry and new settlements. Families in Västerbotten County could be fined large sums of money if their reindeer had crossed the settler's borders, which were in no way indicated in the landscape, and were therefore hard to recognize. A particularly hot topic was the issue of hay from the marshes. The grass growing in the marshes was a staple food for the reindeer, but when the settlers began to harvest the grass for their livestock, a conflict arose regarding the supply.

In the early 1800's, the Swedish government had yet to make a decision regarding schooling for the Saami children. It was discussed what language should be used in the Saami schools and the decision dragged on. In 1835, Svenska Missionssällskapet was founded; an organization that did missionary work among the Saami. It came to be in charge of Saami education. Saami children usually attended school for two years, but few were able to attend and most Saami children were never taught to read or write. The quality of the missionary schools varied greatly: in some cases the children were given rooms among the permanent residents and were properly fed and kept warm. In other cases, the children were housed in the schools which lacked proper heating and were not given enough food, leaving the children starving and freezing. The cleaning of these schools could also be sub-standard and the children sometimes fell ill. The Swedish reform from 1842 which instituted compulsory education for all children did not include the Saami, which left their education on the sidelines. In 1846, the time of Saami children's schooling was prolonged from two years to five or six years.

Magdalena Mathsdotter made two trips on skis to Stockholm, one in 1864 and the other in 1866. On both occasions she addressed these issues. Many who heard her speak were taken by what she had to say and noted that she was a skilled orator. It is very likely that her lobbying played a part in the making of the law concerning the cultivation line. Her ski trips were given much attention among people who struggled for a more humane society. Her stories about life in Lapland and her political demands were heard. Together with people she met from the church, the royal family and the government, she built seven children's homes and schools in Västerbotten. Many who met her chose to use their influence to further her cause. For example, she met with the governors of Umeå and Härnösand. The latter was elected into parliament a few years later, and then made a motion to legislate a cultivation line. The motion carried and the law took effect on March 3 1871.

Mathsdotter's ski trip also inspired young women from Fredrika Bremer's teacher training seminars to apply for jobs in the missionary schools in order to improve the education given to Saami children. Magdalena Mathsdotter, Fredrika Bremer and the teachers all had the same reason for wanting to educate Saami children. They knew that without being able to read and write, a person was unable to participate in the democratic system. Influence was exercised through the written word and without education the Saami as a group might have been rendered entirely powerless.

To what degree did Mathsdotter and Bremer influence each other? And how important were Mathsdotter's well-noticed ski trips to the suffrage movement? After her travels, an increase in skiing can be seen: several of the women winning skiing competitions and wearing pants in the ski trails also become prominent figures in the Swedish suffrage movement. One example is Sigrid Wiking, suffragist and ski jumper from Stockholm.

# SKI SUITS REPLACED CORSETS

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Sports and physical exercise became fashionable in Europe during the 1800's. But the long woolen skirts and tight jackets that middle-class women were expected to wear, were not fit for activities such as hiking, ice skating, bike riding or skiing.

At the same time, the tightly laced corsets came to be seen as the cause of health issues. Breathlessness, tendencies to faint, paleness and lack of stamina were blamed on constricted waists and lack of physical activity. The women of the middle-class worked hard to change this fashion. Alternative women's clothing was presented by various producers in Europe and America. The "reformed costume" was developed; a loose dress without a corset or bustle, and became a topic of discussion. When skiing gained popularity among the wealthier members of society, pictures of skiing women were printed in the news-papers and papers distributed by the skiing associations. Satirical drawings from the turn of the 19th century ridiculed the new fashion, along with the outfits of women on skis.

This did not stop women who liked to ski from starting to wear a knee-length tunic with pants. These garments were often inspired by folklore or workwear. A skiing fashion emerged, with garments resembling traditional Saami clothing. A source of inspiration was needed for creating fashion fit for sports, and maybe Saami clothes was a reminder that there were women who did not have to wear a corset and who were great skiers?

# OPPOSITION AGAINST WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

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During the 19th and 20th centuries there was social resistance against women becoming full members of society and given the right to vote. The female body and mind were thought to be weaker than the male. Everyone who was not educated, and this went for men as well, were seen as too “ignorant” to be given the vote.

The government decided who got an education, and how long they could study. Women were long forbidden from studying at the academies, the name for the universities at the time. They were seen as impossible to educate, because of their childish nature and the same was said for people of certain disabilities. Even what people did for a living or their tradition was said to affect their ability to learn, something that afflicted the Saami and large parts of Sweden's rural population.

The women who fought for autonomy and the right to be a part of society sought education. Women's organizations in Umeå arranged lectures and discussion groups and held courses. They also used their bodies as a way to manifest their views, for example by creating new types of clothes which enabled them to participate in sports.

In the debate about suffrage, much emphasis was put on the anatomical differences between women and men. The middle and upper class men who argued against equality mainly debated against women from their own classes. These women often had to live up to ideals which rendered them physically weaker than their male counter parts, and, therefore, they could be labeled the “weaker” sex, which automatically made men the “stronger” sex. International research about the struggle for equal suffrage has shown that when working class women joined the fight, the argument about women's lack of strength was effectively refuted.



# SKIS, BODIES AND THE RIGHT TO VOTE

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Beginning in the mid-1800's organized ski outings gained popularity. The promoters wanted to appeal to young and old, women and men. Up until the early 1900's anyone who wanted to go skiing either had to make their own skis or buy them from a good ski maker. Many villages had their own ski makers and among those, Saami craftsmen were held in high regard.

At the turn of the 19th century, larger skiing societies and a national association were established to encompass the interest in skiing. In 1892, what is today known as *Friluftsförbundet (The Outdoors Association)* was established; a society for the furthering of skiing. Norway had started such an organization in 1883, and a hobby related magazine claimed that the reason why the women of Norway were given the vote earlier than their Swedish counterparts, was that Norway had more women involved in skiing.

Competitive skiing for women was opposed by many. They claimed that competing would make a woman lose touch with her femininity and her female chores; taking care of a home and a family. These fears were expressed by male debaters, but not by female athletes.

Sweden's, Norway's and Finland's national skiing associations were established in 1908. Following this, competitive skiing really took off, and it was no longer possible to keep women out of the game. Starting in 1910, the number of competitions with events for women increased, and after universal suffrage was legislated in 1921, women could really establish themselves as athletes.

Up to the start of the 20th century, boards and committees of sports associations were mainly composed of men. When the national sporting association was founded in 1903 a discussion arose about whether or not women should be allowed to earn badges. Some thought this was self-evident, but others wondered what this would lead to. In 1910, a sports badge for achievement was instituted. It could be given to any athlete from the general public, but was only awarded to men until 1934, when it was finally awarded to a woman.

In the debate about women in sports, we find the same type of arguments about body and mind as in the debate about women's right to vote. Some debaters were worried that participating in sports would alter women's behaviors and physique. Today, we would classify these ideas, and the norms they lead to, as heteronormativity and assigning men and women gender specific traits. These arguments are still used to maintain the hegemony, by referring to the supposed differences between women and men.

*Further reading on the subject (in Swedish only) can be found in the IDUN magazines in the exhibition.*

# SAAMI PEOPLE IN UMEÅ

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In the 1800's, racist ideas took hold of Europe. During this time, the Swedish government established ethnic frontiers between people. The group of people defined as "Lapps" by the government, was to live a nomad life, live in simple housing and engage in reindeer husbandry, according to the predominate view of the Saami at the time. The word "Lapp" was a Swedish and Norwegian term for Saami and not an actual Saami word for themselves. The result of this was that only those Saami who kept reindeers were included in the official definition of "Lapp". The Saami who fell outside of this definition were considered to be Swedes.

The Saami people who were defined as "Lapps" were registered in the parish closest to the lands where the "Lapps" payed taxes to be allowed to keep reindeers. All the Saami who kept reindeers in the vicinity of Umeå were registered in Tärnaby in the 1800's. They lived in Umeå even if they were registered in Tärnaby, meaning that they had to see the governor in Umeå for certain matters.

It was common for older people to stay with non-nomadic relatives during the coldest weeks of winter. A person could also stay for an entire winter helping out in a household, sewing pelts or doing other commissioned work. The Saami who lived like this in Umeå are invisible in the censuses, because they were considered nomads and registered somewhere else. Many Saami who had permanent residence or were settlers had Swedish surnames and earned a living from handicrafts or other professions. Sometimes they changed their names because this made it easier for them to be allowed to buy land or run businesses. A pupil with a Saami surname but a father named Nils could be registered as "Nilsson" in school or church, and this name would then later be used in public records.

If a Saami family changed their profession from reindeer keepers to farmers, the term "Lapp" would be stricken from the register. In other words, the term "Lapp" was attached to profession and not heritage in the civil registers. This means that parish and civil registers were written in a way that hid the Saami from the populace of Umeå. This is one example of how governments can make it look like only one type of people were living in a place, and that certain groups never existed there, while reality looked completely different.

# CHANGES IN ALCOHOL POLICY

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In the beginning of the 1900's, there was intense lobbying for the prohibition of alcohol. Temperance societies were among those working to ban alcohol. In 1905, public utilities gained the sole right to sell Scandinavian vodka, and the need for stricter government regulation was expressed among politicians, both locally and nationally.

Many were upset about the levels of drunkenness in Umeå. Even if it was no longer allowed to serve spirits at night-time, it was still possible to order wine in cafés after ten. The *Woman's Christian Temperance Union* worried about the future and solicited both the chief constable and clergymen in their attempts to put an end to wine being served at night. Cafés were frequented by young men and women. The drinking could affect the physical health of the next generation. Young people were being tempted into moral decay. The fact that young people had opportunity to meet at the cafés, drink and get intimate with each other was troubling. The organization co-hosted lectures with other women's organizations in Umeå, in which young women were strongly urged to abstain. *WCTU* meant that there was a risk that work ethic – the will to work and earn a living – would drop. The future was dependent on young people staying healthy, working and starting well-adjusted families. The future would be secured for everyone, *WCTU* said.

In 1922 parliament voted against the prohibition of alcohol, a major setback to the temperance movement. This happened only a few years after full and equal suffrage was legislated in Sweden. Women could use their vote to influence alcohol policies and were now part of the democratic process in an entirely new way. They no longer stood at the side-lines, criticizing men's politics as before. In many ways, *WCTU* had their opportunities to influence Umeå altered in the 1900's. During the first half of the century, they were able to invoke swift local changes through various actions. This type of direct, local influence decreased as alcohol policy became a national issue.

# THE FIRST WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION IN UMEÅ

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In 1867, Umeå's first women's organization was established. It was called *Umeå Fruntimmersskyddsförening* (*The Society for the Protection of Women*). Many organizations, created by women for women, were to follow.

The society was organized by women, but men were given a say in certain matters and could also give donations to the cause. The first women's organizations in Sweden were often philanthropic, non-profit charity organizations. However, *Umeå Fruntimmersskyddsförening* focused on what is today known as helping people help themselves, giving women work that would generate an income. The society bought supplies which were distributed to the needy women. The women then spun yarn, knitted socks and made other garments, which in turn were sold by the society, and the women received a share of the profit – so called labor charge. In 1871 the group's effort accounted for as much as 10% of the relief to the poor in Umeå.

Members of the board made house calls to the poor in the city in order to learn about their situation. They encountered families in poverty, alcoholism and illness. Their aim was to alleviate and change the situation for families in need. Starting in 1916, the organization conducted charity through fundraising and benefits to the needy, without the demand that women work to receive economic aid. In 1973 the society was disbanded as social services had taken on their responsibilities – welfare payments had replaced the need for charity.

# FKPR – A SOCIETY FOR WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE

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In the beginning of the 20th century, most women were not allowed to vote in the local elections. The right to vote was based on one’s declaration of income – a higher income meant more votes. Women who qualified for the vote could also be elected into City Council. However, women could not be elected into all councils and boards. Women who did not qualify for the vote could in some cases be included in certain councils.

It was essential to *FKPR* in Umeå that women who were allowed to vote in the local election used their right. Through hard work they succeeded at increasing the number of women voting in the local elections. In 1905, ca 16% of the women who were qualified to vote actually voted, and this number had already increased to 24% by the next election. To further increase voter participation among the women who could vote in the local elections, *FKPR* raised awareness through meetings, pamphlets and newsletters that went out to their members. Women were informed on how to declare their income, by being sent pre-written declaration forms illustrating how to fill them in.

In 1910, the society used a bakery owned by Mrs. Tjernberg as an election office in order to hand out information about the different political parties and how to vote in the actual elections. All women who were qualified to vote were encouraged to do so, and if they were unable to go to the polling stations, they were given information about how to vote by proxy. A magazine about suffrage was placed in dentist’s offices and other places where it was thought women could have the time to read it.

The members of *FKPR* improved their debate skills regarding women’s suffrage by arranging workshops. They used magazines to publish their views and information about activities and protest meetings. They also wrote to the various political parties and suggested women who could be nominated for the local elections. The society was independent and only ever spoke out in context concerning suffrage. This was a strategy to preserve unity within the organization, so that as many women as possible would want to join.

On December 17 1918, parliament voted for universal suffrage in local elections. Women’s organizations in the city held classes teaching people about the new rules and how to vote. *FKPR* planned to hold courses giving people general knowledge about the women’s movement, industrialism, cultural movements and the different political parties. However, the content of these courses was changes, as the final goal of the suffrage movement was achieved only a few months later. On May 24 1919, parliament voted for universal suffrage in Sweden in national elections as well. The members of *FKPR* were jubilant and in 1921 they brought their organization to an end with a victory song.

# UMEÅ AND THE WORLD WARS

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When looking at the women's organizations in the city, it becomes evident that the world wars had a major impact on the people of Umeå. During WWI, rationing was so strict that *Woman's Christian Temperance Union* had to shelve their planned classes. For example, a sewing class had to be cancelled due to the fabric shortage. After WWI the "costly times" and the difficulties of realizing their plans were talked about during the meetings of *Föreningen för kvinnans politiska rösträtt* (a society for women's suffrage).

The large stream of refugees during WW2 forced *Woman's Christian Temperance Union* to hold their meetings in people's homes, as all the premises they would normally rent were used as refugee reception centers. The union continued supporting the refugees long after the war had ended. They raised money and clothes, the members knitted garments and spread information to those housing refugees.

The stream of refugees led to people expressing themselves in a personal way during *WCTU's* meetings. The members read poems they had written about the refugees and their situation, and special care was given to child refugees.

In February 1940, *WCTU* abstained from holding an event, as "nearly every housewife is occupied with relief work for Finland". Several women lost their husbands in the war, for example some of those who had volunteered to fight in Finland. Many of the married women were left alone as their husbands were drafted, and the state of combat readiness meant that they had a heavy burden placed on their shoulders. Some meant that the daily struggles of women to care for their homes were the most important relief work carried out by women during the war.

# VEGETARIANISM IN UMEÅ – A LONG HISTORY

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Umeå started using vegetarianism as a way to improve public health early. A vegetarian diet was said to cure alcoholism, and vegetarian cooking was therefore used as a strategy to change society and end the destructive consumption of alcohol.

In the fall of 1914, Woman's Christian Temperance Union held a vegetarian cooking class. The teacher was Mrs. Alma Bagge of Vegetariska föreningen (The Vegetarian Society), a national association founded in 1903 and still active today. The cooking class meant that the general public of Umeå could, for a short period of time, pay to eat vegetarian meals:

"Public interest was great and the number of dinner guests grew each day, so that in the final days the premises was filled to maximum capacity, and the newspapers even wrote about how someone enterprising enough must set up a public vegetarian cooking establishment here in Umeå."

Minute, September 23, 1914. Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Umeå. The Popular Movement Archive.

Plans for a vegetarian cooking class had been made already in 1912, but they could not be carried out until two years later. During WW1, plans for more courses had to be put aside due to rationing.

*Since these days, vegetarianism in Umeå has been more or less strong. We know there was a vegetarian movement in the mid-1900's, and we would like to know more about it. Perhaps you know more? Or do you have an older relative that has shared or could share what it was like being a vegetarian in Umeå in those days?*

# VITA BANDET – WOMAN’S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION IN SWEDEN

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In the year 1900, Emelie Rathou started a Swedish affiliate of *Woman’s Christian Temperance Union* in Stockholm, and called it *Vita Bandet (The White Ribbon)*. The already existing temperance societies did not allow women sufficient capacity for action. The effects of alcohol abuse were felt by women and children across the country. There was also a need for establishing women’s shelters that would accommodate women alcoholics. By starting an organization of their own, they had created an operation where women decided how to best fight alcohol abuse in Sweden.

In Umeå, *Woman’s Christian Temperance Union* focused on holding courses, giving funds to charity and cooperation with other women’s organizations in the city. For a number of years in the early 1900’s, they ran their own youth association along with activities for younger girls, and a girls’ camp in Stöcksjö in the 1950’s. Several women from *WCTU* were also active in the movement for universal suffrage. This becomes evident as *Föreningen för Kvinnans Politiska Rösträtt (The Society for Women’s Right to Vote)* gave members of both associations a discount on their membership fee. During their first active years, the union protested against alcohol commercials, motion pictures featuring a lot of alcohol, and took action against the opening of more establishments that served liquor in the city.

Sewing circles were a common form of meetings for women’s organizations in the 1900’s. It allowed them to proceed with household work whilst getting organized. Sewing meetings were essential to *WCTU* for many years. They took minutes during their meetings, and many key discussions about the union were held at these meetings, along with the planning of actions and activities that were then held in the city.

The *WCTU* was active in Umeå until 1993, when it became dormant.



# UMEÅ – A CITY ON SKIS

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Skiing for sport quickly became popular in Sweden. Skiing already had a long history as a means of transportation but during the 19th century it became a fashionable, wholesome form of exercise for the expanding middle class. In the area around Umeå it was *Umeå Gymnastikförening* (*Umeå Sporting Society*) that arranged skiing for women in the 1880s and '90s. In a short notice in the newspaper *Westerbotten* from March 1891 it was mentioned that for the first time ever there had been a skiing competition in the county. It was a competition for grammar school students, arranged by the sporting society.

On the 12 March 1892, *Umeå Gymnastikförening* arranged another skiing competition for grammar school students and a brief was published two days later in local newspaper *Umebladet*. 50 participants started by the great bridge at 8 a.m., the track was laid around Ön (an island in present-day central Umeå) and the finish line was at the mountain farms of Öberget. The length of the track and the full results of the competition were unfortunately not published. The women's prize, a large piece of silverware, went to B. Himmelstrand of the seventh grade. *Umeå Idrottsförening* (*UIF* – not to be confused with present-day *Umedalens IF*) was founded in the 1890s and became central to women's opportunities to participate in competitions. *Skidfrämjandets* (*the Skiing Association's*) 'Nordic Games' were arranged in 1902 by *UIF*, *Skidklubben Skade* and *IFK Umeå*. The games were opened at Tegsbron (the bridge between central Umeå and Teg), and there were so many spectators that the nearby riverbanks were "completely black". In the women's five km event a Saami woman, Christina Persson, set a new record; 28.15. Gurli Nottelblad finished second at 32.51. In the first decades of skiing for sport, Saami people were often among the fastest competitors.

*UIF* arranged women only-competitions, and many women were voting members of the organization from the start. However, many men in the organization, especially young grammar school students, clerks and shop assistants opposed women's competitions. Those who opposed went on to start their own sporting society, *IFK Umeå*, in 1901. *UIF* arranged several outings in which men and women, young and old participated. The society was disbanded in 1907.