

Teracom
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About Erik Esping

The following is an excerpt from a Doctor's thesis by Ms Anna Wormbs dealing with the history of the establishing of a broadcasting distribution system in Sweden, "Through wire and over air".

One phase in this history is the attempt by the organization responsible for the distribution, a part of the state telecommunications administration ("Televerket"), to introduce a wired distribution system for sound broadcasting instead of FM in the early 50-ties . Erik Esping had a leading rôle in this attempt which was much debated about until the FM system finally was the winner. As a person he was also criticised particularly by some engineers in the state broadcasting company. It must be noted though that the relations between the two organizations had been strained almost from the very start of state broadcasting in Sweden.

Here is a translated and somewhat simplified excerpt describing Erik Esping, the person and the personality. The text is partly based on interviews with persons that knew him, among them his daughters. This is clearly seen in the last part of the excerpt. I have deleted the references to the particular interviews:

"Erik Esping was born in Rättvik 1901, the oldest one of two sons to a police constable from the Västergötland province and his wife coming from thr Dalecarlia province (where Rättvik is located). The family soon moved to the town of Sundsvall where both sons passed their "gymnasium" examination. Erik was accepted by the Chalmers Institute of Technology in 1920 from where he graduated in 1923.

He then made his compulsory military service and after that worked for a few years in the local electric power company in Sundsvall. At the same time he was studying at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm as a special student from where he graduated in 1926. (In those days, Chalmers provided a lower level of studies than the Royal Institute of Technology, today they are equal.)

The year before he had been accepted as Aspirant Engineer at the Radio Department of the Telecommunications Administration. From 1929 he held the title of Assistant Engineer. However, in 1932 he left the Radio Department to work for a couple of years as a sound recording expert for Svensk Filmindustri. The reason was that he could not come on speaking terms with his chief, Siffer Lemoine. ("He had to get away from "Lömmän", Esping chose his own path and had quite different manners from the typical state civil servant" says one of the interviewed persons.) However, the problems were not too big and in 1934 he was back to the Radio Department.

He married the same year and the couple got two daughters. He married rather late in life because he wanted to pay back what his parents had paid for his studies. Esping was brought up to be careful with money and he was not spoiled and it is told that he

was not particularly interested in money. During his career he was offered other jobs but he did not accept them and possibly he was not interested of living the life that might have been possible (and expected) with another type of position. It is said that he liked to be at home and he often sat in the living room sofa with his “telecom briefcase” writing speeches and articles. He preferred noisy children before the desk in his working room upstairs.

In 1936 he had advanced to “Second Senior Engineer” in the Radio Department under Ernst Magnusson that was “First Senior Engineer”. Esping replaced him in this position in 1946 when the latter took up a higher position. In 1954 Esping became Chief Engineer of the Radio Department. Under his last 14 years he only had the General Director of the Swedish Telecommunications Administration above him.

Since 1948 Esping was chairman of the CCIR Study Group for television, 1956-59 chairman for the Swedish organization for university-educated electrical engineers, 1967-68 chairman for Intelsat and since 1950 he was a member of the Swedish Academy for the Engineering Sciences. Even if there are statements by one of the pioneering engineers in the television broadcasting company Arne Sanfridsson, also interviewed by Ms Wormbs, like the following “never has a person in state administration thrown away so much money and made so many statements in technical matters that later proved totally false as Esping”, the positions Esping held and the rewards he was bestowed indicate that he was accepted and well liked in both the national and the international engineering societies.

Regarding his temper and character, Esping is said to have been joyful and generous. His voice was a barytone and he was an active singer in the local church choir in Täby. He often was singing and whistling in the office, in particular before going on official journeys which he looked forward to with pleasure. The atmosphere in the Radio Department is said by many to have been more pleasant and less formal than in the rest of the administration. Esping was the direct opposite to the General Director Håkan Sterky. Sterky was always on time and brought a manuscript with him while Esping always arrived in the last minute, without a manuscript. He was said to have been a kind man both as a chief and as a father. The daughters describe him as sensitive, even too sensitive and vulnerable at times, and he was generous towards relatives and friends. Besides he was also “honest and just”. For example, the family was never allowed to accompany him in the official car of the administration - if he was picked up this car the rest of the family had to go by other means. It was said that there were two ways to get a bad reputation in the administration. One was to cheat in travelling expenses reports for example by declaring a later arrival than in reality. The other was to take up passengers in the official car. If this was found out it resulted in a bad reputation. Some colleagues took up passengers in the official cars but Esping did not belong to them. Politically he belonged to the conservatives and held a position in the local council for about fifteen years.”