

The Mock Trial against Stig Engström for the Murder of Prime Minister Olof Palme

THE INDICTMENT

According to the indictment, Stig Engström killed Olof Palme at approximately 23:21 on 28 February 1986, by shooting him in the back at the corner of Sveavägen and Tunnelgatan in central Stockholm.

THE VERDICT

The reasoning

The panel has gone through all the arguments pro and contra and evaluated all the evidence and other documents presented in the case file. Each argument and each piece of evidence has been first considered separately and then the panel has assessed the evidentiary value of all the facts and evidence combined.

Opportunity

Olof Palme was shot about 60 meters from the main entrance of the Skandia headquarters, where Engström worked. According to the testimony of Roland Bergström, Engström used his access card to clock out from Skandia at 23:20, but the punch clock ran one minute ahead, so the correct time was 23:19. There is no reason to suspect the accuracy of Bergström's testimony, so it can be taken as a fact that Engström clocked out at 23:19.

According to the testimony of Henry Olofsson, a security guard at Skandia, Engström chatted with him for a couple of minutes before he left the building. Olofsson was interviewed by the police three months after the murder. The panel notes that Olofsson's time estimate is rough and it's also possible that he doesn't remember the conversation correctly, since three months had already passed from the event. Therefore, Olofsson's testimony cannot be considered as sufficient evidence that Engström and Olofsson talked for a few minutes before Engström left the building. When assessing whether Engström could have arrived at the murder scene in time, it should also be considered that 23:21:30 is not the precise time of the murder. It is possible that the murder took place some ten seconds earlier or later.

After evaluating all the facts and evidence, the panel concludes that it is possible that Engström had enough time to walk to the crime scene and commit the murder.

No concrete evidence has been presented whether Engström had or could have had a gun with him. There are only various theories and speculations. The panel states that it is possible that Engström had a gun with him, but in the absence of evidence, this mere possibility cannot be given probative value against Engström.

Eyewitness descriptions of the killer

The police have interviewed several eyewitnesses and many of them multiple times. Some of the descriptions fit Engström in some respects. According to several witnesses the killer was a man of medium height (180-185 cm). Many eyewitnesses have said that the killer was wearing a dark coat which went below the waist and dark trousers, not jeans. Some eyewitnesses have also mentioned that the killer was wearing a flat-cap. All these descriptions fit Engström. On the other hand, there are also conflicting descriptions that do not fit Engström. For example, the description provided by Lisbet Palme does not fit Engström, as she describes the killer as wearing a dark-blue quilted jacket. Some witnesses describe the killer as wearing a beanie/knitted hat (Anders Björkman, Inge Mårelius) or no hat at all (Anna Hage, Leif Ljungqvist, Jan Andersson) and wearing a leather jacket (Jan Nilsson). Most witnesses estimate the age of the killer as between 30 and 45 years, with Egon Enoksson having the impression that the killer was “quite young”. Engstrom was 52 at the time of the assassination.

The panel notes that many descriptions are quite general and also fit many other men. Most importantly, none of the witnesses claims to have seen the face of the killer in a way that permits identification. Therefore, no eyewitness has identified Engström as the murderer, even though he appeared in numerous newspapers articles and also on television. Furthermore, empirical psychological studies have shown that there are several factors that undermine the reliability of witness testimonies. For example, witnesses' own interpretations, experiences and post-event information can distort the witness' memory and influence the testimony. In this case, many witnesses have been interviewed several times and the murder has raised huge publicity in the media. Numerous newspaper articles and radio and TV-shows may have influenced the witnesses' memories and consequently also their testimonies. In some witnesses' police interviews, leading questions were also observed, which may have affected their testimonies.

The prosecution has referred to the testimony of Yvonne Nieminen. Nieminen has testified that she saw a stocky man wearing a dark jacket running along David Bagares gata, carrying a small bag in his hand and trying to open or close the zipper. He was sliding in the snow on the pavement. According to the prosecution this man must have been the murderer and the man's description fits Engström because he was carrying a wristlet bag and was wearing slippery office shoes on the night of the murder. The panel assesses that there is not enough evidence to support the argument that the man Nieminen saw was the murderer. Furthermore, Nieminen has not identified Engström as the man she saw. A wristlet bag and office shoes are generic clues and not conclusive evidence. There is not enough evidence to support the prosecution's argument that the man Nieminen saw was Engström.

Considering all the uncertainties related to the descriptions of the eyewitnesses, the panel concludes that the eyewitness descriptions cannot be regarded as evidence of Engström's guilt.

Engström's story

Engström has been interviewed by the police several times as a witness, he has given multiple interviews to newspapers, and he has appeared on television. He has also testified as a witness in the trial against Christer Pettersson in both the Stockholm District Court and the Svea Court of Appeal. The prosecution has argued that Engström's story has changed several times and that his story contradicts the testimonies of other witnesses. None of the eyewitnesses have recognized Engström at the crime scene, even though he has claimed that he played a significant role in the attempts to save Olof Palme's life and in aiding the police to catch the murderer.

The panel notes that Engström's story has changed with regard to many details. It seems that he has exaggerated his own role at the crime scene and has tried to give the impression that he has played an important role in the attempts to save Olof Palme's life and to help the police catch the murderer. The panel considers this to be one of the probable reasons for the alterations of his story. Moreover, according to studies in witness psychology, it is common and natural for stories to change over time, and this should not be considered as an indication of an untruthful story. Regarding the specifics of the changes in Engström's story, the panel refers to the closing arguments of the defense.

It is true that Engström does not seem to appear in the testimony of any witness present at the crime scene, including Lisbeth Palme. The panel does not consider this to prove that Engström was not present. Engström was a man of medium height (182 cm), medium build, with no special facial features, wearing a $\frac{3}{4}$ long dark winter coat on a cold night in Stockholm. He was very nondescript. Unless specifically asked about him – which the eyewitnesses were not – it is understandable that they do not remember him.

The prosecution argues that Engström must have left the crime scene passing through Tunnelgatan, because otherwise he could not have accurately described the blue-quilted jacket and curly hair of Lars Jeppsson. Jeppsson had been hiding behind the portacabins and was not visible from the murder scene. However, this is contradicted by the testimony of Lisbeth Palme, who states having seen a man in a dark blue quilted jacket at the corner of Tunnelgatan. She could have seen Jeppsson, who was wearing a blue quilted jacket, which indicates that Jeppsson was visible from the crime scene also for Engström. Or there was another man wearing a dark quilted jacket, potentially the murderer. Jeppsson himself describes the man he saw running up Tunnelgatan as wearing a dark quilted jacket. This exonerates Engström, as he was not wearing a quilted jacket on the night of the murder.

Engström's story contains some details which are in contradiction with some other witnesses, especially with testimonies of Anne Hage and Stefan Glantz. However, that does not mean that Engström's story is not true. Hage and Glantz were both busy trying to save the life of Olof Palme and mainly concentrated on that task, obviously not paying attention to the identity of people around them. Hage explicitly testified that when she was helping Palme, there "was just a buzz of people", and that someone started to pull Olof Palme's legs, and amongst others that she asked that person "What are you doing?" ... because I was so involved in my work ... But I only looked at the arms, like ... 'What are you doing?' ... and then I carried on." It is therefore very probable that they did not pay any attention to Engström. Some of the discrepancies can also be explained by the fact that Engström exaggerated his own part in the events.

After evaluating Engström's story and how it has changed in relation to the testimonies of other witnesses, the panel concludes that though the prosecution is right that Engström's stories raise many questions, they don't support the prosecution's arguments sufficiently.

Motive

Engström was a member of the Conservative Party. According to the prosecution, there was strong hostility towards Olof Palme in conservative circles in the 1980s. The prosecution has argued that this constitutes a motive for the murder. The panel considers that a membership in a non-extremist political party is not sufficient to establish a motive for the murder.

Murder weapon

The murder weapon has not been found, but the bullet that killed Olof Palme has been identified as a .357 Magnum. This kind of bullet is typically used with a Magnum revolver manufactured by Smith & Wesson, but there are also other handguns that can be used to fire this kind of bullet. According to the prosecution, one of Engström's closest friends, Willy Glaser, collected firearms and owned a Smith & Wesson Magnum revolver. Forensic experts examined Glaser's Magnum and were unable to exclude that it was the murder weapon. Engström visited Glaser frequently and it's therefore possible that Engström used Glaser's Magnum to commit the murder. The prosecution has also argued that Engström was a member of a shooting club and had experience with handguns.

The panel notes that there is no evidence that Palme was shot with Glaser's Magnum revolver, nor is there evidence that Engström ever used any of Glaser's weapons. The prosecution's theory is mere speculation. Moreover, Glaser's Smith & Wesson Magnum is a very large revolver, with an overall length of 29 cm, which is difficult to conceal and does not fit into Engström's wristlet bag, which undermines this theory. The panel concludes that the fact that Engström's friend Glaser owned a Magnum revolver has no probative value in this case.

Engström's character

According to the prosecution, Engström fits the criminal profile of the assassin of Palme created in 1994. Engström had professional setbacks, as he had been passed over several times for promotions at Skandia. Engström had an inferiority complex and narcissistic personality, which is evident from his interviews in the newspapers and television appearances.

The panel notes that there is no record of Engström ever using violence. It is true that some of Engström's traits fit the criminal profile created in 1994. However, some other characteristics don't fit Engström. The panel concludes that Engström's character does not support a finding of guilt.

Conclusion

There is no forensic or other physical evidence linking Engström to the murder. There is no evidence that sufficiently supports Engström's guilt. There are some rather weak indications that Engström could possibly have been the murderer, but there is no concrete evidence. Even if all these faint indications of Engström's guilt are combined, this is not enough to form even a strong suspicion against Engström.

In conclusion, the panel finds that the evidence required for Stig Engström's conviction has not been established. There remains reasonable doubt about his guilt and therefore the panel, by unanimous decision, finds him not guilty.

5th May 2025 at Lund University

Jelte Hielkema, Riku Jaakkola, Stefania Riccio, Mark Schweizer and Mikael Sjöberg