

# Sweden: Nazi demonstration met with protests

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On the International Workers' Day, May 1, the violent, openly Nazi group Nordic Resistance Movement (Nordiska Motståndsrörelsen, NMR), staged a demonstration in the town of Borlänge, about 200 km north west of Stockholm. The NMR have attempted to build a base for their outfit in the region for a number of years, moving a number of their cadre to villages there. The May 1 march, under the hypocritical, anti-Semitic slogan of 'Against traitors and big business?', was an open provocation directed at the historical victories of the labour movement and the working class in Sweden. But the Nazis didn't march unopposed. Locals and antifascists organised a protest, and many followed the Nazis up close, to make their opposition to their divisive, fascist politics heard.

The Nordic Resistance Movement, which is mainly composed of the Swedish Resistance Movement and smaller counterparts in Norway and Finland, was founded in the 1990s by formerly incarcerated fascists around the White Aryan Resistance movement. They count among their influences the U.S. white supremacist terrorist organisation The Order, and a number of NMR members have served prison sentences for bank robberies, weapon thefts, assault, attacks, including murder and attempted murder, against immigrants, leftists and innocent bystanders.

To most Swedes, the NMR became infamous with a violent attack against a peaceful anti-racist vigil in Kärrtorp in southern Stockholm, in 2013. After the attack, which was luckily repelled by demonstrators and antifascists, people around Sweden showed their solidarity with Kärrtorp in massive demonstrations against fascism and racism. Almost three years on, it was Stockholm's turn to show solidarity. Therefore, Arbetarmakt, Swedish section of the League for the Fifth International, along with a number of other left, trade union and solidarity groups, working together in Red Forum in Stockholm, organised transport to the Borlänge counter-mobilisation.

Anti-racists arriving from other cities were greeted warmly by local anti-racists as we arrived to the official, broad protest at a square in the centre of the city. The 1,000 in attendance listened to music and speeches from local activists. Among the speakers were two activists who made the news dumping fertiliser in the park where the Nazis were to gather. A number of Clowns Against Racism were also to be found in the crowd. The many local antiracist activists in Dalarna, who organised the protest, had undoubtedly worked hard for the demonstration, and several speakers gave examples of threatening Nazi activity in the region. But something was still missing in the mainly apolitical orientation of the protest. There were many contributions on spreading 'love' instead of racism, celebrations of human rights and musical entertainment to be heard, but not much that clearly explained how we can combat fascism and racism here and now. On the police's advice, the organisers even urged the crowd not to seek out the Nazi march and protest them when they walked past. That was unfortunate, as it was certainly possible to get closer to the Nazis and show them our contempt up close.

Meanwhile, the Nazis gathered at a shopping centre in another part of the city. As buses of Nazis from

other parts of the country and their pathetic "race brothers" from Norway and Finland arrived, they lined up to march in a military style formation. Attendance in the Nazi march was around 300 people, which cannot be described as anything other than an alarmingly high number. The NMR's own führer took the lead, followed by a uniformed mob guard in white shirts and ties with flags and banners, and finally, a tail of plain-clothes Nazis. In their ranks were numbers of people known to be convicted of everything from drug offences to serious violent crimes, as is customary with the violent sect that the NMR is. So much for the Nazi's hypocritical concern for "law and order".

The front banner, calling for struggle against "traitors and big business" was in line with historical Nazi attempts of appropriating the labour movement's messages, distorting them for their own purposes. The "big business" they say they want to fight is obviously a code word, a not-so-subtle dog-whistle referring to the "Jewish lobby" the Nazis see everywhere. Plenty of theories about Zionist conspiracies supposedly running the world are to be found on the NMR web site. In reality, of course, the fascist movement has always been the last resort of capital against a struggling working class.

The Nazis obviously tried their best to appear respectable, disciplined and militaristic. Their usual blind aggressiveness only surfaced on a few occasions, such as when protestors with a banner came too close, or a brave anti-racist stood in the way of the Nazi march. The image of Tess Asplund, a Stockholm anti-racist, standing up to the Nazis soon became iconic in Sweden and across the world. When the Nazis reached the centre of the city, many left the official protest to face them. Ordinary, curious locals and anti-racist activists flocked to the street while the Nazi demonstration, under massive police protection, strolled in. Many spectators who did not participate in the counter-demonstration showed a palpable disgust at the Nazi invasion. Many conversations on the offense of Nazis marching openly in the streets were heard, and many joined in as anti-racists took up the chants of "No racists in our streets" or "fash scum". A group of young, local anti-racists displayed a banner directed at the Nazis, reading "No fucking Nazi nonsense, working class against the upper class".

When the NMR reached the park where they were to hold their rally, anti-racists gathered around the police barriers. We took up slogans, several anti-racist speeches were made and music was played to drown out the Nazi speeches. Spirits were high in the anti-racist camp, except for when the cops, sometimes seemingly unprovoked, picked out and dragged individual anti-racists from the fences. We kept the chants and the fighting spirit up throughout the Nazi meeting, and once the fascists lined up to march out of the city, anti-racists left, too, to see them out.

However, before the Nazis were let off, the police let through the traditional Social Democrat May Day march, significantly larger than the Nazi demonstration. Many Social Democrats who marched past the anti-racists took up our chants.

After following the Nazis out of town, continuing our protest chants, the anti-racists drew back, tired but content after a day when we proved that Nazism won't go unchallenged. Those of us who had travelled from Stockholm were greeted with appreciative comments from locals who had heard about the bus trip in the news. Many talked of their fear of a repeated Nazi march next year, and expressed their hope for more support from other parts of the country should that happen.

While activists from the Social Democrat Youth League, the Young Left as well as individual Social Democrats and Left Party members did participate in the protests, regrettably, the official labour leadership in Borlänge and Dalarna largely ignored the fact that Nazis were marching on their streets, on our day. The Social Democrat May Day march looked like any traditional demonstration in any city, while young workers, locals and anti-racists protested a violent Nazi march just a few blocks away. Shamefully, a local Left Party councillor even went to the press in the days leading up to May Day, calling on "party comrades

and humanists in Dalarna to stay away from the Nazi march". Any protests would only serve to give the "NMR attention and legitimacy," he said. Indeed, the Left Party May Day march was held in a different part of town, far away from the Nazi march and protests. If resistance against Nazis automatically gives them legitimacy, as the Left Party claims, the problem with the German workers' movement in the '30s was that they even attempted to oppose the rise of Hitler and fascism there.

One doesn't need to go as far back as the dark period of the '30s and '40s in order to realise how dangerous it can be if the workers' movement remains passive in the face of fascism. The example of Greece, where the fascist Golden Dawn party went on the offensive in a period of crisis, and gained a following in large parts of the police force, shows that fascism does not belong to history just yet. In situations where capitalist order threatens to break down, fascism will always be a last option for sections of the ruling class. Despite a common Swedish sentiment that the country is a 'humanitarian superpower', Sweden isn't insulated from the same kind of developments we've seen in Greece, Hungary and elsewhere in Europe, with fascist forces steadily on the rise.

A small, violent sect, the NMR is obviously generally despised today. Despite their mobilisation of forces in Sweden, Norway and Finland, their march did not outnumber a May Day rally in any small town in Sweden. While not currently a political threat and far from reaching state power, the group is still a threat on a local level, in the streets, as the incident in Kärrtorp and a number of other violent assaults of theirs have shown. The fact that they managed to organise one of the biggest openly Nazi marches in a decade, and that they now have one representative on a city council in Dalarna, should be a wake-up call for the left and the labour movement.

Arbetarmakt, Swedish section of the League for the Fifth International, calls on the entire labour movement in Sweden to make it their cause to thwart the Nazis wherever they appear, and to also offer an alternative to their fascist politics: that of class struggle politics. If the Social Democrats and the Left Party had put organisational selfishness aside and mobilised for a united anti-fascist May Day demonstration in Borlänge, we would have been able to fill the city centre with workers and socialists and have made it impossible for the NMR to march there, or at least significantly raised the temperature of protests. It would have been a boost for all anti-racists, trade unionists, immigrants, LGBT people and everyone threatened by the Nazi terror mob, in Borlänge and all over Sweden. The abstention of the Social Democrats, and the Left Party's total passivity in the face of the Nazi march, meant that it fell mainly to young socialists and anti-racists to ensure that the Nazis would not be left undisturbed.

A recurring proposal during the day, discussed on the stage of the official protest, in flyers and in spontaneous speeches in the protests, was that of 'banning Nazism'. According to the anti-racists who support this idea, the UN convention on the elimination of racial discrimination, should mean that racist organisations are in effect illegal, and that the police should act against them or at least deny their applications to hold rallies and demonstrations. While we wouldn't mind one bit if the Nazi parade had been stopped or dissolved by the police, relying on the state to ban Nazism, or primarily treating it as a question of bourgeois law, is a recipe for defeat.

If the state and the police force are given increased powers to ban demonstrations or political organisations on a political basis (because they are "undemocratic"), one can easily imagine their next step. The state's agency against 'violent extremism' has already proved to be just as willing to turn against leftists as right-wing extremists. The revolutionary left would be next in line to face state repression. In a bourgeois state, the police is not there to protect the labour movement, but to defend the existing order: capitalism and class privilege. In a situation of escalated crisis, it is not inconceivable that sections of the upper class and their state would be prepared to use the fascist weapon against a fighting workers'

movement. If we're unprepared for the struggle necessary then, the workers' movement will stand disarmed. Leaving it to the police and the state to combat fascism is not only inefficient but directly counterproductive. Nazism and fascism should certainly be suppressed, but by action, through massive mobilisations of anti-racists and socialists.

Arbetarmakt would like to thank the comrades of Red Forum and the anti-racists in Dalarna who received us in Borlänge for a good protest day. We hope for larger and more action-oriented protests next time. When fascism rears its ugly head, it is up to the workers' movement and the left not just to protest but to stop them. In that struggle, what is needed isn't just general anti-racism or humanist sentiments, but an alternative of concrete struggle: a revolutionary, socialist response. We mustn't forget that fascism is primarily directed at us, and respond to that threat. Smashing fascism isn't an option, but a duty, a matter of survival, for the entire workers' movement.

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Pictures from the protests can be found on Arbetarmakt's website:

<http://www.arbetarmakt.com/2016/05/1-maj-rapport/> <sup>[1]</sup>

A video can be found on our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/arbetarmakt/videos/1048513615209058/> <sup>[2]</sup>

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**Source URL:** <https://fifthinternational.org/content/sweden-nazi-demonstration-met-protests>

**Links:**

[1] <http://www.arbetarmakt.com/2016/05/1-maj-rapport/>

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