

Sweden's ?December Agreement?

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Sweden was once seen as the country of stable Social Democratic governments, but those days are long gone. Not only was there a liberal-conservative coalition government, generally referred to as the Alliance, under prime minister Fredrik Reinfeldt from 2006 to 2014 but, since the general elections of September 2014, there has not been much stability either.*

The Alliance may have lost the elections, but any suggestion that a so-called ?Red-Green? bloc of the Social Democrats, the Greens and the Left party won rests on very shaky ground, to say the least. The parties do not even form a bloc, because the Social Democrats reject any formal agreement with the Left Party. However, although the ?red-green? bloc did gain more votes, and more mandates in parliament, than the Alliance, they are still a minority, the balance being held by the racist Sweden Democrats, who increased their vote to 13.2 percent.

True, Reinfeldt resigned as prime minister and leader of the Moderates, the leading party of the Alliance, and the Social Democrats and the Greens were able to form a government under the new prime minister Stefan Löfven, leader of the Social Democrats. This, however, was a minority government even with the support of the Left party, whose leader Jonas Sjöstedt may complain at not being invited to enter the government, but at the end of the day, will always support a Social Democratic government.

Both the Social Democrats and the Greens have been quite clear that they are ready to make deals with parties to their right, even invite them into government. Primarily, they have been aiming for two of the smaller parties in the Alliance, the liberal People's Party and the Centre Party. These are still sometimes called the ?middle parties?, especially when the Social Democrats and the Greens want to make cooperating with them sound sweeter, but it is a long time since they were noticeably to the left of the Moderates. In any event, they have so far turned down all offers that would mean breaking up the Alliance.

As long as all the openly bourgeois parties rejected Stefan Löfvens, he could not form a majority government in this parliament. There was, however, another possibility; a deal between the Moderates and the Sweden Democrats to form a majority government. So far, the Moderates have refused to go for this option. At a local level, however, that kind of cooperation is already a fact in several municipalities and an increasing number of conservative and liberal commentators are now arguing that the isolation of the Sweden Democrats must stop. Polls show that an increasing number of the Alliance's voters agree.

Future collaboration between the Alliance and the Sweden Democrats, therefore is likely, but they are not ready for it yet. However, it should also be remembered that the last Alliance government was also a minority government, kept in office with the support of the Sweden Democrats, although without any formal agreement.

The December Agreement

The parliamentary arithmetic meant that the government was defeated on its budget proposal and that of

the Alliance, backed up by the votes of the Sweden Democrats, was adopted. Faced with the prospect of governing on the Opposition's budget, and with no chance of pushing anything through parliament without their consent, Löfven announced there would be a re-election in March, the first time that has happened in Sweden for 57 years.

The Alliance, however, were also not pleased with the situation. Unless the re-election changed the situation markedly, which seemed unlikely, they would be in a position to obstruct the government at any time, but at the risk of being seen to be irresponsible. As a result, they preferred to negotiate with the government.

The result of the talks was what rapidly became known as the 'December Agreement'. This, which is to be in force until 2018, meant that the Opposition would give the biggest bloc in parliament the chance to govern. The government's budget would be approved, without the Opposition actively opposing it. Calmness and order was restored in the kingdom, and sighs of relief could be heard from many quarters, including the reformist left.

Supporters of the Agreement argue that it ensures a Social Democratic government for four years, and will keep the Sweden Democrats out of any influence. Jonas Sjöstedt of the Left party basically supports the Agreement, although he is still sulking that he and his party were not invited to join the government. Some leading members of the Moderates have protested that the agreement means shelving their politics until at least the next election but, generally, it has a broad support.

No compromise with the parties of the bourgeoisie!

It should be obvious to all socialists that the agreement is thoroughly reactionary. The interests of the working class and all oppressed simply cannot be defended by moving to the right and striking a deal with the liberal and conservative parties. Some supposed leftists and even socialists argue that this is the only way forward at the moment, given the parliamentary situation. However, that would only be true if one took a shortsighted and strictly parliamentary perspective, abstaining from all real struggle and clinging to the vain hope that compromises in parliament could protect us. In recent decades such compromises have actually led to the rolling back of past gains of the working class.

As to the argument that the agreement keeps the Sweden Democrats away from any influence, in fact, the opposite is the case, this is more likely to increase their influence in the country. They have been growing for several years largely because the other parties have grown more alike. The bourgeois workers' parties, busy compromising and trying not to alienate liberals and the middle class, have not offered the workers a way forward which they can believe in.

To be sure, the claim of the Sweden Democrats that they are the only real alternative to the other parties is entirely fake. Their policies are thoroughly bourgeois and conservative, just more openly reactionary and racist, promising to solve Sweden's problems by severely restricting immigration and the right of refugees to come here. However, many people, suffering the effects of government policy, will believe them because the Agreement makes them the only real opposition in parliament.

The attacks on the workers and the oppressed can only be beaten back by class struggle, not primarily in parliament, but in the workplaces, estates, schools and the streets. The only way for the workers to defend themselves is by organising that struggle from below, putting massive pressure on the leaders of the working class movement to mobilise, and if they refuse, which they most likely will, organising without them and against them, replacing them with real workers' leaders, willing to lead the fight, and accountable to the rank and file.

As to what the Social Democrats and the Left party should do, the reply must be: tear up the Agreement, break off all collaboration with the parties of the Alliance, kick the Greens out of government, bring in the Left party and start taxing the rich, re-nationalise all that was privatised, under workers' control, put massive resources into re-building and improving health care and schools, and working class neighbourhoods ? that is, real workers' policies.

No doubt the leaders of the two parties, Stefan Löfven and Jonas Sjöstedt, would reply that it would be impossible to get majority support in parliament for that. That is true, but then the conclusion should be that they announce a re-election, and go to the polls on precisely this platform, mobilising the workers to support these demands and to fight for them regardless of the outcome of the election.

We do not expect those leaders to fight for such demands, not because it is impossible but because their first loyalty is to Swedish capitalism. However, to members of those parties, and of the trades unions whose leaders have essentially the same politics, who believe the organisations can be won to a fight we say, organise to demand your leaders fight or to replace them with leaders who will. If, when, that proves impossible, join with us in the fight to build a new, fighting and revolutionary workers' party, to organise the struggle not only against right wing policies, but also against their source, that is, capitalism

*<http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/sweden-no-holding-back-preserve-social-democrat-green-minority-coalition>

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