

Sweden's Social Democratic-Green government tightens up borders

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At the start of the refugee crisis, in the autumn of 2015, Swedish authorities behaved relatively decently, compared to other European countries. When tens of thousands of refugees arrived, the government, and most parties in parliament, talked about the need for generosity towards people in distress whenever they could spot a microphone.

The many thousands who attended demos in favour of welcoming refugees, and the thousands who volunteered to help the people arriving, were, of course, a small minority of the whole population, but polls showed that the policy of being generous to refugees had quite widespread support.

To be sure, the racist Sweden Democrats had been growing, and there were anti-refugee currents in other parties as well, but those were not nearly enough in themselves to force a change of policy on those parties. Or would not have been, if the parties in parliament had not been desperate for votes and prepared to fish for them in racist waters.

Change

Naturally, there was never any reason for socialists to be too impressed by the official rhetoric. Each year, thousands of people, including families with children, have been deported back to the countries from which they had fled, and the Department of Migration has rightly been one of the most hated institutions among the left in recent years. We never had any confidence that the openness would last but, for several months, the government did as much as we had reason to hope. That, however, would soon change drastically.

In November, came the turning point. The first step was the decision to erect ID checks at the border to Denmark. ID checks at the border may not sound remarkable, but in fact the Nordic countries abolished passport controls between themselves in 1958. ID checks for everyone arriving from Denmark, therefore, was a significant step. Since, on average, some 95,000 people pass between Sweden and Denmark daily, this naturally caused irritation, quite apart from the blow it meant for refugees. Absurdly, it is now a criminal offence to ?smuggle? someone across the border.

The second, and more dramatic, step came later in November. The government, represented by Prime Minister Stefan Löfven (Social Democrat) and Maria Romson (Green) stepped in front of the gathered media to proclaim the new official policy. With a very solemn and appropriately sad face, Löfven announced that Sweden could not possibly take all the refugees arriving. He explained that, while it was important to help, and Sweden had done more than most countries, the country was now reaching the limits of its resources.

After Löfven, Vice Premier Romson stepped in front of the microphones, far outdoing him in the sadness stakes. Tears were rolling down her face as she made clear that her party's recent promises of generosity and humanity were worth exactly zero. With the pain of someone who is forced to choose between the

benefits of being a Minister and the principles she had held so dear just the day before, she carefully pointed out how much it saddened her that they had to take this decision. We can safely assume, however, that her tears were little consolation for all those who are now denied refuge in Sweden.

The Moderates, the leading party of the bourgeois Alliance that governed between 2006 and 2014, were not to be outdone. Under Fredrik Reinfeldt, the party had toned down its old image of the typical right wing conservatives, but the new party leader, Anna Kinberg Batra, has again started to steer the party away from the "open up our hearts" rhetoric of her predecessor. Her reaction to the government's announcement was: good, but we need to tighten up our borders even more!

The Christian Democrats, under their new leader Ebba Busch Thor, have been flirting with the racist voters lately, under the threat of falling below the 4 percent mark and therefore losing all their parliamentary seats. They naturally followed suit. The only party from the Alliance that stood out from the others was the Centre party, formerly the Farmers' Party but now more of a crazy liberal party led by brats. They, of course, hate unions and think lower wages are the way to welcome refugees, lest anyone thinks they are the "good" liberals.

Sweden Democrats

The racist Sweden Democrats naturally rejoiced at this admission from both the government and the opposition that they were right all along: Sweden cannot take all those refugees. Of course, they did not commend the government on its new policies. Instead, they kept attacking them for still letting in too many foreigners. Much as they cherish their "We are the only real opposition" rhetoric, they have lately been moving closer to the Alliance and are now openly wooing the Moderates. The day when the bourgeois Alliance returns to power, supported by the Swedish Democrats, may not be too far off.

If the Social Democrats and the Greens thought they could win new voters with their new announcement, they were sorely mistaken. In the latest polls, the Social Democrats dropped to 23.2 percent, which is behind the Moderates (25.6 percent), and not too far ahead of the Swedish Democrats (18.2 percent). In an election, they probably would not do quite so badly, but it does look like they may well drop below 30 percent for the first time since 1911 (28.5 percent) and that was before universal suffrage was instituted.

The announcement naturally had a significant impact on public opinion. The number of people who think Sweden should accept fewer refugees has increased. This was to be expected. If most of the establishment, including the parties that were talking about the need to be generous only the day before, suddenly proclaim Sweden cannot afford all those refugees, then many people are likely to be convinced that we really cannot.

It should, however, be noted that those figures have been varying quite a bit. During the first months of the present crisis, the pro-refugee sentiment was on the rise. According to a poll in September, 44 percent wanted Sweden to increase the number of refugees who were allowed to stay, which was a big improvement over February, when the figure had been 26 percent. With a radicalised workers' movement that clearly pointed out who is really draining our resources; the banks, the corporations, the wealthy, the pro-refugee figures could clearly be raised again.

Deportations

One natural consequence of the government's announcement is that the number of deportations will increase. Anders Ygeman, Minister of Internal Affairs, told the authorities to get ready to deport 80,000 people. When asked about it, he replied that there was no decision that 80,000 would be the number of deportations, the exact number would be up to the Department of Migration.

Regardless, the fact that the Minister of Internal Affairs even mentioned such a figure means that, at least, tens of thousands will be sent back. Shocking as that may seem to people who are used to regarding Swedish Social Democracy as something of a beacon for people who are forced to flee oppression and war, in fact only about half of the people applying for asylum are granted it, and the other half are not allowed to stay.

Around 160,000 arrived last year, so 80,000 being sent back would not really be surprising. That is, of course, no reason not to launch a fierce struggle to open the borders for all refugees arriving here, to stop all deportations and to give everyone papers and full citizen rights.

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