

Swedish election: Mobilise against the right!

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Sweden goes to the polls on Sunday, September 9, and surveys suggest that the result will be a big success for the rightwing forces and a corresponding defeat for the labour movement, with demoralisation as a consequence. Responsibility for this lies primarily with the leaderships of the Social Democrats and Left Party, who have faithfully moved to the right in their vain attempts to "show responsibility" for an economic and political system that is fundamentally hostile to the working class. In doing this, the Social Democrats, the governing party, have effectively undermined themselves and indirectly helped the racist and populist Sweden Democrats, who are predicted to win as much as 20 percent of the vote.

The open bourgeois parties, the Moderates, that is, the main bourgeois party, and the Christian Democrats, constitute a substantial threat to the social and political rights of the working class. They want to reduce employment rights, giving employers greater freedom to cut jobs. Their idea of job creation is the extension of precarious jobs, forcing workers to take on several jobs to support themselves. This is especially true for young people and immigrants. Health and safety representatives shall no longer be appointed by the unions but by the employer and the number of qualifying days for sick pay will be increased, while the sick pay itself is to be reduced.

These parties have also been increasingly hysterical in their demands for increased repression with increased police numbers and harsher sentences and in their attacks on immigrants and refugees in their attempts to win back voters from the Sweden Democrats. These are just a few examples of how the bourgeoisie, with the help of the Sweden Democrats, is planning to attack the entire working class in Sweden, regardless of national or ethnic background.

The established parties stand in essence for the same politics

Because of the threat they pose, it is tactically important to prevent election successes for the bourgeoisie. This does not mean that socialists and workers should have any illusions about the policies of the Social Democratic and Left Party leaders. The cut-backs and privatisation policies were introduced by the Social Democrats in the 1980s and 90s. Today, the Social Democrats, together with the leadership of the Swedish TUC, are pushing for restrictions on the right to strike. Even Swedish membership of NATO is now on the cards.

When the leadership of the Social Democracy moved to the right, the Left Party's leadership followed and occupied the vacant place. One of their main political slogans, "Stop the Hunt for Profit", shows their strategy; trying to benefit from massive dissatisfaction in society against private robbery in the health care and service sectors while leaving their own policy ambiguous and vague. They do not dare to call for the complete reversal of privatisations, returning services to public ownership.

In the context of negotiations with the Social Democrats for a seat in government, their slogan can easily mean that the "freedom of choice revolution" will be kept in place, but that the private firms will be

prevented from earning "too much" money. Such a modest, and deceptive, attitude is worthy of a party whose parliamentarism long ago robbed it of any ambitions to revive a weakened labour movement by leading a real fight in the workplaces and streets.

Fundamentally, there is no political difference between the parties of the establishment. From the Left Party to the Sweden Democrats their ambition is to administer capitalism, keeping the working class in place to guarantee production and profits. What separates them politically is the way they want to do this. Recently, a more aggressive right-wing block has evolved, in the form of the Moderates, the Christian Democrats and the Sweden Democrats. In the light of this it is important to stress that these, including the likes of the Sweden Democrats, are the openly bourgeois parties and the most immediate enemy.

Some left-wing radicals simplistically judge the parties by their day to day policies, and conclude that there are no major differences between them. This then leads them, however, either to call for abstention in the election or, because its platform is marginally "softer", to call for a vote for the Left Party as some kind of "lesser evil". These are premature conclusions based on a one-sided assessment.

Class base

There is a fundamental difference between the Social Democrats and the Left Party, on the one hand, and the openly bourgeois parties on the other hand. The difference lies in which social classes the parties come from and are part of. When the bourgeois parties conduct right-wing politics, they are only doing what their social base, that is, employers, financiers and the voters who identify with them, demand and need.

However, when the Social Democrats and the Left Party pursue their form of bourgeois politics, they are essentially acting in contradiction to the wishes and needs of their voters. Very few social-democratic workers wanted their own party to reorganise the welfare state until it was unrecognisable. But it still happened. The Social Democrats and Left Party are politically bourgeois; they have no real programme to abolish capitalism, and they have been for a long time, in the case of the Social Democrats since the beginning of the 20th century. Nonetheless, they are working class parties in terms of who supports them and what their expectations are. Most people who support the Social Democrats and the Left Party are workers who want to see a labour policy. Therefore, these parties are contradictory formations: bourgeois in politics and leadership but proletarian in class base and history.

Social Democrats and Left Party were historically started by the workers to be their tools in politics. Even today, the Social Democrats, and to a lesser extent, the Left Party, have a strong connection with the trade unions. What has happened is that these parties have, in principle, been kidnapped by a layer of careerists, who ensure a place for themselves at the trough through their control of the party apparatus. In order to maintain their position, they must pressure capital to make certain concessions, to keep the working class disciplined while safeguarding capitalism. In an epoch in which the threat of Stalinism has disappeared but the rivalry between different capitalist blocks has sharpened, there is less room for reformist leaders to find such compromises. Reformist leaders are in a political and moral crisis, they are increasingly forced to attack their own traditional base. This is an international phenomenon that manifests itself in crises almost everywhere for the traditional social-democratic and communist parties.

When Marxists evaluate the established parties, we do not only look at current policies. We must also take into account their class character, which class established them, which class maintains them? What we see in Sweden is that large groups of workers have not yet abandoned their traditional parties, even if that support is shrinking. There are still wide layers hoping for a change. They are also justifiably afraid of the alternative option: an open capitalist government with a right-wing extremist party as its unofficial partner.

Since there is no significant left force that can provide either an alternative or leadership, many workers see no other solution than to use the tools they have, however deformed, to stop capital's open parties from coming to power. They will therefore vote for the Social Democrats or the Left Party and, in the best cases, express expectations of a change to the benefit of labour policy. Indeed, the Left Party looks like it is on the way to its best ever results. However, some extremely demoralised and confused layers have been captured by the Sweden Democrats and use that party as a perverted and self-harming form of protest.

Left pressure on the Social Democrats and the Left Party

Thus, the choice is not just between different degrees of bourgeois politics but also between parties from different classes. According to sectarian voices on the left, it does not matter who forms the government after the election. As we have seen, this is not how wide layers in the working class think, and for good reason. If the Alliance of the Moderates and the Christian Democrats wins, there is a high risk of worse attacks on the working class than if there is a social-democratic government.

This is not because the Social Democratic leaders are better in themselves than the bourgeois leaders, because they are not. The difference is that they are under pressure from a different class. That pressure is more often dormant and potential than actually effective. But the movement around Corbyn in the British Labour Party shows that it can be activated and lead to a left-wing development under certain conditions. Either way, the pressure, passive or active, is a factor in holding the reformist leaders back from the worst attacks. The purely capitalist parties, on the other hand, have a relatively harmonious relationship with their class base, which urgently puts pressure on them to increase the attacks on the working class and oppressed.

Socialists should not be neutral in the choice between parties representing workers and parties that represent workers' enemies in the class struggle. As socialists, we must make common cause with the politically conscious layers within the working class against the representatives of their enemies. To refuse support for the workers' parties because of their miserable leaders would mean refusing to act together with our class when it is defending itself against capital's offensive in the parliamentary context. It would mean deserting under fire and certainly would not increase confidence in revolutionary socialists.

Of course, elections and parliamentary work are not the most important venue for conducting class struggles, far from it. But that does not mean they are of no importance at all. Strengths between the classes in Parliament affect (and are influenced by) the strengths of society in general.

Neither the Social Democrats nor the Left Party is the party that the working class really needs. But that does not mean that Marxists should automatically be cheering if those parties are weakened or even disappear. It makes a huge difference whether they disappear as a result of pressure from the right or of pressure from the left.

Today's situation for social democracy illustrates this. They are at a historically weak level, and not only with regard to opinion polls. But this is not linked to a left-wing development. Quite the opposite. It is right-wing extremism, in the form of the Sweden Democrats, that has had a major breakthrough, and it appears quite possible that the bourgeois parties will form a government.

The Left Party has moved forward it is true, but not on a radical leftist policy, it has just taken on the policy of the Social Democrats of yesterday. In addition, the extra-parliamentary class struggle is at low levels. The whole political spectrum has moved to the right, and the collapse of social democracy is part of that process. As Marxists, we are struggling to transform the workers' movement into a new working class

party, in the long run a communist party. But a tactic is required for this. Petitions or launching various alternatives that get a few hundred votes are not such a tactic.

It is also not an option to surrender and uncritically vote for Social Democrats or the Left Party out of fear of the right, in the absence of anything else. The Left Party has no ambition other than to become the new Social Democrats, and that project will fail for them just as it has for the original Social Democrats.

Vote against the bourgeoisie and fight for a workers' policy at the same time

What is required now is a mobilisation of the working class to counter the traditional bourgeois parties and the Sweden Democrats so that they do not form a government after the election, which would strengthen the development to the right. To do this the established reformist working class parties must be used as tools, not in a way that creates harmful illusions in their policies and leadership but, on the contrary, in a way that can help to develop a left-wing opposition within them.

We urge all workers and socialists to vote for either the Social Democrats or the Left Party in the parliamentary elections, but not as an isolated act. A vote for either of these two bourgeois workers' parties must be combined before and after the election with the demand that they conduct the policies they vaguely claim to have, namely labour policy. Everyone who is dissatisfied with the policies of betrayal, and there are many, must unite and expose the leaders of the Social Democrats and the Left Party to massive pressure from below. Trade unions and workplaces are of course the central platform for this, but it also applies to popular movements such as the Tenant Association and local branches of these two parties, social media and so on.

Examples of demands that need to be fought for are:

- * Return the entire welfare sector to state, municipalities and county councils. It is not enough just to limit the profits as the Left Party in its deep demoralisation stops at.
- * Defend the right to strike.
- * Start drawing up a public plan for an environmentally and climate-friendly reorganisation of society.
- * Reinstate a socially aware housing policy. Build to meet needs, not for the contractors to make money.
- * Re-nationalise the schools. Abolish the private schools and the postmodern pedagogical ideas that only benefit students from academic families. Stop downgrading vocational training for working class youth.
- * No to all approaches to NATO.
- * Defend the right to asylum. Open the borders!
- * Defend our suburbs against both policemen and gangs through workers' self-organisation.
- * For mass mobilisations and organised self-defence to stop the threat from fascists and racists.
- * Stop the attacks against women's rights; defend the right to abortion; raise wages; clear sexism out of the judiciary, no to commercial surrogate motherhood.
- * Abolish the current pension system that discriminates against the working class and women. For a pension to live on.
- * Nationalise the banks and large companies under workers' control to rebuild society and redistribute

resources.

This is the kind of the policy that the working class needs to live in a worthwhile way. There must be a grassroots movement that tells the leaders of the labour movement either to implement this policy or step aside in favour of leadership that actually fights for the working class. As Marxists, we make the prediction that today's leaders will not fight for a policy that is even half as radical as this. To all our colleagues in the workplaces who do not share our prediction, but who have hopes that today's leaders will be reasonable, we say: Let's jointly start fighting for these demands here and now.

The future will show which side today's leaders will be on. Then remember our words: To win we need a new Marxist leadership and a new revolutionary workers' party because today's leaders will continue to fail and even betray us. But for now we are stuck with what we have. We can at least unite with social democratic and Left Party workers to put powerful pressure on today's leaders of the Labour movement and make sure that the whole right is defeated on the election day. Irrespective of what happens in the election, we must then start with the more important task of developing the real class struggle, because that will be the way to really win against the right.

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