



Swedish elections: Right-wing prevails, Sweden Democrats enters the parliament ? time for action

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How the violent racist Sweden Democrats made their breakthrough and how to stop them

In Sunday's general elections, the racist, populist Sweden Democrat party (SD), a once open Nazi group who have exchanged their boots and Nazi salutes for suits and Islamophobia, made their breakthrough, passed the four percent threshold and entered parliament. After a campaign defined by Islamophobia and attacks on immigrants the party managed to get a 5.7 percent electoral support, which translates to about 330,000 votes.

The wave of electoral successes for the extreme right in Europe has reached Sweden. For several years now, SD have tried to break their old bond with the extra-parliamentary Nazi movement, something they've mostly succeeded in doing. A wider, reactionary layer of voters have been attracted to their xenophobia and efficient populism. The party now tries to model itself the established, uncontroversial anti-immigrant party, like the Danish Peoples' Party, and will push the other right-wing parties to co-operate with them. Looking to the right-wing parties for co-operation comes natural to the SD: they are a racist right-wing part looking to weakening workers' rights.

One of few issues where SD might agree with the left is in a parliamentary vote on withdrawing Swedish troops in Afghanistan. But to the SD, this is mainly a question of focusing the army on the defense of the bourgeois state and its territory, rather than any international solidarity with the oppressed Afghan people.

The rise of the SD will most likely be of decisive importance to the political period ahead.

The established right-wing parties increased their voter share, but the conservative Moderate party, coalition leaders, won't be able to form a government that easy as the SD probably will end up holding the balance of power. At one point even using the slogan 'the only working class party?' (a clear stab at the Social Democrats), the Moderates tried to act as the responsible center party, safeguarding both finances and social security. This strategy paid off, and they have continued to gather support from wider groups than the traditional right-wing electorate. The Social Democrats are still the most popular party among LO (Swedish TUC) members, but according to a recent poll more people would like to see Moderate leader Fredrik Reinfeldt as prime minister than Mona Sahlin, the Social Democrat chairwoman.

Aggressively supporting Reinfeldt's attempts to describe himself as the 'father of the nation?', the media has largely abstained from criticising the Moderate leader. The Moderates have been given overtly positive press. The most telling example of that is how the media completely ignored the bloody affairs of Minister of Foreign Affairs Carl Bildt, despite the new facts uncovered about his involvement in a multinational company committing heinous crimes against people in Sudan.

The right-wing electorate was supported in a massive campaign during the pre-election period, and as usual, the right-wing parties collected large financial support from the big capital. Quite understandably, the Moderates are one of few parties who still haven't made their financial donor register public.

The media support and well-financed campaign serves to partly explain the right-wing successes in the elections. Another reason is that the inability of the Social Democrats and Mona Sahlin to build a powerful opposition and

mobilize all those who were unhappy with the right-wing policies of the government.

The election defeat is a manifestation of the acute crisis of leadership in the workers' movement. Despite four years of anti-working class politics, tax cuts for the rich, attacks on the trade unions, the unemployed and the ill, continued privatisations and cuts, a growing mass unemployment ? despite all of this, the opposition was defeated. The election was a disaster to the Social Democrats, who lost 4.4 percent and ended up with only 30.9 percent of the electoral support, which is a loss of 140,000 votes as compared to the previous elections in 2006. The once-mighty party is now only slightly bigger than the Moderates.

Losing 0.3 percent in comparison with the previous elections, the Left party ended up with a 5.6 percent result. In absolute numbers, their support increased with 4,000 votes - the lower percentage is due to an increase in votes in total. They, too, failed in strengthening the opposition against the government.

Why did the opposition fare so badly? Neither the Social Democrats nor the Left party were really interested in organising or leading a wider workers' resistance against the right-wing charge. When the government initiated their attacks on the unemployment security, some TUC leaders were forced to support the call for a political strike. Unwilling to leave the safe haven of class collaboration, the Social Democratic leadership quickly tried to demobilise the movement. The election result must be respected, they said, and it would be undemocratic to defend the workers against the attacks. As a result, over half a million workers left the union unemployment funds, and almost as many has left the TUC since.

The Left party never took a stand against the cowardliness of the TUC leaders, and hardly participated in the mobilisation against the reform that took place in Stockholm around initiatives such as the September alliance. The leadership of the Young Left, obedient to their mother party, even tried to push through a ban against any criticism of the TUC leaders, and wanted the organisation to formally reject any involvement with the movement ?to the left of the Left party?.

And what about Left party chair Lars Ohly, the supposed radical in the three-party opposition coalition? He never put any concrete demands to the TUC leadership, he never advocated collective action in defense of the workers. Appearing on TV, he put his energy into portraying himself as a traditional social democrat, and limited his criticism to the unwillingness of the right-wing government coalition to invest their way out of the crisis. He openly affiliated himself with Keynesian theories, but giving them a left cover doesn't make this bourgeois school of economics any less bourgeois.

The election defeat means the right within the Social Democrats will feel vindicated in their criticism against the cooperation with the Left party. It remains to be seen whether they will actually try to oust Sahlin. The social democratic right wing largely agree with the analysis of many bourgeois commentators: the Social Democrats declined because of their cooperation with the ?communist? Ohly. The truth is rather the opposite: the decline in support for the Social Democrats among their traditional voters is just because they won't defend working class interests. That's the key problem.

This late autumn, Arbetarmakt called on the Socialist party (Swedish Usec section) and the Justice party (CWI). With the election coming up, we said that fighting left forces needs to build a rank-and-file movement which in turn would be able to form an anti-capitalist alternative to the red/green opposition. Alas, our call didn't receive much hearing. The election results tells us what happened then. The Left party oriented to the right in order to appease the Social Democrats, and this created a vacuum that could have been filled by a progressive alternative. Even worse, this vacuum seems to have been filled by the Sweden Democrats. As we go to press, the election results are not yet finalised, but there are signs that the SD gained even in poorer working class communities such as Sofielund in Malmö and Angered in Gothenburg ? places where a radical workers' alternative is needed more than anywhere else. If this turns out to be true is yet to be seen, but if it does, it's further evidence to the fact that the success of the SD is the price the workers' movement has to pay for failing to create a militant leadership that will efficiently defend working class solidarity.

Tiny parties that try to build a new workers' party themselves, such as the Socialist party and the Justice party. Will at most gain local, municipal breakthroughs, but they won't be able to win the wider workers' movement for their strategy. The fact that the Justice party defended and strengthened their municipal seats in Haninge outside of Stockholm and the northern city of Luleå (they have two seats in both those places), is proof that an alternative of struggle can build a fundament by organising the fight against cuts and privatisation. But in order for an opposition to achieve a wider breakthrough they need to gain approval for their demands in a united front with all those workers prepared to defend their interests, and this without declaring themselves as the new workers' party in advance. It needs to be according to the principle of 'with the workers' leaders if they fight for us, without them if they abstain from the struggle, and against them if necessary'. In such a struggle, revolutionaries can hope to win reformist workers for revolutionary politics and for a new party based on mutual experiences by making demands on the existing working class leadership, and, step by step and through common actions, convince reformist workers to liberate themselves from this leadership.

The election results sent a shivering chill through the country not least through the suburbs of the larger cities. One SD representative, Kent Ekeröth, promised that the party would make the Muslims leave Sweden with a combination of incentives (high repatriation grants) and force (intensified attacks and forced assimilation). In the aftermath to the elections, SD chair Jimmie Åkesson and other leading SD representatives did what they could in order to portray themselves as 'not hostile against immigrants', in order to push through a deal with the right-wing parties. Such comments won't fool anyone who's seen their inflammatory and incredibly Islamophobic election commercials, or read Åkesson's article in the tabloid Aftonbladet last autumn, where he declared the Muslims the greatest threat against Sweden.

The election result could be the straw that breaks the camel's back to all those in the working class and immigrant communities who've been disadvantaged by the right-wing government's policies. This Monday, large protest demonstrations were held in several Swedish cities. Arbetarmakt sets out to transform these spontaneous mass demonstrations into the first step in building a mass movement against the racist SD and the right-wing's attacks. Lars Ohly and other leaders of the workers' movement have said that the SD needs to be met with a wide, anti-racist fightback. We agree, and will demand that they stand by their words and use their influence in the workers' movement in order to mobilise an all-out struggle. Especially Ohly, who said on the election night that he wanted to take the struggle to the streets, needs to be held responsible for his words. We have to struggle for the whole of the workers' movement to take this path.

Everyone who agrees with us also needs to call on everyone who are ready to fight to form an active, independent opposition in the workers' movement, on the workplaces, among the women and the youth. Naturally, Lars Ohly would rather see the wide resistance against the SD to be based on the red/green opposition. We need to make sure the resistance is able to act on its own and based on the real interests of the working class. The Green party, for example, would hardly be interested in a movement that connects the anti-racist struggle to the class struggle. The opposition we need has to be able to do what the red/green coalition couldn't. We need to mobilise to fight now to turn these new developments:

- Fight all threats against immigrant and refugee rights
- Build a movement based on the working class communities for improvement of our living areas and more resources to housing, education and health care
- Prepare the workers' movement to fight employment agencies, social dumping and attacks on employment rights.
- Build a fighting workers' opposition in the LO. We need a union-wide discussion on how to build a fighting political alternative.
- Last but not least: Unconditional solidarity with people fighting imperialist occupation. Swedish troops out of Afghanistan now, but in the name of international solidarity, not rotten nationalism.

The EC of Arbetarmakt

Swedish section of the League for the Fifth International

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