

Workers' movement must mobilise against Fascist terror in Finland and Sweden

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On September 10, in Finland's capital city, Helsinki, 28-year-old Jimi Joonas Karttunen was attacked from behind by supporters of the Finnish branch of the neo-Nazi Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM), after having protested against them during one of their provocative street actions. Six days later, Karttunen tragically died from the brain trauma sustained in the vicious beating. On September 17, Swedish Social Democrat and trade unionist Pierre Esbjörnsson was the victim of an arson attack. His car was set on fire, a fire that could easily have spread to his house, and the symbol of the NRM was spray painted on the wall of his house.

These attacks expose what is at the core of the Nazi ideology. The fascists' theories and arguments are entirely secondary: their objective is to build a movement committed to violent direct action to terrorise their opponents. The attacks also show that the Nazis should not be understood as just racists or a threat only to those who fall outside their white heterosexual macho norm. Their violence is directed at all of their opponents, and especially the left and the workers' movement. The fight against Nazis and all forms of fascism is therefore not only about solidarity with vulnerable groups. It is also about the right of self-defence of the labour movement.

The latest events once again underscore the need for the workers' movement and the left to take this issue seriously, in more than just words. Swedish anti-racists can easily recall the NRM's violent attack on a peaceful demonstration in Kärrtorp in Stockholm in 2013. The repeated attacks and provocations toward organisations like Young Left, and now the attack against Pierre Esbjörnsson, apparently by the same organisation, show that the Nazis are not just a threat to the revolutionary left but against all those active in the workers' movement in general.

Attacks like these should be followed by powerful protests; protests not "only" against racism and the violence that is its direct consequence, but that also brand the Nazis as splitters of the working class. The poison of racism and the pursuit of a nationalist community set worker against worker and divide, confuse and disarm us in the face of the attacks from the right and the bourgeoisie. The struggle against social cuts, venture capitalists, the dismantling of welfare systems and deteriorating working conditions require unity among workers, regardless of origin, against the capitalists, bosses and right-wing politicians, whether they are Swedish or not.

The fact that some Nazis occasionally verbally attack corporations, banks and capitalism does not alter that. By rejecting internationalism and class struggle and instead preaching national unity, the fascists undermine the real fight against these corporations and banks. If any individuals in their ranks are at all serious about this rhetoric, that only reveals a deep confusion on their part.

The workers' movement must therefore not only organise rallies, but also begin to act directly against the Nazis. To begin with, we need to think about matters of security when we organise activities, especially around anti-racism and anti-fascism, which tend to attract Nazis. While the Nazis might not always use physical force, as in Kärrtorp, it is enough that they show up and create a disturbance in their attempt to intimidate people into not attending meetings. Those provocations might have been less frequent lately, but they will increase if the Nazi movement is allowed to grow. The task now must be to prevent this, and to build our capacity to respond. Every time the Nazis show up, using force or not, is one time too many.

At the same time, we must not leave the Nazis alone as long as they are not directly attacking us. The mere fact that their movement exists is a threat to everyone organised in the left and the workers' movement, to everyone the Nazis regard as non-Swedes, to all defenders of women's rights and to LGBT people. We need to mobilise against them wherever they show up, not only to show that their opponents outnumber them, but that we will take action to prevent them occupying a single metre of the streets.

Many rank-and-file trade unionists might not have felt at home with attempts to stop Nazi protests in previous years. While this is understandable, our answer against the passivity in the trade-union movement against fascism must be to underscore the necessity of active struggle against the Nazis. Above all, while it is necessary even for small numbers to try to prevent or disrupt Nazi meetings and demos, our objective is to build a mass movement against them.

Massive mobilisations of thousands of anti-fascists would be a different matter entirely. One natural example to refer to would be November 30, 1991, when 10,000 antifascists stopped the Sweden Democrats, then still a Nazi organisation, from gathering in Stockholm. Similar positive examples can be found more recently, like when the Nazis were driven away by a popular anti-racist demonstration in Kärrtorp.

It used to be that most left-wing activists agreed on the principle that it's right to stop Nazis and run them off the streets. In recent years, however, reformist misleaders have gained increasing support for their view that we must respect the supposed "freedom of speech" of the Nazis. As a general rule, we do respect the right of free speech even of those with whom we have fundamental disagreements, but with fascists it is not just a matter of countering wrong ideas.

We must learn from history, fascism succeeds by building a mass movement to suppress all freedom of speech. That is why we have to fight within the workers' movement for the principle: no platform for fascists! The principle must be accepted not just in words, but in action. Wherever fascists and Nazis try to mobilise, they should be countered with powerful mobilisations to stop them.

To make that possible, we need to be many and we need to stand firm. The leadership of the political and trade union organisations in the Swedish workers' movement are however not interested at all in such a perspective. Rank-and-file activists in the movement need to demand it. No longer can we sit back and silently hope that the Nazis don't grow further or become an even bigger threat; the situation must be dealt with sooner rather than later.

Some might ask why the workers' movement should direct its energy against dangerous but still marginal groups when the class divide within society is increasing, housing and social problems are widespread, working conditions deteriorate and welfare systems are eroded or sold off. It is true that some of the fascists' goals are met even today, by the current government, in the form of increased deportations of immigrants and draconian border controls. The objection, therefore, should not be brushed aside, it must be taken seriously.

Our response is that we should not see the battle against the Nazis, or against racism, as a separate issue from others. We must combine that with a fight against anything that threatens us, against everything that attacks our interests and destroys our lives. More specifically, against right-wing policies, cuts, deteriorating working conditions and increased class differences. As a necessary part of the struggle we must fight against all forms of racism, sexism and homophobia that oppress and divide us, and against the fascists and Nazis who threaten us physically.

We need a revitalised, militant workers' movement that will fight against right-wing politics and the bourgeoisie, that does not tolerate fascists on the streets and firmly opposes racism, sexism and homophobia in its own ranks.

The current leadership of the workers' movement, in the top ranks of the Social Democratic and Left Party, as well as the upper layer of the LO and TCO trade union federations, aren't interested in that. In recent decades, we've seen them in continuous retreat before the bourgeoisie, moving steadily to the right, with the Social Democrats taking the lead and the Left Party in tow a few steps behind. A campaign such as the one we call for is a necessary task unless we want to see conditions deteriorating further. With worsening conditions, racist "solutions" will appeal to more groups of workers. They need to be given another alternative, and an opportunity to fight for their actual interests.

Rank-and-file activists in the workers' movement must demand this of their representatives, as long as they indeed remain representatives. It seems unlikely today that the leadership of the Social Democrats, Left Party or LO and TCO trade union federations can be pushed to leading this necessary battle. As revolutionary Marxists, we are of course aware of that. But as long as they're the leadership of the workers' movement, we need to demand it of them. At the same time, we do not propose doing nothing until they take the lead. By organising those who already see the need to fight to mobilise the whole labour movement, we can begin to build an alternative leadership that is willing and able to fight on all fronts.

The workers' movement can only be revitalised from below. A rank-and-file movement must be organised within the trade unions, with the many radical and dissatisfied members mobilised. A new, militant leadership, elected from below, needs to be forged.

This is no easy task, and one that can only be realised through resolute and long-term struggle. But it is an absolutely necessary one if we are not to let the bourgeoisie and the right-wing run society entirely according to their wishes, with increased class inequalities, insecurity, racism and fascist violence as the inevitable consequence.

Arbetarmakt, Swedish section of the League for the Fifth International, took part in the memorial ceremony for Jimi Joonas Karttunen in Sweden, and we send our warmest solidarity wishes to his family, as well as our unconditional solidarity to the trade unionist Pierre Esbjörnsson against the Nazi attack. The best way to honour Jimi Joonas Karttunen and the many, many other victims of Nazi violence is through a determined struggle to uproot fascism and class society.

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