

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7822>



Sweden

Swedish elections provoke earthquake

- IV Online magazine - 2022 - IV572 - September 2022 -

Publication date: Monday 19 September 2022

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The Swedish Social Democrats lost government power in the 11 September election. They will in all likelihood be replaced by a right-wing government consisting of Moderates (Conservatives) and Christian Democrats, possibly also by the Liberal Party. The government will seek and be completely dependent on the active support of the right-wing populist and xenophobic Sweden Democrats.

While the voters' most important issue was health care and while the climate disaster became increasingly clear, an aggressive right, with the help of a passive social democracy without ideas, succeeded in dominating the election campaign with discussions on crime, claiming the connection between immigration and crime and avoiding dealing with the climate crises and instead campaigning in favor of expanded nuclear power.

The right has painted a picture of Sweden being hit by an uncontrolled wave of violence. In fact, crime, including violent crime, has generally fallen in Sweden in recent decades. But in one area there has been a considerable rise, namely armed confrontations between criminal gangs, mainly related to drugs. Hundreds have been killed, the vast majority gang members, but also bystanders. This has been used as excuse to demand significantly harder penalties and repression.

The result had been a sharp turn to the right. This turn is particularly noticeable within the right block. Its electoral success can be entirely attributed to the Sweden Democrats. The other right-wing parties all lost votes.

The Sweden Democrats, on the other hand, increased by over three per cent and is by far the largest party on the right. A coming bourgeois government is entirely dependent on their support. This means nothing less than an earthquake in Swedish politics.

For a long time, not least on the left, there has been the view that the Sweden Democrats' success was above all due to dissatisfied workers, who are actually still social democrats, voting in protest for SD and that they could quickly be won back with a slightly more radical social democratic policy. This is grossly underestimating Sweden's most successful political party.

Sweden Democrats - the most successful political party

The Sweden Democrats have a skilled and determined leadership, with roots in racist and fascist movements. It has systematically built up a strong party. Not least, it has been able to use the favorable municipal and state grants that political parties receive to give the party organizational strength. The Sweden Democrats are also the most successful of all parties at using social media with xenophobia as the main unifying message. This has not least given them a growing influence among younger voters

The party's electoral successes have been striking. At its parliamentary debut in 2010, the party received 5.7 per cent. The support has since increased to 12.9 per cent, 17.5 per cent and this year 20.6 per cent. No other party has the same strong cohesion. Attempts from the left to win over the voters of the Sweden Democrats have failed. Eighty-six per cent of the party's voters from 2018 voted for the party again this year, a uniquely high party loyalty.

Indeed, the Sweden Democrats have continuously won over new voter groups, both from the right and the left. In this year's election, 14 per cent came from the moderates and 12 per cent from the social democrats. The Sweden Democrats have long been the strongest party among male workers. But also large groups of entrepreneurs, and after the last election, farmers vote for the party. The party is politically homogeneous. The vast majority of their voters describe themselves as right-wing and they deeply identify with SD's national conservative and xenophobic credo. The Sweden Democrats' roots in and connections to racist and fascist groups are no complication for them.

Until the 2018 election, there was a demarcation line of decency also within the Swedish bourgeoisie against a collaboration with a xenophobic and right extremist party. This line has long since been crossed. First up was business, which successfully managed to get the Sweden Democrats to accept continued privatization of Swedish welfare. Then it wasn't long before the leader of the Christian Democrats, Ebba Busch, offered meatballs and opened the right to organized parliamentary cooperation. Quickly every red line disappeared. But the party was no easily caught victim. On the contrary, the Sweden Democrats' program has largely become that of the bourgeois parties. "No other party has stood up like the Sweden Democrats in strong headwinds against increased immigration," declared the leader of the moderates and intended prime minister Kristersson admiringly. They have been a good example in the fight against crime, said the Liberals' leader Johan Persson.

We see the result now. Today, the Sweden Democrats have outgrown the traditional bourgeois parties and is the dominant right-wing party. In all the regions outside the big cities, they usually have 25-30 per cent of the votes, surpassing the Moderates, the leading bourgeois party for the last 45 years, by up to 10 per cent. Without doubt, the Sweden Democrats have exceptionally good opportunities to influence the new government's policy, even if they probably will choose to not join formally.

Social Democrats adaptation

The Social Democrats have been in government for the last eight years, despite the bourgeois parties plus the Sweden Democrats having a majority in the Parliament. This was possible because two bourgeois parties, the Liberals and the market-liberal Center Party, reached a political agreement with the Social Democrats. One of the aims was to keep the Sweden Democrats out of political influence. Through the agreement, the Social Democrats made far-reaching concessions and accepted, among other things, lower taxes for high income earners, reduced job security for workers and the introduction of market-controlled rents. The social democratic government has also implemented a series of measures to reduce immigration and to place Swedish refugee policy at the EU's minimum level. Border surveillance has been tightened, family reunification has been made more difficult and refugees will no longer be able to count on permanent residence permits.

In this year's election campaign, the Social Democrats' tactic has been to essentially adapt their program to that of the right. Issues such as the climate crisis or defense of the welfare state today under attack by commercial interests, which were formally part of the Social Democrats' election platform, played a secondary role, if they were raised at all. The Social Democrats rather tried to overbid the right in demands for tougher penalties - that the government has presented some 70 laws in this direction has been a constantly recurring message. Likewise, the connection between criminality and immigration has been underlined. Special legislation has been proposed for "non-Nordic" people and the prime minister has spoken condescendingly about "Somalitowns". New nuclear power has also been accepted.

The most notable capitulation, however, was the decision to abandon 200 years of formal Swedish neutrality policy and support a Swedish accession to NATO. The initial social-democratic reaction after February 24 was that a Swedish NATO accession would contribute to further destabilizing the security political situation in northern Europe. However, after an intense campaign from the right-wing parties, the party leadership chose, without letting the party members take a position, to give in to the pressure. The main reason was with all certainty to remove the issue from

the election campaign agenda, and they have succeeded in that. NATO accession and the war in Ukraine were completely absent from the election campaign.

Left Party vote falls

The social democrats reached its second worst result in 111 years, despite an increase in votes, from 28.3 to 30.4 per cent, and thus lost government power. The increase of the Social Democratic vote can be explained by the fact that there was a shift to the right also within the left bloc. The Left Party got a mediocre result and fell from 8 to 6.7 per cent. The party leadership made an American-inspired campaign around the party leader while trying to present themselves as the new social democrats. Particular attention was paid to the purpose of trying to win back “workers in milltowns” attracted by the Sweden Democrats.

For that reason, the Left Party downplayed issues that they thought such workers would disapprove of, such as, for example, demands for changes of life to save the climate or NATO. The party also supported a proposal from the bourgeois parties for a sharp reduction in the price of petrol. In addition, they demanded to enter an eventually coming red-green government that would also include the neoliberal center party – the only bourgeois party that insisted on not cooperating with the Sweden Democrats. As a result was the Left Party lost particularly among the workers it tried to reach - while the Sweden Democrats continued their success in these environments.

On the other hand, the Left Party, like the Social Democrats, did well in the bigger cities. Sweden is thus similar to many other European countries with red big cities and a blue (or blue/brown) countryside.

It is clear that the forces that today mainly offer resistance to the right-wing wave are among movements that fight against the climate crisis, racism, sexual repression and social austerity. Some trade unions, above all within welfare and social service, have also been radicalized.

Today, the Left has a huge task to build a broad counter-offensive with these forces, with the climate crisis and the defense of welfare state at the center.

18 September 2022

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