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Sweden

Stieg Larsson in the Struggle

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Stieg Larsson is world famous as a result of his “Millennium series” of crime novels, all published since his death in 2004. His less known political history is sketched here by HÅ¥kan Blomqvist, editor of the Swedish revolutionary socialist paper Internationalen from 1979-1999.

Stieg Larsson came to support the Vietnamese liberation struggle in 1968, when he was only 14 years old. He joined the Kommunistiska Arbetarförbundet “(The Communist Workers League), the Swedish section of the Fourth International — around 1974 in the northern town of UmeÅ¥. There he distributed the party’s paper for soldiers –Röd Soldat (Red Soldier) — among the conscripts in his infantry regiment.

After completing his military service he worked at a paper mill and later as a postman. In 1977 he went to Eritrea to deliver money collected by the party and solidarity groups (including the Fourth International, according to his companion Eva Gabrielsson) to the Marxist-oriented EPLF liberation movement. During his stay with the guerrillas he helped train women soldiers in handling mortars, which he learned in the army.

Back in Sweden he and his companion Eva moved to Stockholm where they joined the northern branch of the party in the capital. He carried out ordinary party work and began his trade at the Swedish press agency TT, where he worked with graphics.

In the late '70s he also started writing for the party’s weekly journal Internationalen (the International). During the '80s he wrote many well-researched feature articles about U.S. imperialism, right-wing extremism and fascism. He also contributed with articles on cultural and scientific matters — his first feature was about Jules Vernes.

Together with Eva and other comrades he was active in the Grenada-Swedish friendship association, and wrote about the revolution in Internationalen. In 1982 he went with a group of comrades to Grenada to experience the revolution. Back in Sweden when the Coard faction organized its coup d’etat and Washington invaded, he interviewed by phone comrades who were in Grenada on solidarity teams.

During the early 1980s, after years of left-wing hegemony in the streets, Swedish racist and fascist groups became active. In 1984, inspired by the British Anti Nazi League, members of the Swedish section worked with others to organize Stoppa Rasismen (Stop Racism) and carry out countermobilizations. By 1985 it became a national organization; Stieg was a member of the party’s fraction in this broader organization. Together with other comrades he developed contacts with the British comrades and their journal, Searchlight.

He contributed to Internationalen and the journal of the Swedish Stoppa Rasismen, but I think it was during these years he developed the idea of a Swedish Searchlight — becoming the project of Expo in 1995 (which he started together with other former activists in the Stoppa Rasismen).

The “fall of the wall” together with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the “Eastern bloc” brought a dramatic shift of the political and ideological climate in the 1989-91 period — and of material realities. The 1991 Swedish general elections led to the first right-wing victory since 1928. As head of the victorious conservative party Carl Bildt became prime minister.

Furthermore, for the first time ever a racist, populist and anti-immigrant party, Ny Demokrati (New Democracy), was

elected to parliament. This was followed by an upsurge of street racism with the so called Lasermannen (The Laser man) as its most horrible expression: He was a cold-blooded killer who used a laser aim to shoot immigrants in Stockholm.

Fighting the Rise of Racism

The year of Lasermannen (from 1991-1992), the right-wing turn in politics, together with the vanishing of the workers states in Eastern Europe made some comrades take new decisions. For Stieg, who since he moved to Stockholm had concentrated on fighting right-wing extremism and racism – both in his articles and in his practical work – the decision was to concentrate on the issue where he thought he could make a difference. He was very active, together with other journalists, in writing books about the threat of right-wing extremism.

Stieg never formally left the party, which became the Socialistiska partiet (Socialist Party) in 1992, but his membership dues were paid less frequently and then stopped altogether. With a declining membership, the northern Stockholm branch was dissolved. In that context Stieg's membership came to an end.

I have read an inaccurate article in Wikipedia that Stieg actively left the party in 1987 because he “didn't want to defend socialist regimes of a dubious democratic character” [“inte ville försvara utländska socialistiska regimer av tvivelaktigt demokratisk halt.”]. This is ridiculous, both in relation to chronology and to political content.

The Swedish section of course never defended the Stalinist regimes but on the contrary was active in supporting – including through clandestine work – the democratic and working-class opposition in the East. We were allied with Charter 77, KOR, Solidarnosc and the clandestine unions of the Soviet Union.

Stieg's last article for Internationalen in 1989 expressed the strong hope for a democratic socialist development in the Soviet Union and internationally, a hope we all shared. The headline was: “Glasnost in the streets of Moscow – like a warm wind.”

Stieg was continuously active in Stoppa Rasismen together with other comrades. But the organization, which was democratic, non-violent and oriented towards mass action, suffered a decline as a younger generation oriented towards direct action, including physical fights against fascists.

Stoppa Rasismen vanished by the mid '90s. Stieg was occupied with the Expo project in which antiracists of different political colors cooperated. But as I recall no party comrades were active in the project.

We still met in antiracist work, he always kept contact with the comrades at Searchlight and the comrades in Sweden active in the antiracist movement. He now and then contacted Internationalen for information and an exchange of views. We would sometimes ask him for advice and sources of information for articles we were planning. Shortly before he died he invited me up to the Expo office for a chat.

Stieg was in some ways a “product” of our movement (of course without diminishing his subjective history, development and other influences) where he learned to combine a revolutionary socialist perspective with democracy, feminism, antiracism and internationalism. He was “educated” in study circles on revolutionary Marxism with the books and pamphlets of Ernest Mandel, Trotsky, Lenin, Marx and Rosa Luxemburg...

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I never heard of him leaving his socialist ideals â€” but he was never a “Marxist teacher” (although he contributed to the internal debates of the Fourth International around issues like Grenada and the Falkland/Malvinas war). He was a socialist “digging” journalist who came to concentrate his efforts on exposing right-wing extremism, imperialism, racism and fascism. That’s how we knew him, and remember him.

We hope to be able to publish his Internationalen articles for an international audience.

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