

Swedish Greens offer support to right-wing Alliance

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The Green Party has indicated that it will back a right-wing Alliance government to keep out the far-right Sweden Democrats in the aftermath of elections on September 19. The move is a further illustration of the lack of any political difference between the two main blocs in the vote.

While the Greens nominally belong to the so-called Red-Green coalition, together with the Left Party and Social Democrats, the election campaign has shown that no issues of a fundamental character separate them from the Alliance, composed of the Moderate, Liberal, Centre and Christian Democrat parties. Both blocs have vowed to maintain fiscal discipline throughout the election campaign, with the Red-Greens accepting the budgetary framework put forward by the Alliance in formulating its spending proposals.

On September 8, a meeting of the Green Party's 26 regional heads agreed by a margin of 18-8 that the Greens would support the Alliance in the event that the four-party coalition failed to secure a parliamentary majority. The decision was framed as a means of blocking the influence of the Sweden Democrats on a future government, with one regional head commenting to daily SVD, "Personally, I, along with many others, will not accept any form of influence from the Sweden Democrats. Definitely not. It's priority number one for many of us."

Green Party co-leader Peter Eriksson rushed to make clear that the vote did not represent a plan to collaborate with the Alliance, insisting that the party would still work for a Red-Green majority. But his comments were revealing in that they raised no objection to a coalition with the right wing. In fact, he went even further, blaming the Moderate party for blocking the potential for cooperation with the Greens. Referring to Moderate party leader and current Prime

Minister Frederick Reinfeldt, Eriksson explained that collaboration was "totally out of the question because Reinfeldt is not open to such a possibility. It is not on the table."

Reports have indicated that the Greens may still seek some working relations with the Centre and Liberal parties if the Moderates continue to oppose any deal.

Eriksson then went on to make clear that the chief concern of the Greens was to ensure a majority government, declaring, "I am troubled by Reinfeldt's stance, that he wants to give the Sweden Democrats a unique position of power by holding a minority government. It is terrible, it is not good for Sweden."

In a televised debate on Sunday, Prime Minister Reinfeldt stated that he was also opposed to any collaboration with the Sweden Democrats, and that in the event the Alliance fell short of a majority he would seek to govern in a minority. However, he hinted that his opposition to working with the Greens could change, commenting that if the four parties fell short of a majority they would need to seek "a broader parliamentary solution."

The concern in the ruling elite is that an unstable government may prove incapable of carrying out the necessary measures that ruling circles in Sweden will require. Although the election campaign has been dominated by pledges for extra spending for some public services and the possibility of tax cuts, all of these measures have been presented with the condition that the economy continues to stabilise. While Sweden has performed relatively well in recent months economically compared to its European neighbours, unemployment is still running high at over 8 percent. Moreover, heavily dependent on exports to Europe, Sweden's economy remains extremely vulnerable to any economic contraction on the continent, a scenario

that many leading economists regard as inevitable.

Predictably, the discussion of such prospects has been conspicuously absent from the election campaign. As with recent votes internationally, most prominently in Australia and the UK, the official debate has been designed to avoid presenting the austerity programmes to working people. Carrying out such a programme demands a solid parliamentary majority, which the Greens are willing to create by supporting whichever coalition appears most capable of forming a government.

This is a role that the Greens have played time and again internationally. In Germany the Greens helped the Social Democratic Party to introduce the Harz IV plan that cut welfare entitlements. In Ireland, the Greens have sat in coalition with Fianna Fáil, imposing billions of euros in spending cuts through several emergency budgets, whilst at the same time bailing out the banks with unlimited amounts of public money.

During the recent election in Australia, the Greens made clear that their top priority was the establishment of a “stable” government with the secure parliamentary majority that would be required to impose the coming austerity measures. In the aftermath of the vote, with the Labour Party seeking to govern with support from the Greens and several independents, the Greens have sought at the same time to cultivate ties with the right-wing opposition.

The Greens in Sweden can be expected to play a similar role. They share common origins with the Green parties of other countries, having been founded in the early 1980s out of the anti-nuclear weapons movement and various environmental campaigns. Since achieving their first representation in parliament at the 1988 elections, they have worked to ensure the stability of the current set-up. Between 1998 and 2006, the Greens supported the Social Democrat-led government with the Left party in a coalition. This government prepared the way for the vast privatisation drive launched by the Alliance after taking power in 2006. At the last election four years ago, despite no formal agreement to work in a coalition, the Greens campaigned for a continuation of the Social Democrat government.

Now, with the polls increasingly showing that a Red-Green majority is ever more unlikely in 2010, the Greens are preparing to take the next logical step and

seek an Alliance with Conservative and right-wing parties.

The latest polls give the Alliance more than a 5 percent lead over the opposition, although their support continues to hover around the 50 percent level. The Sweden Democrats have polled as high as 5 percent in recent days, well above the 4 percent threshold needed to enter parliament. While the party has sought to whip up anti-immigrant chauvinism with its campaign, the overwhelming response from the population has been to reject such claims. On Monday, for example, a Sweden Democrat rally planned in Gothenburg had to be abandoned after a larger crowd of counter-demonstrators gathered at the scene, which led to a standoff with the police.



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