

Shootings of immigrants in Sweden

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A man was arrested in Malmö on Saturday in connection with a spate of shootings targeting immigrants. The 38-year-old's arrest comes after a massive police operation, involving more than 50 officers.

The story broke in mid October, although authorities now believe the gunman could be responsible for a number of unsolved murders dating back to 2003. According to police information, a total of 15 shootings since October 2009 remain unexplained and may be the work of the gunman, one of which resulted in death. Since these figures were released on October 20, a further four shootings took place, bringing the total to 19. On Sunday, however, the police stated that the arrested man was suspected in only seven of the attacks at this point, leading to suspicions that another individual may be still at large. This contradicts police claims that the shootings were the work of a lone gunman.

Whilst Malmö has been the scene of relatively high levels of gang related violence in recent times, with reports estimating up to 50 shootings in the past year, this is the first time individuals have been targeted with no links to organised crime and with a racial motive.

A clear pattern has emerged, with all of the attacks targeting members of Malmö's substantial immigrant population. An example can be seen in one of the latest attacks, when an Iranian tailor was attacked in his shop on the weekend of October 24-25. After hearing what he imagined to be rocks thrown through the window of his shop, the 57-year old rushed outside to confront his assailant who headbutted him before escaping the scene. It was only later that investigations discovered that the window had been smashed by bullets from a gun.

Tahmourss Yassani, head of the Iranian-Swedish association in the city, said on October 22, "Many people are frightened at the moment, especially families

who have children. I had a phone call just this morning from a mother who was concerned and asked what was happening. We have said to our families to try to stay home in the evenings. We have asked our children to always have their mobile phones on, so we can reach them."

Demonstrations have been held in Malmö against racism and in support of immigration, with several hundred protesters gathering on a number of occasions over the past few weeks.

The targeting of immigrants takes place in the context of a concerted campaign within the political establishment to whip up anti-immigrant sentiment in the population. While the most blatant expression of this is the recent success of the far-right Sweden Democrats, who obtained 20 seats in the elections for the Riksdag (parliament) in September, all of the major parties have sought to blame immigration for the social and economic problems Sweden confronts.

The Sweden Democrats campaigned in the elections for a 90 percent reduction in immigration quotas, and the repatriation of asylum seekers. One candidate for the local council in Trelleborg called for their political opponents to be shot, adding they should "then put them in a bag, stick a stamp on them and send them back to where they come from."

Although the major parties made strong criticisms of the Sweden Democrats as a racist and neo-nazi party, their position on immigration has encouraged such sentiments. The Alliance government, in power since 2006, has constantly made reference to high levels of immigration as a threat to Sweden's economy. It has sought to make it more difficult for asylum seekers and other migrants to settle in the country. The new government has pledged to look at immigration issues during the current parliament, with reports after the election indicating that the Social Democrats may be preparing to cooperate with the Alliance in this area.

The opposition Social Democrats, who work in a coalition with the Left and Green parties, adopted a policy on immigration in the lead-up to the September elections which accepted the reactionary framework of border controls and called for stricter measures on immigration, albeit somewhat less stringent than their Alliance counterparts.

Even the mainstream media has pointed out the connection between the shootings and the shifting of political debate to the right. But instead of an honest analysis of the reasons behind this, all of the blame is pinned on the Sweden Democrats, with the roles of the other parties ignored.

The press has noted the similarities between the string of shootings in Malmö and a number of armed attacks against immigrants in Stockholm in the early 1990s. John Ausonius, nicknamed “laser man” due to the weapon he used, was jailed for life in 1994 after killing one and shooting ten others between 1991 and 1992. Then as now, a far-right political party had just won seats in the Riksdag, with the New Democracy winning representation for the first time in the 1991 elections. Although the party lasted only three years in parliament, it provided crucial support to the government of Carl Bildt between 1991 and 1994, allowing him to rule in a minority.



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