

Swedish Left Party leader announces resignation

Jordan Shilton
8 September 2011

Lars Ohly, the leader of Sweden's Left Party since 2004, revealed August 9 that he will step down as head of the party at its next congress in January 2012. The move came after the party's poor performance in elections late last year and is driven by a desire to shift the party even further to the right.

Responding to Ohly's announcement, commentators described him as a radical and a "traditionalist" who had been unwilling to give up his "communist" political views. *Dagens Nyheter* journalist K G Bergström commented, "It served to give a gifted leader an aura of the 1950s and made people think of the Soviet Union instead of left socialism."

Four candidates have put themselves forward to replace Ohly at next January's party conference. All are long-time leading figures in the party, including Ulla Andersson, who led negotiations with the Social Democrats to reach a common electoral programme prior to the 2010 elections.

Even a cursory examination of Ohly's term as party leader reveals that talk of his "radicalism" is without foundation. He has presided over an organisation which has made a consistent turn to the right over the past seven years. Far from opposing this development, Ohly's main concern was that it did not go far enough.

As he remarked at the press conference, Ohly felt the worst decision he had taken as leader "was trying to turn the term 'communism' and make the public associate it with its original meaning, rather than the practice shaped, for example, by the Soviet Union. It was a mistake and I still regret that."

Ohly's regrets notwithstanding, no action taken by the party could in any way be associated with a return to the true meaning of communism or socialism.

Ohly now makes clear his acceptance of the right-wing claim that the collapse of the Soviet Union

represented the death of socialism. But his desire to hold on to the term "communism" was rooted in his long association with Stalinism and its political crimes, not a repudiation of them.

Ohly spent a long period in the Communist Youth. As a member of the Left Party, he hailed the Soviet Union and the Stalinist eastern European states as "socialist" and defended both them and Joseph Stalin against criticism, even within those sections of the Left Party moving in a Euro-Communist direction and embracing social democracy. The Left Party was known from 1967 to 1990 as the Left Party—the Communists (Vänsterpartiet kommunisterna—VPK). The year before Ohly joined saw the formation of the hard-line Stalinist Workers Party—the Communists (Arbetarpartiet Kommunisterna—APK) from out of its ranks.

Ohly successfully married his pro-Stalinist views with a career in the Left Party, becoming party leader in 2004. There is no instance in which, when challenged on the basis of crude anti-communism, he has not either dissembled or backed down.

Ohly assumed leadership of an organisation that had acted for nearly a decade as a left-talking prop of a Social Democratic Party government. The Göran Persson administration, which assumed power in 1996, began the attacks on the welfare state and state-owned property that created the conditions for the launching of the largest privatisation drive in the history of the country when a right-wing coalition took power in 2006.

In opposition, the Social Democrats and Left Party sought closer cooperation. From 2008 onwards, Ohly involved the Left Party in negotiations to create a three-party alliance to fight the 2010 election. Although the Left Party withdrew from the talks on several occasions, citing differences of an economic nature, it

ultimately acceded to the demands of the Social Democrats and the Greens—including the call for a balanced budget and an independent central bank.

The result was a sharp drop in support. While the Left Party polled just over 5 percent in the 2010 elections, the three-party coalition as a whole gave up a lead of almost 20 percent in 2008 to lose the vote, with a minority right-wing Alliance administration reelected.

Since the vote, the Left Party has united with the Social Democrats and the political establishment as a whole to support Swedish involvement in the bombardment of Libya. Stockholm sent several Saab Gripen fighters to aid in the destruction of Tripoli and other cities. Prime Minister Frederick Reinfeldt has not ruled out the deployment of Swedish troops to help “stabilise” the situation in Libya.

Ohly continued to defend cooperation with the Social Democrats and Greens after the electoral debacle, although the formal Red-Green alliance appears to have been dropped for the time being. The Social Democrats have moved even further to the right and stated that collaboration with the Liberal and Centre parties is a possibility following the next elections in 2014.

This has in no way discouraged the Left Party, which would be quite willing to be a part of a future coalition. As Ohly himself stated at the press conference announcing his resignation, “We will be a government party sooner or later.”

Such a statement is meant to reassure Swedish ruling circles that the Left Party is ready to defend the capitalist state during a period of growing crisis. One week after Ohly’s resignation, Finance Minister Anders Borg led an emergency meeting of the parliamentary finance committee to discuss the European debt crisis and its impact on Sweden. The committee agreed on measures offering further financial guarantees to the country’s banks in an attempt to prevent the spread of the debt crisis. Already, conditions are worsening, demonstrated by the Nordea bank’s announcement of 2,000 job cuts over the next 18 months.

Reports indicate a sharp drop in economic growth prospects for Sweden over the next two years. Although compared to other European states, Sweden’s economic position is relatively strong, no one can deny that such a small economy will be hit hard by the deteriorating situation in Europe. As the Swedish

Centre for Economic Research noted in a recent study, “These developments could be much worse in the instance of a deeper debt crisis in Europe.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact