Neo-Nazi mob assaults immigrants in Stockholm, Sweden

Jordan Shilton
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A group of some 100 neo-Nazi thugs marched through the centre of the Swedish capital Stockholm Friday evening, carrying out a series of brutal attacks on refugees and foreign-looking bystanders. The action was claimed soon afterwards by the fascist Swedish Resistance Movement in a statement advocating vigilante "justice" against what it termed the "criminal" actions of refugees.

The men were dressed in black and wore masks. As they targeted refugees and immigrants, they distributed leaflets bearing the slogan "It's enough now!" in which they vowed to give "the North African street children who are roaming around the punishment they deserve." The Stockholm police said the attackers had links to football hooligans and acknowledged that "they were scattering leaflets which had the intention to incite people to carry out crimes."

One witness told the newspaper *Aftonbladet*, "They came from Drottninggatan [Stockholm's main shopping street] and walked down towards the square and began to turn on immigrants. I saw maybe three people who got hit. I was quite scared so I left."

In a statement, the Swedish Resistance Movement, which espouses white supremacism and a united Nordic nation, declared it had "cleaned up criminal immigrants from North Africa who are housed in the area around the central station." It continued: "Police have clearly shown that they lack the means to stave off their rampage, and we now see no other alternative than to ourselves hand out the punishments they deserve." The statement concluded by calling on supporters around the country to follow suit.

Naked fascist violence on the streets of a major European city is a result of the anti-refugee hysteria being whipped up by the political establishment across the continent and the turn to authoritarian methods traditionally associated with the far right. The portrayal of the hundreds of thousands of desperate men, women and children who have fled wars in the Middle East and North Africa initiated by the imperialist powers as criminals has been encouraged by the mainstream media and governments of every political stripe, from the grand coalition in Germany to Denmark's right-wing Liberal government and France's Socialist Party government. This in turn is being used to justify an expansion of the imperialist war drive in the Middle East and North Africa, which received new impetus over the past week with the announcement of preparations for a new US-led intervention in Libya and an expansion of operations in Syria.

Meanwhile, the major powers continue to look on as the death toll of men, women and children trying to cross the Mediterranean mounts almost daily. Over the weekend, at least 40 refugees drowned when their boat capsized on the way to Greece.

The neo-Nazi thugs carried out their assault with virtual impunity and appear to enjoy the tacit support of sections of the police. Although witnesses reported seeing 100 men involved in attacking refugees, only three were detained, including one held for carrying brass knuckledusters. By the next morning, all three had been released.

By contrast, the police are demanding vast new resources to throw the full force of the state against refugees. Figures were released to *Dagens Nyheter* alleging that over 5,000 incidents at asylum centres had been reported to the police. A new code has been created for crimes involving refugees.

Far less attention has been paid to uncovering the identity of those behind arson attacks on at least two dozen refugee centres over the past year.

The Swedish Resistance Movement is hardly an unknown quantity. Last August, members of the group joined colleagues in Finland in a violent rampage through the town of Jyväskylä. On the same day as the Stockholm

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attacks, an article in Britain's *Daily Mail* revealed that Simon Arnamo, a 24-year-old Swedish Resistance Movement member, is on a Europol list of the most wanted criminals in Europe for a murder carried out in 2012.

Sweden's political establishment bears full responsibility for the outbreak of far-right vigilante attacks. The fascist violence against immigrants came just days after Stefan Löfven's Social Democrat-Green coalition unveiled plans to deport up to 80,000 asylum-seekers, including children. Interior Minister Anders Ygeman claimed the government would seek to persuade asylum seekers to leave "voluntarily," but vowed, "If this does not work, it will be necessary to carry out their return by force."

The government announced the creation of a further 1,000 border police positions and ordered the police to conduct checks based on racial profiling.

The attacks also follow plans by the German government to establish massive internment camps for refugees, including a proposal to create one in Greece with European Union funding capable of holding up to 300,000 people. The Danish government implemented a policy last week allowing border guards to confiscate valuables worth more than €1,340 from asylum-seekers entering the country. Nothing like this has been seen in Europe since the days of Hitler's Third Reich, when the Jewish population was rounded up, deprived of its property and sent to concentration camps.

The anti-refugee fever reached a new pitch in early January after the as yet unexplained events on New Year's Eve in Cologne. A vicious slander campaign was launched in the German media against supposed criminal immigrant elements who allegedly carried out sexual assaults on women. This was then exploited by the government to prepare the way for mass deportations and to intensify the attack on the basic rights of refugees, culminating Friday in the throwing of a grenade at a refugee centre in Villingen-Schwennigen. The grenade, fortunately, failed to explode.

Last Monday's fatal stabbing of 22-year-old Alexandra Mezher, a care worker at a refugee centre near Gothenburg, was exploited for similarly reactionary ends in Sweden. A lurid media campaign swung into action portraying the 15-year-old boy who stabbed Mezher as a hardened criminal, in spite of evidence that he was deeply traumatised by his experiences in Somalia before fleeing to Europe.

None of the self-proclaimed defenders of the rule of law and justice bothered to note that several warnings had been issued by workers at the facility about cuts to staff, which resulted in Mezher, who had only a few months' work experience, being left alone to care for at least 10 teenage refugees during a night shift. Government inspectors had recently visited the centre, which is operated on the state's behalf by a private contractor, and proclaimed it an excellent facility.

This anti-immigrant and right-wing atmosphere has played directly into the hands of the neo-fascist Sweden Democrats. On Saturday morning, they held a rally in Stockholm calling for the government to resign on the grounds that it had lost control of the refugee situation.

Sweden's Social Democrats, like their counterparts in neighbouring Scandinavian countries and throughout Europe, have paved the way for the strengthening of the far right. The Social Democrat-Green coalition drastically curtailed the right to asylum in October. The government also banned refugees from receiving permanent residency and restricted family reunification so that it is effectively unreachable for all new asylum seekers. Just weeks later, it closed the border with Denmark and introduced ID checks.

The Social Democrats' embrace of the policies of the Sweden Democrats is the outcome of decades of a steady shift to the right. Since the 1990s, the Social Democrats have implemented vast privatisation programmes, helped create areas of social and economic misery in major cities where immigrants have been disproportionately affected, and whipped up militarism and nationalism to justify increased spending on the armed forces in the face of alleged Russian "aggression."

Similar policies are being pursued in neighbouring Finland. The government in Helsinki followed Sweden on Thursday in announcing plans for mass deportations of asylum-seekers. A government spokeswoman put the figure at two thirds of the 32,000 who had arrived.

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