

No confidence motion tabled by far-right topples Sweden's Social Democrat-led government

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Sweden's Social Democrat-led minority government became the first administration in the country's history to be toppled by a no-confidence vote initiated by opposition parties last Monday.

Prime Minister Stefan Löfven, who led a coalition with the Greens that was tolerated by the ex-Stalinist Left Party and the centre-right Liberal and Centre parties, has until today to resign, reach a new deal to keep his government afloat, or call a snap election.

Löfven's government is deeply unpopular. It has presided over a criminal "herd immunity" policy during the pandemic, allowing the virus to run rampant with virtually no public health measures. As a result, in a country of just 10 million people, over 1 million have been infected and more than 14,200 have died, at a per capita rate far higher than its Nordic neighbours.

The Social Democrat/Green coalition has also continued the steady march to the right in social spending, tax policy, and privatisations that has proceeded uninterrupted since the 1990s. The issue over which his government finally fell was a proposal to lift rent controls on newly built apartments to enrich multi-millionaire and billionaire property speculators—a proposal that the Left Party felt it could not support without committing political suicide.

The housing crisis in Sweden is a major social issue, with over two-thirds of municipalities reporting a housing shortage. The lack of affordable housing reflects the rapid growth in social inequality over recent years, regardless of whether a government of the "left" or "right" has been in power.

The initiative for the no confidence vote was taken by the far-right Sweden Democrats, whose roots are in the neo-Nazi milieu of the 1980s. Sweden Democrat leader Jimmy Akesson was joined by the Christian Democrats and by the Moderates, traditionally the largest conservative party, in voting against the government. The motion succeeded because the votes of the Left Party's 27 deputies secured a

majority of 181 to 168 in the 349-seat Riksdag (parliament).

The fact that the far-right is the beneficiary of widespread popular opposition to the Social Democrat/Green coalition's right-wing, big business policies is the responsibility of the ex-Stalinist Left Party, which has for decades worked to subordinate the working class to the Social Democrats and their trade union allies.

Over recent years, this policy has been justified by the need to prevent the rise of the far-right. The events of the past week have made clear that this disastrous course has only handed the political initiative to the far-right and paved the way for the fascists to come to power. Akesson, jubilant at the success of his no confidence vote this week, was able to denounce the Löfven government as historically weak, adding that it "should never have come to power."

The Left Party sought to cover its tracks by presenting itself as the voice of workers and the oppressed. In a speech to the Riksdag, party leader Nooshi Dadgostar claimed to be defending the "Folkhemmet" (People's Home), a term used to describe the relatively generous social services and welfare programmes introduced by successive Social Democrat-led governments in the post-war period.

"The political situation remains difficult, but I'm proud of having contributed to making sure that the voice of Swedish tenants were heard," commented Dadgostar on Twitter.

The Left Party's attempt to portray itself as a defender of the "Swedish social model," which no longer exists for the majority of the population, is a political fraud. It has played a critical role in propping up every Social Democrat government over the past three decades, helping to dismantle the "social model" and turn Sweden into a paradise for private investors. It backed the Social Democrats as they carried out sweeping privatisations, business deregulation, the gutting of workers' rights, and attacks on social programmes. This is the product of the Left Party's acceptance of Sweden's official political setup, identifying the establishment parties as two opposed blocs: the "left",

which includes the Social Democrats, Greens, and Left Party; and the right-wing “Alliance,” composed of the Moderates, Centre, Liberal, and Christian Democrat parties.

Under the Social Democrat-led government of Göran Persson (1996-2006), which relied on Left Party backing for a majority between 1998 and 2006, a wave of privatisations and public spending cuts was initiated. This laid the basis for the right-wing Alliance government under Prime Minister Frederick Reinfeldt to launch the largest privatisation drive in Swedish history between 2006 and 2014.

When Löfven first came to power after Reinfeldt’s defeat in the 2014 election, he failed to secure a majority within the traditional framework of the “left” bloc. This was a reflection of growing disillusionment with the Social Democrats, whose support fell from well over 40 percent during the 1970s and 1980s to 31 percent in 2014. Due to the lack of any genuine alternative to the right-wing programmes offered by all the major parties, the Sweden Democrats more than doubled their vote to over 13 percent.

Löfven struck a deal with the right-wing parties to ensure his minority government remained in power, including the adoption of the Alliance’s budgetary framework and the imposition of one of the most aggressive anti-refugee policies in Europe. The Left Party voted in favour of this government, which it touted as a bulwark against the far-right. Instead, after four years of a right-wing Social Democrat-led government, the Sweden Democrats were able to grow their support further to 17.6 percent in the 2018 election. In contrast, support for the parties in the “left” bloc dropped from over 43 percent in 2014 to 40.6 percent in 2018.

Löfven responded by deepening his collusion with the right. Instead of relying on an informal understanding, he secured a formal deal with the Centre and Liberal parties not to topple his government while still being guaranteed the informal backing of the Left Party.

Löfven agreed to major tax cuts for the wealthy and big business, and the undermining of workplace seniority rights. The Centre and Liberal parties, for their part, justified the January Agreement by saying that the alternative would have been to prop up a government led by Moderate leader Ulf Kristersson, which would have been reliant on the support of the right-wing extremists. The Left Party backed this arrangement for over two years, until this week.

In March, the Liberal Party passed a formal motion announcing that it would return to campaigning for an Alliance government at the 2022 election and did not rule out working with the Sweden Democrats. Liberal leader Nyamko Sabuni told the daily *Dagens Nyheter*, “My analysis is that no government can be formed without having to at least have a relationship with one of the outer fringe

parties (the Left Party and Sweden Democrats). We will from now on negotiate with all parties in parliament and look for a majority where we can find it.”

The prospect of a government including the Sweden Democrats has taken a major step forward. On Thursday, Sabuni told the TT news agency that she would not enter talks to keep Löfven in power, a reversal of her party’s position in March pledging to continue backing the government until it had passed the 2022 budget. A day earlier, Centre Party leader Annie Lööf offered Löfven a compromise that included the implementation of further tax cuts. Even assuming Löfven can persuade the Centre and Left parties to back a new edition of his Social Democrat/Green coalition, the opposition of the Liberals would prevent him from achieving a parliamentary majority.

The Moderates’ Kristersson is openly pushing for a change of government without an election, based on an agreement among the Alliance members to join a government backed by the Sweden Democrats. He demanded in an interview with Sveriges Radio that the Centre Party should choose sides and back a “bourgeois government,” an alternative description for the Alliance.

A sharp warning must be made to workers in Sweden. The policies of the Social Democrats and Left Party have facilitated a dramatic shift to the right in official politics. To oppose this the working class must repudiate the Left Party’s reactionary claim that workers’ interests can be protected and advanced by lending support to the Social Democrats and seeking to revive the “Folkhemmet”.

The problems faced by Swedish workers—rising social inequality, the destruction of public services and social programmes, and the threat of the fascist right—are confronted by workers across Europe and around the world. What is required above all is a new political orientation and programme based on a socialist and internationalist perspective. This poses as an urgent task the construction of a Swedish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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