

Government crisis in Sweden strengthens far-right

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A government crisis in Sweden that began earlier this year with the temporary resignation of then Prime Minister Stefan Löfven has gained intensity over recent weeks.

Behind parliamentary horse-trading and posturing, which has led to new Social Democrat leader Magdalena Andersson being elected twice as the new Prime Minister within a week, the crisis has produced a sharp shift to the right within official politics. This development is a product of the Swedish ruling elite's homicidal "herd immunity" pandemic policy, which served as the model for the most viciously anti-worker governments around the world to let the deadly virus run rampant.

The latest stage of the crisis began when Löfven announced his departure as prime minister and Social Democrat leader, claiming that he wanted to give his successor time to build up their authority ahead of next September's parliamentary elections. Andersson, who served as finance minister under Löfven, was chosen in early November to lead the Social Democrats. The party has headed Sweden's government since 2014 in coalition with the Green Party.

When Andersson secured the support of parliament to become prime minister on November 24, she was backed only by the Social Democrats and Greens, giving her just 117 votes in the 349-seat parliament. The Centre and Left parties, which have helped the Social Democrat/Green coalition secure a majority over recent years, abstained. The remaining parties—the Liberals, Moderates, Christian Democrats, and Sweden Democrats—voted against Andersson.

Parliamentary tradition has it that a prime minister does not require a majority to be elected. They only need to ensure that a majority of deputies do not vote against them. The four right-wing parties' votes amounted to 174, one seat shy of the majority necessary to block Andersson's election.

Later that day, parliament debated two budget proposals for 2022, one drafted by the Social Democrats and another by the right-wing Moderates and Christian Democrats, and far-right Sweden Democrats. Andersson's budget, backed

by the Social Democrats, Greens, and Left Party, was defeated before parliament accepted the Moderate-led proposal after the Centre party voted with the other right-wing parties. This marked the first time ever that a budget put together with the involvement of the Sweden Democrats was adopted. The Greens, claiming to be opposed to implementing a budget partly drafted by the fascistic party, withdrew from the government, forcing Andersson to resign just hours after being elected prime minister.

Andersson insisted that she would stand for re-election as prime minister at the head of a minority government composed of the Social Democrats alone. She vowed to impose the 2022 budget drafted by the Moderates, Christian Democrats, and Sweden Democrats. On this basis, she secured re-election on November 29, with the Greens, Centre, and Left parties abstaining to prevent a parliamentary majority against Andersson from emerging.

The interminable manoeuvring is merely the latest expression of the steady march of official politics to the right. The process has been dramatically accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the ruling class's criminal response, but it has been ongoing for decades thanks above all to the combined efforts of the Social Democrats, Left Party and trade unions to block the working class from intervening independently into political affairs.

Primary political responsibility lies with the ex-Stalinist Left Party, which has invoked the threat of the far-right to justify extending support to right-wing Social Democrat-led governments. "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," the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote of the Left Party in June. "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.”

Since the Social Democrats returned to power in 2014 following eight years of Moderate-led rule, they and their “left” partners have facilitated the steady growth in the Sweden Democrats’ political influence.

In the name of stopping the Sweden Democrats coming to power, the Social Democrat/Green minority coalition struck a deal with the Alliance parties in 2014 to ensure Löfven could govern for a full parliamentary term so long as he accepted the Alliance’s budgetary framework. After the Sweden Democrats gained further ground at the 2018 election, the Social Democrats shifted even further right, reaching a formal agreement with the Centre and Liberal parties to keep Löfven in power. The Left Party continued to back the Social Democrat government throughout.

Even now, when it is clear to everyone that the “left” parties’ claim to be blocking the rise of the far-right has produced the opposite effect, the Left Party continues to insist on backing the Social Democrats. With its decision to abstain in the vote on Andersson’s re-election, it has allowed a Social Democrat government to come to power pledged to implementing a budget backed by the Sweden Democrats.

The Social Democrats, Greens, and Left Party are paving the way for the fascists to enter government after the September 2022 election. The budget just adopted lays out a series of anti-immigrant and law-and-order measures they intend to accomplish. These include salary increases for police officers, additional funds for surveillance technology, a commitment to carry out “more deportations and asylum rejections,” and a pledge to “combat illegal immigration as well as those who live in Sweden illegally.”

More than any other country, Sweden was associated in the pandemic’s early stages with a “herd immunity” policy, i.e., the refusal by the government to adopt any serious public health measures as the virus ran rampant. State epidemiologist Anders Tegnell became the poster boy for far-right figures around the world, including Donald Trump in the United States and Boris Johnson in Britain, who wished to emulate Sweden’s brutal “profits before life” agenda. Tegnell provided advice to Johnson just weeks before the British prime minister made his infamous “No more f***ing lockdowns! Let the bodies pile high in their thousands!” declaration.

Sweden’s policy included ordering care homes not to send people aged over 80 to hospital, leaving them to die if they got infected. COVID-19 infection and death rates were much higher in immigrant and other low-income communities. To date, with a population of just over 10 million, Sweden has

registered more than 1.2 million infections and 15,100 deaths.

The enforcement of such a ruthless policy necessitates the encouragement of the most reactionary political forces. When governments around the world adopted in all essentials Sweden’s “herd immunity” strategy by reopening their economies after temporary lockdowns in early 2020, their ruling classes relied on far-right protesters to spearhead the dismantling of public health restrictions. In the United States, Trump and his fascistic followers mobilized violent anti-lockdown demonstrations and threatened to assassinate politicians associated with COVID-19 measures, like Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer. In Germany, the political establishment and media built up the “Lateral Thinkers” protests led by right-wing extremists and outright fascists. In August 2020, protesters mounted the steps of the Reichstag building to wave the old flag of the German Empire.

The threat of a Swedish government coming to power with the support of a right-wing extremist party comes as bourgeois democracy across Europe enters ever deeper crisis. In France, Germany, and Spain, the army, security forces, and police are riddled with fascist terror networks that are plotting coups and the assassinations of political opponents. Two far-right candidates, National Rally’s Marine Le Pen and Eric Zemmour, are being boosted in the media as the main challengers in next spring’s French presidential election to the hated Emmanuel Macron. Austria’s government collapsed last month amid allegations of corruption and criminality on the part of former Chancellor Sebastian Kurz and his allies.

These developments underscore the urgency of workers in Sweden joining with their class brothers and sisters across Europe and internationally in struggle against the capitalist profit system. This task requires the building of a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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