

“The elderly have been thrown under the bus. ... They’ve been treated as a burden on society.”

The criminal role of the Swedish government in the pandemic: Testimony from anti-COVID-19 activist Keith Begg—Part 2

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The World Socialist Web Site spoke to Keith Begg, an Irish-Swedish anti-COVID-19 activist who has led efforts to expose the criminal response of the Swedish government to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is the second part of a two-part interview for the Global Workers’ Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic. The first part can be read here.

Gabriel Black: I was wondering if you could speak a little more to the economic question. I know this has been a complete windfall for the banks. Could you speak more about the Swedish policy of prioritizing profits above saving lives?

Keith Begg: The irony is that Sweden prioritized its economy over the health and welfare of its people. But at the end of the day, Sweden’s economy did worse than the other Nordic countries or at least very, very similar.

They constantly gaslit the Swedes on this point. They would use car sales, for instance, to claim that the economy was doing really well. In reality, Sweden has the fourth largest unemployment rate in the whole of the European Union, just narrowly behind Italy. It has one of the highest youth employment rates, so their policy resulted in literally nothing.

Sweden, in the European Union, is known as one of the “frugal four.” So there’s Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark and Austria. They, of course, did not want to help struggling economies like Italy and Spain, because they were really, really affected by the pandemic. So one of my theories is that if Sweden went into lockdown, like many other well developed countries, it would almost have to act as an insurer for businesses and furlough staff, etc.

In smaller villages, some people did not follow the guidelines. In Dalarna, which is a län, or equivalent of a state or county in Sweden, they recommended wearing masks. So gradually, there were different regions in Sweden that totally ignored the Swedish public health advice.

But very clearly, there was a huge economic modus operandi in Sweden that was to protect the economy. But that did not come to fruition. Business Insider wrote an article about how this strategy did not give Sweden any leeway, especially in the Nordics.

And of course, protecting the image of Sweden comes with the economy, because if stories like mine and many others in Sweden get out, there is huge reputational damage. And they are all about protecting the image of Sweden.

There is an amazing political docent from Uppsala University, Gina Gustavsson. A quote from her sticks out in my mind. She says that if Sweden was a person, the difference between the self-image and the

behavior would be so great, it would be time to seek professional help. It’s just this level of dogged exceptionalism. It’s the reluctance to analyze mistakes.

Lena Hallengren, the Minister of Health and Social Affairs, has lied consistently throughout the pandemic. We have had two coronavirus commission interim reports that were scathing about the Swedish handling of the pandemic. The third and final one is due out. Mats Melin, who was the head of the commission, had asked Lena Hallengren for documents. She said there were no documents arising out of 149 meetings at the start of the pandemic. And thanks to a whistleblower, an ordinary secretary, she [the secretary] showed these documents.

Lena Hallengren has lied the whole way throughout the pandemic. And she lies with pride. And this is so endemic within the Swedish government system. You cannot define Sweden as a democracy anymore. It’s a totalitarian democracy.

GB: The so-called “left” in the United States puts Sweden on a pedestal. Could you speak to this image that is built up around Sweden?

KB: The welfare state, while it still exists, has totally crumbled. I will give you an example. Throughout the pandemic, thousands and thousands of mainly female workers who were employed by elderly care agencies, were on zero-hour, low paid contracts. So many of them went to work sick, because there were no social welfare provisions for them if they got sick.

In America, you know, I can understand why people might look at Sweden and think it’s a welfare state, but we pay one of the highest tax rates in the world. At the moment, there are hundreds of thousands of people who can’t access health care because of the COVID problem. Basically, to access first level care, which is like a general practitioner, is incredibly difficult in Sweden.

At the moment, in Sweden, because the restrictions are gone, COVID patients can be mixed with non-COVID patients. I spoke to one of my friends who has severe disabilities, and many people cannot take the risk of going to the hospital here, because they have severe risk factors.

So what I would say is, I used to always be a left or a Green voter. When I was in Ireland, I would vote left. So in Sweden, I would vote left as well, the *Vänsterpartiet*. But since the pandemic began, there is so little ideological differences between the left and the extreme right. And the Social Democrats, you know, you conjure up images of equality. But the elitism they have demonstrated during this pandemic.

Anders Tegnell is trying to blame immigrants for the spread of COVID,

for the death rate, when in fact, as I said earlier on, it was thousands of largely privileged, white Swedes that went to the Alps, and came back and were not tested. So the Left Party, they failed to protect the schools and the children, who are the most valuable in our society.

The elderly have been thrown under the bus. It's almost like the elderly are seen as useless eaters. [There was] an ideology in the 1930s in a certain country, not too far away from Sweden. The elderly were seen as a burden on society, and they were being treated as a burden on society.

Meanwhile, the marginalized in Sweden, in the ghettos in the cities where many people with foreign heritage are living out on the margins, they can barely access this information in their own languages. But yet, they are targeted. They're living in cramped conditions, and the Social Democratic party is saying, "One of our solutions is that people can work from home." Yes, middle class "Ingrid" and "Sven" can work from home. But the majority of people in the service industry were totally thrown under a bus.

Marginalized people who are a little bit outside of society have been affected the most. And the Social Democrats have demonstrated, in a way, some of the most extreme right tendencies that have been seen within the Nordics in a long while.

GB: I think an important point is that the Left Party in Sweden is a pseudo-left group through and through. The bankruptcy of these pseudo-left parties, in fact, leads to the growth of the far-right. A corollary in the United States is the Democratic Socialists of America, who platformed Martin Kulldorff. I don't know if you are aware of this?

KB: No, no, I'm not...

GB: *Jacobin*, the magazine associated with the DSA, uncritically gave Kulldorff a platform in 2020. This was promoted by Bhaskar Sunkara, an editor of *Jacobin* and leader in the DSA, on Twitter. If you look through their website, they have barely written about COVID. Recently, the DSA expressed opposition to striking teachers in Chicago who were fighting against the reopening of schools. I share this to clarify that we do not support the Left Party or Social Democratic Party in Sweden. Whatever pretense they have that they feed to the working people of Sweden, they are big business parties.

KB: I totally get you. But the thing that I find so shocking in Sweden is that the elite and the governance system can proceed with impunity. That is the absolute shock of the system for me. We have a Minister of Health who has lied through her teeth, Lena Hallengren, and she still has her job. Anna Ekström, the Minister of Education, she fiddled the OECD PISA scores to make Sweden look higher [better] on education. She's part of a system that has forced parents to send their children to school even if the parent or the child is in a risk group, to unprotected schools.

Yesterday they stopped testing for COVID, they've stopped testing the public, and they're citing costs. One of the richest countries in the world is citing costs! Last week, 325 people died, reported that we know of, and already we're up to 150 this week. What type of moral, ethically and scientifically bankrupt society does this?

[Those who speak out] have been vilified on Swedish media, we have been vilified by the authorities. If you step out of the very, very narrow opinion corridor, you're deemed a subversive, a radical, a threat to democracy.

Many of us want to just be able to tell our stories. I so appreciate what the WSWS is doing [with the Inquest]. We need a historical, video record. The funny thing about the Swedish governance system and the elite is that they almost live in the 1950s where they think that they can shred the evidence. The internet does not forget, you know, it's all there on the cloud, on the web.

GB: Our perspective is that genuine scientists and ordinary workers have had their voices silenced during the pandemic. We recently published the testimony of Randall James, an autoworker, whose brother caught COVID in the Michigan auto parts plants and died. His

grandmother now has Long COVID.

We have not spoken about your vilification. Could you speak more about this and the Facebook group you put together?

KB: We were a small group of 200 people, and we were in a closed Facebook group which we began in April 2020. It consisted of teachers, doctors, plumbers, parents, a wide spectrum of people.

The reason we were in a hidden group was that we were so tired of fighting the haters. Many of us received homophobic abuse, anti-Semitic abuse. It started off with three of us, we decided to create this group so we could advocate on the issues and counteract the gaslighting of the media, but also to campaign to European Union members of parliament in relation to the faults in the data and manipulated statistics that were being fed out from Sweden.

We were a tiny group, compared to the Tegnell group, for example, which had 90,000 people. Tegnell's group was made up largely of extreme right-wing, anti-vaxxers, etc., and were deemed "okay" by the media.

But for us, last year, the publicly funded Swedish Radio put a planter or spy into our Facebook group. They analyzed what we were talking about, and most of it was advocacy. They analyzed what we wanted to do and what we had achieved. We then received a series of questions from Swedish Radio which said, "experts say that you're out to damage the image of Sweden and Swedish interests," that you could be construed as a "threat to democracy," that you could "incite people to commit crimes"—this was absolutely hilarious.

When we got the questions, the questions were so off-the-wall, I put them, with my answers on Twitter, and it literally went viral. [I did this] just to show how sinister [it] was [and] what would happen. Then the radio program launched, I think at four in the morning. What followed was a total vilification by Swedish media. Our photos were put in the media with our names, saying this is the hidden group that attacked the Swedish strategy, with these bombastic headlines.

It got so bad that many of us received threats, but one person received 80 threats, death threats to her children, to her family. We were completely vilified by the media like this, the media that the government had just bailed out. It got so bad, the rhetoric that was being used, many of us didn't know what would happen.

I had to flee, so I went to stay in Ireland. I know that that sounds dramatic. But the thing is, if you lived in the situation, and the threats we were getting, you did not know what next steps the government or the authorities would take. Another advocacy activist, Andrea Rodriguez from Portugal, who set up Safe Sweden, she left as well. But you just felt you didn't know whether a rock would come through your window.

GB: Can you speak on the question of eliminating COVID-19? We fight for the global elimination and the eventual eradication of the virus.

KB: Sweden has the fourth lowest population density in Europe. It's on the periphery of Europe and has among the highest number of single housing units. They could have eliminated this virus.

In the "herd immunity" countries, what they do not realize is that you won't have a very strong economy when your population, hundreds of thousands, and perhaps millions, suffer from long-term COVID effects. This is going to impact their health costs going forward. The social welfare costs of people that cannot work, their hospital care costs, it's going to impact every aspect of society. And to think that vaccinations alone are the only way out of this is incorrect.

GB: The idea that this is "mild" is a lie aimed at pushing people back to work...

KB: Economists have hijacked this pandemic. And the financial interests have hijacked the pandemic. This should be about lives, about the quality of our lives.

In Sweden the average life expectancy has gone down by about one year. But the fact is, we won't see the major impacts for some time. The

lost productivity with a sicker society, with more costs, this is going to affect all aspects of our society.

I think our only way out of this is getting to zero. It's a deadly virus. It's killing children. It's not just elderly people, it's killing young people in at-risk groups and damaging their brains, their organs.

GB: Is there anything else you want to say before we close?

KB: We want the world to know what has transpired in Sweden. Something needs to be done and needs to be addressed. It's not just a Swedish problem. But in Sweden, it has been a concerted effort to unleash the herd immunity experiment on its population, to revise history, to lie shamelessly. We want the truth to come out.

The World Socialist Web Site calls on all its readers to follow and participate in the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 Pandemic. We are collecting testimony and submissions from experts, workers and victims around the world. To participate in the Inquest, please fill out the form below.



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