

Ahead of Sunday's general election:

Who bears political responsibility for the rise of the far-right Sweden Democrats?

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This Sunday's general election in Sweden could result in a far-right party with roots in the neo-Nazi movement emerging as the country's second largest in parliament and even joining the government.

The Sweden Democrats, which are polling around 20 percent support ahead of the election to Sweden's 349-seat national parliament (Riksdag), have been systematically integrated by the established parties into official politics over recent years as Sweden's ruling elite has swung sharply to the right.

The current Social Democrat minority government led by Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson, which depends on support from the Green Party, ex-Stalinist Left Party, and the Centre Party for a majority in parliament, is currently polling just under 30 percent. To remain in power, Andersson will require the four parties that currently tolerate her government to secure 175 seats.

The right-wing opposition, traditionally led by the conservative Moderates, includes the Liberals, Christian Democrats, and Sweden Democrats. However, if current polls prove correct, the far-right Sweden Democrats will emerge as the largest party in the right-wing alliance, allowing it to play a decisive role either as the largest party in government or opposition. The two blocs are currently running neck-and-neck in the polls, making it difficult to predict the outcome.

The Sweden Democrats emerged out of efforts to popularize the neo-Nazi movement in Sweden in the late 1980s. Despite ongoing efforts by the Sweden Democrats to sanitize their public image and disassociate themselves from their past, a recent study by the research group Acta Publica found that an overwhelming majority of the 289 right-wing extremists running in the 2022 election are on the Sweden Democrat ticket. Many of these Sweden Democrat extremists are members of the Nordic Resistance Movement, the Scandinavian neo-Nazi organization which fights to establish a totalitarian, racially and culturally "pure" Nordic state.

Jimmie Åkesson, leader of the Sweden Democrats since 2005, has described Sweden's Muslim minority as our "biggest foreign threat since World War II." He decries the "unholy alliance between liberals and Marxists... united in a common disdain for national identity."

Over the last 20 years, the Sweden Democrats have gone from receiving 1.4 percent of the electorate's votes (2002) to 5.7 percent (2010) to 12.9 percent (2014) and then 17.5 percent (2018).

Whatever the final outcome of Sunday's vote, the fact that an avowedly far-right party can largely determine the future course of political life poses the urgent need for workers in Sweden and internationally to draw the political lessons of this development.

The deliberate promotion of far-right political forces by the ruling

elite is a global phenomenon, driven by the needs of the bourgeoisie in every country to intensify the exploitation of working people at home and join military conflicts involving the major powers abroad. In Sweden, this process has been facilitated by the Social Democrats and their allies on the "left," above all the Left Party and trade unions, which have blocked the working class from intervening independently into political affairs over the past three decades.

In what amounted to a massive self-indictment, Andersson remarked on the campaign trail earlier this week, "There are right-wing populist parties in many European countries, but the Sweden Democrats have deep roots in the Swedish neo-Nazis and other racist organisations in Sweden... just last week, one employee at their central headquarters invited the other employees to celebrate the Nazis' invasion of Poland during the second world war. I mean, it's not like other parties."

It is thanks to the entire political establishment, Andersson's party included, that the Sweden Democrats have become an integral part of official political life. When Social Democrat Prime Minister Stefan Löfven came to power in 2014 after eight years of Moderate Party-led governments, he insisted that it was necessary to keep the Sweden Democrats out of power by breaking with the traditional "left" and "right" divide in Swedish politics. Since his traditional Left Party and Green partners could not secure him a parliamentary majority, Löfven struck a deal with the right-wing four-party Alliance, consisting of the Moderates, Centre, Liberals, and Christian Democrats, to stay in office. The deal involved Löfven agreeing to enforce strict budget discipline based on the Alliance's spending plans and anti-immigrant measures.

When this predictably resulted in the Sweden Democrats gaining further ground in the 2018 election, Löfven moved further to the right and formalised his ties with Centre and the Liberals in a deal that became known as the "January agreement." It was on this basis that Sweden was governed when the COVID-19 pandemic hit and Stockholm emerged as one of the leading proponents of the homicidal "herd immunity" strategy in the world.

The past eight years of Social Democrat-led governments have also been characterised by a massive military build-up, with Sweden sharply increasing defence spending, reintroducing military service, and sending weapons to support the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine. The Social Democrats junked their traditional opposition to the NATO military alliance and led the charge for Sweden to join, helping transform Scandinavia into yet another front in the imperialist powers' drive to subjugate Russia to the status of a semi-colony. Swedish Social Democrats also played a leading role in

the persecution of whistleblower Julian Assange, whose work exposed the war crimes of US imperialism and its allies.

After enforcing such a reactionary agenda, the Social Democrats' grip on power became increasingly tenuous. After a government crisis last year, the party only managed to hang onto power by agreeing to implement a budget drafted by the Moderates and Sweden Democrats, the first time that a Swedish budget had been co-drafted by the far-right party.

Special mention must be made of the duplicitous role of the Left Party, which repeatedly justified its alliance with the pro-austerity, pro-war Social Democrats with the need to stop the far-right. While the Left Party feigns a defense of the disintegrating Swedish welfare system, it has backed Social Democratic governments for three decades as they carried out privatizations, business deregulation, and attacks on workers and vital social programs.

During the pandemic, the Left Party acted as cheerleaders for the Swedish Social Democratic government and state epidemiologist Anders Tegnell, as their herd immunity policy led to the death of thousands of people. This opened space for the Sweden Democrats to pose as opponents of the Social Democrats' disastrous policies, particularly in nursing homes, where sick and elderly people were involuntarily euthanized.

As Keith Begg, a leading Swedish-Irish COVID activist previously expressed to the *World Socialist Web Site*, "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." Begg recently told the *WSWS*, "The complete white washing and lobotomizing of the government's reckless handling of the pandemic has not surfaced during the countless tv and media debates. It has been largely forgotten and buried by the dualling parties." He continued, "The fact that children under 12 are still not eligible for vaccinations, that thousands of elderly were involuntarily euthanized with a shot of morphine, and that masks were demonized throughout the pandemic does not seem to matter in these elections."

The bridge between the pseudo-left and the far-right on COVID was expressed in the US when the DSA-backed *Jacobin* magazine gave a platform to Swedish herd-immunity advocate Martin Kulldorff; a few weeks later he met with then President Trump.

While formally opposing NATO membership, the Left Party voted to support the war in Ukraine and provided political cover to the Social Democrats as Sweden applied to join NATO. In a nationalist outburst in March, Left Party leader Nooshi Dadgostar stated, "My position is that we are safer in Sweden if we are outside of any military alliance. But it is important that we have broad agreement. That we do this together as one people and one nation. I don't often agree with Carl Bildt [a former conservative prime minister and long-standing advocate of NATO membership], but on this question I do. There's the left-wing and there's the right-wing, but the Swedish military is all Swedes together."

From the Left Party onwards, the Swedish political establishment has pivoted towards the anti-immigrant, law and order positions of the Sweden Democrats, with the current election campaign obsessively focused on immigration and gang violence. No mention has been made in the election campaign of the crimes the Swedish ruling class has committed in recent years, including its support for the savage bombardment of Libya, its pandemic policy, and support for war with Russia. There has been no serious discussion of the staggering class divisions in Sweden, which has the highest number of billionaires per head of population of any major European Union country.

The Moderates, trying to compete with the Sweden Democrats over which is more right-wing, have based their campaign on "restoring law and order." Their proposals include measures aimed at restricting immigrant access to the welfare system and punishing them for not adequately assimilating into Swedish society. This includes deporting foreigners suspected of being gang members even if they are not found guilty of a crime, allowing raids on the houses of welfare beneficiaries "to find malpractices," and withdrawing social benefits from non-Swedes who fail to meet cultural and language goals set by the state.

Having imposed many of the far-right's demands over the past eight years, the Social Democrats have made large chunks of the Sweden Democrats' program their own, especially on immigration. Their campaign is focused on new anti-immigrant, law and order measures, such as longer prison sentences and limiting work permits. Andersson recently stated in an interview with *Dagens Nyheter* that she "does not want Chinatowns in Sweden, we do not want Somalitowns or Little Italy."

"The degree of xenophobic rhetoric by the major parties is shocking," said one foreign-born worker to the *Local* news site. "I feel deeply unwelcome when I see that parties representing four-fifths of the electorate are proudly repeating anti-immigrant rhetoric." Another told the site that the parties were "using fear to [point] directly at the migrant population as the causes of social issues – unemployment, insecurity, inequity." Another added, "Foreigners seem to be presented as the source of all Sweden's problems."

Opposing the growth of the far-right requires the independent political mobilization of the working class. The role of the ex-Stalinist Left Party in subordinating political opposition to the Social Democrats must be understood. Like their pseudo-left allies around the world, it works to prevent a genuine movement of workers by accepting and supporting the narrow, nationalist, and pro-capitalist framework of official politics.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on those who agree with this perspective in Sweden, and Scandinavia more broadly, to contact us to help build a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International. There is no national solution to the crisis of capitalism in any country. Swedish workers must unite with their brothers and sisters in Europe, and across the world, in political struggle against imperialist war and social inequality, and for the socialist reconstruction of society.



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