

Far-right Sweden Democrats gain ground in election as composition of future government remains unclear

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The far-right Sweden Democrats, a party which emerged from Sweden's neo-Nazi movement, was the clear winner in Sunday's general election in the Scandinavian country. Although the vote totals for the two major blocs of parties remain so close that a final result will only be known after postal votes and overseas ballots are tallied on Wednesday or Thursday, the Sweden Democrats increased their support more than any other party and are now the second-largest political party in Sweden.

As of Monday afternoon, preliminary results gave the right-wing bloc of parties led by the conservative Moderates 175 seats and the "left" bloc led by the Social Democrats 174. However, the Moderates were replaced by the Sweden Democrats as the largest party in the right-wing four-party bloc, which also includes the much smaller Christian Democrats and Liberals. The Sweden Democrats saw its share of the vote increase from 17.5 percent in 2018 to 20.6 percent, while the Moderates dropped from 19.8 percent to 19.1 percent.

The Social Democrats remained the largest single party, making slight gains from their 2018 result to finish with 30.5 percent of the vote. Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson, who depended in the outgoing parliament on the toleration of the Centre Party, Greens, and Left Party to stay in power, has refused to officially concede defeat. There is still a slim chance that the remaining votes could secure the Social Democrat-led bloc the 175 seats required for a majority in the 349-seat parliament (Riksdag).

The election result is a damning indictment of what has passed for "left" politics in Sweden. Long held up by left-leaning media outlets and political parties internationally as a "progressive" paradise, Sweden has witnessed wave after wave of privatisations and public spending cuts, tax

cuts for the wealthy, an explosion of military spending and the scapegoating of immigrants under successive governments of the "left" and "right."

This culminated in the policies pursued by the Social Democrats under Andersson and former Prime Minister Stefan Löfven over the past eight years, including bringing Sweden into the NATO military alliance, lining up full square behind the US-NATO war with Russia, and championing a homicidal "profits before lives" pandemic policy that left Sweden with one of the highest death rates from COVID-19. Supported by the Greens and Left Party, the Social Democrats also enforced budgets dictated by the right-wing parties and adopted punitive measures against asylum seekers and immigrants.

Whatever the final outcome of the vote, the Sweden Democrats have emerged politically strengthened as the entire political establishment lurches sharply to the right. Even in the unlikely event that the Social Democrats manage to cling to power, the far-right Sweden Democrats would be the official opposition in parliament.

Prior to the election, Moderate leader Ulf Kristersson raised the possibility of forming a government consisting of the three traditional right-wing parties with himself as prime minister with the far-right Sweden Democrats providing parliamentary support from the outside. This proposal was a tacit recognition of the deep hostility felt by broad sections of the Swedish population to the far-right party, which has never before held government office.

But on election night, Sweden Democrat leader Jimmy Akesson made clear that the Sweden Democrats would not be satisfied with a supporting role, declaring, "Right now it looks like there will be a change of power. Our ambition is to sit in the government."

On Monday afternoon, leading tabloid *Aftonbladet*

reported that Akesson visited the Moderates' headquarters for talks in central Stockholm. Talks were also held by the Moderates with Christian Democrat leader Ebba Busch and Liberal leader Johan Pehrson. Kristersson reportedly hopes to negotiate an arrangement whereby the Sweden Democrats and Liberals support a minority government consisting of the Moderates and Christian Democrats.

Akesson and the Sweden Democrats' ability to play the decisive role in determining the incoming government's policies and composition is the outcome of the far-right's systematic integration into official political life by all the established parties. When the fascistic Sweden Democrats first entered parliament at the 2010 election, all other parties claimed that they would refuse to cooperate with them. In 2014, Social Democrat Prime Minister Löfven justified his acceptance of an agreement with the traditional right-wing parties as necessary to stop the rise of the far right. The deal involved Löfven committing the Social Democrats to enforce budgets based on the right-wing parties' spending plan, which involved continued austerity for public services after decades of cuts and privatizations. In return, the right-wing parties promised not to topple Löfven's minority government with the votes of the Sweden Democrats.

After Kristersson took over as Moderate leader in 2017, the Moderates switched course and began openly collaborating with the Sweden Democrats. This cooperation resulted in parliament voting last year in favour of a budget drafted by the Moderates and Sweden Democrats, which the minority Social Democrat government headed by Andersson agreed to implement. The Centre and Liberal parties, which constantly claim to oppose in principle joining or supporting a government that includes the Sweden Democrats, also voted for the budget.

Behind the parliamentary maneuvering, powerful objective forces have driven the Swedish ruling elite to embrace the far-right Sweden Democrats. Sweden has one of the fastest growing levels of social inequality among the OECD countries. This trend has been produced by the comprehensive dismantling since the 1990s of the social welfare system and public services, which were among the most generous in Europe during the postwar period. One of the most glaring expressions of this process is the increasingly segregated character of Sweden's major cities, which have impoverished suburbs dominated by immigrant populations where unemployment is sometimes more than double the national average.

The Swedish ruling class is also playing a leading role in transforming Scandinavia into a second front in the US-NATO war with Russia, including by applying to join NATO with its neighbour Finland and sending weaponry to Ukraine. And last but not least, Stockholm spearheaded the homicidal "herd immunity" policy in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, a policy that found favour with the most reactionary political forces around the world, including the fascist-minded former US President Donald Trump.

The intensification of these policies under conditions of a global crisis of the capitalist system necessitates the mobilisation of openly fascist forces to intimidate working class opposition, as is underscored by developments in all the major capitalist countries. The rise of the Sweden Democrats to the position of the country's dominant right-wing party resembles the transformation of the Republicans in the United States into an ever-more explicitly fascist party following the attempted coup on January 6, 2021, and the British Conservatives' emergence as a vicious far-right party under the leadership of Boris Johnson and now Liz Truss. In a general election due later this month, Giorgia Meloni, leader of the neo-fascist Fratelli d'Italia that honours the fascist dictator Mussolini, has strong prospects to become Italian prime minister.

None of these far-right forces enjoys mass popular support. Rather, these forces' political strength comes from two key factors: first, the support they enjoy from key sections of the ruling elite and its state apparatus; and second, the role played by the official "left" parties and their trade union allies in blocking the working class from intervening independently into political life. The latter factor has proven especially critical in Sweden, where the ex-Stalinist Left Party and the trade unions have kept working people subordinated politically to the Social Democrats as they have marched steadily to the right and adopted many of the Sweden Democrats' key policies.



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