

New government takes power in Sweden with backing of far-right Sweden Democrats

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After a month of talks following the September 11 election in Sweden, the right-wing Moderate Party has come to power with the support of the far-right Sweden Democrats. Moderate leader Ulf Kristersson won the backing of parliament on Monday to become prime minister by 176 votes to 173. He will be officially made prime minister following a ceremony with the king of Sweden on Tuesday.

Kristersson's election marks the first time a Swedish prime minister has relied on the votes of a far-right party with neo-Nazi roots to become prime minister. The Sweden Democrats were founded in the 1980s by neo-Nazis seeking to form a party capable of gaining representation in parliament. They have succeeded in capitalising on the sinking popularity of all the other capitalist parties, the Social Democrats in particular, as they oversaw the dismantling of the Swedish welfare state, tax cuts for the rich and a major military buildup. The Sweden Democrats secured more than 20 percent of the vote in last month's election and have the second-largest group in parliament behind the Social Democrats.

Kristersson's coalition consists of three right-wing parties: the Moderates, the Christian Democrats and the Liberals. However, the Sweden Democrats will exercise significant influence over the coalition. In the new government's policy document, called the Tidö Agreement, the Sweden Democrats were able to secure support for most of their law and order, anti-immigrant demands. They also have ensured that their party has representatives in all governmental departments to supervise the work of the new government.

The leader of the Sweden Democrats, Jimmie Åkesson, heralded the new government as a "paradigm shift." This follows celebratory comments from fascists and neo-Nazis across the world since the election, including from close allies of fascist-minded former US President Donald Trump.

The stated policies of the new government include the following:

- The creation of zones in working class, migrant areas where the police can search people indiscriminately for no reason or warrant.

- Tripling of minimum income required for labor-based migration, disqualifying poorer migrant labourers.

- The drafting of plans to criminalise begging throughout the country.

- Substantial increases to police funding and surveillance cameras throughout the country.

- The abolition of permanent asylum for refugees and more than a four-fifths reduction in refugees allowed per year.

- All new residency applicants will be required to give DNA samples for a state-wide DNA registry of foreigners.

- A new round of tax cuts for businesses.

- Anyone without Swedish citizenship suspected of being a gang member can be deported without being found guilty in a court of law of a crime.

- General increase in the severity and duration of punishments, including youth convicted of crimes being handled by the prison system and increased sentencing for people convicted of multiple crimes.

- Consideration of registering EU citizens if they stay longer than three months.

- Consideration of asylum "transit zones," i.e., holding camps for migrants seeking asylum.

- Inquiry to more than double the time it takes to qualify for Swedish citizenship—moving it to eight years—and adding stricter language and cultural knowledge qualifications. This could also include a new oath of loyalty to the Swedish state.

The proposed political agenda of the new government makes clear that the Swedish ruling class is turning ever more openly towards authoritarian and fascist forms of

rule. This development can only be explained by the staggering growth of social inequality, which has convinced the ruling class that it must resort to more aggressive methods to defend its wealth and privilege, and the transformation of Sweden into a frontline state in the US-NATO war with Russia.

Having applied to join NATO and undertaken a vast expansion of its armed forces since 2014, the Swedish ruling elite has abandoned the last vestiges of its historic policy of neutrality. The vast amount of financial and material resources Stockholm intends to plough into the US-led drive to subjugate Russia to the status of a semi-colony can only be squeezed out of the working class using the brutal methods associated with the far right.

Over the past three decades, successive governments, chiefly those led by Social Democratic prime ministers, have gutted Sweden's relatively generous welfare state, undermined pension rights and privatised public services. The Sweden Democrats sought to capitalise on the growing anger towards the political establishment produced by these policies by blaming mounting social problems on immigrants.

While the Sweden Democrats have pioneered this chauvinism, the Social Democrats have effectively adopted their positions. Right before the election, the outgoing Social Democrat Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson complained that she did not want any "Somali towns" in Sweden.

The social problems confronting large numbers of immigrants to Sweden, which the fascistic Sweden Democrats reduce to "gang violence" and blather about, are inseparable from the general onslaught on workers rights and public services since the 1990s. Over the last decade, Sweden had one of the highest rates of refugee migration within the European Union (EU). About a quarter of all Swedish residents are foreign-born. The systematic slashing of state revenues through tax handouts to big business and the wealthy, and the opening up of health care, education and other key public services to private profit have denied many of these new arrivals the services needed to help secure a decent standard of living.

The relaxation of labour regulations has created large swaths of low-paid, insecure employment, not least in sectors like health care and elderly care. Large numbers of immigrants live in neighbourhoods of major cities, like Stockholm and Malmö, where rates of unemployment and poverty are significantly higher than the Swedish average.

A recent Oxfam report on global inequality found that "inequalities in Sweden have increased significantly" in

the last decade. Suzanne Standfast, Oxfam Sweden's general secretary, stated, "Sweden is one of the OECD countries where economic inequalities have increased the most in recent decades." She continued, "We have a high tax burden, yes, but assets are taxed considerably lower in Sweden than in many other countries. This means that people with a low income sometimes pay a higher percentage of tax than people with greater assets."

Stockholm, Sweden's capital, is the seat of the second largest tech boom in the world—only outpaced by Silicon Valley in California. Sweden has the highest number of billionaires per capita of any major EU country.

The Social Democrats have played a key role in presiding over these developments with the support of the Left Party and Greens. The ex-Stalinist Left Party backed the outgoing Social Democrat government throughout its eight years in office as it enforced huge increases in military spending and implemented budgets dictated by the right-wing parties.

As COVID-19 spread around the world in 2020, the Social Democrats and Left Party played a criminal role in promoting the false idea of "herd immunity," implementing policies of mass infection that led to a significantly higher fatality rate in Sweden than its Nordic neighbours. Sweden's "herd immunity" policy was embraced by the most reactionary political figures around the world, including Trump.

The fight to defeat the threat to basic democratic and social rights posed by the far right in Sweden can only be conducted on the basis of a turn to the working class and socialism. The "socialism" of the Social Democrats and the Left Party has nothing in common with genuine socialist politics. Governments led and supported by these parties have imposed savage austerity, whipped up nationalism and turned Sweden into a garrison state for NATO. The only viable alternative to these anti-worker policies lies in the unification of the struggles waged by Swedish workers with those of their class brothers and sisters throughout Europe and around the world on the basis of a socialist and internationalist programme.



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