

Worst mass shooting in Swedish history claims 11 lives

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A 35-year-old lone gunman killed 10 people at the Risbergska community school in the Swedish town of Örebro Tuesday before turning the gun on himself. The worst mass shooting in the country's history occurred against the backdrop of rapidly growing social inequality, the promotion of militarism and war fever, and ongoing gang violence driven by the deepening social and economic crisis.

The gunman, identified as Rickard Andersson, was unknown to police before the shooting. He has been described in reports as a loner with few social contacts. He lived alone, was heavily involved in online gaming, and had earned no taxable income in recent years. To date, no information has been provided indicating a motive for his murderous outburst. An unconfirmed report suggested that he signed up for, but did not complete, various mathematics courses at the school, which aims to help adults complete their education.

Andersson apparently chose his victims at random. One of the dead was 28-year-old Salim Iskef, a student at the school due to get married in July, according to broadcaster SVT. Some other victims remain to be publicly identified. The gunman also injured numerous people in the shooting, which the police described as “an inferno.” SVT reported that he used a semi-automatic weapon and had licences for five firearms, three of which he had in his possession at the scene. When his body was found, he still had a large supply of unused ammunition.

It cannot be excluded that further information may reveal Andersson to have been influenced by far-right views. However, the currently available information suggests that he was a socially vulnerable, disoriented young man who snapped amid mounting social tensions and non-stop militarist war fever.

While the shock among the population has been palpable and widespread, official statements have failed to go beyond the most banal platitudes. Prime Minister

Ulf Kristersson, whose conservative Moderate party-led coalition government relies on the support of the fascistic Sweden Democrats in parliament, sought to project an image of national unity by attending a public memorial in Örebro with the king Wednesday.

Speaking at a press conference, Kristersson described the massacre as “the worst mass shooting in Swedish history,” adding: “It is difficult to comprehend the extent of what has happened today. Darkness hangs this evening over Sweden.... what cannot be allowed to happen has now happened in Sweden.”

Any serious explanation for Andersson's horrific act must take into account the dramatic deterioration of social conditions in Sweden. Over the past three decades, Sweden has been rapidly transformed from a country with one of the world's most extensive welfare states into a society riven by social inequality, poverty and unemployment. Once held up by social-democratic politicians as proof that capitalism's worst excesses could be reformed, Sweden has become a byword for corporate deregulation, anti-immigrant agitation, law-and-order crackdowns and rearmament for war.

This was mostly accomplished by Social Democrat-led governments, which began after the economic crisis of the early 1990s to systematically cut social spending and privatise public services. Sweden's nationally regulated labour market, based on co-management between the employers and trade unions, was abandoned under the pressure of globalised production. The 1994-2006 Social Democrat-led government, which was also supported by the Greens and ex-Stalinist Left Party, paved the way with its right-wing record for the right-wing Alliance government to start Sweden's largest-ever wave of privatisations in 2006.

Summing up Sweden's transformation into a free-market paradise in their 2014 book *The Fourth Revolution*, former *Economist* editors John Micklethwait

and Adrian Wooldridge observed, “The streets of Stockholm are awash with the blood of sacred cows. The local think tanks are overflowing with fresh ideas about welfare entrepreneurs and lean management. Indeed, Sweden has done most of the things that politicians know they ought to do but seldom have the courage to attempt.”

As public services increasingly fell apart and social inequality grew, the entire political establishment sought scapegoats for the deterioration in economic and social conditions. Sweden’s once open immigration and asylum system was transformed into the most restrictive in Europe by Stefan Löfven’s Social Democratic government from 2014.

All of the major parties blame foreigners for growing unemployment, gang violence and other social ills to divert attention away from the real culprits: political parties that implemented cost-cutting and austerity, and capitalists who reaped profits and grew wealthy by funnelling society’s resources from public services into their pockets.

To this end, all the parties facilitated the promotion of the fascistic Sweden Democrats, a party with its roots in the neo-Nazi movement of the 1980s. By adopting many of its anti-immigrant policies, the Social Democrats, their Green and Left Party partners, and traditional right-wing parties like Kristersson’s Moderates helped build up the far right so much that after the 2022 election, the Sweden Democrats were the kingmakers in coalition talks.

The explosive growth of social inequality is extensively documented. The Global Wealth Report 2023 by Credit Suisse and UBS noted that the richest 10 percent of Sweden’s population owns 74.4 percent of the wealth, making Sweden the European country with the most unequal wealth distribution. A major factor in this has been the financialisation of the economy, which disproportionately benefits the very wealthy with access to investments.

According to Statista, 16 percent of Sweden’s population is at risk of poverty, the highest among all Nordic countries, with others ranging between 8 and 12.7 percent. Oxfam’s global Commitment to Reducing Inequality index placed Sweden in 20th place, the lowest of any Nordic country.

A March 2023 article in the medical journal *The Lancet* noted, “It is a well-established fact that economic inequality leads to increase in violence, crime, poverty, and health inequalities, all of which can have lasting generational impact.” In this regard, gun violence has dramatically risen in Sweden, which went from having the

lowest level of gun violence in Europe in 2000 to the highest rate of gun-related deaths per head of population today.

Although most gun crime is related to gang violence, it impacts the entire population. In 2023, 55 people were killed in 363 shootings in a country of just 10 million people.

Bound up with the dramatic worsening of economic and social conditions for broad swathes of the population are Sweden’s militarisation and the country’s emergence as a frontline state in the imperialist-led war on Russia. Sweden’s long-touted “neutrality” was jettisoned; it is now a NATO member state that provides substantial military support to Ukraine in the US-NATO war on Russia.

Stockholm reinstituted military conscription in 2017 and committed in 2022 to hike its military spending by over 60 percent by 2028. The vast sums of money required for war must be squeezed out of the working class, through the destruction of wages and public services, and attacks on working and living conditions.

In addition to the financial impact of militarisation, the pervasive war fever whipped up by the political and media establishment forces brutal violence into all areas of daily life. The public prominence of the military, with US-led military exercises in Stockholm and open military recruitment efforts, has increased sharply. Last November, the Swedish government sent printed copies of a pamphlet to every household informing readers how to survive for up to a week in the event of war.

A burst of bloody violence from an apparently isolated and deeply disoriented individual is not in the final analysis surprising under these conditions. Unfortunately, the question is not if but when the next eruption of sociopathic violence will occur. The only way to put a stop to mass shootings and other manifestations of the barbaric character of the present social order is through the fight by the working class for socialism to put an end to capitalism and the social ills it produces.



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