

Sweden's Social Democrats try to form government after worst election result in modern era

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Sweden faces a government crisis more than a month after September's parliamentary election. The Social Democrats won the September 13 poll with their lowest share of the popular vote since the introduction of universal suffrage in 1921. They are struggling to cobble together a coalition to secure a parliamentary majority for leader Magdalena Andersson as prime minister.

The election demonstrated the deep alienation of workers from the entire political establishment. After four years of a right-wing minority government that depended on the fascistic Sweden Democrats for its parliamentary majority, Andersson's Social Democrat-led bloc of parties secured a razor-thin majority, winning 176 seats against the right-wing bloc's 173.

The Social Democrats' share of the vote fell from about 30 percent in 2022, when it was the largest opposition party, to 28 percent this time around. The other parties in the bloc—the left/liberal Centre Party, the Greens and the ex-Stalinist Left Party—obtained very modest gains in support. Moreover, sharp divisions within the Social Democrat-led bloc may prevent a majority coming to pass. The Left Party is demanding ministers in government as a condition for backing Andersson's election as prime minister, while the Centre Party has ruled out backing Andersson if the Left Party is part of the government.

The Social Democrats and their allied parties could not capitalise significantly on the deep unpopularity of the outgoing right-wing government because they were not viewed as a genuine alternative. On all fundamental issues—Sweden's support for the European imperialist-led war on Russia, its membership in the aggressive NATO military alliance, immigrant-bashing and the continued pursuit of austerity to fund a major military buildup—the parliamentary parties are in agreement. It was the previous Andersson-led Social Democrat minority government that initiated Sweden's application to join NATO prior to the 2022 election, with the support of the other three parties now negotiating to form a new government. The move formally ended Sweden's two-century-long official neutrality, transforming the Nordic country into a frontline state in the imperialist drive to subordinate Russia to semicolonial status.

The Social Democrats have done more than any other party over the past four decades to destroy the "Swedish model," the comparatively generous wages, social programmes and welfare provisions secured by the working class in the post-war period through bitter class battles. Supported by the Greens and Left Party in parliament, Social Democrat-led governments laid the basis for sweeping privatisations of public services in the late 1990s and early 2000s, embraced the

right wing's vicious anti-immigrant witch-hunting following the 2015 refugee crisis, adopted the demands for financial restraint and initiated military spending increases and the reintroduction of conscription.

This class war agenda was the response of Sweden's ruling class to the escalating global capitalist crisis and the breakdown of the post-war economic order, which once provided the basis for it to pursue policies of class compromise. The Swedish economy and industry have over recent decades been exposed to ruthless competition due to the globalisation of production, eliminating many of the protections workers previously enjoyed and that served to ensure support for national-reformist organisations like the Social Democrats and their allied trade unions.

The fate over the past two decades of such iconic Swedish names as automakers Saab and Volvo, and more recently the battery-maker Northvolt, either sold off to foreign owners or bankrupted, is part of a restructuring of Swedish capitalism that has benefited investors and better-off layers of the middle class. Meanwhile, workers confront increasing job insecurity and growing social inequality.

The lack of an alternative on the official "left" gave the ruling class an opportunity, through backroom parliamentary manoeuvring, to hand power back to the most right-wing parties. Andreas Norlén, the Moderate Party speaker of parliament, declared on Tuesday that he will put Andersson's candidacy for prime minister to a vote on Thursday, with her leading a Social Democrat minority government. Norlén won the speakership on September 28 with the backing of the Left Party, against a Social Democratic candidate.

Parliamentary tradition in Sweden allows a minority government to take office provided a majority does not vote against it. In the event that parliament votes three times to reject a candidate for prime minister, fresh elections must be held.

Citing Andersson's reluctance to offer seats in her government, the Left Party voted with the right-wing parties to secure Norlén a parliamentary majority as speaker. Should Andersson lose Thursday's vote, as is expected, Norlén can assign the task of forming the government to a party leader of his choice. This could include acting Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson of the Moderates. On April 1, Kristersson pledged to give the Sweden Democrats ministerial posts if he formed a government after the election. Since 2022, the far-right party backed Kristersson's Moderate/Christian Democrat/Liberal coalition from the outside.

Norlén said on Tuesday, referring to an Andersson defeat, "In that case, I will discuss with the other party leaders how we should take the process forward. I envisage making a round of phone calls rather

than inviting them to a meeting with the Speaker in my office, to show that we are moving this process along at a brisk pace.”

Andersson was blunter still about the direction of travel, telling public broadcaster Sveriges Television on Wednesday, “Personally, I think it is reasonable for the leader of Sweden’s second-largest party to take over—that is, Ulf Kristersson.”

If Kristersson receives the approval of the speaker, he will face his own challenges. The “Tidö” parties, the Moderates, Sweden Democrats, Christian Democrats and Liberals—named after Tidö Castle, where they struck their first agreement to elect Kristersson’s government in 2022—do not have a majority and would need the Centre Party’s votes to nominate Kristersson as prime minister. The Centre Party, previously part of the right-wing bloc before breaking with the traditional right-wing parties when they began collaborating directly with the far-right Sweden Democrats, has to date refused to back a government containing either the Sweden Democrats or Left Party.

However the wrangling over the new government plays out in the coming days, the decisive factor for the working class is to recognise the Left Party and its associated pseudo-left organisations as the chief obstacles to the development of a worker-led counteroffensive against austerity, war and anti-immigrant agitation.

The Left Party picked up some support at the polls, especially among younger people seeking an alternative to the right-wing government, achieving 8.4 percent of the vote and becoming the fourth-largest party in parliament after the Social Democrats, Moderates and Sweden Democrats.

The Left Party has repeatedly supported Social Democrat-led governments from the outside since the 1990s as they have dismantled large swathes of the “Swedish model” through privatisations and budget cuts. Its support for former Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and then Andersson was indispensable between 2014 and 2022 for the Social Democrats’ embrace of the right-wing parties’ budgetary framework and the initiation of NATO membership.

Since this year’s election, the Left Party and its leader, Nooshi Dadgostar, have focused their chief criticism of the Social Democrats on Andersson’s refusal to offer them ministerial posts, not their right-wing, pro-war policies.

The ideological justification for the Left Party’s effort to keep the working class subordinated to the Social Democrats is provided by Socialistisk Politik, the Swedish section of the Pabloite United Secretariat. In its newspaper *Internationalen*, the group drew on the Stalinist “popular front” policy of the 1930s on September 13 with the headline “Today we vote out Tidö and the fascists!”

They wrote, “Sweeping away this right-wing political mob is the first duty of every voter who shows solidarity and takes responsibility. Tidö – not a single day more after 13 September! A setback for Swedish Trumpism would be a victory for all democratic and progressive forces, not only in Sweden but throughout Europe.”

The lie that “democratic and progressive forces” offer a counterweight to the growth of fascism in Sweden and throughout Europe conceals the fact that it is precisely the right-wing, anti-worker policies pursued by nominally “left” parties like the Social Democrats, supported by the Left Party and Greens, that have enabled the Sweden Democrats to demagogically appeal to social anger.

Uniting the “democratic and progressive forces” permits groups like Socialistisk Politik, and the Left Party, of which it is a part, to back entering a government even with the support of the Centre Party, which until 2018 was part of the right-wing Alliance led by the

Moderates, the party that wants to bring the Sweden Democrats into power.

During the 1930s, the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and its aligned Communist parties insisted that the working class had to subordinate itself to “democratic,” i.e., bourgeois political parties, in the “popular front” to stop the rise of fascism. On this basis, the Stalinists beheaded the Spanish Revolution, blocking the revolutionary workers from challenging private property and the bourgeois republican government, and betrayed the French general strike of 1936. In both countries, the Stalinists’ bourgeois allies responded by turning over power to the fascists at the first opportunity in the form of the Franco dictatorship in Spain and the Nazi collaborationist Vichy regime in France.

The promotion by Socialistisk Politik of a contemporary “popular front” alliance with the Social Democrats, Greens and even Centre to stop the far right is in keeping with this group’s Pabloite origins. When Michel Pablo and his followers broke from Trotskyism in 1953, it was on the basis of an explicit rejection of the revolutionary capacity of the working class, and the searching for substitutes among factions of the Stalinist bureaucracy, Social Democracy and the trade unions, and bourgeois nationalists in the colonial countries. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) was founded in struggle against this revisionist anti-Marxism and has defended and developed the programme of world socialist revolution and the political independence of the working class.

The questions of political perspective fought out in this struggle are essential for workers in Sweden and internationally today. Opposing war, austerity and the rise of the far right is possible only if the working class establishes its unconditional political independence from the official “left” led by the Social Democrats and Left Party.

The urgent task is to build organisations of class struggle, rank-and-file committees that can unite the struggles of workers in Sweden with their colleagues throughout Europe opposing public spending cuts, attacks on wages and conditions, and the subordinating of society’s resources to militarism and war. The socialist and internationalist political leadership such a movement requires must be provided by building a Swedish section of the ICFI.



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