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Sweden

Everybody but the bourgeoisie loses

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The European Parliament elections in Sweden have once again shown the mistrust the Swedish working class has for the European Union project. The highest abstention rate in Swedish history and the breakthrough of a new party symbolize an election of protest towards the ruling classes and their parties in Sweden.

The population as a whole and especially the working-class, followed up last years “No” to the Euro [1] with an act of defiance towards the neoliberal Swedish social-democratic government by abstaining from voting on a big scale. Only 37.8% of all voters participated in the elections. [2]

	European Election Results (%)		Last Swedish Parliament elections
	2004	1999	2002
Social Democrats (S, SAP)	24.56	25.99	39.8
Conservatives (M)	18.25	20.74	15.2
June-List (JL)	14.47	-	
Left Party (V)	12.79	15.81	8.3
Liberal Party (FP)	9.86	13.85	13.1
Center Party (CP)	6.26	5.98	6.1
Green Party (MP)	5.96	9.48	4.6
Christian Democrats (KD)	5.68	7.64	9.1
Sweden Democrats (SD, far right)	1.13	0.33	1.4

As a protest the elections can be considered a success, but in fact the high abstention rate is problematic. Participation in the elections was higher among upper class people and substantially lower in the working class. The working class, because of this, is very poorly represented in the European parliament. Instead nearly all those elected represent the bourgeoisie. This means that despite the intentions of the working-class to make the election an election of protest by abstaining, they have instead strengthened the political influence of Swedish capitalists. It also creates a problem with the credibility of not only the elections to the European Parliament but also all elections. Over time this can create a situation in Sweden (and Europe) that is a copy of the situation in the USA. The working class gets alienated from the whole political process, a development that will cause working people great harm.

Generally the parties that are considered to be against the European Union get higher results in the European parliamentary elections than they get in elections to the Swedish parliament. This is why the Left Party and the Greens got a significantly higher percentage in the European elections. There is also a tendency to punish the parties in government. Both these reasons account for the poor performance of the social democrats in European elections. The higher percentage for the Conservatives and Christian Democrats in the European elections is due to the lower abstention rate among the upper classes.

The party that traditionally represents the Swedish working class is the social-democratic party, the Social-Democratic Workers Party (SAP). The SAP was one of the main losers in an election where winners are hard to find. They got the lowest number of votes and the lowest percentage of votes in Swedish modern history. This election and last year's referendum show that there is a breach starting to emerge between the social-democrats and the working class, and even between the social-democratic leadership and some smaller unions, the Transport Workers Union (Transport) and Shop and Trade Employees Union (Handels). During the election campaign there have been problems for the social-democratic leadership in mobilizing their members in the working class to agitate and work for the election apparatus in the party. They have also had very big problems in getting their traditional supporters to vote. This has not been helped by the fact that the SAP party leadership removed critics of the European Union from all electable places on their ballot papers. This when most of their voters are against membership of the European Union. The two trade unions mentioned above decided to support a candidate, placed number 31 on the ballot paper, who is a known critic of the European Union. Despite outright sabotage of the young female candidate's campaign from the social-democratic leadership, she managed to get elected. This was of course a slap in the face to the social-democratic leadership and shows again how the SAP leadership have distanced themselves from their own traditional voters in the working class.

This obvious split between the social democrats and the working class has not led to an increase in support for other parties on the left wing. The Left Party (Vänsterpartiet, ex-Communist) did not manage to benefit from the weakness of the social democrats. This despite the fact that the Left Party is not in favour of Swedish membership of the European Union. While it may look a bit strange that they could not manage to increase their number of votes, in reality it is not really strange at all. Apart from not having any ministerial posts the Left Party is in reality a part of the Swedish government. Thus, they are supporting the neoliberal policies of the Swedish social-democratic government, supporting privatizations and so on. Exactly the same reasoning goes for the Green Party (Miljöpartiet) in Sweden. So they could not benefit from the poor social-democratic result either.

Sad to say, the extreme left in Sweden could not benefit either. There are three anti-capitalist left groups in Sweden, the Socialist Party (SP), [3] Justice Party-Socialists (RS) [4] and the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist Revolutionaries (KPMLr). [5] Of these only RS ran in the elections and they had an extremely bad result with about 2,000 votes which is less than a tenth of a percent of all voters. The Socialist Party made a decision not to run. The reason for this decision was mainly that the elections were totally unimportant for the Swedish working class. The KPMLr had a campaign for abstention. This failure for the extreme left is probably due to the animosity among the Swedish working class towards the European Union, the low occurrence of social struggles among Swedish workers and the thin roots of the extreme left in the working class. The most radical workers in Sweden are often the ones that are most opposed to the European Union and as a result extremely prone to abstain from voting for a parliament of an institution they despise.

The traditional bourgeois parties also became losers when a new party showed up on the scene and took many of their presumptive votes. This party, June-list (Junilistan, JL) was created only four months before the elections. They got most of their voters because they are considered to be a party of European Union critics. Thus they got a lot of votes from workers that traditionally vote for the social democrats and votes from other groups normally voting Conservative or for the Christian Democrats. In fact their voters are probably going to wake up with a severe trauma because the June-list is a party led by bankers and economists that are everything else but radical. It is a party that will support neoliberal policies and politics as long as the decisions are made in national parliaments instead of the European Parliament. One of the party leaders is a former social democrat and this is one explanation for the reason so many social-democratic voters switched to the June-list despite this party's support for conservative and nationalistic politics. JL is the only party that can be considered a winner in the elections. But their success is definitely also a triumph for the Swedish bourgeoisie.

Only one good thing can be said about the European elections in Sweden. The far right did not make a breakthrough. In fact their number of voters and their percentage of voters decreased. This is a different development than in the rest

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of Europe. Despite their decrease in votes compared to the last ordinary parliamentary elections they had pretty good results in the southernmost part of Sweden, in the city of Malmö and the farming areas around it as well as in certain areas around Stockholm and Gothenburg (Göteborg).

As a whole the European Parliament elections can be considered as a loss for most people and most parties in Sweden. Definitely a loss for the working-class, a loss for the anti-capitalist left wing parties, a loss for the social democrats. Only the Swedish capitalist class can be considered a winner.

[1] Referendum in September 2003; 55,9% No and 42.0% Yes

[2] Blank votes are not counted in Sweden; if they were the rate of participation would be around 40%.

[3] Swedish section of the Fourth International.

[4] Swedish section of the Committee for a Workers International (CWI).

[5] A Stalinist party that supports North Korea, also the biggest Swedish extreme left group.