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Sweden

Neo-fascist upset in Swedish elections

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For the first time in several decades, Sweden is witnessing a political crisis generated by shock-vote for neo-fascist Swedish Democrats, now the third-largest party in the newly-elected Riksdag (Parliament).

Sweden went to elections on September 14 to elect a government for the next four years. As was expected, a so-called informal Red Green coalition gained a majority (43.7% votes) against its rival ‘Bourgeois Alliance’ (39.3%). The Red Green Alliance is not a formal alliance. Consisting of Social Democrats, Left Party (a reformed mutation of the old Communist Party), and Greens, the Red Green Alliance has represented ideological polarization in Swedish electoral politics since the 1990s. It represents the mainstream Swedish left. In contrast, the right-wing ‘Alliance’, consisting of Moderates (Conservatives), Liberals, Centre Party, and Christian Democrats, was a formal block. It won the last two elections and during eight-years of misrule, it managed to aggressively dismantle the famous Swedish Model of welfare state. It will be news only for casual observers of Swedish developments that the country now tops among OECD lands where class gulf has widened most.

The much talked about Feminist Initiative (F!) received 3.2% votes, almost one percent short of 4% threshold a party must reach to enter Riksdag. A few months ago, when elections for the EU Parliament were held, F! was able to bag almost five percent of the votes and one F! member secured a seat in the European Parliament earlier this year. Founded in 2005, F!’s public face has been Gudrun Schyman who was earlier chairperson of the Left Party. Described by Britain’s *Sunday Times*, as the ‘Dancing Queen’ for her participation in the Swedish version of the internationally popular formatted TV show, *Lets Dance*, Gudrun Schyman is not the only popular face available to F!. In the recent election, for instance, Benny Anderson, member of former legendary Swedish band, ABBA, endorsed F! by generously donating a huge sum for F!’s election campaign.

Sweden can be proud of an enviable gender equality compared to any other country even in the West. Therefore, the emergence of F! surprises even the western commentators. However, the emergence of F! was possible only because Swedish women have won many rights. Not merely, they need to defend them, a feminization of politics is important to fight discrimination and injustices women still face. Considered a leftwing formation, F! has helped to bring an intersectionality perspective into the Swedish politics. For instance, during the recently concluded canvassing, F!’s relative rise has highlighted the position of women in the structures of various political parties. It turned out that the Left Party, often claiming to be feminist and socialist, had an embarrassingly low representation of women in its top echelons. Likewise, to the amusement of many on the left, Swedish Liberals’ (Folkpartiet) most widely propagated slogan was: Socialism utan feminism (Socialism without feminism). Personally, I am not a huge fan of F! since I find they reduce every problem to gender and skip the class question especially at a time when the welfare system in Sweden is under attack and class differences have begun to grow. It is piecemeal dismantling of Sweden’s enviable welfare system, since the 1990s, that has contributed to the rise of neo-fascist Swedish Democrats (SD).

Rise of neo-Fascists:

Incidentally, F! also generated lot of enthusiasm in certain circles because, to its credit, it was viewed by certain circles as a party to block SD’s entry to Riksdag. In the previous elections, SD received 5% to reach the parliament. Many on the left voted F! in the hope of edging out SD which did not fare well in the pre-election opinion polls. Also, for the last one month, far left was able to mobilize huge anti-fascist manifestations. But bagging 12.9%, SD emerged as the third largest party. Since outgoing prime minister, Fredrik Reinfeldt had announced ahead of polls not to build

a government in alliance with SD even if he had to go, therefore, Social Democratic leader Stefan Lofven will replace Reinfeldt as the next prime minister.

However, SD's huge vote (48 MPs in the next Riksdag) has already unsettled the Swedish politics. It had delivered the end of Red Green Alliance. The Social Democrats have announced to form the next government without the Left Party. Social Democratic PM-designate, Stefan Lofven, instead, wants to form a government in alliance with the two right-wing parties: Liberals and Centre Party. Thus, practically, the right-wing alliance has also fallen apart. In other words, a right wing alliance will be replaced by an anomalous "right-left" alliance. The Social Democrats have refused to build a coalition government with the Left Party despite opinion polls whereby a majority wants Social Democrats to build a coalition government with the Left Party and Greens. The Left Party, that retained 5.7 percent vote share, campaigned to fight back privatization of schools, hospitals and other institutions of welfare. It seems, a Socialdemocratic government in alliance with right-wing parties, in a position of invoking fascist scare, is intent upon dismantling welfare system rather than reviving it. In other words, the very cause of neo-fascism's growth will find favourable objective conditions to flourish.

Islamophobic and anti-immigrant, SD now will also be able to influence an enviable Swedish immigration policy. Only a day before the polling, my Swedish friend Marco Espvall had proudly claimed in his Facebook post that his neighbourhood, Sodertalje, has received more Iraqi post-2003, than the USA and Canada. Despite a right-wing government, Sweden opened its borders for the Syrian immigrants after the break out of civil war. A Syrian landing Sweden is granted permanent Swedish residence. Such has been the progressive nature of Swedish migration policy that an anti-immigrant party in neighbouring Denmark has been campaignin, of late, to close down borders with Sweden "from where illegal immigrants' sneak into Denmark.

Far Left remains marginal:

The far left is a marginal force in Swedish electoral arena. While far left groups (Anarchists included), were in the forefront, if not instrumental, in anti-fascist mobilizations that swept Sweden ahead of September 14 elections, they were not able to translate the success of anti-racist activism into votes. Notable among far left groups, besides anarchists, are Justice Socialist Party, or SR (an affiliate of CWI), Socialist Party, or SP (Swedish section of the FI) and KP (Communist Party, a stalinist party). These groups usually concentrate on the elections for the municipalities, held the same day, and manage to retain half a dozen or so mandates across Sweden. Encouraging as it may be, it remains insignificant. In the recent past, RS and SP built an election alliance which generated hopes for the far-left But it did not last long.