

19 October 2014

Sweden's New Political Landscape

*Recent election results in a weak government
and an outcast party holding the balance of power*

The Swedish national election held on 14 September resulted in some confusion and much consternation. As no party or coalition won a majority of seats in the Riksdag (parliament), it was not immediately certain how or by whom a new government would be formed.

Equally significant, the balance of power ended up in the hands of a nationalist party with which all of the seven others have sworn not to co-operate. The Sweden Democrats (SD), who first entered the Riksdag in the previous election, more than doubled their share of the vote to become the third largest party — despite the relentless efforts of political and media elites to stigmatize and isolate them.

The centre-right coalition of four parties which has governed for two terms during the past eight years received just under 40 per cent of the vote, a decrease of over eight per cent.

The three remaining parties — Social Democratic (SDP), Left and Green — campaigned together and received a total of nearly 44 per cent.

Centre of SDP gravity

As it has for the past 100 years, the SDP received the most votes — 31 percent — and was invited to form the new government. It did so by joining with the Greens, but not the Left, to form a minority government representing only 38 per cent of the voters — ten per cent less than its outgoing centre-right predecessor.

With only 138 of 349 seats in the Riksdag, the new government will have to conduct extensive negotiations for every decision requiring legislative approval. No other government in recent memory has been so outnumbered.

Omission of the Left Party came as a surprise to many, partly because of its prominent role in the joint election campaign, and partly because it has long been a staunch ally of the SDP in the Riksdag. But throughout the election campaign, SDP leader Stefan Löfven had consistently avoided any commitment to include the Left in a new government, and had also signalled his intent to seek alliances in the political centre, most likely with the Liberal and/or Centre parties.

That strategy is consistent with the SDP's continuing shift to the right which began three decades ago and accelerated after the assassination of party leader Olof Palme in 1986.¹ Fundamental Social Democratic principles such as full employment, socio-

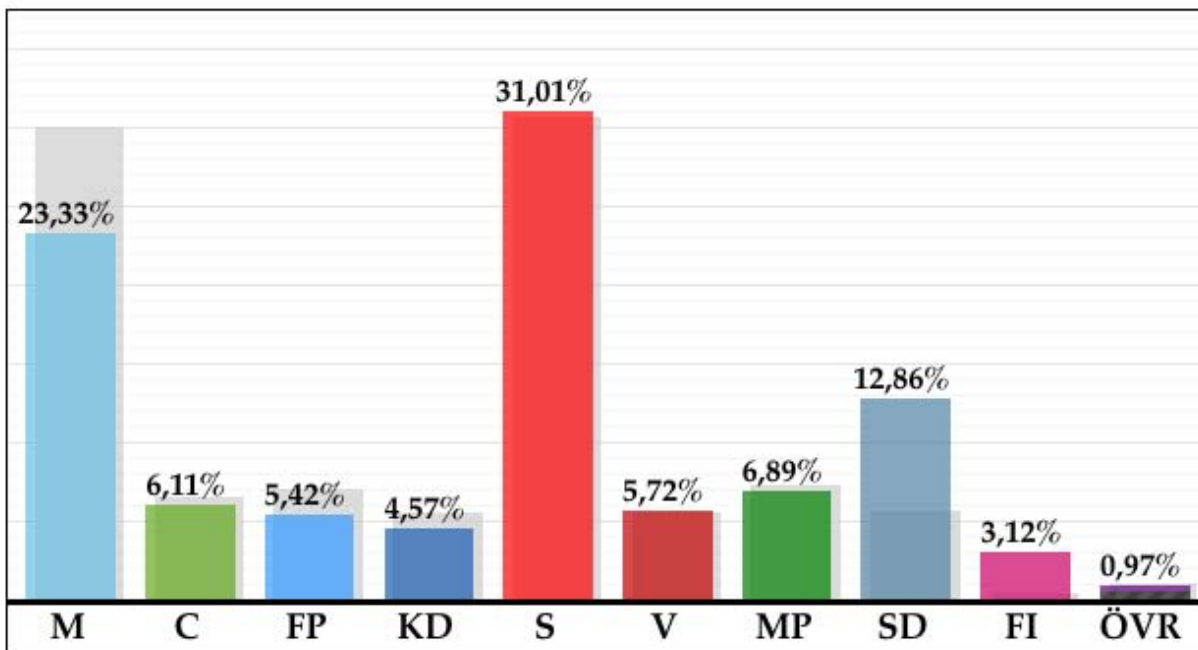
economic equality and anti-militarism were quietly jettisoned upon entry into the European Union in 1995 — although they continue to be honoured in the rhetorical abstract, presumably to mollify the dwindling party faithful.

The transformation of the SDP was consolidated during the reign of party leader and prime minister Göran Persson during 1996-2006. Persson has since moved on to the comfortable life of country squire and well-paid lobbyist (for a public relations firm linked to the Conservative Party), leaving behind a party and a country subordinate to the neo-liberal policies of the EU and incorporated into the United States' global war machine (primarily via USA/NATO's so-called Partnership for Peace).²

Much the same process has taken place in Social Democratic parties throughout Europe, including those of Germany, France and the United Kingdom.³

There is nothing in Stefan Löfven's background to suggest any inclination to reverse that trend. Prior to being selected in 2012 as party chairman by the rightward-leaning clique that now controls the SDP, Löfven was chairman of Metall (Metalworkers), a male-dominated union linked to the Swedish manufacturing industry. Metall has a long history as a conservative power centre within the SDP, and the Swedish labour movement in general has a long history of collaboration with the U.S. government.

2014 ELECTION RESULTS



Swedish Election Authority

Party name, seats in new parliament (% vote in 2010 election)

M: Conservative, 84 (28.68%)	C: Centre, 22 (6.54%)	
FP: Liberal, 19 (6.97%)	KD: Christian Democratic, 16 (5.49%)	
S: Social Democratic, 113 (31.92%)	V: Left, 21 (5.76%)	MP: Green, 25 (7.23%)
SD: Sweden Democrats, 49 (5.98%)	FI: Feminist Initiative	Övr: Other

(The threshold for representation in the Riksdag is 4% of the total vote.)

According to Olle Svenning, a journalist with close ties to the SDP: “The Social Democratic movement’s relations with the gigantic U.S. embassy were largely managed during the post-WWII period by union man Erik Södersten. From the embassy, he directed Swedish folk movements and social democracy, and also conducted some monitoring of political ‘non-conformists’.”⁴

For these and other reasons, it came as a surprise when Prime Minister Löfven in his inaugural speech on October 3rd announced that his government intended to formally recognize the State of Palestine.

That has been on the SDP’s agenda for decades, and was included in this year’s campaign platform. But hardly anyone expected Löfven to go through with it, all the less so on his first day in office. It seemed to invite trouble — which was not long in coming.

Israel’s Zionist government reacted with customary outrage and insults, the U.S. foreign ministry issued a mild rebuke, and critics in Sweden complained that recognition would be premature, “one-sided”, legally invalid, etc.

Worldwide, the declaration of intent to recognize was deemed highly significant, given Sweden’s status in world politics and the European Union. Although seven of the 28 EU member-states have already recognized the Palestinian state, they did so before joining the Union.

Sweden would be the first to do so after joining and is one of the more highly regarded members. The new government’s announcement was therefore interpreted as a significant challenge to U.S. control of EU policy regarding Israel, the empire’s foremost client state.

Responding to that suggestion, Foreign Minister Margot Wallström declared that, “Our policy is not determined by the United States,” and seemed to strengthen that impression by encouraging other EU member-states to follow Sweden’s example.

If the Löfven government does indeed plan to conduct a foreign policy independent of the United States, it would



Prime Minister Stefan Löfven

It is likely that Stefan Löfven will follow in Göran Persson’s footsteps — and may even be more positively disposed to USA/NATO. That appears to be confirmed by the new party leader’s stance on the first major foreign policy issue that he has had to deal with — the scandalous arms trade with Saudi Arabia.... The most recent disclosures have provoked demands for the cessation of that trade, but Löfven is clearly not of the same mind: “We have to be able to export for reasons of national defence.... We now have a contract, and it cannot be broken just like that.... If one breaks a business agreement, one will never again be able to sell to that client.”

It thus appears that neither USA/NATO, its allies in Sweden nor Saudi Arabia need worry about the Social Democrats with Stefan Löfven as their leader.

— *From Neutrality to NATO (2012)*⁵

be a complete reversal of the subservient posture adopted by both Social Democratic and centre-right governments of the past three decades.⁶ Such a fundamental shift would no doubt be welcomed by a large majority of Swedes, but to confirm it would require more than a single decision. That was underlined by an element of the new prime minister's inaugural speech which preceded the reference to Palestine — routine condemnation of Russia, including the demand that "Russia's destabilization of Ukraine must cease."

Doubtful defiance

Given Löfven's lack of experience in foreign affairs and the massive campaign of Russophobia now being conducted throughout the Western world, including Sweden, he may actually believe that Russia is primarily to blame for the current mess in Ukraine. But the principal culprits are the United States and the European Union — a fact so well-documented⁷ that Löfven's unawareness or conscious denial of it suggests continued loyalty to the U.S. empire rather than liberation from it.

In any event, the intention to recognize Palestine may not be as defiant as it appears. It cannot have escaped the notice of Prime Minister Löfven and his associates that the Obama administration and other elements of the U.S. establishment have become increasingly exasperated with the brutal, destructive and obstinate behaviour of the Israeli government.⁸

Accordingly, there is reason to suspect that recognition of Palestine by the EU would not be entirely unwelcome in Washington; and it is conceivable that the new Swedish government sought and received tacit permission to take the lead. Certainly the



Martina Huber/Regeringskansliet

The new government consists of Prime Minister Löfven (centre) and 23 ministers — 11 men and 12 women. Six of the 24 are from the Green Party and 18 from the SDP.

official U.S. response was quite mild — “We believe international recognition of a Palestinian state is premature” — and it was conveyed not by the president or a cabinet minister, but by a press officer at the State Department (foreign ministry).

In short, the Obama administration may have decided to put pressure on Israel via Sweden and the European Union, where the political risks of confounding the Zionists are much lower than in the United States.⁹

At this point, however, there is no certainty that Swedish recognition of Palestine will actually take place. The government has not given a time frame — other than to state that a formal decision will be made “sooner rather than later” — and its intention to do so without consulting the Riksdag has been challenged by opposition MPs on what appear to be valid constitutional grounds. An intense campaign to prevent or sidetrack recognition may be anticipated.

Other priorities

It was to be expected that the paragraph on Palestine would attract a great deal of attention abroad; but it came toward the end of the inaugural speech, a policy statement that was primarily concerned with internal matters. As outlined by Prime Minister Löfven, the primary objectives of his government include the following:

- Reduce the steadily growing socio-economic inequality.
- Increase investments in human capital, especially via the education system.
- Reduce unemployment, especially among immigrants and young people.
- Stimulate a major increase in housing construction.
- Revitalize economic and social development in rural regions.
- Ensure that the labour market operates in accordance with Swedish regulations, which provide comparatively strong protection to workers.
- Strengthen environmental protection and sustainability efforts at both the national and global levels.
- Impose constraints on profit-taking in privatized public services.¹⁰

These and other objectives enunciated by the new prime minister indicate a retreat from the tax-cutting, privatization policies of his predecessors. But such ambitions have been proclaimed by SDP leaders before, without much effect; and it will be difficult to fulfil many or any of them within the neo-liberal framework of the EU and a world order which, despite increasing signs of dissolution, is still dominated by the relentlessly capitalistic USA.

That order is based on a doctrine which, among other things, prescribes minimal government and maximal reliance on private enterprise. It is a doctrine that has been embraced by at least six of the eight parliamentary parties — including Löfven’s own SDP — occupying 80 per cent of Riksdag seats. Of the two remaining parties, the Sweden Democrats’ ideological colour is somewhat obscure (see below); but during the recently concluded Riksdag session, SD voted with the centre-right government over 80 per cent of the time.

The Left Party is the only one to clearly reject neo-liberalism. Formerly entitled the Left Communist Party, it shortened its name and discarded its communist ideological

baggage after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Its current political programme resembles nothing so much as traditional social democracy, and it might as well call itself the Social Democratic Party if that name were not already taken.

Opinion surveys indicate that its policies are favoured by a large segment of the population — sizable majorities in some cases — and its current leader, Jonas Sjöstedt, is both articulate and highly competent. But the party's election success has been limited by the stigma of its communist past, concerning which the mainstream media and the other established parties frequently remind the voters.

Another factor may be that the full extent of the SDP's abandonment of social democracy has yet to sink in among the general public or the mainstream press. That in turn may be largely explained by the reluctance of genuine Social Democrats to strongly and loudly resist the rightward shift that has taken place, due to the constraints of the consensus ethic that is a core element of party culture.¹¹

Public funds, private profits

The Left Party's relationship to the nominal Social Democratic Party may be illustrated with the Left's most important issue during the recent election campaign — elimination of the profit motive in tax-financed public services, especially education.

A private-enterprise option for the public schools was introduced by a centre-right government in the early 1990s and further strengthened by the SDP government of

Collaborating with reactionary forces in the EU

IT IS TELLING that important neoliberal policies were implemented between 1997 and 2002, while social democrats were running an overwhelming majority of member states in the EU (12 out of 15). What has the Party of European Socialists (PES) done for 'Social Europe'? Next to nothing. Yet, every five years the same hollow social democratic chants ring out: 'Social Europe! Social Europe!' Whether as heads of governments, in the Commission, or in the European Parliament, social democrats have worked alongside reactionary forces to promote 'unfettered markets' (according to the words in title 3 of the Constitutional Treaty).

Instead of developing concrete steps to promote solidarity and employment, they have voted in favour of policies that have fostered competition between member states. This in turn has created an incentive for some countries to practice social dumping. It has made the European Union a place of high unemployment, low wages and dismantled public services.

Back in the 1980s, social democrats believed that the Single European Market and later on the eurozone would enable them to launch the market-corrective policies that they could no longer implement nationally. In the end, it had the opposite effect: the neoliberal policies adopted by all member states (including social democratic ones) have further restricted redistributive policies nationally. These choices have facilitated economic and social policies which have gone against the interests of social democracy, i.e. its proclaimed social justice agenda....

Social democracy can only recapture a sense of purpose and make a useful contribution to progressive politics if it rediscovers its egalitarian roots and shows empathy for the underdogs.

— *"The decline of Europe's social democratic parties"*¹²

Göran Persson that followed. The theory was that privately operated “free schools” would lead to general improvements in the quality of education, while providing pupils and their parents with greater “freedom of choice” (the effectively appealing mantra of neo-liberal propaganda).

After two decades with this mix of private and public schools, all financed by tax revenues, it is difficult to detect any general improvement in the quality of education. In fact, there are clear signs of deterioration; and as predicted, the new system has led to increasing social and ethnic segregation. It has also spawned a growing “education industry” which siphons off large volumes of tax revenue in the form of profit, much of which leaves Sweden to enrich venture capitalists in other countries.

As explained by an education expert at the University of London: “If the aim of education is to reconcile high achievement and social integration (Finland serving as an excellent example), it can be concluded that Sweden’s free schools have had the opposite effect....

“The Swedish experience shows that allowing for-profit providers into the ‘school market’ has not led to increased standards and improved schools, but instead permitted another vested interest into education in pursuit of aims above those of children’s education, in this respect: profit.”¹³

Dealing with the Left

Eliminating profits from public services became the highest priority of the Left Party during the election campaign, and it had broad support among the voting public. Opinion surveys found that large majorities — even among supporters of the centre-right government — favoured either a total ban on profits in education or their compulsory reinvestment in the schools.¹⁴

An even larger majority of SDP voters favoured a ban. But Stefan Löfven remained adamantly opposed throughout the campaign; and Margot Wallström, now foreign minister, stated that the Left Party’s uncompromising opposition to public-service profits rendered it unsuitable as a potential coalition partner. It was a suitable opinion for Ms. Wallström, a devotee of the European Union who for over ten years was Sweden’s representative on the powerful EU Commission.

Nevertheless, one of the first initiatives of the new government was an agreement with the Left Party to present a formal proposal for constraints on public-service profits, sometime in 2016. In what way and to what extent are open questions to be studied in the meantime; and at this point there is no apparent majority for any such proposal in the Riksdag. But the agreement has been generally interpreted as a victory for the Left Party — apparently conceded in order to ensure its essential support for the government — and has been denounced by the centre-right opposition.

Whatever the eventual outcome of the agreement on profits, it illustrates several factors that are likely to influence future developments. One is the evident reluctance of Stefan Löfven to reject neo-liberal policies that have been adopted by the SDP and the centre-right parties during the past three decades. Another is continued reliance on the Left Party’s support which, among other things, is essential to passage of the new government’s crucial first budget which is to be presented later this month.

Yet a third key factor is the delicate task of a government which must somehow cobble together Riksdag majorities on numerous issues from a highly diverse array of opposition parties — where an alliance with one, however temporary, is certain to repel another.

Formerly fascist

There is, of course, another question whose significance may turn out to exceed all others, namely: What will the Social Democrats do, and how will the other parties deal with them?

To begin with, at least, all of the seven other parties have declared that they will continue to disdain any co-operation with SD, on the grounds that its ideology is racist and fascist. That is a characterization which certainly applied when SD was founded in 1988. Much or most of the original leadership and tiny membership had backgrounds in various extreme-right organizations.

But as the party grew, it attracted somewhat more moderate members, resulting in an internal conflict from which current leader, Jimmy Åkesson and his allies emerged victorious in 2005. The new leadership adopted a less brutal and more nuanced anti-immigration policy, and has expelled members with openly expressed fascist and other no-longer-welcome tendencies.¹⁵

The party programme has also been diversified with other issues — often, however, with explanatory links to immigration and multi-culturalism — such as family policy, crime and punishment, social services, national defence, elderly care, etc. The net result is a party programme that may be described as more nationalistic and social conservative than purely xenophobic.¹⁶

It is a programme that appeals to an increasingly broad spectrum of voters, including some immigrants. A survey published in February this year found that SD was the party of choice for over seven per cent of immigrant men. Among them was a student teacher from Iran who left the Social Democrats for the Sweden Democrats, noting that, “Just because I am an immigrant does not mean that I want more immigration”.¹⁷

Another immigrant party member has declared that he is “proud to have participated in an SD election campaign film.... The fact that I, a dark-skinned person, could represent a party which — according to socialists and liberals — promulgates a racist and undemocratic ideology has bewildered and even provoked some people....

Of course it is highly regrettable when representatives of the party that I also represent are



Scene from SD campaign film: Party leader Jimmy Åkesson flanked by two members with immigrant backgrounds.

revealed to hold xenophobic and racist opinions. But I want to make it very clear that such opinions are not representative of the ideology we espouse.”¹⁸

As this quote indicates, SD has not thoroughly cleansed itself of “racist and undemocratic” elements — on the contrary. Party representatives continue to supply critics and the media with more than enough scandals — often followed by the culprit’s resignation or expulsion — to discredit it among the majority of the voting public.

But there has undeniably been a substantial decline in such behaviour since Jimmy Åkesson & Co. won control in 2005, and that has presumably contributed to SD’s success at the polls. It first gained entry to the Riksdag with the election of 2010, its 5.7 per cent of the vote earning 20 seats and a substantial boost to party finances. Its 9.7 per cent share of the vote in the EU election in May of this year gave it two of Sweden’s twenty seats in the EU parliament.

Its nearly 13 per cent vote in the recent election earned 49 seats in the new Riksdag, along with a corresponding increase in state funding which will no doubt help to spread the party message.

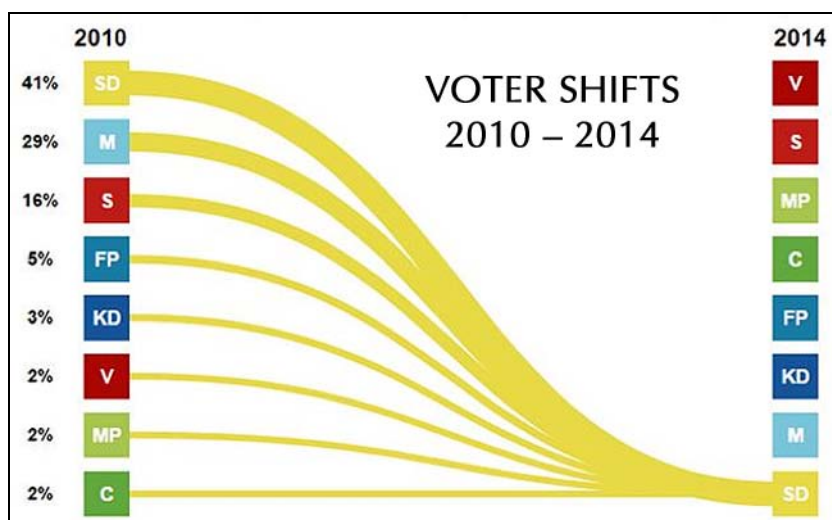
‘Normalization’

Post-election surveys indicate a significant shift in SD’s voter base. Previously, it included a large portion of unemployed and/or poorly educated young men living outside major urban areas. Its success in this year’s election was due to a large influx of less disadvantaged voters, including pensioners from the major cities.

In general, the new SD voters had better incomes and educations than those of previous elections. Equally significant, nearly half of all SD voters this year had voted for the two largest parties in 2010 — Conservative (29% of total SD voters) and Social Democratic (16%).

“The new SD voters more closely resemble average Swedes. The party has become normalized, which has led to an influx of middle-class voters,” concludes the leader of an extensive online survey.¹⁹

Although that survey can be questioned on methodological grounds, its findings are consistent with those of others, including the generally reliable exit poll conducted by Swedish Public Television on election day.²⁰



The exit poll conducted by Swedish Public Television on election day found that nearly half of those who voted for SD in 2014 had voted for the Conservative (M) and Social Democratic (S) parties in 2010.

See page 2 for complete list of party names and abbreviations.

Source: SVT/VALU

Indelible origins

Given the Sweden Democrats' broadening appeal — even among immigrants — and their election gains, it might be assumed that the other parliamentary parties are now prepared to grant them a measure of legitimacy.

Not yet, however. All other parties continue to reject any thought of co-operation with SD, primarily on the basis of its disreputable origins. "During the 1990s... the Nazi swastika could still be seen in your demonstrations," noted Prime Minister Löfven in a recent parliamentary exchange with Jimmy Åkesson. "Party leader Anders Klarström gave speeches about 'Jewish conspiracies'. Racism still lives in your party."²¹

The problem for the SDP and the other anti-SD parties is that it is no longer the 1990s and much has changed since then, however much they choose to deny it. That is clearly indicated by the election results, which in large measure are due to the fact that SD's party leader is no longer Anders Klarström, but Jimmy Åkesson — who is articulate and quiet-mannered, looks and dresses like a sober accountant, and obviously has no qualms about associating with immigrants.

One thing that has not changed is that there appear to be racist elements in all parties, including the SDP which lost many of its 2010 voters to SD in this year's election. Numerous politicians, primarily from the centre-right parties, have been forced to resign or apologize for expressing racist or anti-immigrant attitudes.

But SD's opponents prefer to dwell on its wicked past, rather than to acknowledge its altered present. The implication is that the party's less threatening new programme and image merely form a facade which conceals an indelible core of racist/fascist ideology — a sort of original sin that cannot be eradicated, however successful the Sweden Democrats may be in deceiving unwary voters.

However, it is not unusual for political parties to undergo genuine change, and for examples one need look no further than to the current government. The Social Democratic Party used to be social democratic; now look at it. The Green Party emerged from the peace and environmental movements, with a radical vision of sustainable society in harmony with nature and itself. Much of the original rhetoric remains; but the Greens have voted in the Riksdag to support neo-liberal policies and Swedish participation in USA/NATO wars of aggression.

Democratic dilemma

In any event, it is unlikely that the Sweden Democrats will remain politically isolated throughout the current Riksdag term, however long it may last. Even some harsh critics have noted the hypocrisy in accusing SD of being undemocratic while effectively disenfranchising its voters — the thirteen per cent of the total who have made SD the third largest party.

It is also apparent that the attempt to isolate SD is not having the desired effect, and may even have contributed to its success. That is the conclusion of Olof Holst a leading Conservative politician in the historic town of Sigtuna: "We have made a mistake by pretending that [the Sweden Democrats] do not exist. They would not have received 13 per cent of the vote if we had brought them in and conducted a sensible political discussion to expose who they really are.... Trying to shut them out and not allowing them to be heard has only encouraged protest votes. That is what we have seen in the recent election."²²

Many citizens are of the same mind. A credible opinion survey has found that nearly half of all voters are in favour of acknowledging the Sweden Democrats and co-operating with them on issues of common interest.²³

Turbulent months ahead

The Löfven government's predicament has been summarized by Anna-Lena Lodenius, a leading expert on right-wing movements who notes that the election outcome appears to confirm the theory that increasing similarities between established parties tend to benefit upstarts like SD which offer clear alternatives: "It should be obvious to most observers that there has been an ideological shift in European politics which has led to right-wing and social democratic parties becoming more like each other...."

"With the Left Party in opposition, there is greater freedom to challenge the Löfven government from both the left and right. But it also means that the government may be inclined to more or less routinely seek support for its policies among the parties of the right. The resulting impression on voters will be exactly that which populist right-wing parties always state, namely: It makes no difference which of the established parties one votes for.

"No matter what Stefan Löfven does, it is likely to benefit the Sweden Democrats.... There is no reason to believe that SD's thirteen per cent constitutes some sort of upper limit."²⁴

It all suggests some turbulent times ahead in Swedish politics, and Stefan Löfven will no doubt have frequent need of the negotiation skills he acquired as a labour leader.

For the immediate future, however, his government does not appear to be in serious danger. The initial strategy has been to ensure the support of the Left Party by acceding to its demands regarding public-service profits and related matters. Also, and despite its exclusion from the governing coalition, the Left would presumably be reluctant to join a no-confidence vote and thereby risk a new election that might result in another centre-right government and further gains by the Sweden Democrats.

The centre-right parties are not at all happy with the seemingly leftward shift of the new government (although it may only be tactical and temporary). But their coalition is currently in a state of disarray and unlikely to risk another election in the near future. The coalition's dominant figure, former prime minister Fredrik Reinfeldt, has resigned as leader of the Conservative Party and is not expected to be replaced until the spring of next year. Also, the position of Liberal leader Jan Björklund is insecure, his party having just experienced the second worst election in its 80-year history.

Only the Sweden Democrats may be eager to fell the Löfven government. But they cannot do that alone, and it is not entirely certain that their recent gains would be preserved or further expanded with a new election.²⁵

The Löfven government is therefore likely to survive at least until the spring of next year. Beyond that, it would be imprudent to speculate.

Addendum: Much ado about immigration

The growing success of the Sweden Democrats has been widely interpreted as a sign that the people of Sweden are becoming more racist and xenophobic. The available facts indicate the opposite, however.

Swedish opinion surveys have found that attitudes toward immigrants have become steadily more positive in recent decades. “There is nothing in our findings to indicate that racism and xenophobia are increasing in Sweden,” states a lead researcher at an academic research institute in Göteborg. Regarding negative attitudes toward refugees, for example, “The trend is inexorably downward.”²⁵

Those findings are corroborated by a comparative survey of nearly 28,000 citizens in the 28 EU member-states which was published this March. It found that Swedes were by far the most positively inclined toward immigration, with over 90 per cent responding with complete or partial agreement to the question: “To what extent do you agree or disagree that immigrants contribute a great deal to our country?” The next highest rate of agreement was 77%, in Luxembourg.²⁶

It is also indicative that immigration was not among the top ten issues of “very great importance” identified by voters’ in Swedish Public TV’s exit poll on election day (see diagram).

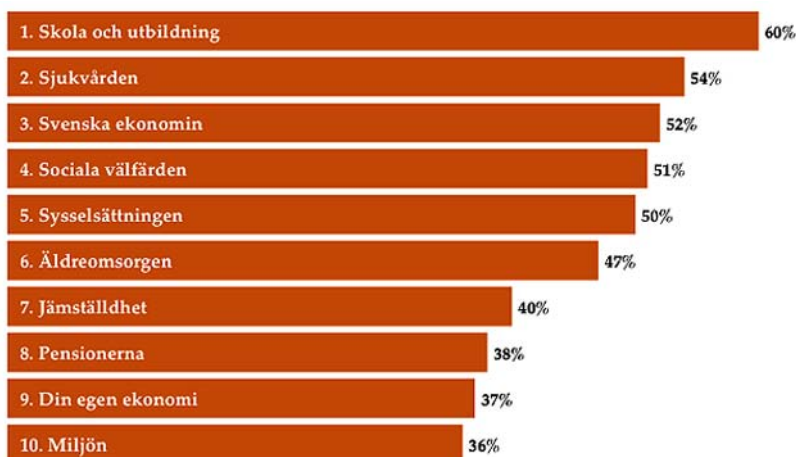
It would thus appear that the main political significance of immigration, thus far, is that it underlies SD’s current status and potential influence as the country’s third largest party. That is no small thing, for the reasons noted.

The growing success of the Sweden Democrats is almost certain to increase the relative priority of the immigration issue. They will no doubt be labouring to ensure that it does, from their new position of strength. In addition, other parties will come under increasing pressure to discuss and, most likely, to adopt more stringent positions on immigration in order to compete with SD. That political process has already taken place in neighbouring Denmark and Norway.

Apart from such considerations, the issue is long overdue for a thorough and open debate. The public discourse on Swedish immigration policy has for many years been dominated by a well-placed corps of thought police who promulgate and enforce a doctrine that constitutes a sort of immigration fundamentalism.

Voters’ Top 10 Issues of ‘Very Great Importance’

1. Schools and education: 60%
2. Health care: 54%
3. Swedish economy: 52%
4. Social welfare: 51%
5. Employment: 50%
6. Elderly care: 47%
7. Gender equality: 40%
8. Pensions: 38%
9. Personal finances: 37%
10. Environment: 36%



Source: SVT/VALU

Although the doctrine has yet to be formally codified, based on the pronouncements of its adherents — including their condemnations of the many groups and individuals to which they apply the labels of “racist” and “xenophobe” — its essence may be summarized as follows:

All immigration is positive and beneficial.

No problems result from immigration.

The problems that result from immigration are all caused by moral and/or intellectual deficiencies of native Swedes.

It follows that all immigrants, and especially refugees, are to be welcomed — without any regard to their numbers, capacity and willingness to adjust to Swedish society, or practical considerations such as the supply of housing and basic services.

‘Humanitarian’ vs. ‘responsible’ policy

The nature of current policy has been illuminated by an immigrant from China who has compared Sweden with Canada, to which he has previously immigrated and which is often cited as providing a superior model of integration. Based on his experience of the two countries, translator Zhengyang Wu explains:

“Sweden conducts a so-called ‘humanitarian’ immigration policy which is primarily adapted to refugees. Immigrants are often not required to prove that they have never committed crimes in their homelands, and those who commit crimes in Sweden are seldom deported. They don’t even need to have identification papers when they come here. Rules concerning labour immigration prohibit ‘discrimination on the basis of age, sex, education level’, etc.

“Canada, however, places high demands on immigrants with respect to integration, and those who are accepted must possess useful skills that are lacking in the Canadian labour market. In addition, no one who has committed a crime in his country of origin is let in, and deportation is obligatory for immigrants who commit crimes in Canada.”

Thus, “The appropriate conclusion, which unfortunately is in line with the programme of the Sweden Democrats and is therefore not readily allowed in the Swedish debate, is that when the state conducts a responsible immigration policy, integration is successful — otherwise, not.”²⁷

An immigrant can get away with expressing such ideas, and is usually ignored. But woe betide any native Swede who questions the reigning doctrine.

That was the lesson taught to the chair of the Christian Democratic Party’s youth organization two weeks before the recent election.

While declaring her party’s continued support for Sweden’s humanitarian immigration policy, Sara Skyttedal argued in a prominently displayed debate article that, “We must begin to discuss a limit on the number of refugees.

This is how it is in the Swedish debate: Instead of discussing the issue at hand, i.e. how to solve the problems of immigration policy, we play the game “You’re a racist!” The one who labels an opponent “racist” the most times wins. And every time we squander the word “racist” to make a cheap point, the debate sinks to an even lower level, further away from possible solutions.

— Rebecca Weidmo Uvel²⁸

“In recent months there has been an exceptional increase in the number of refugees seeking asylum in Sweden,” she explained. “Immigration authorities no longer believe there will be a significant reduction in new arrivals during the next four years, and estimate that circa 340,000 refugees will seek asylum” during that period.

The large and rapid increase in refugees is making it increasingly difficult for local and national authorities to provide them with the services to which they are entitled. There is a serious housing shortage for both citizens and refugees, and few of the latter can find places in the Swedish market. “After three years in the country, only 18.7 per cent of working-age refugees have a job; and after 15 years, 40 per cent still lack gainful employment....

“We risk increased segregation, along with more social exclusion and rage when gaps develop between our desire to help and our structural capacity to do so. We must begin a serious, fact-based discussion about where to set the limit for how many refugees Sweden can accept,” argued Ms. Skyttedal — pointing out that Sweden is the EU country which has accepted the most refugees, both in absolute numbers and in proportion to its size (current population ca. nine million). “The fact is that the EU’s common refugee policy has collapsed.... Other EU member-states must assume the responsibility that is incumbent upon them.”

The Christian Democratic youth leader received an immediate response from her counterpart in the Green Party. Previously, noted Magda Rasmusson (accurately), only the Sweden Democrats have presented such arguments. “Skyttedal’s article represents something quite new in Swedish politics. Both the rhetoric and the politics have their source in the ideological realm of racist and xenophobic forces....

“We also know that the only thing that is certain to increase the growth of the Sweden Democrats is for other parties to legitimate its view of reality.... This sort of move from an established party opens the way for something very unpleasant. Now it is more important than ever for all of us who want to safeguard the right to asylum to be very clear. Human life cannot be discussed in terms of numbers. The only limits that have any place in this discussion are moral limits.”

To prevent a backlash

So much for the “serious, fact-based discussion” urged by the young Christian Democrat. One of the few establishment figures who has attempted to launch such a discussion is Staffan Danielsson, a recently retired Riksdag member for the Centre Party.

In a sort of farewell address on the subject, he warmly endorsed the humanitarian basis of Swedish immigration policy and expressed great satisfaction at the strong pro-immigration opinion among the general public. However: “If the integration and employment of newcomers continues to be increasingly problematic, there is an obvious risk of an opinion backlash and a more restrictive policy.”

Among the problems he notes are that over 20 per cent of all those who receive asylum in an EU member-state do so in Sweden (with less than 2% of the total EU population), which also takes in 35 per cent of all unaccompanied refugees under age 18. “Daily applications for asylum are now record-high and it is estimated that Sweden will approve 92,000 this year, alone. Sweden is the first or second choice of refugees from Syria, Eritrea and Somalia.”

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AN IMMIGRANT'S 'UNSUSTAINABLE' VIEWS ON IMMIGRATION

The few challenges to Sweden's current immigration policy that have come from establishment figures have focused on practical matters (see main text). But there are also social and cultural issues that may turn out to be equally or more significant, and they have been briefly addressed by the Danish TV series, *Borgen*, which has won critical acclaim and large audiences at home and abroad.

In one brief scene, a pro-immigration political party is seeking a spokesperson on integration matters and believes it has found the perfect candidate in an articulate, intelligent economist from Pakistan. But delight turns to dismay when the party's media expert (*Party* in the following exchange) prepares her for a forthcoming debate by rehearsing the questions that are likely to come up:

Party Positive discrimination?

Candidate The thought is good, but it is important that we don't give the impression that they can't get by without help.

Party What do you think of [the Conservative government's] immigration policy?

Candidate Rhetorically offensive. But they have a few ideas that we could develop.

Party Excuse me?

Candidate Their rhetoric has been too crude. But they have introduced some important restraints. It is economically unsustainable to take in a group, a large portion of which lives on state benefits. And culturally, it is equally unsustainable.

Party What is that is culturally unsustainable?

Candidate Just because I am a Muslim does not mean that I have to be naive about the way that Islam has developed in much of the Third World. I come from Pakistan, most of which is culturally incompatible with a developed society like Denmark. The Salafists there have openly declared that they are against freedom and democracy. Why should we let them in?

Party Some of your formulations we need to be careful with. When you say that Denmark is "developed" it sounds as though you regard Pakistan as *underdeveloped*.



The Danish party official becomes increasingly dismayed as she hears the views of the immigrant from Pakistan.

(Continued on next page)

AN IMMIGRANT'S 'UNSUSTAINABLE' VIEWS (continued from page 15)

Candidate I do, absolutely. There are some elements of my extended family that I would not want to seek admittance to Danish society. They live as though it were the Middle Ages.

The bright, articulate women from Pakistan does not become the party's spokesperson on integration matters....

It was necessary to take this example from Danish television because nothing like it would be possible in the Sweden of today. It is fairly certain that any Swedish programme which made such a scene would be subjected to a withering barrage of criticism for the sins of racism, xenophobia and, of course, Islamophobia.

It was possible to broadcast this episode of *Borgen* in Sweden because the offensive scene was very brief; the programme buyer was probably not even aware of its existence. In any event, the unfortunate episode may be rightly blamed on the Danes, who for many years have been conducting a debate on immigration which is far more open and often brutal than anything yet or likely to occur in Sweden.

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For these and other reasons, contends Staffan Danielsson, the government and Riksdag must accept its responsibility to find a balance between "an ideal immigration policy based on open borders" and the "practical realities of the world today". In that regard it is essential to consider what rules apply in the other EU states, and to what extent Sweden is able to deviate from them.

Among the changes in current praxis recommended by Danielsson are:

- Greater restrictions on residence permits to relatives of immigrants, more in line with the general rule in other EU countries which requires a demonstrated ability of the sponsoring family member to support them economically.
- Systematic age-testing of unaccompanied children. "It is evident that many of them are over 18 years, but Sweden differs [from other EU states] by making very few serious efforts to determine age."
- More effective efforts by the police to deport those whose applications for asylum are denied.
- Sharper controls on labour immigration, especially for the protection of current residents competing for low-skilled jobs.

"It is not regarded as politically correct to discuss such issues in Sweden today," acknowledges Danielsson. "But I believe that it is both appropriate and necessary, within a framework of basic principles of generosity."

He concludes with the hope that "a new government and Riksdag can analyse, discuss and taken action on these issues in a more open manner than has thus far been the case."³¹

There are few signs that Staffan Danielsson's appeal for a more open public discourse on immigration will soon be answered. He has been harshly criticized for his views and his incitement to debate, and the rage against the Sweden Democrats continues largely unabated.

It will probably take at least one more SD election success or a large negative shift in public opinion to prise open the lid on debate. The growing influence of the Sweden Democrats may hasten such a shift. If and when it occurs, the initial results may not be pretty, given that discussion of the issue has been suppressed for so long.

* * *

NOTES

1. See "Death of a Troublesome Socialist". Nordic News Network, 2011-02-28.
www.nnn.se/nordic/palme/assassin.pdf
2. For details on the SDP's shift to the right, etc.:
 - (a) *Great European Expectations*. Nordic News Network, 2001-01-01.
www.nnn.se/n-model/eu/eu.htm
 - (b) "The Return of Laissez Faire" in *The Price of Everything*. Nordic News Network, July 2000. www.nnn.se/n-model/price/price.htm
 - (c) "Collateral Damage: Sweden's Legacy of Peace." Nordic News Network, 2001-10-21.
www.nnn.se/n-model/foreign/damage.htm
 - (d) Henrik Brors, "Persson skadar sig själv och socialdemokraterna". *Dagens Nyheter*, 2007-05-08.
 - (e) *From Neutrality to NATO*. Nordic News Network, 2012-09-22.
www.nnn.se/nordic/americult/nato/neutrality.htm
3. The abandonment of social democracy by Social Democratic parties is a crucial development that remains to be fully explained. Some of the factors involved are analysed by Philippe Marlière in "The decline of Europe's social democratic parties". *Open Democracy*, 2010-03-16.
www.opendemocracy.net/philippe-marliere/decline-of-europes-social-democratic-parties
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www.aftonbladet.se/ledare/ledarkronika/ollesvenning/article12690940.ab
5. *From Neutrality to NATO*, *op.cit.*
6. For details, see *From Neutrality to NATO*, *op.cit.*
7. See for example: Ray McGovern, "Ukraine: One 'Regime Change' Too Many?" *Consortium News*, 2014-03-02.
<http://consortiumnews.com/2014/03/01/ukraine-one-regime-change-too-many>

8. See for example: Chas W. Freeman, Jr., "Israel's Fraying Image and Its Implications". *The National Interest*, 2013-05-31. <http://nationalinterest.org/article/israels-fraying-image-8378>
9. On 13 September the U.K. Parliament voted in favour of recognizing the Palestinian state. It was a purely advisory resolution which the centre-right coalition government has pledged to ignore and from which its MPs were instructed to abstain. But especially given the majority in favour among those who did vote, 274 vs. 12 against, the outcome was a significant message to the Palestinians, the Israeli government, and the legislatures and governments of other EU member-states. See: Patrick Wintour, "MPs vote to recognise Palestinian state, adding to pressure on Israel". *The Guardian*, 2014-10-13. www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/13/mps-vote-to-recognise-palestinian-state
10. Prime Minister Löfven's inaugural speech is available in English at: www.government.se/sb/d/2031/a/247569
11. See "Little resistance" on page 54 of *All Quieted on the Word Front*. Nordic News Network, 2005. www.nnn.se/n-model/foreign/ordfront.htm
12. Philippe Marlière, "The decline of Europe's social democratic parties", *op.cit.*
13. Susanne Wiborg, "The Big Winners From Sweden's For-Profit 'Free' Schools Are Companies, Not Pupils". *The Conversation*, 2014-09-09. <http://theconversation.com/the-big-winners-from-swedens-for-profit-free-schools-are-companies-not-pupils-29929>
14. Bo Jansson, "Alliansens väljare vill stoppa eller reglera vinster i skolan". *Dagens Nyheter*, 2014-09-09. www.dn.se/debatt/alliansens-valjare-vill-stoppa-eller-reglera-vinster-i-skolan
15. Peter Wallberg, "Åkesson städar upp i SD". *Dagens Nyheter*, 2012-10-12. www.dn.se/nyheter/politik/akesson-stadar-upp-i-sd
16. "Vår politik", Sverigedemokraterna. <http://sverigedemokraterna.se/var-politik>
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18. Marcus Silverbåge, "Jag är stolt över att medverka i SD:s valfilm". *SVT-Opinion*, 2014-09-12. www.svt.se/opinion/article2310544.svt
19. Karin Nelsson quoted in "Sex av tio SD-väljare proteströstar." *Aftonbladet*, 2014-10-13. <http://story.aftonbladet.se/?id=652#section-8>
20. *SVT:s vallokalsundersökning: Riksdagsvalet 2014*. Sveriges Television, 2014-09-16. www.svt.se/pejl/det-har-ar-valu
21. Hans Rosén, "Åkesson varnar Löfven". *Dagens Nyheter*, 2014-10-08. www.dn.se/nyheter/politik/akesson-varnar-lofven
22. Mats J. Larsson, "M-politiker: Vi måste börja släppa in SD". *Dagens Nyheter*, 2014-09-25. www.dn.se/valet-2014/m-politiker-vi-maste-borja-slappa-in-sd
23. Jens Kärrman, "Väljarna: Börja samarbeta med SD". *Dagens Nyheter*, 2014-10-01. www.dn.se/valet-2014/valjarna-borja-samarbeta-med-sd
24. Anna-Lena Lodenius, "Stefan Löfven fast i en rävsax". *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2014-09-19. www.svd.se/opinion/brannpunkt/stefan-lofven-fast-i-en-ravsax_3933058.svd

25. As this article was being readied for publication, SD party leader Jimmy Åkesson announced that he was taking an indefinite leave of absence to recover from burnout syndrome. That is certain to weaken the influence of the Sweden Democrats, at least temporarily, given that Åkesson has been SD's pre-eminent public figure since 2005 and will be difficult to replace.
26. Andreas Örwall Lovén, "Professor: Ingen ökad rasism i Sverige". *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2014-06-16. www.svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/ingen-okad-rasism-i-sverige_3662648.svd
27. *Ibid.*
28. Zhengyang Wu, "Kanada ställer helt andra krav". *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2014-10-12. www.svd.se/opinion/brannpunkt/kanada-staller-helt-andra-krav_4003799.svd
29. Rebecca Weidmo Uvel, "Den som kallar motståndaren rasist flest gånger vinner". *Aftonbladet*, 2013-03-19. www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/kronikorer/rebeccaweidmouvell/article16447112.ab
30. (a) Sara Skyttedal, "Vi måste börja diskutera gräns för antalet flyktingar".
(b) Magda Rasmusson, "Enda gränsen som hör hemma i asylpolitiken är den moraliska". *Dagens Nyheter*, 2014-08-29. www.dn.se/debatt/vi-maste-borja-diskutera-grans-for-antalet-flyktingar
31. Staffan Danielsson, "Anpassa regler för asyl och migration". *Svenska Dagbladet*, 2014-10-01. www.svd.se/opinion/brannpunkt/anpassa-regler-for-asyl-och-migration_3966482.svd