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## *Swedish election results in gridlock and growth of the far-right*

Sweden's national parliamentary elections were held Sunday amid widespread fear of the growth of the neo-fascist Swedish Democrats combined with contempt for the mainstream political parties, particularly the Social Democrats.

The election resulted in a state of political gridlock between the two major coalitions. The "center-left" bloc, an alliance between the Social Democrats, the Left Party and the Greens, won 40.6 percent of the vote, while the "center-right" bloc, called the "Alliance," composed of the Moderates, the Centre Party, the Christian Democrats and the Liberals, won 40.2 percent of the vote.

Neither coalition has a sufficient number of deputies in the Swedish Riksdag (parliament) to form a government on its own. In the coming two weeks, before the parliament opens, the two coalitions will attempt to cut deals with sections of the opposing coalition or seek a deal with the Swedish Democrats.

Swedish Democrat leader Jimmy Akesson has made clear that his party will seek to force the entirety of Swedish politics to the right by playing the "kingmaker" in this political crisis. He stated at an election rally, "We will increase our seats in parliament and we will gain huge influence over what happens in Sweden during the coming weeks, months and years."

The Swedish Democrats, which emerged out of the neo-Nazi and white supremacist movement, won 17.6 percent of the vote and 63 seats in the 349-seat Riksdag, making it the third largest single party after the Social Democrats and the Moderates. The Swedish

Democrats' share of the vote increased from 2014, when it won 12.9 percent, however, the party's electoral result was lower than polls had anticipated. During the summer, some polls predicted it would win almost 25 percent of the vote.

To the extent that the Swedish Democrats have been able to win a hearing, it is because of the bankruptcy of the traditional ruling parties in Sweden. The Social Democrats, working in alliance with, at different times, the Moderates, the Green Party, the Left Party, the liberals and the Christian Democrats, have overseen decades of growing inequality and deteriorating social services, particularly education and healthcare. Years of scandals, incompetence and deception have eroded the support sections of workers and youth once gave to the Social Democrats.

The Social Democrats, who have ruled Sweden for most of the past 100 years, received their lowest vote in over a century. The Moderates, traditionally the second largest party, also experienced a sharp decline in support, losing 14 parliamentary seats.

What is taking place in Sweden follows the general political pattern seen throughout Europe and much of the world under conditions of the global crisis of the capitalist system.

In France, the Socialist Party has essentially collapsed, with the far-right feeding on the void. In Germany, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) has emerged as the official opposition as a result of a similar climate of disgust with the mainstream parties—and support from the military-intelligence apparatus and sections of the ruling class for the neo-fascists.

While Sweden is often placed on a pedestal by reformist groups in the United States and Europe due to its comparatively extensive welfare state, the reality is that it, like every other capitalist country, is heading deeper into economic and political crisis.

A January 2015 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report found that between 1985 and the early 2010s, inequality grew in Sweden faster than in any other country in the organization, including the United States.

In 2014, the top 10 percent of the population held over 68 percent of the total wealth, according to Credit Suisse's Global Wealth Report. This level of wealth concentration is higher than that of every other country in Europe except Switzerland, and it is significantly higher than many countries with similar levels of development such as the UK (53 percent), Australia (50 percent) and Canada (57 percent).

The ballooning wealth of the top 10 percent of Swedish society, bound up with financialization and the rise of stock values, contrasts sharply with the experience of

millions of Swedes, who have seen years of cuts to social services, including healthcare, pensions and education, along with rising living costs, particularly housing, and a loss of decent-paying manufacturing jobs.

It is in this social climate that the far-right is able to gain a hearing and use immigrants as a scapegoat. In 2015, Sweden, relative to its size, admitted the largest number of refugees in Europe. The overwhelming majority of the population expressed warmth and sympathy for the hundreds of thousands who fled regions destroyed by the US-led war drive in the Middle East (wars, such as Libya and Afghanistan, in which Sweden has been involved). Since 2015, all of the political parties, from the Left Party on down, have moved sharply to the right on immigration, adapting to the racist policies of the Swedish Democrats and bolstering their political status. Now there is only a trickle of new immigrants coming in. Meanwhile, the Swedish ruling class is stepping up its role in the anticipated war between the United States and Russia. The Swedish press, increasingly filled with sensationalist stories about Russian Baltic expansion, produced several articles on alleged Russian involvement in the Swedish election. While social services are on the chopping block, the Social Democratic-Green coalition concluded an agreement last year with the Moderates and Centre Party to hike military spending by over 8 billion kronor (\$1 billion) between 2018 and 2020.

It is notable that the Swedish Democrats' vote fell well short of the media predictions. This reflects the widespread left-wing and pro-immigrant sentiments of broad masses of Swedish workers and youth. Many people voted out of a deeply felt conviction that this fascistic party needed to be stopped in its tracks.

The growth of support for the Stalinist Left Party, from 5.7 percent to 7.9 percent, likewise reflects this politically unclarified leftward sentiment. The Left Party actually increased at a slightly faster rate (38 percent) than the Swedish Democrats (36 percent).

However, the Left Party plays a politically reactionary role, working to channel working class anger behind the Social Democrats and block the development of an independent working class political movement. Stopping the growth of the far-right in Scandinavia and Europe as a whole requires the creation of a genuine socialist movement of the European and international working class.