**Swedish Politics: Left, Center-Right, and Racial Right**

By Nick Gier

*Sweden is the most successful society the world has ever known.*

*—The Guardian* (10/25/05)

In 1976, after 44 years of rule, Sweden’s Social Democrats lost, by a small margin, to a coalition of moderates and conservatives. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Olaf Palme, a leading critic of the Vietnam War, the Social Democrats returned to power in 1982 and have governed until the present, except for center-right stints in 1991-94 and 2006-14.

In 1976 a Conservative Party leader offered this assurance to voters: “We have to keep all this social welfare of course, and we might make it better.” In 2007 the Moderate Party’s finance minister said that his government’s goal was “to combine the entrepreneurial spirit of America with the welfare of Sweden.”

**The World’s Most Efficient Welfare State**

The center-right governments kept their promise and together with the Social Democrats, they reformed the welfare system while at the same time reducing both taxes and transfer payments.

Sweden now has the most efficient system of social services in the world, providing superb programs for less money. With tax benefits taken into account, the U.S. actually spends 3 percent more than Sweden on much less effective and comprehensive programs.

Since 1992, elder care has moved to local government control, and the result is that Sweden has been able to keep 90 percent of its seniors in their homes with food and medical services provided. In addition to happier seniors, the savings in public funds were huge. Nursing home care in Denmark costs on average $600 per month as opposed to $3,000-5,000 in the U.S.

**Family Values Scandinavian Style**

After living in Denmark for four years, I know first-hand how important families are to the Scandinavians. Every Swedish child is guaranteed a $156 monthly stipend, and in Denmark the amount is $190 for the first child. Seventy percent of Sweden’s poor children are in state-financed child care, while fewer than 30 percent of their American counterparts are.

Sweden’s parental leave policy is the most generous in the world. The government pays for a total of 17 months, but only if the father takes three of them. One dad is really excited: “Think of what it would mean for yourself, your child, and for your relationship to stay at home with your infant for a long period of time.”

American infants die, however, at a rate of 6.5 per 1,000, whereas the Swedish rate is 2.6. American teens give birth at a rate of 21 per 100,000, while the number for Sweden is 5 (4 in Denmark). The U.S. has the highest rate of maternal mortality in the developed world, and the Nordic countries have the lowest.

**Social Democrats Reduce Public Spending and Taxes**

Moderate Party leader Anders Borg is certainly exaggerating when he claims that his government changed Sweden from a “stagnant benefit-based society to a vibrant modern economy.” That is quite a claim for the center-right coalition that was in office for a total of only 17 years since 1976.

In the early 1990s Sweden suffered a banking crisis, and it was a center-right government, borrowing ideas from Franklin Delano Roosevelt, which legislated a solution. The fix was so good that Sweden weathered the 2009 financial crisis just as well as the Germans.

The largest reduction of public spending—from 67 percent of Gross Domestic Product in 1993 to 49 percent in 2012—was accomplished under the Social Democrats. It actually went up under the third center-right government of 2006-2014.

In 1983 the Social Democrats cut the marginal tax rate from 84 percent to 57 percent (40 percent for the U.S.), and corporate taxes dropped from 26.3 to 22 percent. Just before their opponents came to power in 2006, the Social Democrats eliminated the inheritance tax.

**Sweden: Fastest Growing Economy in Europe**

Even with much higher taxes and public spending compared to the U.S., the Swedish economy still grew on average by 2.7 percent from 1993 to 2010. (The U.S. average rate for this period was 3 percent—4 under Clinton and 2 under Bush II.) Currently, under the Social Democrats, it was 3.2 percent in the last quarter (4.2 the previous quarter), and for the year it is estimated to average 2.8 percent.

This is hardly the stagnant economy suggested by Anders Borg above, and it certainly unfair for the free market *Economist* to declare “The Strange Death of Social Democratic Sweden.” The European welfare state is alive and well in countries now ruled by center-right governments.

The U.S. growth rate was 4.2 percent for the last quarter and an estimated 2.9 percent for the year. Let’s see if Trump can actually top the highest quarters of the Obama presidency: 4.7, 5.1, and 4.9 percent. Economic growth under Clinton was nearly 4 percent over 8 years, and he left us the first budget surplus in the post-war years.

**Budget Surplus for Sweden vs. 4.8% Deficit for Trump**

Sweden is now running a surplus of 1.1 percent, which is equal to the performance of Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands. Denmark beats them all with a 5.4 percent surplus. (Even Greece has reduced its deficit to near zero.) These are fiscally and morally responsible countries, balancing spending and revenue and providing the best social services in the world.

In stark contrast the U.S. budget deficit, primarily because of the GOP tax cuts, is now at 4.8 percent and rising. As a result, our national debt is now at 104 percent of GDP, and the Congressional Budget Office estimates that it will reach 152 percent if no new revenue is found. (Greece stands at 170 percent.) The Sweden has reduced its debt from 70 percent of GDP in 1993 to 37 percent today.

**Sweden Ranks High in Economic Freedom and Competitiveness**

The conservative Heritage Foundation now ranks Denmark and Sweden higher than the U.S. on its Economic Freedom Index, and Sweden stands at 7th place in economic competitiveness behind Switzerland, the U.S., Singapore, the Netherlands, Germany, and Hong Kong. A full 90 percent of the Swedish economy is still in private hands.

The annual Social Progress Index ranks countries by the following criteria: basic human needs, human well-being, socio-economic opportunity, and personal rights/freedoms. Countries developed mainly by Social Democrats are at the top for 2018, but Sweden lags behind Norway, Iceland, Switzerland, Denmark, Finland, Japan, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, and New Zealand. The U.S. is way down at 25th (falling from 16th in 2015), and ranking 50th in basic education.

**Sweden More Ethnically Diverse than the U.S.**

The standard conservative response to Sweden’s success is that the country is less ethnically diverse and therefore has higher levels of trust. Sweden’s population, however, is now 19 percent foreign born, whereas the U.S. percentage is 13 (only 5 percent in 1965).

During the Iraq War, Sweden admitted about 80,000 Iraqi refugees, 6,000 Christians among them. With a population 325 times that of Sweden, the U.S. has accepted only 135,643 Iraqis since 2007.

Since the turn of the century, the Swedes have welcomed an average of 26,000 refugees per year, maxing out at 163,000 in 2015, more per capita than Germany. In stark and embarrassing contrast, the Trump administration just announced that it was placing a limit of 30,000 on all new refugees.

**Immigrants Do Not Commit More Crime**

Donald Trump and Jeff Sessions are of course wrong in their constant fear mongering about immigrant crime. In Germany, the United Kingdom, and the U.S., immigrants commit fewer crimes than native citizens. However, crime for this demographic is higher in Sweden, but no more so than those of the same socio-economic status.

Nevertheless, incidences such as Kurdish gangs setting cars aflame in four major cities in August, has stoked anti-immigrant sentiment. Crime is actually down in Gothenburg—the city hit worst by the fire bombings—but nation-wide shooting deaths are up from 17 in 2011 to 41 in 2017. For that year the U.S. number was estimated at 15, 549.

**Far-Right Swedish Democrats Have Neo-Nazi Roots**

The far-right, anti-immigrant Swedish Democrats have capitalized on this unrest and, they have risen in the polls—from 1.4 percent in 2002 to 17.5 percent in the election on September 9. The Swedish Democrats have neo-Nazi roots, but they now expel members with connections to neo-Nazi organizations.

Nevertheless, the Simon Wiesenthal Center listed one of their leader’s statements as among top ten most anti-Semitic events of 2014. The Swedish Democrats do support the welfare state, but they don’t want immigrants to benefit from it. Party leaders have called them “parasites” and “shameless liars.”

**Denmark and Sweden Impose Border Restrictions**

The response to the refugee problem to the governments in both Sweden and Denmark, through which most refugees reach Sweden, has been dramatic. The once open borders between Germany and Denmark (including the bridge between Denmark and Southern Sweden) now have restrictions.

The Danish government now requires asylum seekers to pay for their own subsistence, something the U.S. still does while they are being processed. The Trump administration, however, is now proposing that immigrants who take food stamps, Medicaid, and other forms of assistance may not obtain green cards.

**The Racial-Right Swedish Democrats Advance**

The September 9 election resulted in a hung parliament, with Social Democrats, the Greens, and the Left Party winning 144 seats and the center-right coalition garnering 143, not enough for a majority. The Swedish Democrats gained 13 seats and now has 62, making it the power broker henceforth. Only the Moderates and Christian Democrats are open to cooperating with Sweden’s Racial Right.

Denmark’s anti-immigrant People’s Party is a member of its center-right government (the same holds for Norway and Finland), but Sweden’s major parties have always rejected such a formal arrangement (together with Germany and the Netherlands). Nonetheless, the Swedish Democrats voted with the center-right to remove Social Democrat Stefan Lofven as Prime Minister, a first in Swedish political history.

Sweden can expect many more weeks of political turmoil, and the likely result is that the center right parties—Conservatives, Moderates, Liberals, and Christian Democrats—will form an unstable minority government.

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