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(Eds.)

RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN EUROPE

Country Analyses, Counter-Strategies and
Labor-Market Oriented Exit Strategies
COUNTRY ANALYSES SWEDEN

FES Projekt
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EXTREMISMUS

**FRIEDRICH
EBERT** 
STIFTUNG
Forum Berlin

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ISBN: 978-3-86498-940-7

Edited for:

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
(Friedrich Ebert Foundation)
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Forum Berlin/Politischer Dialog
"Project on Combatting Right-Wing Extremism"
Hiroshimastraße 17, 10785 Berlin

Proofreading:

Sandra Hinchman, Lewis Hinchman

Translations:

zappmedia GmbH, Berlin

Photos:

dpa Picture Alliance

Design:

Pellens Kommunikationsdesign GmbH, Bonn

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Projekt „Gegen Rechtsextremismus“, Forum Berlin

Editors' notes:

The spelling, grammar, and other linguistic conventions in this publication reflect American English usage.

The judgments and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author. They do not necessarily represent the views of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation or of the editors.

This publication was compiled as part of a project entitled "Confronting right-wing extremism by developing networks of exit-oriented assistance." That project, in turn, is integral to the XENOS special program known as "exit to enter" which has received grants from both the German Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the European Social Fund.



Bundesministerium
für Arbeit und Soziales



EUROPÄISCHE UNION

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On November 30, 1999 the Swedish Newspaper Expressen, acting jointly with three other major papers in Sweden, publishes the names and photographs of 62 Neo-Nazis who had been convicted or indicted on criminal charges, or were classified as "agitators."

RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN SWEDEN

Anna-Lena Lodenius

1. Introduction

*"I only got out of a truck five weeks ago. I haven't really gotten into the policies of the Front National."*¹ This was the answer given to journalists when they tried to find out with which other parties the Swedish right-wing populist party *Sverigedemokraterna* (the Sweden Democrats, or SD) might cooperate in the EU Parliament, assuming that they took some seats in the EU-wide elections held in May, 2014. The respondent was Peter "Nalle" Lundgren, who in fact won the second of the SD's parliamentary mandates.

Nalle Lundgren is an ordinary man, at least according to posters displayed during the election campaign. His very ordinariness, according to the SD, is precisely what makes him suitable for the job of representing the party in Brussels. He is certainly not the kind of person who would come across to voters as a member of the elite. Lundgren's candidacy suggests that the SD is in many ways a typical right-wing populist party with a standard populist appeal.

The Swedish media have been preoccupied with the question of which other parties the SD might choose to affiliate with in the EU Parliament. In spite of the vague answers given not only by Nalle Lundgren but also by the party leadership, SD representatives undoubtedly have been in

1 Fredrik Lennander, "Kritik mot SD-toppen: 'Gå hem och läs på,'" Expressen, March 14, 2014, available at <http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/kritik-mot-sd-toppen-ga-hem-och-las-pa/>

close contact with the French *Front National* and throughout the years have attended several meetings with ideologically similar parties, such as the *Austrian Freedom Party* (FPÖ) and the Belgian *Vlaams Belang*. Those contacts date back to the Party's beginnings; indeed, the SD received financial support and took advice from the Front National even prior to the national election in 1999.

The SD's International Secretary and Member of Parliament Kent Ekeröth has been participating in meetings intended to lay the groundwork for a new faction in the EU Parliament, the *Europe Alliance for Freedom*. The EAF and SD have contributed financially to the project as well.² But as late as March of 2014, Ekeröth was threatening to quit the group because of controversial statements made by FPÖ member Andreas Mölzer. The latter claimed that the welter of rules and regulations characteristic of the EU were worse than those that had prevailed during the Third Reich. He added that the EU might soon become a "conglomerate of Negroes" because of immigration.³

It is interesting to speculate about why the SD is so reluctant to admit that it is affiliating with similar parties throughout the EU. The answer seems to lie in the SD's history. For many years, Sweden was the Nordic exception to European trends, in that it lacked an openly xenophobic or right-wing populist party in its national parliament. Instead, there were a number of small but very active groups of neo-Nazis who sometimes were involved in serious crimes such as robbery and murder, particularly during the 1990s. Although the SD occasionally participated in elections, it garnered few votes.

The history of both the *Fremskrittspartiet* (Progress Party) in Norway and the *Dansk Folkeparti* (Danish People's Party) can be traced back to populist

2 TV4 Nyheterna, "SD samarbetar med högerpopulistiska partier," January 28, 2014, available at <http://www.tv4.se/nyheterna/klipp/sd-samarbetar-med-h%C3%B6gerpopulistiska-partier-2535762/>

3 SvD/TT, "Ekeröth hotar hoppa av EAF," March 14, 2014, available at http://www.svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/ekeroth-hotar-hoppa-av-eaf_3413246.svd/

movements against taxation. The *Perussuomalaiset* (True Finns), a party that also has enjoyed some electoral victories in recent years, was constructed from the remnants of a fairly successful agrarian populist party that disbanded in 1995. All three parties managed to find a niche in the domestic politics of their respective countries and are now considered to be part of the establishment.

The *Dansk Folkeparti* offered frequent support to a right-wing government during the ten years that preceded the general election of 2011. In Norway, the *Fremskrittspartiet* was invited by that country's principal right-wing party to help shape the new government in the aftermath of the right-wing victory in the general election of October, 2013.⁴ The leader of *Fremskrittspartiet*, Siv Jensen, is now the minister of finance. *Perussuomalaiset* was invited to join the Finnish government after the election held in the spring of 2011, but the party turned down the offer in the wake of a dispute about the EU giving financial support to Portugal.⁵

At its inception, the SD was a more extreme party than it is today. Its founders belonged to fascist and/or neo-Nazi movements, and for many years it won few votes and rarely participated in public debates. But Swedish politics took a new turn in the national election of 2010, when the SD finally managed not only to capture 5.7 % of the total vote in the national election, but also to win seats in the vast majority of municipal councils. Only in the far north of the country did it fail to make headway at the local level. The outcome of the 2014 EU election shows that support for the SD is increasing rapidly both in rural areas and in bigger cities such as Stockholm, the capital. The party is even making a better showing in the far north. The SD, which took 9.7% of the vote in the EU election,

4 I have detailed the early history of *Dansk Folkeparti* and *Fremskrittspartiet* in my book, *Extremhögern* (The Extreme Right), co-authored by Stieg Larsson (Stockholm: Tiden, 1991; revised edition, 1994).

5 TT, „Sannfinländarna inte i regering,” DN, April 12, 2011, available at <http://www.dn.se/nyheter/varlden/sannfinlandare-inte-i-regering/>

now seems able to appeal to both men and women and to people of nearly all ages and regions. It has learned how to attract and organize critics of immigration who may differ widely on other issues. Some of these individuals belong to a free-floating bloc of voters alienated from the more traditional political parties.

What happened on the journey from the SD's inception in 1988 up to its breakthrough in 2010? Is it even the same party as it was originally? The answer is both yes and no. Ideologically, the differences between the original party and its present-day version are small; with some minor exceptions, the positions it takes on the major issues are pretty much the same today as they were a quarter century ago. There indeed have been some changes, but most of them involve organization, not ideology. Those changes have come about partly because the SD has restricted intra-party democracy and dealt firmly with its internal opponents. The SD adopted a new Communication Plan and a policy of "Zero Racism" in October, 2012. Oftentimes, members who have expressed their opinions in a way that could cause offense have been expelled. Indeed, no other Swedish parties have excluded so many adherents in such a short time. The new rules also mean that a few individuals who had previously enjoyed strong support within the SD were not nominated as candidates on the party list for the national parliament in 2014.⁶

Of course, ambitious members who want to make a career in the SD understand the new guidelines and practice self-censorship. Nevertheless, there have been some occasions when the party's representatives have let their guard down, perhaps because they were in situations that put them too much at ease. It is obvious that when members and representatives of the party communicate with each other in private, they have a far higher tolerance for extreme expressions of xenophobia, Islamophobia, and so-

6 Axel Andén, "SD-politiker döms för förtal," *Medievärlden*, June 4, 2012, available at <http://www.medievarlden.se/nyheter/2012/06/sd-politiker-doms-for-fortal/>

metimes even anti-Semitism than the new rules permit. Statements made by SD figures in closed web forums have been exposed by left-wing activists who sell their findings to the tabloid press.⁷

Just after the elections to the EU-parliament in 2014, the leader of the SD, Jimmie Åkesson, made it clear that the party would cooperate with the *UKIP* and *Dansk Folkeparti* and not with the coalition that Marine Le Pen was attempting to organize. This was somewhat surprising news, since prior to the election few experts would have guessed that the SD would cast its lot with the EU-skeptics and more mainstream parties that were gathered in the group known as *Europe for Freedom and Democracy* (EFD).

The decision concerning party blocs and affiliations marks the end of a long process in which the SD has attempted to alter its public image. Initially, the *UKIP* leader, Nigel Farage, warned that he still entertained doubts about the SD, partly because of its ties to other more extreme parties in Europe.⁸ But in the end it was decided that the SD should be accepted in the EFD, probably partly because other parties such as the *Dansk Folkeparti* and *Perussuomalaiset* have defected to the ECR. Farage was in danger of losing official recognition for his group in the EU Parliament if he couldn't attract representatives from at least seven countries.

7 *Expressen*, a major Swedish tabloid, published a number of articles drawn from material provided by Researchgruppen, formerly AFA-Dokumentation, a research center with strong connections to the extreme left-wing movement. The articles were awarded the most prestigious prize for journalists in Sweden, "Stora journalistpriset." A notable example is Christian Holmén and David Baas, "Namn på anonyma användare knäckta," *Expressen*, December 10, 2013, available at <http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/expressen-avslojar/namn-pa-anonyma-anvandare-knackta/>.

8 Max Byström, "Ukip: Samarbete med SD osannolikt," *SvD*, May 27, 2014, available at http://www.svd.se/nyheter/valet2014/efterdyningar-vinnare-och-forlorare-i-eu-valet_3601142.svd?sidan=8/



First meeting of the right-wing populist party Sweden Democrats.

2. The history of the Sweden Democrats

Those who want to follow the twists and turns of the party's history must go all the way back to the late 1970s. In 1979 two men put out a leaflet claiming that they represented Bevara Sverige Svenskt, or BSS (Keep Sweden Swedish):

For every year the Swedes are getting fewer. In four years' time there will be no Sweden for the Swedes. Immigrants and their descendants have totally occupied our country. There will perhaps be a Turk as a dictator and a Negro as foreign minister. The people will then be a mixture of chocolate brown inhabitants who do not speak Swedish but different languages helter-skelter.

Their manifesto was the start of a loose movement consisting of mainly men with a background in various neo-Nazi and fascist sects. They decided to downplay the legacy of Hitler and Mussolini and to focus on combatting multiculturalism – an issue that they perceived to be increasingly salient within the wider community.

The BSS took its bearings especially from *Great Britain's National Front*, or NF, a party that had enjoyed some success in the British election in 1973 and begun to act as a role model for similar parties in other countries. But Swedes did not interpret the BSS's message in the way that the group had hoped they would. Whenever the BSS took to the street, it attracted gatherings of anti-racists. Meanwhile, media publicity was entirely negative; in fact, journalists sometimes ridiculed the odd appearance of certain members of the network.

In the mid-1980s, the BSS joined forces with the *Framstegspartiet*, or FP (the Swedish version of the Progress Party, but one that is notably smaller and much less important in the country's domestic politics) in order to found a national anti-immigration party. The result of the parties' amalgamation was a short-lived organization known as the *Sverigepartiet*, or SP (Sweden Party). The SP focused entirely on fighting multiculturalism:

We do not want Sweden to become a kind of multi-national conglomerate. We want to preserve the land that our fathers built up with sweat and defended with their blood. We want a Sweden for the Swedes.⁹

The new party mobilized quite a few nationalistic skinheads, among other supporters, to join in its parades and public meetings; some participants at such rallies would wrap themselves in the Swedish flag and drink substantial amounts of alcohol. The SP attracted relatively strong interest from the media, but its internal problems were so serious that they caused the party to implode after just a year. Still, the right wing was not about to abandon its dream of attaining real political power, and it persevered in seeking other avenues.

After the SP's dissolution, former activists in the BSS soon joined forces to launch a new party. They chose to name it *Sverigedemokraterna*, or SD

9 Svensk Tidning, 1987: 1-2

(Sweden Democrats). In its early phases, some of its personnel also belonged to organized neo-Nazi groups, just as had been the case with the BSS. Most of them had once been members of the *Nordiska Rikspartiet* (NRP), a national socialistic party founded back in the mid-1950s that fostered a traditionalist, nostalgia-tinged interest in everything belonging to Third Reich culture and ideology.

The NRP drifted into media oblivion until the mid-1980s, when a major trial in Gothenburg exposed a plethora of crimes committed by adherents who belonged to a faction known as Riksaktionsgruppen (RAG). Among those crimes was the brutal killing of a man who happened to be both homosexual and Jewish, two main target groups for the young Nazis in Gothenburg. Anders Klarström, who later would become the first SD leader, was convicted for threatening people's lives. He confessed that he had vandalized bookstores belonging to left-wing organizations and stolen ammunition from military depots.¹⁰

In its early years, the SD did not differ much from the SP. As before, skinheads frequently participated in the parades, and the leadership employed a harsh rhetoric that occasionally could be directed against Jews, although asylum seekers and other immigrants tended to be the main targets of their vitriol.¹¹

As early as 1988, when the SD participated in its first national election, the party nearly gained local governmental representation in the small municipality of Vårgårda in the western part of the country. (In Sweden, local and regional elections are held on the same day.) But the SD managed to win only slightly more than 1,000 votes in the general election. In the election of 1991, the SD got single representatives in two small municipalities, Dals Ed and Höör, in which victory did not require a large number of votes.

10 In its early years, SD had a shared leadership, and Anders Klarström was one of two leaders from 1989 to 1992. From 1992 to 1995 he served as the party's sole leader.

11 Lodenius and Larsson, *Extremhögern*, op cit, 1994

In 1994 the SD received enough support at the polls to gain representation in the local government of the slightly bigger town of Trollhättan, also located in the west. For some years, Trollhättan had been known for the prevalence of xenophobic sentiments; indeed, some local far-right activists were accused of burning down a mosque, and there had been several high-profile cases of abuse. A local SD representative was convicted of severely assaulting a Somali refugee. He was honored with a rock band named after the incident: the so-called “Somali kickers.”¹²

In 1995, Anders Klarström was succeeded by Mikael Jansson. During Jansson’s leadership, the SD began the long trek that would eventually make it a larger and more respected party in Swedish politics. One important reform enacted during the Jansson era was a ban on attending party meetings wearing clothes that might remind onlookers of uniforms. The measure was primarily directed against the sometimes-large contingent of skinheads.

But the core program of the party did not actually change much during this period. It still included demands for sharply reduced immigration (to be limited primarily to individuals from other European countries), and for government efforts to encourage immigrants to return to their countries of origin and to try to strengthen Swedish culture. Many of the texts and flyers published by the SD during those years dealt with what it considered to be the crucial problems associated with immigration. In particular, the SD tried to emphasize the high costs of asylum procedures and the link between immigration and increased crime.

During the election campaign of 1999, the SD induced the French *Front National* to pay for printing and distributing propaganda to voters. Long before, representatives of SD had met with their French counterparts;

12 The early history of SD is detailed in *ibid.*, 1994. The entire period is covered by Anna-Lena Lodenius, “Sverigedemokraternas historia,” in Håkan A. Bengtsson, ed., *Högerpopulismen – en antologi om Sverigedemokraterna*, Atlas: 2009.

contacts were made especially between the youth sections of the two parties. The SD also met regularly with the *Vlaams Belang* from Belgium and certain obscure nationalistic organizations in Denmark, Norway, and Finland, as opposed to the big populist parties in those countries.

2.1 The populist parties in southern Sweden

Electoral support for the SD is concentrated disproportionately in the southern regions of Sweden. In fact, vote tallies from local municipalities in Skåne county still totally dominate the statistical picture of the SD's base of support, despite the fact that some minor shifts have occurred recently (as indicated earlier).¹³ It is important to understand the drift of voter allegiance toward the party in that region in order to grasp why the SD was able to achieve its breakthrough on the national level.

The SD's rise to national prominence would not have been possible if it had lacked the option of entering into coalitions with local parties and politicians in the south of Sweden. About the same time that populist parties were emerging in Norway and Denmark, some Swedish politicians enjoyed a similar appeal. Most of them came from Skåne.

It is also important to understand the efforts made by a group sometimes called the "Gang of Four," which included the present leader Jimmie Åkesson. During his student days as a political science major at the Lund University, Åkesson affiliated with other young men¹⁴ who shared an interest in European politics and an admiration for extreme right-wing

13 The SD had 5.7% in the national vote total 2010, but there are 23 local municipalities in which it typically attracts more than one out of every ten votes (in 6 of those over 15%). Only two of those are north of Skåne and Blekinge. In 2010, the party won 11.65% in Söderhamn (Hälsingland, which ranks in 19th place on the list of strongest local municipalities) and 10.87% in Borlänge (Dalarna, 22nd place).

14 Apart from Jimmie Åkesson there are Björn Söder, the present chairman of the SD-group in the national parliament, Richard Jomshof, SD-representative in the parliament and rights policy spokesperson, formerly chief editor of the SD-publication *SD-kuriren*, and Mattias Karlsson, vice leader of the group in the parliament and the author of most policy documents.

politicians such as Jörg Haider. Eventually, all of them decided to leave other more mainstream right-wing parties and organizations to become members of SD, although their rightward shift did not happen simultaneously. At that time, the party was still only marginally important and had a reputation as a playground for extremists. Moreover, the SD was not yet an important factor even in the politics of southern Sweden. Other parties, such as the *Skånepartiet* (Party of Skåne), which was set up during the late 1970s as a kind of freedom movement for Skåne, still enjoyed a higher profile. The *Skånepartiet* was inspired by Mogens Glistrup, the chairman and founder of the *Fremskridtspartiet* (Progress Party) in Denmark. Glistrup was a tax lawyer with many wealthy and famous clients and an ambition to avoid paying any taxes at all. Eventually he would be convicted for tax evasion and spend two years in prison (1983-85).¹⁵

Glistrup's first political program consisted of proposals to eliminate the direct income tax, deprive pensioners of the right to vote in general elections, close down the whole defense system (to be replaced with telephone answering machines that said "we surrender" in Russian), and abolish social services, relying instead on porridge machines set out along the streets. Could such a program be taken seriously? Danes might not have thought so, but they voted for Glistrup's party anyway. Perhaps they did so precisely because they assumed that its main purpose was to challenge the political status quo. In a comparable case, quite a few Swedes (6.7 % of the electorate, to be precise) voted for *Ny Demokrati* (New Democracy), a similar but short-lived populist party, in the election of 1991.¹⁶

15 Erik Magnusson, „Politikern Mogens Glistrup död,” *Sydsvenskan*, July 2, 2008, available at <http://www.sydsvenskan.se/familj/dodsfall/politikern-mogens-glistrup-dod/>

16 The ND received only 1.24 % of the vote in the general election of 1994 and thus lost all of its representatives in the national parliament. Still, it retained some representation in one local municipality, Laholm, until 2000. The party was dissolved after declaring bankruptcy in 2000. Some of its grass-roots organizations were converted into local political parties, a few of which later decided to join the SD.

Skånepartiet and *Ny Demokrati* emulated both Glistrup's political style and his neo-liberal ideology. But over time, most right-wing populist parties in Scandinavia, as in the rest of Europe, turned more conservative. They demanded a strong welfare state, albeit only for “desirable” categories of people. However, back in the 1980s and '90s, politicians on the right were still concerned about reducing the impact of the government on the lives of ordinary citizens and small companies.¹⁷

The founder of *Skånepartiet*, Carl P. Herslow, came to public prominence when he started handing out free shots of vodka outside Systembolaget in protest against the state's monopoly on selling wine and spirits. Herslow was one of the first public figures to make frequent use of the new community radio, and often invited guests who wanted to talk about how to expand the “rights” held by the residents of Skåne to nullify or stymie institutions in the capital city of Stockholm.

Part of the neo-liberal, populist agenda in Skåne was devoted to finding ways to reduce the federal impact on the region. Because similar local parties appeared in many other local municipalities, one can speak with some justification of a special southern Swedish political culture. Those parties often recruited representatives who had once belonged to rival organizations, but had broken with them mainly for personal rather than programmatic reasons. The parties did not advocate any coherent political line, although they did have common features, such as a populist appeal.

Around the mid-1980s, nearly all these local politicians developed an interest in an issue that soon came to overshadow all others: the fight against increased immigration. In 1988 a local branch of the *Centerpartiet*, an old and well-established organization focusing on environmental issues and rural interests, arranged to hold a referendum about accepting

17 The *Fremskrittspartiet* in Norway is an exception, continuing to employ a more decidedly neo-liberal rhetoric.

asylum seekers in the Skåne county town of Sjöbo. This decision was widely questioned, and three Centerpartiet politicians were expelled. The latter then formed a local party, the *Sjöbopartiet* (the Party for Sjöbo), that eventually came to dominate politics in that town for a number of elections.

The fight over the referendum in Sjöbo became a unifying symbol of dissatisfaction with a refugee policy that many thought was created by a state that neither knew nor cared how its decisions would affect Skåne county. The expelled politicians initiated a debate that surely was inspired partly by Danish political culture. They were regionalists, not nationalists, and they acted mainly out of concern for the local budget and in order to protect the Swedes' rights to jobs and access to housing, not because they championed Swedish values or wanted to protect a certain Swedish lifestyle.

Nevertheless, elements of underlying racism came to the surface, such as when the local leader in Sjöbo, Sven-Olle Olsson, expressed the fear that Swedes soon would no longer have blond hair and blue eyes. But his colleagues seldom talked about the alleged need for a more homogeneous population and an ethnically-cleansed welfare state built on Swedish customs and traditions – the sorts of ideas that would crop up in SD circles later on. Still, the populist parties in Skåne created the conditions for the SD's eventual breakthrough. They did so by legitimizing the view that ordinary citizens can be critical of refugees without being Nazi sympathizers or holding secret fascist agendas. The debate in the southern towns accustomed the public to the SD and trained the organization to do further political work.

In the election to the regional council of Skåne in 1998, those populist parties that were represented in over half of the county's municipalities entered into a political coalition. Because the SD enjoyed representation only in a single municipality in Skåne, it was not invited to participate in that alliance. But one by one, local populists adopted a more favorable

attitude toward the SD and decided to join the party. Sven-Olle Olsson in Sjöbo was among the first.

The SD also attracted some members of the political establishment. For example, Sten Andersson – a former shipyard worker, trade unionist, and Social Democrat – was recruited to a right-wing party (*Moderaterna, which is considering itself as a liberal-conservative party*) and elected to the national parliament. Andersson had taken considerable interest in the discussion about the referendum in Sjöbo. The youth section of *Moderaterna* tried to have him expelled, but in the end he resigned voluntarily, and he joined the SD while he was still in the parliament.

2.2 The Gang of Four

The *Gang of Four* joined the SD with a mission of changing the party. In April of 2007, party leader Jimmie Åkesson said in an interview in *Sydsvenskan* (the biggest daily in southern Sweden):

We found during the time at the University of Lund that we were the party. It was a disorganized party then, and there was a lot of space to take, if you wanted to. There was a Stockholm faction of the party, and they were mainly interested in what happened in Stockholm. We were the gang of Skåne who were interested in the whole of Sweden.¹⁸

Different intra-party factions were at loggerheads with one another, and the one that dominated the headquarters in Stockholm gradually lost ground. In 2001, a number of members articulating a tougher line on immigration issues left the SD, among them the most active party workers. Subsequently, they formed another party, the *Nationaldemokra-*

18 Niklas Orrenius, "SD-ledaren har tagit plats i rampljuset," April 21, 2007, available at <http://www.sydsvenskan.se/sverige/sd-ledaren-har-tagit-plats-i-rampljuset/>, and "SD-toppens kärlek till Lund obesvarad," May 19, 2010, available at <http://www.sydsvenskan.se/lund/sd-toppens-karlek-till-lund-obsvarad/>

terna, or ND (National Democrats), that obtained representation in a few municipalities before finally ceasing operations in 2014. The ND never really challenged the SD, but it did become an alternative for those who were suspicious about the SD turning more mainstream. The ND also created a bridge to the more extreme parties that continued to peddle ideas connected to Nazism and fascism. When it came to demonstrations, the ND never hesitated to join forces with parties that advocated a clearly undemocratic and national socialist agenda.¹⁹

2.2 The road to the national parliament

In the 2002 elections, the SD made significant strides, more than tripling its vote total, from approximately 20,000 to 75,000 votes. The party's progress continued in the national election of 2006, when it captured 1.44 % of all ballots cast. A party receiving more than 1 % of the vote in federal elections in Sweden receives financial support from the state to help it file papers for the next election and finance its political work. But just as important, financially and organizationally, was the growing number of the party's local representatives in municipal bodies, in which the SD numbers shot up from 49 in 2002 to 281 in 2006.

During the campaign leading up to the general election of 2006, the media tried to hamper the SD by limiting the amount of public information they disseminated about the party. All the parties in the national parliament also reached a common, though not formalized, understanding to avoid participating in public debates with SD representatives. Still, support for the SD continued to grow; the party ended up with 2.93 % of the votes cast (4 % of the total vote being the threshold for entering the Swedish national parliament). In 2010, the SD finally managed to win

19 The ND earned representation in two local municipalities in the election of 2002, Haninge and Södertälje. It maintained close contact with the British National Party (BNP) and tried to establish similar relationships with parties in other countries. Notably, the BNP's leader, Nick Griffin, participated in the ND campaign for the national election in Sweden in 2010. The ND also played a part in the network known as Euronat, established by France's Jean Marie Le Pen.

seats in that body. Since then, it has met with increasing levels of sympathy in opinion polls, which indicate that approximately 10 % of the voting population supports the party. Some polls even show the SD to be the third largest party in the country.

And yet, despite growing popular support for the SD, no other party wants to cooperate with it politically. The *cordon sanitaire* remains. Although the SD could play a role in balancing powers, the ruling right-wing parties would rather join forces with one of their leftist counterparts. This fact has been particularly obvious when it comes to issues of particular importance to the SD. For example, Moderaterna (the biggest right-wing party) opted to negotiate a deal with the Miljöpartiet (Green Party) on immigration policies, instead of collaborating with their farther-right rival.

3. The media hunt for scandals

The media continue to make efforts to expose SD representatives for their links to racism and violence and their informal contacts with neo-Nazis. Of several such “affairs” that have surfaced in recent years, perhaps the most talked-about is the so-called Stockholm “Iron Bar Scandal” of June, 2010. In this incident, three leading SD politicians, Erik Almqvist, Kent Ekeröth and Christian Westling, armed themselves with metal pipes from a scaffold and verbally attacked stand-up-comedian Soran Ismail and other people using racist and sexist epithets. Kent Ekeröth filmed the whole incident using his mobile phone, and eighteen months later the video somehow fell into the hands of the tabloid newspaper, *Expressen*.²⁰

The criminal investigation into the Iron Bar Scandal yielded no indictments. Nevertheless, the political fortunes of all three defendants were affected. Erik Almqvist resigned his parliamentary seat and his position

20 David Baas and Christian Holmén, “Almqvist och Ekeröth beväpnar sig med järnrör,” *Expressen*, November 15, 2012, available at <http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/almqvist-och-ekeroth-bevapnar-sig-med-jarnror/>

as economic policy spokesperson, and went so far as to drop his membership in the SD. Christian Westling left his post as deputy member of the party's Stockholm section. Kent Ekeröth, for his part, stepped down as spokesperson on legal policy and took a two-month "time-out," though he retained his parliamentary seat and got new assignments within the party in January of 2013 as an alternate member of the Committee on EU Affairs and the Economic Development Committee.

The SD's forceful reaction in the wake of the Iron Bar Scandal shows that public opinion still matters a great deal to its leadership. Sensitivity to the party's image is also the reason why certain representatives still are excluded on a regular basis.

The most obvious attempt to sever ties with a number of popular, but sometimes too outspoken, characters in the party took place during the nomination process for the general election of 2014. In this case, the chairman of the youth organization, Gustav Kasselstrand, and Toralf Alfsson, SD representative in the national parliament from 2010 to 2014, were both excluded from the official party list of candidates. Both names appeared on an alternative list put together by their advocates, which garnered significant approbation from the delegates at the SD conference intended to kick off the election campaign. Yet the alternative list did not win enough support to replace the official one.

Thoralf Alfsson was convicted for defamation of a leftist activist in 2012. He was later investigated, though not subsequently convicted, for hate speech in connection with the following text on his blog:

For every person from Somalia who obtains a residence permit in Sweden, it increases the money flow from Sweden to the terrorist organization Al-Shabab, and the amount of the drug khat entering Sweden increases with the square.²¹

21 Axel Andén, "Riksdagsledamot misstänks för hets mot folkgrupp," *Medie världen*, November 18, 2013, available at <http://www.medievarlden.se/nyheter/2013/11/riksdagsledamot-misstanks-for-hets-mot-folkgrupp>. See also Thoralf Alfsson's blog from June 16, 2012, available at <http://thoralfalfsson.webblogg.se/2012/june/att-sla-dovorat-till.html/>.

Alfsson remains a popular figure within the party, but will most certainly leave parliament after the upcoming autumn, 2014 elections.

As for Gustav Kasselstrand, he and his youth organization have criticized the SD for adopting a stance that is overly sympathetic to Israel in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Kasselstrand also stood up for Erik Almqvist, opposing his exclusion after the “Iron Bar Scandal.” Kasselstrand enjoys an extensive network of European contacts, including some with the Ring *Freiheitlicher Jugend* (RFJ), the youth organization of Austria’s right-wing FPÖ, a group proven to have Nazi links.²² On more than one occasion, he has affirmed his desire to strengthen ties between the SD and other European parties having nationalistic policies.

We must strengthen the bonds of friendship with parties in Italy, Austria and Belgium so that we have a solid base to stand on. My goal is to increase cooperation.²³

From the SD leadership’s point of view, Kasselstrand is reaching out to exactly the organizations that SD now is attempting to shun so in order to increase its clout in Sweden. This is one reason why UKIP used to have a negative view of the SD, according to statements made by Nigel Farage.²⁴

The SD has decided to use the label “social conservative” to describe the direction of its political program. During the EU election campaign in 2014, the party focused a great deal on trying to ban beggars in the streets, a campaign theme that it borrowed from UKIP. It remains to be seen whether participating in such a network will undercut SD’s effort to clean up its reputation.

22 Daniel Vergara, “SDU:s samarbetspartner i samröre med nazister,” Expo, February 26, 2013, available at http://expo.se/2013/sdus-samarbetspartner-i-samrore-med-nazister_5703.html/

23 Daniel Vergara, “SDU:s ordförande hyllar skandalomsusad politiker,” Expo, February 1, 2013, available at http://expo.se/2013/sdus-ordforande-hyllar-skandalomsusad-politiker_5640.html/

24 Max Byström, „Ukip: Samarbete med SD osannolikt,” SvD, May 27, 2014, available at http://www.svd.se/nyheter/valet2014/efterdyningar-vinnare-och-forlorare-i-eu-valet_3601142.svd?sidan=8

4. The history of the radical right in Sweden

There is a famous photograph taken in 1985 in the town of Växjö in Småland that shows a woman hitting a Nazi skinhead on the head with her handbag. The photo won several prizes, and in 2014 an artist used it as the basis for a statue at an exhibition. Just after the picture was taken, the skinhead in question was convicted for the murder of a Jewish homosexual man in Gothenburg, an event mentioned earlier in this text. The woman wielding the handbag was of Jewish origin and knew people who had been murdered in Nazi concentration camps.²⁵

Nazis were certainly not innocent of violent crimes during much of the postwar era in Sweden. But during the 1990s the violence increased. The murders of Gerard Gbeye, a refugee in the town of Klippan in Skåne, Peter Karlsson, a homosexual ice hockey-player in the town of Västerås, and the young boy John Hron i Kode in 1985 made the public aware that they faced a new and dangerous movement. But the most notorious crime committed by far-right extremists arguably was the killing of trade unionist Björn Söderberg in 1999.

Söderberg, who worked as a forklift driver at a warehouse, was active in the syndicalist union SAC. He was openly critical of the election of a known neo-Nazi as union representative in his workplace. In response, he was attacked by three Nazis on the stairway to his residence. After a quarrel, Söderberg was shot several times, once in the head. In the wake of his death, two Nazis were convicted of the crime, even though the court failed to determine who fired the fatal shots.

In that same year, 1999, neo-Nazis killed two policemen in the small, beautifully situated village of Malexander in the region of Småland. The murders were linked to the last in a long series of robberies of banks and post-offices in the area. Media sources soon found out that one of the

25 This story is told in Anna-Lena Lodenius, "Gatans parlament," Ordfront, 2006.

robbers, Tony Olsson, as well as a man with neo-Nazi connections, Mats Nilsson, had been hired as actors in a play written by the famous playwright Lars Norén. Nilsson was supposed to be a leading figure in the gang of robbers, although he would be convicted only of minor offenses in the judicial proceedings to come. Olsson and two neo-Nazis, Andreas Axelsson and Jackie Arklöw, received life sentence for the murders, despite the court's inability to pin all the robberies on them.

At the time of the murders, Olsson and Nilsson were both incarcerated, but they frequently got passes to leave their place of confinement. Thus, they were able to commit the robberies and to continue to tour with the theater company. Their passes and their role in the plays were part of a project initiated by the prison staff, who had invited Lars Norén to write dramas based on the experiences of men in prison. The incident sparked a serious debate about whether the Swedish penal system employed excessively liberal methods in dealing with criminals.²⁶

As a result of the growing violence of the far right, Sweden's four biggest newspapers forged a uniquely high level of cooperation towards the end of 1999. They decided to publish several identical articles about the Swedish neo-Nazi scene in order to expose its most important activists and heighten readers' awareness of the threats it posed.

A new generation of Nazi organizations

The growing violence partly reflected a generational changing of the guard in the neo-Nazi movement during the 1980s and early 1990s. Some of the new groups, such as the Blood and Honor Movement that was inspired by British musician Ian Stuart Donaldson, were focused on orga-

26 The story of the project with Lars Norén has been described in Elisabeth Åsbrink, "Smärtpunkten," *Natur & Kultur*, 2009. One of the robbers, Tony Olsson, wrote an autobiographical account, *Chockvågor* (Hjalmarsson & Högberg: 2004). See also Magnus Sandelin, *Den svarte nazisten* (Forum: 2010), which concerns a black former mercenary who admitted to having killed the two policemen.

nizing racist skinheads. Blood and Honor and similar groups lured potential recruits to rock concerts with racist music, and tended to attract large contingents of skinheads and hooligans.

Other neo-Nazi elements, such as *Der Brüders Schweigen* (the Silent Brotherhood) drew inspiration from militant white supremacist American groups. They focused on fashioning closed and partly-secret movements based on the idea that civilization was heading for a global race war and that white soldiers therefore should be trained to fight for their own side. During the early 1990s, a loose organization inspired by the White Aryan Resistance, the Vitt Arisk Mostånd or VAM, took to robbing banks and post offices. Most of its leaders were caught and spent a number of years in jail.

The first series of Nazi robberies committed during the 1990s were not professional jobs. Eventually, however, the movement started to recruit professional criminals and gradually become more effective in the robbery business.

During the 2000s, the far-right crime spree diminished, but neo-Nazi activities came increasingly into the open, and more cooperation ensued among right-wing extremist organizations. One annual event was the Salem parade in memory of a young skinhead, Daniel Wretström, who was killed in December of 2000 by a person with an immigrant background. Although the murder was not politically motivated, Wretström nevertheless was heralded as a martyr within neo-Nazi circles. In its peak years, the memorial march attracted 1,500 to 2,000 Nazi sympathizers, including the ND. However, an even greater number of anti-racists staged counter-demonstrations. In ensuing years both sides started to lose interest, and accordingly, in 2010, its organizers decided to take a time out.

Meanwhile, from 2005 to 2008, the radical right co-sponsored another parade called “the People’s March” during National Day celebrations in Stockholm. Most Swedish neo-Nazi groups at that time took part, but the



Members of the National Socialist Front wave big blue and yellow flags at a demonstration on May 1, 1999 in the Swedish city of Ludvika. In addition to the murder of labor union member Björn Söderberg in October, 1999, which amounted to an execution, two policemen were also murdered in the course of that year.

parade attracted at most 1,000 participants. The unity evident in this event was rather unusual, both historically and in terms of international comparisons. Since that time, the movement has become more fragmented.

5. The radical right in Sweden today

Radical right-wing organizations in Sweden are actually quite small, in spite of the notorious crimes attributed to them and the extensive media coverage they have received. According to the Security Police, there are barely 100 full-time activists. The *Svenska Motståndsrörelsen*, or SMR (Swedish Resistance Movement), one of the two dominant organizations, is estimated to have a few hundred members. The other dominant organization, *Svenskarnas Parti*, or SvP (Party for the Swedes), may be slightly

larger. Occasionally the two have been able to rally more than 1,000 activists to special events, but in recent years this has not been the case very often, and to attract even that many participants, the groups have needed to invite people from all over Sweden as well as from other countries. The two organizations have different goals with respect to the recruitment of followers. The SMR primarily seeks contact with individuals who may constitute a kind of elite and who are prepared to display uncompromising loyalty. Members are strongly pressured to sacrifice time and money for the group. The SvP, which used to be an openly National Socialist organization, changed its name and now participates in general elections. It has won a few mandates in local municipalities, sometimes when representatives for the SD and the earlier ND changed their party affiliations.

The years 2013 and 2014 may represent a turning point in the fortunes of the SMR and SvP. There has been a recent surge of right-wing extremist activity, and Nazi-style groups may have increased their numbers slightly. In December of 2013, anti-racist demonstrators in the Stockholm suburb of Kärrtorp were violently attacked by members of SMR. Some of the former were injured by people wielding knives and smashed bottles. Three neo-Nazis were convicted and sentenced to six to eight months in prison.²⁷

The same event also seems to mark the beginning of a revitalized anti-racist movement, as thousands of Swedes have participated in demonstrations against the extreme right all over the country. Some of the anti-racists who participated in the Kärrtorp event also went to court for alleged offenses. A 35-year-old activist in an extreme-left organization (Revolutionära fronten) was convicted of a lengthy list of crimes, among them attempted murder, for stabbing a Nazi in the back with a knife. He was sentenced to six and a half years in prison.²⁸

27 Anders Johansson, "Nazister döms till fängelse efter upploppet i Kärrtorp," *Aftonbladet*, March 26, 2014, available at <http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article18610174.ab/>

28 Erik Carlsson, "Dom efter knivdåd i Kärrtorp," *Expressen*, April 29, 2014, available at <http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/dom-efter-knivdad-i-karrtorp/>

In March of 2014, far-right activists violently set upon people exiting a feminist festival in Malmö in southern Sweden. The most severely-injured victim almost died. Three of the perpetrators, two of whom were members of the SvP, were apprehended by the police. The SvP defended the activists, claiming they had been attacked and were acting in self-defense.²⁹

5.1 Svenska motståndsrörelsen, the *Swedish Resistance Movement*

The *Swedish Resistance Movement*, or SMR, which was founded in 1997, is the most hierarchical, closed, and disciplined organization of the Swedish extreme right. It has roots in the above-mentioned VAM, which folded in the mid-1990s. Some former VAM activists drifted toward a group known as the *Nationell Ungdom*, or NU (National Youth). Later absorbed by the SMR, the NU was disbanded in 2006.

The SMR has initiated a pan-Nordic resistance movement that includes the *Finnish Resistance Movement* (Suomen Vastarintaliike), the *Norwegian resistance movement* (Den norske motstandsbevegelsen), and the *Danish resistance movement* (Den Danske Modstandsbevægelse). But these other organizations may not have displayed the same intensity of activity as has the SMR.

The SMR's leader, Klas Lund, who was born in 1968, was convicted of complicity in the murder of Ronny Landin, a teenager killed in a fight with skinheads in the town of Nynäshamn in 1986. Lund was later active in the VAM, and during that phase of his life he was sentenced to prison for armed robbery.

The SMR is divided into six geographical zones, dubbed “nests.” Each nest has a chief operating officer and is comprised of battle groups with separate staffs of managers.

29 SVT/TT, “Polisen: Nazister bakom knivattacken,” March 9, 2014, available at <http://www.svt.se/nyheter/sverige/nazister-bakom-knivattack-i-malmo>

Members of the SMR have been convicted of numerous crimes. Two members of the NU, the youth organization that merged with the SMR, were convicted of the previously-mentioned murder of trade unionist Björn Söderberg in 1999. Weapons caches have been uncovered over the years, and several members have been apprehended with weapons and explosives. When the anti-racist group Expo investigated the SMR in 2009, it found that 43 of 96 individuals surveyed, all associated with the SMR, had been found guilty of criminal activity. Twenty-five of the cases involved physical abuse and 24 were weapons offenses. At the time of the survey, two active members were serving prison sentences for attempted murder.³⁰

The most recent report issued by Expo again details violent attacks carried out by members of the SMR. Several SMR activists were convicted of carrying out knifings during 2012. In February of 2012, a 24-year-old member was sentenced to prison for assault after chasing people who had torn down stickers put up by the SMR in Umeå. Later the same year, an 18 year-old was convicted of murder. Another member who was suspected of involvement in the murder was being sought by police.³¹

The SMR handbook for activists underscores the importance of fighting back against the group's enemies:

Resistance defends the Nordic peoples. We are the last line of defense. But we know that victory can only be achieved through seizures. Only by attacking can we regain the initiative and push back the enemy. Resistance is attacking! We are politically aggressive. (...) Given what's happening with our Nordic race there is no moral justification for pacifism; on the contrary, those who take up arms and act have the eternal right on their side, although some petty weaklings would claim the opposite.

30 Figures based on information provided by Expo

31 Expo, Intolerance Report 2012 – Expo's annual report. Can be downloaded : http://expo.se/www/download/Expo_Intolerans_12.pdf

5.2 Svenskarnas parti, the *Party for the Swedes*

Another notable change on the far-right scene in recent years is that groups previously presenting themselves as more extreme have toned down their rhetoric. The former political party *Nationalistiska Fronten*, or NSF (National Socialist Front), has changed its name to *Svenskarnas Parti*, or SvP (the Party for the Swedes).

The SvP is one among several small organizations, many of them catering to youth, pitched around criticism of multiculturalism and Islam rather than racial hatred and anti-Semitism. Such a shift brings the radical right closer to the SD rhetorically. At the same time, the SvP takes the SD to task for being too weak on immigration issues and too eager to please larger groups of voters.

The SvP has its roots in a group of local skinheads in the town of Karlskrona, located in Blekinge County in southern Sweden. In 1994 they established a local political party, the NSF. A year later the NSF started to form local branches in other parts of the country. While the NSF was a neo-Nazi organization, it mainly focused on the Swedish heritage and inclined to celebrate old Swedish Nazi groups and their leaders rather than their erstwhile German counterparts. In terms of policy demands, the NSF has concentrated on promoting eugenics.

Some changes within the NSF became apparent as early as 2004, when the previously-mentioned ND party split, and some of its former members defected to the NSF. The absorption of these ND elements has had certain implications for policy-making in the NSF – above all, more aggressive propaganda campaigns and a shift of emphasis within them away from race and toward the discussion of cultural differences.

After the NSF was closed down in 2008, its former leadership decided to form a new group, the *Folkfronten* (Popular Front), which was later renamed the SvP. Supposedly, the SvP has taken over the NSF's resources, and most of the previous leadership has remained intact, even though a

certain degree of internal fragmentation has ensued. In 2013 a new leader, Stefan Jacobsson, emerged to take the party's reins.

The SvP attempts to protect what it considers Swedish culture and wants to exclude, more or less completely, all outside influences. As stated in the party's political program:

Only people who belong to the Western genetic and cultural heritage, ethnic Swedes included, must be Swedish citizens. Sweden needs to be Swedish and Swedes must be able to create their own culture, their own customs, and be free to select the influences which shall affect or enrich Sweden from other parts of the world.

The SvP would rather not be classified as neo-Nazi, in spite of its background. The former party leader Daniel Höglund argued:

I've never heard anyone call themselves that. The term is being misused by the media as a way to dismiss our policy, a strategy of political opponents has been used so often that I do not care if the party gets the label. Rather, we are nationalists.³²

Members of the NSF have been involved in a series of high-profile criminal cases. Two of the three figures who participated in the murders of policemen Olle Boren and Robert Karlström in Malmö in 1999 (discussed earlier in the text), as well as the series of bank and post office robberies preceding the murders, had links to the NSF. In 2005, a small group related to the NSF in Västerås was charged with terrorist offenses. The group wrote a novel about making a violent revolution, and launched a series of attacks on federal buildings. But because the court could not find any evidence that participants seriously intended to commit all the crimes described in the novel, they were charged only with illegal arms-dealing.³³

32 TT Ela, September 22, 2010

33 Anna-Lena Lodenius, Gatans parlament, Ordfront: 2006

Still, members of the SvP do commit crimes, such as the previously-mentioned attempted murder in Malmö in March, 2014. Two months later, Swedish Radio carried out an investigation which revealed that about a third of the party's candidates in the forthcoming municipal elections (16 out of 50) had been convicted of various offenses. This means that candidates with criminal records are clearly over-represented on SvP lists, as compared to those put up by other parties. One prominent SvP member with a criminal past is party leader Stefan Jacobsson. He was convicted in 2005 for – among other things – violent rioting, because he had attacked participants in a demonstration. Jacobsson was eventually sentenced to two months in prison for that offense.³⁴

In the 2010 election, the SvP captured fewer votes than it had in earlier years when its candidates ran under the banner of the NSF. Still, the SvP did manage to elect a single representative in the small municipality of Grästorp (garnering 102 votes, or 2.8% of the total). But because the successful candidate was not actually a resident of that municipality, the SvP was not allowed to attend local government meetings. By now, however, the SvP has also accumulated some mandates through defections from other parties. At least two former representatives from the SD and one from the ND have joined its ranks.

The SvP is expected to participate in 35 municipal elections in September, 2014. This is by far the most serious attempt ever launched by a radical right-wing party in Sweden to achieve a breakthrough in a general election. The outcome of that effort remains to be seen.

34 Ekot/SR P1: "Var tredje kandidat för Svenskarnas parti dömd för brott," May 27, 2014, available at <http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=83&artikel=5871403>



Neo-Nazis in Karlskrona.

6. Conclusion

The SD has come a long way since its formative years in the 1980s, but it still retains the same ideological orientation. The main difference between then and now is that the party has toned down its more controversial statements and has removed members who maintain too many obvious contacts with more extreme parties and politicians. This step was necessary if the party was ever going to get a foothold in federal politics. But many critics question whether the party really has changed.

With SD participating in the parliament and in most local governments, Swedish politics is no longer exceptional; instead it has begun to display a pattern similar to what one sees in the rest of Europe. But the cordon sanitaire separating mainstream from radical-right parties is still intact. Thus far, Swedish politics has not undergone the same changes as one observes, for example, in Norway and Denmark. There, mainstream parties have adopted policies similar to those put forward by right-wing

populist parties. An example that illustrates the difference between Sweden and its Scandinavian neighbors is the issue concerning Roma (gypsy) beggars. In both Norway and Denmark, the establishment backs laws that would outlaw begging in the streets. In Sweden, by contrast, the SD is the only party that has advocated such legislation.

The SD might eventually develop into a more mainstream party, in which case we would witness a situation similar to what prevails elsewhere in Scandinavia. In another possible scenario, the SD would split, since some of its factions are demanding a tougher line on immigration. For the moment, however, the party leadership's decision to join Nigel Farage's EFD in the EU Parliament instead of Marine Le Pen's EAF suggests that the dominant mood is to stick with the alternative of going mainstream.

The more extreme parties, such as the *Svenskarnas Parti*, remain a marginal force in Swedish politics. Although it is quite likely that they will attract more support than ever before in the national election in September of 2014, they are still far from staging a breakthrough in national politics. The main problem with the *Svenskarnas Parti* and *Svenska motståndsrörelsen* remains their use of violence against political enemies and certain targeted groups.

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ISBN: 978-3-86498-940-7



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