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Government by finger-pointing

Sweden's new repressive policies targeting non-ethnic Swedes won't improve integration. If anything, they will increase polarisation

In an essay written shortly after Donald Trump's victory in the United States presidential election in 2016, the Russian author Masha Gessen issued advice on how to survive in an autocracy. One admonition was to be outraged. 'In the face of the impulse to normalize,' Gessen wrote, 'it is essential to maintain one's capacity for shock.'

This is useful advice for anyone trying to grasp recent developments in Sweden.

In the general election on 11 September, Sweden's social-democratic prime minister, Magdalena Andersson, lost her red-green majority in the parliament to a coalition rallying behind Ulf Kristersson, leader of the conservative Moderates, as her successor. The coalition comprises three mainstream right-wing parties — the Moderates (19.1 per cent of the vote), the Christian Democrats (5.3 per cent) and the Liberals (4.6 per cent) — plus the Sweden Democrats. The largest component of the coalition with 20.5 per cent support, this nationalist, radical-right party is rooted in the Swedish neo-Nazi movement.

Unsurprisingly, that the Swedish Liberals should have contributed with their decisive votes to the ascent to power of the Sweden Democrats has caused turmoil in the Renew group in the European Parliament. The group has even considered excluding the single Swedish Liberal MEP from it.

It is not much consolation that the Sweden Democrats have no ministers in the government Kristersson appointed last week. The party has literarily been handed the keys to the government offices, in which it will be able to place a large number of political officers. And the government has tied itself to a detailed agreement, the Tidö deal, in which the parties have set out to co-operate closely in six areas: healthcare, climate and energy, crime, migration and integration, education and the economy.

Doubling down on migration and integration

Some of these are covered in one or two pages, with mainly non-binding promises of a 'we will appoint an inquiry to look into the pros and cons' character. But 19 out of the 63 pages are devoted to detailed policy proposals on migration and integration.

Hitherto, Sweden has accepted each year 5,000 'quota' refugees — those selected by the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, for resettlement in a third country and so the most vulnerable of all in need of protection. That number will be cut to 900 and will only include those with a 'good predicted integration'. Family reunification will also be made more difficult.

Moreover, all residence permits in Sweden will now be temporary. And, with compulsory tests of competence in Swedish and knowledge of Swedish society, it will be more difficult for immigrants to obtain Swedish citizenship. Both residence permits and citizenships (for individuals with more than one) will also be easier to revoke.

New grounds for revocation are to be added. In addition to criminal offences, social 'misconduct' (*bristande vandel*) — 'such as lack of compliance with rules' — will lead to the withdrawal of temporary as well as (previously) permanent residence permits. The leader of the Left Party, Nooshi Dadgostar, told the *Riksdag* how her parents had fled from the mullahs of Iran; they could never have imagined Sweden would introduce its own morality police.

Walking down the street, boarding a bus, on the way to a job interview, on a date: the police will be able to stop an individual anywhere and ask for proof of their right to belong — in their own country.

Immigration controls will not only be intensified at the borders. Internally, the police will be ordered to intensify their searches for 'illegal aliens' — 'stop and frisk' actions which are likely to increase already rampant racial profiling. In connection with such controls, the government will seek to give the police 'an enhanced possibility to dispose of and empty digital media', to carry out body searches and to take DNA samples — as well as checking on 'compliance with rules'.

DNA samples and other biometric data will, to a much larger extent than today, be registered, stored and — notwithstanding the risks of serious violations of personal integrity — shared with a number of Swedish

authorities. These authorities, including professions such as teachers and social workers, will, in their turn, be required to share information with the police and abide by a 'notification obligation': anyone suspected of not having legal residence — or not being morally deserving of it, because of social 'misconduct' — must be reported to the police.

Equipping the police with unrestrained authority to stop and search, sample and register anyone who can be suspected of being an illegal alien will make life difficult for everyone belonging to Sweden's visible minorities. For those living in designated 'search zones' where the police will have even more extensive powers to control individuals and carry out house searches, life will be hell. Walking down the street, boarding a bus, on the way to a job interview, on a date: the police will be able to stop an individual anywhere and ask for proof of their right to belong — in their own country.

A dangerous obsession

These repressive policies will not contribute to fulfilling the government's ostensible goal of improving integration. If anything, they will increase polarisation and segregation.

Some 800,000 Swedish inhabitants are not formally Swedish citizens. Two million Swedes were born abroad. Not only is the new government targeting millions with arbitrary rules which violate personal integrity and compromise the rule of law. 'Foreigners' will be made the scapegoats for the pressing societal problems the new government will be unable to solve.

In his first address to parliament as prime minister, Kristersson confirmed his government's obsession with stigmatising non-ethnic Swedes. He listed the challenges of crime, recession, inflation and energy prices. Then he asserted: 'Sweden's largest economic and social problems are due to high levels of immigration.'

If, following Gessen's advice, one resists the impulse to normalise, it is possible to see how the sum of these policies will change Sweden — fundamentally. Singling out a group of the population as the problem, giving authorities the power to restrict arbitrarily the rights and freedoms of this group and forcing others to be accomplices of these policies, by making it compulsory to sneak, is not only utterly repressive and repulsively xenophobic. It is also building the pillars of a fascist state.

It is, indeed, shocking.

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