

## How the Swedish model is collapsing under the weight of Muslim immigrants

By Henry Ergas, The Australian, 14 September 2018

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After repeated rampages in Melbourne by African gangs, Australians are hardly likely to find the election results in Sweden surprising. With a sharp rise in violent crime, including a wave of attacks using hand grenades, since the country received an influx of refugees, the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats emerged this week as the kingmakers in what is certain to be a hung parliament.

Meanwhile, Sweden's ruling Social Democrats — who from 1921 to 2002 averaged 40 per cent of the vote and never received less than 36 per cent — have seen their vote share collapse to 28.4 per cent, lower than at any time since universal manhood suffrage came fully into effect in 1911.

Whether a new government can be formed — and, if so, how durable it will be — is unclear. What is certain, however, is that the “Swedish model”, long the darling of the world's Centre-Left, is dead.

It joins a long list of casualties. Throughout Europe, immigration from North Africa and the Middle East has proven toxic.

And as the problems accumulate, the established political parties are paying an extraordinarily high price for playing Peter Pan with reality, closing their eyes while wishing really hard that issues they would rather not discuss would simply go away.

Rarely have the forces at work been as starkly apparent as they are in Sweden. Nowhere else was social democracy so politically and culturally hegemonic.

But seduced by the rhetoric of diversity, Sweden's Social Democrats ignored, and have now destroyed, the foundations on which that hegemony rested.

At its heart was a crucial legacy of history: having lost Finland to Russia in 1809, then separating from Norway in 1905, Sweden entered the 20th century as one of the most ethnically, religiously and linguistically homogenous countries in Europe.

Drawing on the population's shared Lutheranism, the concept of a Swedish “folk” — viewed as a family rather than a race — gained extraordinarily wide acceptance and played a crucial unifying role in an otherwise fractious transition to democracy.

The genius of the founders of Swedish social democracy — men such as Hjalmar Branting, Per Albin Hansson and Tage Erlander (who served as prime minister for an uninterrupted 23 years) — lay in recasting social democracy's goal as being that of constructing a *folkhem*: a home for all Swedes.

Jettisoning in the early 1920s the Marxist rhetoric that remained central to their counterparts overseas, and which defined social democracy as the party of the working class, they placed the emphasis squarely on the fellow-feeling Swedes derived from their unique cultural inheritance.

That combination of inclusiveness within Swedish society and constantly reaffirmed distinctiveness from the rest of the world allowed the Social Democrats to forge links first with Sweden's strong independent farmers and then with its expanding middle class, while stifling the development of the extremist movements that blossomed elsewhere.

The concept of a home whose roof spanned the Swedish folk also provided the political base for widespread redistribution, effected through social benefits that — instead of being means-tested — were universally paid out, underlining the welfare state's inclusiveness.

That the degeneration of the folkhem was already well advanced by the end of the 20th century is undeniable.

Secularisation took its toll, undermining the community-based churches that had sustained grassroots involvement in the local authorities that provide most public services. As that happened, government became increasingly centralised and technocratic. Ninety per cent of the local authorities that existed in 1950 were abolished by 1975 in the quest for greater efficiency. All that remained was a high tax burden and the promise that Sweden's famously competent bureaucrats could fix every problem.

But one problem they could not fix was that of absorbing a rapidly growing migrant population. Generous spending on integration programs, it was assumed, would transform foreigners into Swedes; but even before the refugee crisis, a detailed study, funded by the EU, of the Swedish-born children of Turkish migrants in Stockholm found myriad signs of trouble.

As well as relatively high unemployment rates, these young people had few native friends, largely intermarried and more often than not felt neither strongly nor clearly Swedish — indeed, many were hostile or indifferent to Sweden and its national identity.

The 350,000 refugees who flooded into Sweden as anarchy gripped Syria and the broader Middle East then added to that population a group that had virtually nothing in common with ethnic Swedes and was not imbued with their norms of restraint and civil peace.

Far from encouraging mutual respect, the result has been explosive resentments.

Bitter about the amounts being spent on the new arrivals and angered by the government's tepid response to mounting violence, native Swedes have swung to the Right. As for the migrants themselves, they have not only brought Islamism but virulent anti-Semitism, which previously played no part in Swedish life, and have fuelled the growth of a fanatically anti-Israel hard Left.

It is hatred, not tolerance, that too often has entered through the refugee door, leaving the idea of a Swedish folkhem in tatters.

Now Sweden is reeling from the consequences, as 100 years of its history draw to a close; but these issues are scarcely Sweden's alone.

Just this week, a study by France's prestigious Institut Montaigne found that up to 30 per cent of young French Muslims frequented websites that routinely preached ethnic separateness, disdain for the West and hatred of Jews.

Equally, it is symptomatic of the trends that the Voice of Islam, a Sydney-based radio station, invited to Australia Mohammed Ali al-Nabulsi, an Islamic preacher for whom Jews are “a collection of defects and imperfections, vices and evils” deserving of extermination — and was helped by Tony Burke, the Labor member for Watson, in seeking to do so.

That Bill Shorten has not severely reprimanded Burke is bad enough; that Coalition governments, at the state and federal level, have done nothing to remove the Voice of Islam’s licence, or to pursue the incitements to violence that feature prominently on Arabic-language broadcasts, makes it all the worse.

None of that is to suggest that there are any easy answers. But if we lack the courage to state the truth, today’s problems will become tomorrow’s nightmares. And if there is a truth that needs stating, it is that no democracy can survive without a reasonable degree of cultural homogeneity.

Our whole political system presupposes a people so fundamentally united that they can argue passionately yet live harmoniously; and so committed to shared values of mutual respect that no police state is needed to prevent civil order from collapsing into lawlessness. Lose that glue, and Sweden awaits.

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