KEELE
UNIVERSITY

Responses to the Extreme Right in Sweden: The Diversified Approach

Anders Widfeldt

Keele European Parties Research Unit
(KEPRU)

Working Paper 10

ISSN 1475-1569
ISBN 1-899488-49-9

KEPRU Working Papers are published by:

School of Politics, International Relations and the Environment (SPIRE)
Keele University
Staffs
ST5 5BG, UK

tel +44 (0)1782 58 4177/3088/3452
fax +44 (0)1782 58 3592
www.keele.ac.uk/depts/spire/

Editor: Professor Thomas Poguntke (t.poguntke@keele.ac.uk)

KEPRU Working Papers are available via SPIRE's website.

Launched in September 2000, the Keele European Parties Research Unit (KEPRU) was the first research grouping of its kind in the UK. It brings together the hitherto largely independent work of Keele researchers focusing on European political parties, and aims:

- to facilitate its members' engagement in high-quality academic research, individually, collectively in the Unit and in collaboration with cognate research groups and individuals in the UK and abroad;
- to hold regular conferences, workshops, seminars and guest lectures on topics related to European political parties;
- to publish a series of parties-related research papers by scholars from Keele and elsewhere;
- to expand postgraduate training in the study of political parties, principally through Keele's MA in Parties and Elections and the multinational PhD summer school, with which its members are closely involved;
- to constitute a source of expertise on European parties and party politics for media and other interests.

The Unit shares the broader aims of the Keele European Research Centre, of which it is a part. KERC comprises staff and postgraduates at Keele who are actively conducting research into the politics of remaking and integrating Europe.

Convenor KEPRU: Dr Kurt Richard Luther (r.luther@keele.ac.uk)

The author is a lecturer in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Aberdeen

1. Introduction*

In recent years, much attention has been paid to the growth of extreme right activity in Scandinavia. The Norwegian Progress Party received 14.6 per cent of the vote in the parliamentary election of September 2001. This will give them significant bargaining power in the forthcoming election period, although they were never seriously considered for inclusion in the three-party government, which was formed after the election. The Danish People's Party has in recent years been supported by roughly one in ten Danish voters, and played a major part in the successful No campaign in the Danish referendum on the EMU in September 2000, something which looks like having increased the party's legitimacy. The party political extreme right is less significant in Finland, where the 'True Finns' party, a successor of the defunct Rural Party, currently holds one parliamentary seat. In Sweden, the gap left by New Democracy, after one term in parliament between 1991 and 1994, has so far not been filled.

Besides the varying impact on the party systems, however, the extreme right is making its presence felt in other ways. Racist violence makes the headlines throughout the Scandinavian region. Neo-nazi groups and militant racist groups are active and visible in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Violent skinhead groups exist also in Finland, but outright neo-nazi groups are, so far, insignificant.[1] Thus, although it might be an exaggeration to state that the extreme right is continuously increasing in support and activity in the Scandinavian region, it is a factor that cannot be neglected. Extreme right parties are potentially important factors in the Norwegian and Danish party systems and, while currently insignificant, should not be ruled out for the future in Finland and Sweden. Racist violence occurs to varying extents in the whole Scandinavian region, and the absence of neo-nazi groups so far in Finland may well prove not to be permanent. Thus, the 'Nordic Model', characterised by democracy, consensus and stability, is facing a completely new challenge.

* Chapter draft for the volume *Western Democracies and the 'New Right' Challenge,* edited by Roger Eatwell and Cas Mudde

[1] *Politik i Norden* (published by the Nordic Council of Ministers), issue 1, April 2000.

In this chapter, the focus will be on the response to the extreme right challenge in the largest of the Scandinavian states, Sweden. Of course, what is loosely labelled the 'extreme right' is a broad and diversified phenomenon. Indeed, as Cas Mudde has argued, 'Extreme Right' is not a happy choice of words, and is mostly used for the want of a better term.[2] Here, the term 'Extreme Right' will be used in a broad sense, and include the New Democracy party, whose populism and xenophobia come across as relatively mild in an international comparison, as well as the much more extreme neo-nazi and militant racist groups. It can, however, be argued that also New Democracy represented something new, different and unwelcome for the remaining political parties when it broke through in 1991. All parties, right, left and centre -- and most certainly the Greens -- reacted with disbelief and horror at the prospect of a sister party to the Norwegian and Danish Progress parties entering the Riksdag. New Democracy certainly qualified as what William H. Downs has called a 'Pariah Party'.[3]

That the growth of neo-nazism and militant racism is a challenge for the democratic system goes without saying. Neo-nazi and fascist groups have existed in Sweden without interruptions since the end of WWII, but for many years they were nothing more than a lunatic fringe. However, the second half of the 1980s saw a significant increase in the activities of extreme right groups. By the early 1990s, members of nazi groups had been convicted of murder, arson and bomb attacks.[4] Extreme right activity continued to increase in the 1990s, with highly publicised incidents such as racist riots in Trollhättan in 1993 and the murder of the syndicalist trade unionist Björn Söderberg in the autumn of 1999.[5] Such incidents shocked Sweden, which had for many years enjoyed a reputation as a country with little racism and a low level of ethnic conflict.[6]

In late 2000, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) estimated that Sweden had the second highest level of racial and extreme right

[2] Mudde 2000:16; 179f.
[3] Downs 2001.
[4] Larsson and Lodenius 1991:43ff.
[5] The troubles in Trollhättan are discussed further below. Following the murder of Söderberg, two men with neo-nazi links were sentenced to 11 years imprisonment (*Searchlight*, September 2000).
[6] Paul Wilkinson (1983:147f) pointed out a number of racist incidents in Sweden in the early 1980s, but also said that there were European countries with far worse tensions, and that the Swedish government had gone further than many other countries in efforts to combat prejudice and conflict.

violence in the EU, behind Germany. In the 1999 Annual Report, the EUMC stated that in 1999 there were 2,363 reported crimes with racial or xenophobic motives. These incidents included cases of illegal threats, assaults and molestation, and signified a continuous increase since 1997. Nearly 1,000 crimes were committed by neo-nazi organisations, including four reported cases of murder, and four attempted murders.[7] While estimations and international comparisons are extremely difficult to make, due to the multitude of problems connected with the reporting and classification of racist and extreme right crime, the report reinforced the impression that Sweden is struggling to come to terms with its transition into a multiethnic society. Available evidence suggests that modern extreme right groups in Sweden have caused more harm and loss of life than their predecessors in the 1930s and 1940s.[8]

Comparative surveys do not suggest that the Swedish public hold extreme right views to a higher extent than elsewhere in Europe. According to data from 1991, analysed by Lauri Karvonen, 6.5 per cent of Swedes mentioned 'other races' among groups that they would not like to have as neighbours, and 8.9 per cent mentioned 'foreign workers'. 40.6 per cent were 'very proud' of their nationality. In all these cases, the proportions represented increases compared to 1981, but they were not particularly high in a European comparison. This is especially true of the unwillingness to live next to 'other races', where for example Norway and -- especially -- Finland displayed significantly higher proportions.[9] A Eurobarometer conducted in 1997 showed that two per cent of Swedes considered themselves to be 'very racist' and 16 per cent 'quite racist'; in both cases below the EU average. Conversely, 42 per cent considered themselves 'not at all racist', which was the sixth highest (Portugal had the highest proportion with 58 per cent), and nine percentage points above the average. On the other hand, 60 per cent of Swedes agreed with the statement that the own country has reached its limits, and that continued growth of minority groups would lead to

[7] EUMC Annual Report 1999, pp. 28ff. (http://www.eumc.at).
[8] This is not to say that Swedish nazi groups of the 1930s and 1940s were harmless. The most serious case was the arson attack in 1940 on the communist newspaper *Norrskensflamman*, in which three adults and two children were killed. The perpetrators had nazi sympathies, but there were no direct links to any particular organisation. (Johansson 1973:274). Still, the number of lives lost due to extreme right attacks in the 1980s and 1990s almost certainly exceed the corresponding figures from the 1930s and 1940s.
[9] Karvonen 1997, pp. 109f.

problems. This was marginally below the average, but could in its own right be regarded as a high figure.[10]

Other research does not suggest a continuous increase of racist and xenophobic attitudes in Sweden. In the 1980s, there was much to suggest that public opinion in Sweden had become more tolerant of immigrants and immigration compared to the 1960s.[11] Surveys conducted by the SOM institute at Göteborg University suggest that there was a surge in anti-immigration sentiment in the early 1990s, but also that such attitudes have since declined. In 1999, 46 per cent of Swedes thought it was a good proposal to accept fewer refugees into the country, compared to a peak level of 65 per cent in 1992. Forty per cent thought that there were too many foreigners in Sweden and 17 per cent responded that they would not like a person from another part of the world to be married into the family. Also the latter figures represent declines since the first part of the 1990s.[12]

However, while survey evidence does not suggest that the demand for extreme right parties and organisations is growing, they are a factor that cannot be neglected. Sweden could hardly be considered as immune to the kind of politics that has made the Danish People's Party and the Norwegian Progress Party established parliamentary parties. The persistence of several neo-nazi groups and the high level of racist crime is a factor which has caused much concern, and can be expected to continue to do so. Thus, the extreme right, in its various forms, is a challenge for the Swedish political system. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the *democratic response* to this challenge. Exactly what constitutes a democratic response is of course not straightforward. Here, it will be understood as measures taken by political parties and democratic institutions in order to minimise the potential for success of political extremism. Thus, responses from civil society and non-governmental organisations, other than political parties, will not be considered. This is not to say that responses from such quarters are not important; merely that time and space does not allow the inclusion of these groups. The choice of focusing on the official and party political response can also be defended for the reason that it helps understanding the impact of the extreme right has had on the political system.

[10] http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg10/epo/eb/racism/racism_en.pdf
[11] Westin 1987.
[12] Demker 2000:59ff.

Distinction will be made between the parliamentary challenge, which consists of New Democracy's guest appearance in the Riksdag 1991-1994, and the extra-parliamentary challenge presented by racist and neo-nazi groups. The parliamentary challenge will be studied by focusing on the other parliamentary parties. To study the extra-parliamentary challenge, a broader perspective is needed. Thus, the challenge provided by neo-nazism and militant racism, will not only be studied by looking at the party political level, but also the judicial and administrative levels. It could, of course, be possible that a political party also raises the attention of the judiciary and/or the public administration, as exemplified by the decision in 1992 to subject the German Republikaner party to surveillance by the Verfassungsschuss,[13] or the court decision in 1998 to proscribe the Dutch Centrumpartij '86.[14] However, it should be remembered that the parties in question were more extreme than New Democracy, whose programme could hardly be regarded as anti-democratic or racist. It should also be noted that the legal framework in Sweden does not provide the same facilities to regulate political parties as in, for example, Germany. In addition, the response to the extra parliamentary challenge will not only be studied at the national level, but also at the local government level, as it is local levels that have to deal with the concrete manifestations of this challenge.

There are many possible ways of responding to an extremist challenge.[15] Responses can vary from completely ignoring the extremists, in the hope that the lack of attention will minimise their support, all the way to an outright ban. To give some structure to the following discussion, two distinctions will be made. First, the distinction between **accommodation** (co-optation) and **marginalisation** (restriction). Second, the distinction between **specific** responses (targeted at the extremist organisations as such) and **general** responses (targeted at the public). These distinctions can be put together into a typology depicted in figure 1 below.

[13] More 1994.
[14] Mudde 2000:147.

FIGURE 1. A typology of responses to political extremism.

	General	Specific
Accommodation	1	2
Marginalisation	3	4

General accommodation (cell 1 in Figure 1) is designed to acquiesce public opinion, by accommodating, or co-opting, some of the demands by the extreme right. It could, for example, take the shape of introducing stricter asylum laws, in an attempt to stem the growth of anti-immigration sentiment.

An example of **specific accommodation** (cell 2) could be to involve an extremist party in government, in order to expose its lack of realism, and to force the party to take political responsibility. It could be argued that this was the strategy used by the Austrian ÖVP, when they in 2000 decided to form a government coalition with the FPÖ. Another possible example is the attempt of the democratic parties in the German Weimar republic to accommodate the NSDAP into government. It should be mentioned, however, that the inclusion of an alleged extreme right party into government could also have other motives. For example, that the other parties quite simply do not regard the 'extreme right' party in question as extreme, or as otherwise unacceptable. If this is the case, then it can hardly be a case of accommodation; rather a case of acceptance.

General marginalisation (cell 3) has the purpose to keep extreme right views, such as racism and xenophobia, in place. For example, laws against discrimination and racist remarks. Such measures can be employed to make it more difficult to openly express support for the extreme right, but can also be a symbolic act, to show that anti-democracy and racism have no place in a democratic society.

Specific marginalisation (cell 4), finally, can include bans or restrictions on extremist groups or parties. The most obvious example is an outright proscription of a

[15] A useful typology of possible responses in provided by Downs 2001:26ff. For a historical overview, see Capoccia 2001.

party or organisation.[16] Less radical examples can involve the seizure of party newspapers, restrictions on symbols and uniforms or restricting the right for extreme groups and parties to hold public meetings.

It should be noted that, in the real world, these four types of response are not mutually exclusive. The banning of displaying Nazi symbols, for example, can be targeted at extreme right groups as such, but also against the general public, thus being possible to view as specific as well as general marginalisation. Similarly, to take an extreme party into a government coalition could be argued to include elements of both general and specific accommodation. Still, while the four types of response may empirically appear as mixtures, it is useful to keep them analytically separate. A certain action taken by a government, political party, et c., may contain elements of more than one of the responses in the model in Figure 1. Still, the main question is how many of the four types of response are included in the overall response in Sweden. In addition, it is of interest to compare differences in the overall response at the party, judicial and administrative levels.

The following account will focus on the 1990s. The section on the response to New Democracy will, for obvious reasons, be concentrated to the period when this party was a force to be reckoned with, i.e. until 1994, but some attention will also be paid to the subsequent period, when a possible democratic response could be regarded as a precaution against the emergence of new challenges from the populist right. The section on responses to violent racism and neo-nazism will cover a longer period, up to the year 2000.

2. The parliamentary challenge: New Democracy

For many years, the 64,000 dollar question about the Swedish party system was why there was no equivalent to the populist right Progress Parties in Denmark and Norway, or the Finnish Rural Party. One reason often given was that the opportunity structure was unfavourable. The Moderate (conservative) Party was more radical than its Scandinavian sister parties in its demands of cutting taxes cuts and the public

[16] For a discussion on the proscription of anti-democratic parties, see Finn 2000.

sector, so that they already occupied the political gap that newly formed populist right parties seized elsewhere in Scandinavia. Consequently, the reasoning went, a populist right party could only appear in Sweden after a period with the Moderate Party in government, where it could not deliver its promises, which would lead to disillusionment among its more radical supporters.[17] True, there were non-socialist governments between 1976 and 1982, but the Moderate Party defected from these coalitions, a year before the 1979 and 1982 elections, respectively. Thus, they never faced the voters as incumbents, which meant that there was no opening for a populist right breakthrough.

The problem with this reasoning is that it is consistent with why no populist right party appeared in the 1980s, but it is not consistent with the circumstances in which such a party, New Democracy, finally appeared. The 1991 election was the end of nine years of Social Democratic government. The final election period between 1988 and 1991 was very difficult for the government, politically as well as economically. The theory of the Moderate Party occupying the space that otherwise would have been available for a populist right party was firmly refuted by the fact that New Democracy appeared at a time when discontent with the Social Democrats was at an all time high level. If anything, this was a situation which ought to have paved the way for the Moderate system critique of the Swedish social democracy. In some respect it did. The Moderate Party had a successful election in 1991, but the result was 1.7 percentage points below the post-war party record of 23.6 per cent from 1982. Above all, it did not prevent the populist right New Democracy from entering parliament.

The events that led to the formation of New Democracy have been documented elsewhere.[18] Already in late 1990, before the party had been formally founded, opinion polls suggested that it had enough popular support to pass the four per cent threshold for parliamentary representation. The immediate reaction among the democratic establishment was one of disbelief. Some opponents seemed to cling to the hope that New Democracy was a passing phase, which would not last until the September election. When one of the party's founders, the record company and

[17] See Kitschelt 1995:127f.

fairground owner Bert Karlsson, performed disastrously in an interview in the current affairs TV programme *Magasinet* in February 1991, some hoped it was the end of the party. Such hopes were in vain. Opinion polls suggested that the party was more or less unaffected by the event. The other member of the leadership duo, Ian Wachtmeister, was a much more effective media performer, and in any case the party was able to play the underdog card when explaining Karlsson's fiasco.

The response from the established parties could be summarised as very cautious. Very few parties and party leaders tried to take on New Democracy. Instead, there was a general tendency to avoid direct debate and confrontation. The main exception was the leader of the Liberal Party, Mr. Bengt Westerberg. Throughout the 1991 campaign, he repeatedly criticised New Democracy and its parliamentary candidates for xenophobia and for simplistic policy proposals. On election night, he demonstratively left the TV studio when Wachtmeister and Karlsson entered, after New Democracy had 6.7 per cent of the vote, comfortably clearing the representational threshold. Westerberg was praised from many quarters for being honest and brave in his uncompromising attitude. It certainly was not an opportunist strategy, given the opinion climate at the time. For all the praise and respect, Westerberg's party suffered a serious election defeat, with what then was the second worst result in its history. Thus, it could be argued that, with Westerberg and the Liberals as the main exception, the initial response from the established party system was non-engagement. The hope seemed to be that a lack of attention would prevent New Democracy from generating too much interest.[19]

The parliamentary situation after the 1991 election meant that it was impossible to ignore New Democracy. Out of the total of 349 *Riksdag* seats, the socialist bloc consisting of the Social Democrats and the Left Party had 154 seats. The non-socialist bloc, consisting of the Moderates, the Liberals, Christian Democrats and the Centre Party, had 170 seats. Thus, the latter four parties, which formed a coalition government after the election, were five seats short of a majority. New Democracy held a pivotal position with their 25 seats. Although the parliamentary situation was complicated, there is nothing to suggest that any of the coalition partners seriously

[18] E.g. Taggart 1996, Arter 1992, Widfeldt 2000.
[19] For example, Elmbrant (1993:276) argues that the Social Democrats and the Moderates responded to the New Democracy challenge by 'ducking and being silent' during the campaign.

contemplated including New Democracy in the government. Nor is there much to suggest that this would have suited New Democracy's plans. The party relied on its image as an outsider, and did not wish to immediately compromise its credentials by joining a government, or even offering systematic parliamentary support. When the government was installed on 3 October, New Democracy abstained in the vote of investiture.[20] This was generally regarded as passive support for the government, since the Swedish constitution states that a government is tolerated by parliament as long as there is not a majority of the elected MPs voting against it.[21] The situation for the government was not enviable. To get its bills through parliament, it had to rely on support from New Democracy, or on cross-bloc agreements with the Social Democrats.

The latter solution was used during the unsuccessful attempts to defend the Swedish currency against speculation in the autumn of 1992. The *Krona* had been tied to the ECU since 1988, but in 1992 it became increasingly apparent that it was significantly overvalued. In order to defend the *Krona* against speculation, the Central Bank raised the marginal interest rate to incredible levels, at most to 500 per cent. At the same time, the government tried to work out austerity packages, in order to regain the confidence of the money market in the Swedish economy. Due to the complicated parliamentary situation, support from New Democracy or the Social Democrats was necessary to carry such packages through the *Riksdag*.

Throughout the crisis, it seemed apparent that major cross-bloc deals with the Social Democrats was always the government’s preferred option. Indeed, broad consensus was considered a value in itself in the quest to rebuild the reputation of the Swedish economy. However, Jan Teorell's study of the events during the turbulent period between September and November suggests that the Moderate leader and Prime Minister Carl Bildt may have been open to discussions with New Democracy during the first phases of the crisis. Wachtmeister openly expressed interest in participating in the negotiations, and Bildt said on TV that Wachtmeister had behaved in a 'responsible and impressive manner', while others did not have the same 'crisis

[20] *Riksdagens årsbok* 1991/92:14f.

awareness', a statement that infuriated the Social Democrats.[22] Whether these words revealed genuine openness towards New Democracy, or were intended as a provocation to get the Social Democratic leadership moving, is not clear. According to Teorell, Bildt did suggest to the government that talks with New Democracy could be an 'alternative strategy', if the negotiations with the Social Democrats were to collapse.[23] Such ideas were, however, firmly resisted by Westerberg and any thoughts of involving New Democracy were soon abandoned.[24] During the subsequent phases of the crisis, New Democracy were clearly out of the picture, and Wachtmeister belonged to the minority who started to question the prevailing consensus that the *Krona* must be defended at all costs.[25]

Thus, although Prime Minister Bildt may at some stage have toyed with the idea of including New Democracy in the package deals to defend the Swedish currency, the government went for cross-bloc deals with the Social Democrats. Two such deals, which together included unprecedented welfare cuts and significant tax increases, were reached in late September 1992. On 19 November, however, the government finally had to give up the defence of the overvalued *Krona*, which was allowed to float. Its value promptly sank like a stone.[26]

After the defence of the *Krona* had failed, there was no room left for further cross-bloc agreements. With their eyes set on the 1994 election, the Social Democrats went in for a fully-fledged opposition policy, and the government had to rely on New Democracy. This reliance turned out to be highly unreliable, however. The main strategy of the government parties was to negotiate with New Democracy in the parliamentary committees, rather than trying to reach wider agreements with the party leadership. The success of this strategy varied, largely depending on which New Democracy MPs they were dealing with. New Democracy's three years in parliament

---

[21] New Democracy also abstained during a vote on a finance bill on 17 March 1993, where the government had declared that it would dissolve parliament if the bill was defeated. *Riksdagens årsbok* 1992/93:11; 41ff.
[22] Teorell 1998:57; Elmbrant 1993:303ff.
[23] Teorell 1998:56f.
[24] Teorell 1998 chapter 2; see especially pp. 56ff. See also Elmbrant 1993, chapters 33 and 34. Wachtmeister claims that it was the Liberals and Social Democrats that were the main obstacles to including New Democracy in the negotiations (Wachtmeister 1992:142).
[25] Teorell 1998:67.
[26] Teorell 1998:68-72.

were riddled with internal conflicts, defections and poor party discipline, which made systematic co-operation difficult, especially towards the end of the 1991-1994 period. There were cases where New Democracy took one side in a parliamentary committee, only to change its mind in the chamber.[27] In addition, there were cases when the party sided with the opposition to abolish laws, whose introduction New Democracy had supported shortly before.[28]

Thus, it is difficult to characterise the response to New Democracy's period in the *Riksdag*. There **is no evidence of specific accommodation**. No other party tried to make far-reaching deals with New Democracy. The fact that the party held the parliamentary balance meant that it was impossible to completely avoid contacts and agreements. But such agreements were made on an ad-hoc basis. There were no systematic attempts to force New Democracy into taking political responsibility. Indeed, Wachtmeister himself often complained about the cold treatment received by himself and his party.[29]

This could, perhaps, be regarded as evidence of **specific marginalisation**. There is, however, much that speaks against such a conclusion. All available evidence suggests that New Democracy thrived on a position as outsiders, and were not interested in appearing as too closely connected to the establishment.[30] It is certainly true that some parties, especially the arch rival Liberals, did not wish to touch New Democracy with a barge pole. There is, however, no evidence that the government coalition consciously avoided co-operation with New Democracy, although it was mostly confined to an ad-hoc basis. The one occasion where deals with the Social Democrats were preferred in favour of seeking New Democracy support was the currency crisis in 1992, although this was a relatively unique situation. Nor did the Social Democrats

[27] This happened with the government proposal to introduce '*vårdnadsbidrag*', an allowance for parents with children. The New Democracy representative had opposed the proposal in the parliamentary committee on social affairs. In the chamber, other New Democracy representatives proposed that the bill should be resubmitted to the parliamentary committee. When the bill was finally brought to the chamber, the New Democracy group was split, but a sufficient number of the party's MPs voted with the government for the bill to be passed. *Riksdag utskottsbetänkanden* SoU 1993/94:25; SoU 1993/94:34; *Riksdag* minutes 1993/94:106 (18 May), 2 §; 1993/94:108 (20 May), 4 §.

[28] This happened when the *Riksdag* voted to abolish a reform of the health care system, the so-called 'house doctor reform', in 1994. The reform had been introduced, with support from New Democracy, a year earlier.

[29] An example is Wachtmeister's book from 1992, *Krokodilerna* (the crocodiles). The title refers to mainstream politicians who, according to Wachtmeister, have big mouths but no ears.

seem to have any qualms about siding with New Democracy, if they could hurt the government that way. There is definitely no evidence of attempts of more severe marginalisation. No attempts were made by the other parties to restrict New Democracy's chances of re-election by amending the electoral laws; nor the rules for receiving the state subsidies, that Swedish parties with parliamentary representation, or at least 2.5 per cent of the votes in a parliamentary election, are entitled to.

General marginalisation was never a likely strategy against New Democracy. It could have involved restrictions against expressing support for the party, carrying its symbols, etc. There is no evidence of such measures taken against New Democracy. General marginalisation will be returned to in the next section, however, in connection with the discussion on the response to neo-nazism.

There is, perhaps, more to suggest that the democratic response to New Democracy included elements of **general accommodation** of the party's views on immigration. New Democracy openly and strongly criticised the alleged generous refugee and immigration policies. The anti-immigration rhetoric was by far the most outspoken ever expressed by a Swedish parliamentary party. New Democracy argued that political refugees should be given loans instead of allowances, that immigrants should be expelled in cases of repeated crime and that immigrant children should not be entitled to education in their 'home language'. The party also argued that the definition of a political refugee should be made stricter.[31] In a private member's motion to the *Riksdag*, New Democracy MP John Bouvin linked the increasing unemployment to immigration, and proposed that immigration should be reduced to a minimum for 'one or more years'.[32]

New Democracy's proposals to change the Swedish refugee and immigration policies received no direct support from the established parties. Indeed, the party was heavily criticised, and sometimes even accused of racism. However, it seemed as if New Democracy had struck a chord with the Swedish public. New Democracy's time in parliament coincided with a period of high pressure on Sweden's capacity to accept refugees, mainly due to the war in the former Yugoslavia. In 1992, 84,000 persons

[30] This was certainly the official version given by Wachtmeister (1992:139).
[31] See, e.g. *Riksdag* motion 1991/92:Sf630, signed by Ian Wachtmeister and three other New Democracy MPs.

applied for political asylum in Sweden, the highest figure so far recorded in a single year. It also coincided with a peak in anti-immigration attitudes among the Swedish public.[33] The party made successful summer tours with public meetings around the country in 1992 and 1993, where criticism against the existing refugee and immigration policies was a key feature. In August 1992, Ian Wachtmeister asked an audience in Göteborg: "What should we do about the Somalians? Bring them here?", which was received with widespread amusement.[34] New Democracy did well in opinion polls, with figures of over 10 per cent in mid 1992. Despite a decline in support in 1993, the party looked well capable of holding on to its parliamentary status until Wachtmeister announced in February 1994 that he was resigning from the party leadership. From then on its support collapsed.

The high number of asylum seekers in the early 1990s came despite the fact that the Swedish asylum policy had been tightened in late 1989, when the Social Democratic government decided on a stricter definition of refugees, which basically was in accordance with the UN Convention on Refugees. Asylum seekers would no longer be accepted on humanitarian or 'refugee-like' grounds.[35] In June 1993, the non-socialist government decided to grant asylum to all pending applications from Bosnia-Herzegovina, unless there were strong reasons against it. At the same time, however, visa restrictions were imposed on Bosnian citizens, which significantly reduced the number of new applications from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Despite this, an all time high number of 79,000 asylums were granted in 1994, although the numbers went down significantly from 1995 onwards.[36] After the 1994 election, a one-party Social Democratic government took office. The minister responsible for immigration between 1994 and 1996, Mr. Leif Blomberg, was criticised for being a hardliner. In December 1996, parliament approved a government proposal, which included the removal of certain ground for asylum, including refusal to serve in military forces. The concept of '*de facto* refugees' was also abolished. This was criticised as a tightening of the Swedish asylum policy, especially by the Left, Green and Liberal

[32] *Riksdag* motion 1991/92:Sf630. The motion was also signed by three other New Democracy MPs.
[33] Demker 2000.
[34] Direct observation by the author.
[35] The decision was taken by the government, and not subject to a vote in parliament. It was, however, debated when the minister for immigration, Maj Lis Lööw, informed the *Riksdag* about the decision. *Riksdag* minutes 1989/90:46 (14 December), 9 §. See also Pred 2000:49f.
[36] http://www.immi.se/asyl/198097.htm

parties.[37] MPs from these parties even argued that the government was introducing policies, which resembled those previously proposed by New Democracy.[38]

If such criticism is true, then it could be taken as evidence of **general accommodation**. As has been shown above, significant parts of the Swedish public seemed to agree with New Democracy's criticism of the existing refugee and immigration policies. The peak of New Democracy support in 1991-1992 coincided with a peak in anti-immigration sentiments among the public.[39] Thus, it might be possible to argue that the decision to impose visa restrictions on Bosnian citizens in 1993, and the changes in asylum policy in 1996, were designed to accommodate public discontent with the influx of refugees, and take away the potential for support for New Democracy. By 1996, of course, New Democracy was a completely spent force politically, but it could then be argued that the policies were decided to prevent renewed support for the party, or the growth of other parties with a similar agenda. Ian Wachtmeister did launch another party for the 1998 election, called 'The New Party', but it received less than 1 per cent of the vote.

Against this, it could of course be argued that the main reasons for the changes in government policy had very little to do with New Democracy, or the threat of any possible successor parties emerging. The official line of both the non-socialist government between 1991 and 1994, and the Social Democratic government after 1994, was that Sweden had already accepted a large number of political refugees, and that the country could not handle a continued intake of the same scale. Nor can it be conclusively proven that the policies were primarily designed to accommodate anti-immigration attitudes among the public. Any evidence would have to be circumstantial. It is true that the refugee policy was tightened after a period when anti-immigration attitudes were at a peak, and after a time when New Democracy threatened to grow in strength. It is also possible to attribute statements to government representatives that support such a conclusion, such as that the previous, more

[37] See *Riksdag* private members motions 1996/97:SF13, 199697:SF18 and 1996/97:SF19.
[38] *Riksdag minutes*, 1996/97:39 (5 December), statements by Hanna Zetterberg and Bengt Hurtig (Left), Ragnhild Pohanka (Green) and Lennart Rohdin (Liberal). See also *Riksdag* private members motion 1997/98:SF14 (Liberal).
[39] This is based on a comparison between New Democracy's ratings in SIFO opinion polls (taken from Oscarsson 1998:328) and Demker's research on attitudes to immigrants and immigration (Demker 2000).

generous, refugee policies lacked 'popular anchoring'.[40] However, while it might be possible to trace elements of general accommodation in the response to New Democracy, this would be highly tenuous. Rather, the response during the 1991-1994 parliamentary period had similarities with the response during the 1991 election campaign; in other words a non-response. Downs' words: 'Ignore it and it will go away',[41] may be a slight exaggeration; the majority situation made impossible to completely ignore New Democracy. But the other parliamentary parties tried to keep New Democracy at arm's length, and kept any co-operation to an ad-hoc basis.

3. The extra-parliamentary challenge: neo-nazism and militant racism

Nazism does not have a particularly strong tradition in Sweden. A number of extreme right groups and parties did exist during the inter-war period. At times, they were quite noisy, but their political impact should not be overstated. Electorally, they were minuscule. The most notable electoral achievement was probably in 1934, when the National Socialist Workers Party got two seats on Göteborg city council. Such successes were isolated and temporary, however. Potential fifth-column groups existed during the war, but it seems as if the German regime never had much trust in the potential Swedish 'Quislings'. Although Sweden had escaped occupation, nazism was as discredited among Swedes as anywhere in Europe at the end of the war. The nazi and fascist groups that survived were completely insignificant.

By the turn of the millennium, however, neo-nazism had become a major blemish on Sweden's reputation. As discussed in the introduction above, racist crime and neo-nazism have reached levels which are among the highest in Europe. The strength and activity of neo-nazi groups began to grow around 1990, and for the past decade, they have become established as a permanent phenomenon in the Swedish society. The development has been subject to much political debate since the early 1990s. In parliament, the discussion has focused on different ways to stop the growth and activity of nazi and racist organisations, as combating racist violence, racist attitudes and discrimination.

[40] Pred 2000:52.

Laws dealing with racism and extremism have existed for many years. A law against political uniforms was first introduced in 1933.[42] Since 1948, there has been a law against the persecution of popular groups (*'hets mot folkgrupp'*). The law was changed in 1970, 1982 and 1988, and refers to verbal threats, and expressions of contempt, in a disseminated statement, against popular groups or groups of persons, with reference to skin colour, national or ethnic origin, or faith.[43] This provision is also included in constitutional Freedom of the Press Act of 1949, which regulates printed matter,[44] and the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression of 1991, which regulates broadcasts, film and video.[45] In addition, the constitutional Instrument of Government of 1974 makes it possible to enact laws that restrict freedom of association "in respect of organisations whose activities are of a military nature or the like, or which involve the persecution of a population group or a particular race, skin colour or ethnic origin".[46] So far, however, the possibility for such legislation has not been used.

During the latter half of the 1990s, the increased activity of neo-nazi groups meant that the existing legislation was subjected to unprecedented tests. In separate court verdicts in 1996 and 1997, it was ruled that the law against political uniforms cannot be applied, as it 'manifestly' (i.e. obviously) conflicts with the Instrument of Government's protection of freedom of expression. The court cases in question involved individuals who had publicly worn armbands with Swastikas. The law against political uniforms still exists, but is to all intents and purposes impractical.[47] In another verdict, however, the Swedish Supreme Court ruled in 1996 that public display of emblems or symbols, or the wearing of clothes, connected with extreme right ideologies or racial hatred, is to be regarded as a case of persecution of popular groups (*'hets mot folkgrupp'*; see above). Other court verdicts have established that the Roman/nazi salute and 'Sieg Heil' shouts should be treated in the same way. These

---

[41] Downs 2001:26.
[42] Berg 1995; SOU 2000:88, pp. 190. The current law against political uniforms is from 1947; however, see further below.
[43] SOU 2000:88, pp. 187ff.
[44] Freedom of the Press Act, chapter 7, article 4, section 11. The wording has been changed on a number of occasions. The current wording is that "persecution of a popular group, whereby a person threatens or expresses contempt for a population group or other such group with allusion to its race, skin colour national or ethnic origin, or religious faith" shall be regarded as an offence against the freedom of the press, if the statement is punishable under law.
[45] Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression, chapter 5 article 1.
[46] Instrument of Government, Chapter 2, article 14; SOU 2000:88, pp. 186f.
[47] SOU 2000:88, pp. 198f.

changes have given the police increased powers to deal with neo-nazi gatherings. Several arrests, some of which have led to prison sentences, have been made for offences against the law against persecution of popular groups.[48]

Thus, some of the most important changes in the way in which Swedish authorities deal with militant extreme right groups have been initiated at the judicial level. These changes have not involved the amendment of laws, or the introduction of new laws. Instead, they are cases of adjustments of the application of existing laws. It could be argued that the changes in question amount to increased precision of existing **specific marginalisation**.

This is not to say that the rise of neo-nazi groups has been ignored by the main political parties. The 1988 decision in parliament to amend of the law against persecution of popular groups was explicitly designed to constrain extreme right activity. The change meant that any dissemination of racist statements was made illegal; earlier only statements made in public had been illegal.[49] In 1994, parliament decided that more severe penalties should be considered if the motive of the crime was to infringe on a person, or group of persons due to their ethnic origin or faith. Again, this was explicitly designed to constrain the activities of extreme right groups.[50] However, proposals to ban extreme right groups have so far been rejected by the *Riksdag* majority. Such proposals have recently been made in private members motions by the Green and Christian Democratic parties. Earlier, similar proposals had also been made by the Left Party -- and New Democracy.[51]

The problems with neo-nazi groups have to a great extent been experienced at local government level. In a report published in 1999, Anna-Maria Blomgren has studied the local response to the neo-nazi activity in the 'Trestad' area, which includes the cities of Trollhättan, Vänersborg and Uddevalla; all in western Sweden. Of the three studied cities, Trollhättan has experienced the most serious problems. After some incidents in 1992, troubles flared up the following year with several riots involving

[48] SOU 2000:88, pp. 191-197.
[49] *Riksdag utskottsbetänkanden* KU 1987/88:36; *Riksdagens Årsbok* 1987/88, p. 208.
[50] *Riksdag utskottsbetänkanden* JuU 1993/94:13.
[51] E.g. *Riksdag* private members motion 2000/2001:K264 (Christian Democrats); 1996/97:K414 (Green Party); 1990/91:K247 (Left Party); 1992/93:Ju620 (New Democracy).

racists and immigrants. The incident that received the most attention was when a mosque was burnt down by nazis. There were also incidents of serious violence directly aimed at individuals. Blomgren argues that a racist underground culture has existed in Trollhättan since the early 1990s. During the decade, neo-nazi groups such as VAM ('White Aryan Resistance'), and NSF (National Socialist League) were represented in the city. There have also been links to the militant magazine Storm, and a number of 'White Power' rock bands have existed in Trollhättan. It could also be noted that the extreme right has also made an impact on the party political level. The Sweden Democrats (see the introduction above) gained two seats on Trollhättan city council in the 1998 election. The Sweden Democrats have no open links to nazi groups, but according to Blomgren, it appears as if informal such links have existed in Trollhättan.[52]

Blomgren's study shows that the initial reaction by local politicians in Trollhättan was to treat the incidents as youth problems, and to deny the possibility of links to the nazi ideology. Also after the burning of the mosque, the problems were considered to be at worst expressions of xenophobia, and the youths involved were thought to be 'mere' hooligans not afflicted by nazism. The response included symbolic gestures and manifestations, such as a 'night walk' against violence, where circa 300 people walked around the city. A book with information and arguments against prejudice was distributed to every household, and a local action plan against racist and xenophobic violence was planned.[53] After an initial flurry of activity, the issue left the political agenda, and became the concern of the police, social authorities and local youth centres. Gradually, as awareness grew that the problems had clear links to nazism, the response became more decisive. However, most of the relevant decisions were taken at the administrative rather than political level. These included bans on the wearing of nazi and racist symbols in schools, youth centres and other council owned properties (this was before it was established that nazi symbols were illegal; see above).

Council officials also tried to restrict the possibilities for extreme right organisations to hold public meetings in council owned properties. According to Swedish law, it is not possible to refuse someone to use council properties to hold public meetings

[52] Blomgren 1999:31-56; especially pp. 52ff.

merely on the grounds of a political ideology. It is, however, possible to make such a refusal if the organiser has given incorrect information about the purpose of the meeting, or if there is considered to be a risk for disorder.[54] Other ways of dealing with the problem have included the involvement of police, youth centres and schools in projects to reduce tensions between ethnic groups, provide alternative activities for youths who may be in danger of being recruited to extreme right groups, and to create an ideological climate that restricts the growth potential for racist and extreme right ideologies. The success of such projects has varied, and much research remains to be done on the response to nazi groups at the local level. A key finding in Blomgren's study is that the response in her studied cities suffered from a lack of communication between different levels, such as the police, local politicians, schools and youth centres. Once these communications had been improved, the response against the nazi groups became more effective.[55]

To summarise the discussion in this section, the democratic response to neo-nazi and militant racist organisations has mainly included elements of **marginalisation**. Several decisions on the national political level have been designed to restrict the activities of nazi and racist groups. The extension of the law against persecution of popular groups, the inclusion of such a provision in the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression and the decision to subject offences with a racist motive to more severe penalties can all be interpreted in this way. All these decisions were explicitly designed to provide difficult for racist organisations; in other words **specific marginalisation**. At the same time, it should be noted that they also make it more difficulties for the general public to express support for such organisations, or their ideas. Hence, they could also be regarded as including elements of **general marginalisation**.

At the same time, it should be noted that the arguably most important recent changes in the policy against nazi organisations have not been caused by political decisions. Instead, it was a verdict by the Supreme Court that widened the applicability of the law against persecution of popular groups to include nazi symbols. It was,

[53] Blomgren 1999:85-89. The action plan was by all accounts never completed.
[54] Blomgren 1999:100ff.
[55] Blomgren 1999:104ff; 131-134.

furthermore, lower court decisions that widened the applicability of the law even further, to also include nazi salutes and shouts. It is also worth remembering that the most severe form of specific marginalisation, an outright ban on nazi and/or racist organisations, has so far been rejected by the parliamentary majority.

Blomgren's case studies of the local response are of particular interest. For one thing, it appears as if the most decisive decisions have been taken at the administrative rather than at the political level. It was just argued that a significant part of the response on the national level came from the judiciary rather than parliament. Thus, it seems as if the national and local responses had it in common that elected politicians did not provide the most decisive response. Elements of general accommodation in the local response are difficult to detect. Attempts to provide free time alternatives for youths who might be in danger of being recruited to extreme right groups could possibly be interpreted this way. That would, however, be a very tenuous interpretation, and it was not a case of accommodating views or grievances that had extreme right links. Rather, it could be seen as addressing other sources of discontent and frustration, such as the lack of meaningful free time activities. Elements of specific accommodation of nazi and racist organisations appear to have been completely absent; both nationally and locally. The democratic response to the growth of such groups has been dominated by marginalisation.

4. Conclusion: a diversified response

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests significant differences in the democratic response to the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary extreme right challenge, respectively. Beginning with the parliamentary challenge, the response is difficult to characterise. To completely ignore New Democracy would hardly have been possible, given the difficult majority situation in the *Riksdag*. The government needed New Democracy's support, or at least make sure that they did not support the opposition proposals. This became especially important when the level of conflict between the government and opposition increased after the unsuccessful attempt to rescue the Swedish currency. Thus, New Democracy was not systematically neglected. Wachtmeister, Karlsson et co. may have been considered as 'Pariahs' by their political opponents, but they were not repulsive enough to break up traditional left-right bloc politics. To completely marginalise New Democracy would have

necessitated long-term cross-bloc agreements, and such were never seriously considered after the currency fiasco in 1992. On the other hand, it has been suggested that the response to New Democracy at least to some extent included attempts to accommodate popular discontent with immigration, which was a contributory factor behind New Democracy's initial success. If the argument is accepted, that the Swedish refugee policy since the mid 1990s has included the introduction of some of the demands from New Democracy, which were condemned at the time, then there may be some credibility to such an allegation. It is, however, not supported by strong evidence.

If the response to New Democracy is difficult to characterise, the response to nazi and racist organisations seems to be more straightforward. The evidence presented in this chapter strongly suggests that it has been dominated by marginalisation; primarily specific but also general. Most of the measures taken have been designed to make life difficult for nazis and racists. Thus, the overall response to the extreme right in Sweden has been diversified. The parliamentary and extra-parliamentary challenges have been met with different responses. The chosen responses can be regarded as adjusted to the perceived seriousness of the respective challenge. New Democracy was regarded with contempt by the political establishment. It was certainly not given the same acceptance as the Christian Democratic Party, which also entered parliament for the first time in 1991, and went straight into the non-socialist government coalition. The other parties did not treat New Democracy as an equal in the party system; that you compete with for votes but whose existence you accept. Rather, it was treated as an unwelcome guest. Still, New Democracy was not considered a threat to democracy. The other parties certainly hoped that the intruder would disappear as soon as possible, but no direct measures were taken to make this happen.

Prima facie, this strategy of tolerance without acceptance appears to have been successful, in that New Democracy disappeared after a single parliamentary term (in late 2000 it still existed on paper, but has been politically and electorally insignificant since 1994). It has even been argued that the New Democracy interlude has made Sweden immune to populist right parties.[56] That, however, is a highly debatable

[56] *Arbetet Ny Tid*, 17 September 2000.

assertion. The fall of New Democracy was primarily caused by internal factors, exacerbated by party leader Ian Wachtmeister's decision to step down half a year before the 1994 election. Thus, there is not much to suggest that the response by the other political parties played a significant role in the demise of New Democracy. Indeed, it is difficult to see why Swedish voters could not be open to new challenges from the same corner, possibly from a party presenting an ideological package based on welfare chauvinism and Euro-scepticism, instead of the market liberal and strongly pro-EU policies pursued by Wachtmeister. It has also been suggested that recent changes in the Moderate Party, towards more liberal asylum policies, may pave the way for a new anti-immigration party.

The extra-parliamentary extreme right challenge has of course never disappeared, even though the strength and activity of neo-nazi and militant racist organisations has fluctuated. There is little doubt that the response to these groups has been more decisive and concrete than the response to New Democracy. This could of course be seen as appropriate, considering the relative seriousness of the respective challenges. Still, there is general agreement that the counter-measures taken so far have not been enough, and that neo-nazism and militant racism continue to be a threat. The issue of extreme right activity is subject to much debate. In the winter of 2001, the government presented to parliament a national action plan against racism, xenophobia, homophobia and discrimination.[57] The document includes a report on actions so far taken against these problems, as well as a number of new initiatives. Despite the disappearance of New Democracy, the Extreme Right in Sweden will continue to be a challenge.

[57] *Riksdag* documents; *regeringens skrivelse* 2001:59.

Bibliography

Arter, D. (1992): "Black faces in the blond crowd: Populist racialism in Scandinavia". **Parliamentary Affairs** 45:3, pp. 357-372.

Berg, L. (1995): **Lagen om förbud mot politiska uniformer**. Undergraduate dissertation, Department of Political Science, Göteborg University.

Blomgren, A.-M. (1999): **Vad gör samhället? Offentlig politik mot rasistiskt och främlingsfientligt våld i Vänersborg, Trollhättan och Uddevalla.** Stockholm: CEIFO (Centre for Research in International Migration and Ethnic Relations) skriftserie no. 80.

Capoccia, G. (2001): "Defending democracy: Reactions to political extremism in inter-war Europe." **European Journal of Political Research**, Volume 39, Issue 4, June 2001, pp. 431-460.

Demker, M. (2000): "Attityder till flyktingar: unga flickor och unga pojkar på var sin sida", in Holmberg, S. and Weibull, L. eds., **Det nya samhället** (SOM report no. 24), pp. 59-68. Göteborg: The SOM Institute, Göteborg University.

Downs, W. M. (2001): 'Pariahs in their Midst: Belgian and Norwegian Parties React to Extremist Threats'. **West European Politics** 24(3), pp. 23-42.

Elmbrant, B. (1993): **Så föll den svenska modellen.** Stockholm: T. Fischer.

Finn, J. (2000): 'Electorial Regimes and the Proscription of Anti-Democratic Parties.' **Democracy and Violence** 3-4(12), pp. 51-77.

Johansson, A. (1973): **Finlands sak. Svensk politik och opinion under vinterkriget 1939-1940.** Stockholm: Allmänna förlaget.

Karvonen, L. (1997): "The New Extreme Right-Wingers in Western Europe: Attitudes, World Views and Social Characteristics" in Merkl, P.H. and Weinberg, L., eds., **The Revival of Right-Wing Extremism in the Nineties,** pp. 91-110. London: Frank Cass.

Kitschelt, H., with A. McCann (1995): **The Radical Right in Western Europe. A Comparative Analysis.** Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Larsson, S and Lodenius, A.-L. (1991): **Extremhögern.** Stockholm: Tiden.

More, G. (1994): "Undercover Surveillance of the Republikaner Party: Protecting a Militant Democracy or Discrediting a Political Rival?". **German Politics**, 3:2, pp. 284-292.

Mudde, C. (2000): **The Ideology of the Extreme Right**. Manchester: Manchester UP.

Pred, A. (2000): **Even in Sweden. Racisms, Racialized Spaces, and the Popular Geographical Imagination.** Los Angeles: University of California Press.

SOU 2000:88: **Organiserad brottslighet, hets mot folkgrupp, hets mot homosexuella, m.m. - straffansvarets räckvidd. Betänkande från Kommittén om straffansvar för organiserad brottslighet m.m.** Stockholm: Fritzes (Statens Offentliga Utredningar).

Taggart, P.A. (1996): **The Populism and the New Politics: New Protest Parties in Sweden in a Comparative perspective.** Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Teorell, J. (1998): **Demokrati eller fåtalsvälde? Om beslutsfattande i partiorganisationer**. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.

Wachtmeister, I. (1992): **Krokodilerna**. Stockholm(?): AB IW Ventures.

Westin, C. (1987): **Den toleranta opinionen.** Stockholm: DEIFO (Delegationen för invandrarforskning).

Widfeldt, A. (2000): "Scandinavia: Mixed success for the populist right". **Parliamentary Affairs** 53:3, pp. 486-500.

Wilkinson, P. (1983): **The New Fascists.** London: Pan Books.