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Social democracy, social movements and waves of radicalisation

Bakgrund/Frågeställning

International research usually assigns to Nordic Social Democracy a number of special features as a strong organizational structure and the ambition, and the ability, to build strong welfare states.

In attempts to explain this Nordic model, great emphasis has been put on features linked to the parties' internal conditions: The power of the party's ideology and the importance of thinkers such as Wigforss (Tilton; in terms of economic policy, Lewin), the transformative potential of the party's social policy (EspingAndersen) or the power resources the party and trade union movement could release (Korpi). These explanations are sometimes close to the self-image produced within the movement (Linderborg). With regard to the weakening of reformist ambitions in recent decades, it has similarly been pointed out how neoliberal ideas were conveyed by the "chancellery right" or Blair's "third way" (Andersson, Mudge).

Alternatively, economic, political, and social structural conditions have been highlighted: industrialization, economic growth (Schön), class structures (Åmark, Therborn), or geopolitical relations (Meinander).

A shortcoming in these explanations is that the party relations with - and dependence on - other actors tend to disappear.

My thesis is that the important social and political reforms implemented in Sweden since the turn of the last century, and whose success has often been credited to Social Democracy, have taken place under pressure from extensive social mobilizations that included much wider groups than those associated with the party.

To give some examples:

The suffrage reforms around 1920, where mass movements outside the party's control drove the Social Democrats in front of them.

The initial establishment of folkhem politics in the 1930s took place under the pressure of an extensive wave of strikes and a sharp expansion of old and new popular movements where social democracy was only a part.

The culmination of the welfare state in the 1960s and 70s, where the new social movements, with the women's movement as the main example, and a wave of strikes, fought by the Social Democrats, played a decisive role in changing the political agenda.

The examples given relate to theories of waves of radicalization as a central explanation for the potential to implement significant political and social reforms (Östberg) The structural explanations usually given will in this paper be complemented with discussions on the importance of this kind of changes in political conjunctures.

Metod och Resultat

Konklusion