

Erik Moberg ©:

## **THE SWEDISH GOVERNMENT FORMATION LENDS SUPPORT TO MY THEORY**

On January 18th Sweden at last, 131 days after the general election, got a new government (or rather a new prime minister, the *Social democrat* Stefan Löfven, entitled to, and able to, form a new government). When commenting on this I will at first recall the distinction between positive and negative parliamentarism. In my book I wrote (page 340) that:

“If it is required that the legislative majority explicitly expresses its confidence one usually talks about positive parliamentarism. If, on the contrary, it is enough that no majority has expressed any dissatisfaction one talks about negative parliamentarism.”

Now, and in this sense, the Swedish parliamentarism is negative. And therefore, in spite of the fact that more members of the parliament voted against the prime minister than in favor of him, he got the necessary support. To be more specific 115 members voted in favor of the prime minister and 153 against him while 77 abstained and four were absent. Thus 115 plus 77, that is 192 or a majority, accepted the government, and so it was elected.

A parliamentary system with proportional elections furthermore gives parties willing to change side great possibilities to use the coalition negotiations for favoring themselves. Thus in my book I wrote (page 352):

“Let us for instance assume that there are two coalitions about to be formed—we may call them the left- and the right- coalition respectively—and that neither of them, so far, has succeeded in reaching a majority. Let us also assume that there is a small interest oriented party which, by its cooperation, could turn either one of the two coalitions into a majority coalition. Such a party is then able to negotiate with both constellations—each in turn, forth and back—and withhold its final choice until it draws the conclusion that there are no more concessions to its interests to be achieved in the governmental program that will result.”

A mechanism similar to this one was of great importance for the final election of the prime minister on January 18th. Two parties, *the Liberals* and *the Center party*, basically bourgeois parties, negotiated with both sides, or rather, at the end of the process, kept open the two possibilities of either voting against the prime minister or abstaining from voting. And by keeping this choice

open they finally got a very favorable agreement with *the Social democrats* and hence settled for abstaining. Most important in that agreement was some measures liberalizing, to some extent, the labor market as well as the dwelling market. These measures were clearly contrary to Social democratic ideology, but still, and finally, the Social democrats accepted them.

Having reached this result the Liberals with 20 members and the Center party with 30 members thus abstained from voting against Stefan Löfven and thus contributed to his appointment. The rest of those abstaining, 27 members, came from *the Communist party*, but their reason for abstaining was of a completely different character. They did not take part in any negotiations.

This final result of the negotiations thus, and to a large extent, lends support to my theory. But only to a large extent, not completely. The reason is that the deal was about ideology rather than about interests. And that fact also seems to be part of the reason why it took such a long time to reach the agreement. According to my theory it is much easier to compromise about interests than about ideology. The other part of the reason for the long delay was the existence of the so called *Alliance*, a since long existing cooperative agreement between four bourgeois parties, among them the Liberals and the Center party. The final deal with the Social democrats required the breakup of this cooperation, a difficult breakup in itself.

But finally, and summarizing, small parties in the middle which feel free to join either a right-wing constellation or a left-wing one, can use that freedom for achieving substantial realizations of their own policies. And, as we have now seen, the freedom to vote, in other respects, in various ways can be used in the same way. These possibilities, for parties in the middle, is an important characteristic of a parliamentary system with proportional elections. And, in the process leading to the formation of the Swedish government on January 18<sup>th</sup>, this possibility, in one of its forms, was used by the Center party and Liberals for realizing important parts of their own policies.