

Jens Gmeiner: From the “old” to the “new” moderates. Conditions for success and change processes of the Swedish Conservatives from 2002 to 2010, Books on Demand (BoD) 2020

Submitted as: Conditions for success for the Swedish Conservatives. Structures, actors and processes of change of the Moderate Party from 2002 to 2010

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SUMMARY:

In comparative political science, Sweden is regarded as an ideal-typical example of a universal welfare state and as a social democratic stronghold in Europe. Between 1932 and 2006, the social democrats did not hold office as a governing party for only nine years. Bourgeois and conservative parties have been marginalized by this dominance of social democracy in the political and scientific debate. However, since the 1990s at the latest, structural erosion processes of “social democratic” Sweden have become apparent, which also manifested themselves in party politics with the longest period of bourgeois government from 2006 to 2014 under the liberal-conservative Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt.

Under the leadership of Fredrik Reinfeldt, the liberal-conservative Moderate Party, the strongest party in the bourgeois spectrum since 1979, has been de-ideologizing itself programmatically, representational and in its address to voters since 2003. Starting in 2005, the moderates called themselves “new moderates” and integrated original Swedish symbols and central concepts of welfare culture. In addition, with the label “Sweden’s New Labour Party”, the party aggressively challenged Swedish social democracy with its employment policy. The “new moderates” were able to take over the government in the 2006 election and four years later, in the 2010 election, they were almost on a par with the once dominant social democrats with 30 percent.

On the one hand, the thesis examines party change and conditions for success of the Moderate Party in selected political and thematic areas during the opposition phase (2002 to 2006) and in the government from 2006 to 2010. The thesis asks about the central change actors in the party and about resistance and legitimation processes within the party organization. The work also asks after key terms and programmatic changes of the Moderate Party as well as after the address to the voters. For the evaluation and classification of the “new moderates”, a historical and developmental analysis of the party is assigned a central role.

On the other hand, learning processes on earlier bourgeois government formations as well as the compromise finding and milestones of the “Alliance for Sweden” are analyzed and historically contextualized. In the run-up to the 2006 election, all four bourgeois parties (Moderate Party, Liberals, Center Party, Christian Democrats) had committed themselves for the first time in their history to a common election platform called “Alliance for Sweden”. In addition, the thesis also sheds light on alliance politics in the center-left spectrum as well as party competition and goes into more detail on structural changes in the welfare state and the social change in Swedish society.

The focus of the thesis is also the investigation of the respective elections in 2006 and 2010. Based on the empirical election data, it could be shown that the Moderate Party penetrated into the core social democratic milieus, but at the same time was able to win over former liberal and Christian Democratic voters as well as non-voters. In socioeconomic terms, however, the “new moderates” did not constitute a “workers party” in the composition of their electorate but continued to be a party of higher employees and entrepreneurs, which speaks more for continuity than change.

The subject of the work is party research and political cultural research. The study is empirically based on own expert interviews, national Swedish press coverage, secondary literature, data on post-election surveys, programmatic documents and biographies.