**Social Democracy in Crisis? The Far Right in government in Norway.**

Since September 2013 and for the first time in history the far right Progress Party is in government in Norway in a coalition with the Conservative party; *Høyre*. Reactions from abroad were strong as the Progress Party is associated with Anders Behring Breivik who killed 77 people in an extreme right wing attack aimed at young Labour party members on the 22nd of July in 2011.

The success of the far right in Norway must be linked to economic and political liberalisation by the Labour Party in line with the EU, the European Central Bank and the IMF. The Norwegian red/green coalition under the leadership of the Labour Prime minister Jens Stoltenberg 2005-2013 fully endorsed this development during their time in office. In the same period we have seen an increase in extreme right wing violence, as observed elsewhere in Europe and by far the worst Norway’s tragedy of 2011. Mainstream political parties as well as the Progress Party must take some of the blame for a normalisation of views expressed by Anders Behring Breivik. There is much support for Breivik’s views and racist attitudes in the general public which manifests itself especially in the social media; Facebook, tweets, blogs and in newspaper comments online as in this comment in an online paper: ‘A nigger is a nigger no matter how many generations their family have stayed in the country. A cat born in a stable can’t become a horse’ (Lunøye 2014).

Immediately after the attacks in Norway, the acts were condemned by all political parties, trade unions, grass-roots and special-interest organizations. The attacks were seen as terrorist attacks and as attacks on Norwegian values, openness, and democracy. The prime minister Jens Stoltenberg refused to blame any political party, but several other Labour politicians and journalists pointed the finger at the Progress Party, as the party that had been the strongest critic of multiculturalism and had used stronger rhetorical techniques in the immigration debate than any other political party. Including the term; ‘sneak Islamisation’ which the leader Siv Jensen later said she regretted having used. A broad consensus to address and change the language used in the immigration debate was agreed upon after the Breivik massacre and the PM promised more openness and more democracy. Progress Party politicians were the first to admit their use of language had to change (Wiggen 2012 p. 587).

There has been an increase in normative violence that has led to physical attacks on immigrants, especially Roma visitors and Muslims. This trend is not new and is not isolated to Norway; hate crimes and attacks on Muslims escalated on a global scale after 9/11 (Peek 2011).

The terror attacks of 2011 must be seen in connection to the more general shift towards xenophobia, normative and cultural violence. The Norwegian elections in September 2013 are very important historically because they represent a shift in legitimisation of the Progress Party that until then had been deemed to be too extreme for mainstream parties to collaborate with. The election result where the Conservatives won 26,8% and the far right Progress Party won 16,3% that led to a change in government came as a surprise to the left, to Labour and to international observers. Norway’s Scandinavian neighbours were incredulous as from their position the government coalition had been very successful, particularly in terms of saving Norway from the 2008 economic crisis that was avoided as the government plugged budget deficits by using billions of kroner from the sovereign wealth fund that now has a $884 billion portfolio. The Norwegian election results attracted a lot of international interest with headlines like ‘Norway election results: Anti-immigrant party with links to mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik set to enter government under Conservative leader Erna Solberg’ (Paterson 2013).

Most of the international interest focused on the Progress Party which academics who study the far right put in the extreme right party family, with the Front National in France and the Freedom Party of Austria. It has to be said that the Progress Party is very different from these parties. It has no historic links to fascism or extreme right wing violence. It grew out of an anti- taxation movement in the early 1970s and is a libertarian party with strong anti- immigration policies as most other Norwegian political parties. In the four years leading up to the elections of 2013 the Progress Party lost 8% of its electoral support. A reason the party lost support might be explained by the fact that Labour and the Conservatives competed to take ownership of the immigration issue. Both main parties are anti- immigrant and orientalist in their views on the immigrant population and on integration, similar to the Progress Party. In Norwegian society immigrants are often mistrusted and excluded from social interaction and local community events. This norm ultimately legitimises physical violence as seen in an increase in attacks on immigrants.

Economic crisis is often reported by journalists and commentators as the main reason for support of far right wing parties and policies. That can explain why many were shocked at the Norwegian election results where levels of unemployment are low (3.3%) and economic stability is a given. Labour party politicians were particularly surprised and it showed they had misjudged the mood in the population who had become increasingly dissatisfied with the politicians in charge. The gap between the grassroots and politicians has increased in Norway as in other European countries, but it is unclear why so many voted for the right; 26,8% for the Conservatives and 16,3% to the far right Progress party, this compares to 22,9 % in the general elections of 2009. The coalition is a minority coalition so the change they can introduce is limited as suggestions can easily be stopped in parliament. When it comes to immigration there seems to be broad consensus still and is highlighted by a ban on begging which will make the lives for the Roma population very difficult. Immigrants and especially the Roma are being dehumanised and many Norwegians have expressed their hatred especially in the social media; ‘a wave of hate rhetoric has reached Norway’ said Claudia Lenz at the research organisation Wergelandssenteret in Oslo (2012).

In general bloggers and social media commentators tend to distance themselves from physical violence and the Breivik massacre, but say they understand why Breivik did it and agree with his ideology the warnings against ‘Eurabia’. Xenophobia and racism is not new in Norway, but despite of government promises to make Norway a more welcoming and open society after the Utøya massacre, Norwegian society seems to be moving in the wrong direction; away from openness and inclusion, but this development started long before the new far right government was in place and was legitimised by 9/11.

There is also an increase and a continuation of cultural violence, terrorism and extremism in Norway. Judith Butler’s view of normative violence is helpful here. She sees this as violence where anger motivates action (Butler 2009). Butler argues that normative violence is the violence of the norm, i.e., it is not physical violence per se. The norm produces violence by not allowing people to be what they desire and normative violence may result in actual physical violence –Butler thus argues that it is normative violence which makes physical violence possible, and simultaneously invisible. The invisible violence that is socially not understood as violence because of its normalization; it is tolerated and normalized because it is perpetrated in response to social transgressions made by people who are being dehumanised as ‘the other’.

To understand continuing racism and exclusion it is also useful to link normative violence to structural violence (Gready, Boesten, Crawford, Wilding 2010). Structural violence is violence without a subject where institutions deprive human beings from power, freedom and human rights (Galtung 1969). Galtung introduced the concept ‘cultural violence’ in 1990 which refers to the types of violence that uses aspects of culture to justify structural or direct violence.

We can link these types of violence to anti -immigration parties and anti- immigration sentiments and see how public call for unequal access to resources like welfare and education depending on immigration status can ultimately legitimize physical violence. The Swedish author and journalist Ola Larsmo argued in 2011 that use of language could have paved the way for the Oslo and Utøya massacre and showed how a negative connotation over time had become linked to ‘Islam’, ‘cultural Marxist’, ‘Feminist’ and ‘Europe’.

Norway is not unique, there is a global increase in- and acceptance of these types of violence where objectifying the *other* is the norm with an increase in attacks on Muslims post 9/11. In Norway this was evident immediately after the Breivik attacks; before the media and the public knew the attacks were not the responsibility of Islamic extremists, several attacks on immigrants took place in Norway the day of the massacre (For examples of how Muslims were chased in Oslo after the July 22 terror attacks see,http://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/22-juli/artikkel.php?artid ¼ 10088913..) This violence was and continues to be gendered as women (especially hijabed Muslims) are experiencing attacks on a regular basis. The Norwegian sociologist Inger Furseth has researched fashion, dress and the use of the hijab among educated, Muslim women in Oslo. The women she has interviewed report harassment and physical violence on the streets of Oslo. They have been spat at and attempts have been made to pull their clothes off. One woman in Furseth’s focus group says she lost her job as a result of choosing to wear a hijab (Furseth 2014).

Anti-immigrant rhetoric and xenophobia has not improved three years after the massacre, on the contrary; attacks on women is on the increase. Racism is often used to combat sexism and the prominent Norwegian right wing journalist and feminist Hege Storhaug argues that the use of the niqab and the burka symbolise the most serious human rights abuses women experience in Norway and calls for the parliament to introduce a ban on the niqab. The media, politicians and public commentators are obsessed with culture and clothing and report negatively on immigration and immigrant culture (Vivekananthan 2009).

Negative and violent development is part of a continuous process that can lead to less openness, less equality and less inclusion. This represents a shift from an era when equality was highly valued and the state intervened to ensure all were included and cared for in the Norwegian welfare state. Poverty is on the increase and the majority of the 10% inhabitants who live below the EU poverty level are immigrants. Whereas in the past poverty was not accepted it is now seen as unavoidable.

Reform of a complicated bureaucracy and reducing public sector spending were high on the agenda for right and far right supporters. Populist rhetoric during by both the Conservatives and the Progress Party during the run up to the elections blamed Labour and the government coalition for lack of initiative on improving anything from poverty to slow development of infrastructure. Increase in inequality has taken place during both Conservative and Labour led coalition governments since the middle of the 1990s. During Jens Stoltenberg’s reign this trend accelerated as Labour actively promoted deregulation and privatisation on a much larger scale than under previous Labour leaders. The Stoltenberg led red/green coalition government that consisted of the Socialist Left,the Centre Party (catch all farmers’ /environmental party) and Labour, introduced Margaret Thatcher’s *new public management* with increased privatisation of public services and conservative politics a lá *New Labour* (Møllersen 2014).

The electorate had over the last decade become increasingly upset and angry at change they felt they had no control over. Anger at what people call ‘the bureaucracy’ and right wing policy development with privatisation and liberalisation of the economy, ironic as it is can be seen as one of the explanations as to why the sitting coalition lost the elections of 2013. The Conservative party leader Erna Solberg had led a very successful election campaign where the single most reported issue was;‘ we need change’. In a focus group interview Progress Party local activists told me that it was the ‘bureaucracy’ that was the biggest problem with Labour and what distinguished the Progress Party from main stream parties in the sense that the party called for ‘freedom’ and especially freedom from rules, regulation and bureaucracy that they saw as obstacles to success for small business initiatives (Interview, Stjørdal Frp 27.01/2014).

Labour rhetoric during the election campaign had become so similar to that of the right that it was very difficult for many to see the difference in ideology and policy. In relation to immigration which is top priority for the far right there was clear consensus among the left and the right around strict immigration control and that integration had failed, despite of the fact that proportionally more immigrants in Norway are in work than in any other European country (OECD 2010). The media, politicians and the public alike continue to report and discuss immigration in a negative light.

In 2011 the Labour Party had launched a new policy strategy paper on integration that both the Conservative and the Progress Party claimed was stolen from their party programmes.

The gist of the new integration strategy was that the Labour Party needed to become stricter in its immigration policies while at the same time stressing the important role immigrants play in the labour market. The tone of the document gives the impression that immigrants are not an integrated part of society and that they are a homogeneous group who come to Norway primarily to reap the benefits of a generous welfare state. The strategy document fails to recognize that immigrants have long played a crucial role in building Norway’s wealth, and it also fails to appeal to immigrants as voters. The Progress Party and the Conservative Party welcomed the strategy and both claimed that the policy recommendations were taken from their own party programmes (Wiggen 2012 p. 594-596).

Considering the convergence of the main opposing parties and how the left by legitimising far right views sent signals to the public that anti- immigrant sentiments were acceptable, legitimised the far right and gave them an advantage in the elections of 2013 because they managed to combine it with promising ‘ change’. Exactly what that change entails was- and still is unclear, the left was shocked and so were especially Swedish and Danish journalists reporting on election night.

The promise of more openness and tolerance after 2011 seems a long way away. The situation could have been very different if politicians in charge had practiced what they spoke. In fact already a couple of weeks before the first anniversary of the terror attacks it was clear that things were ‘back to normal’ in the kingdom of Norway. Norwegians could have had the chance to practice their love and tolerance by welcoming or being more civilised in relating to two hundred Romanian Roma travellers who had been refused entrance to local camp sites and ended up setting up camp in a park in Oslo. Instead of support there was a racist public outcry and media reports about Roma beggars, criminal gangs, and their lack of hygiene. The Roma were accused of widespread mafia led criminal activities but no serious crimes by the Roma were documented. ‘On the other hand violent attacks and police harassment of Roma were reported. As a response the Conservative Party suggested a ban on begging, and even politicians from the small socialist left coalition party declared sympathy for the public’s concern about the presence of the Roma. Many Norwegians’ love, tolerance, and understanding did not stretch to embrace one of Europe’s most persecuted groups, and politicians from all three governing parties were busy showing their support for the Norwegian public who found the Roma presence hard to tolerate’ (Wiggen 2012 p. 588).

In June 2014 the Norwegian parliament (with support of the Centre Party) introduced a new law that gives each county a licence to ban begging. The plan is to extend it nationally in 2015. The ban is seen by many as a direct attack on the Roma who with their presence and begging increasingly irritate people in Norway and is also a constant, uncomfortable reminder of poverty within and outside Norway’s borders.

During the attacks on the Roma in the summer of 2012, coinciding with the anniversary of the Breivik massacre the prime minister said he was upset about the use of racist language, especially in social media, but at the same time reiterated that the Roma have to respect Norwegian law and that no welfare support was to be given to people who were not entitled to it. The PM was pandering to the general public’s welfare chauvinistic attitude, greed and fear of extending Norway’s generous welfare state to ‘undeserving’ outsiders.

Verbal and physical attacks on immigrants have shown that the press and the public are far from tolerant and that government politicians must take the blame for not doing enough to confront populist rhetoric and prejudice in a country where xenophobia is widespread. The Holocaust Centre in Oslo reports: 50% of Norwegians would not like to live next door to Roma, 40% would dislike living next door to Somalis, 25–30% would not like to live next to Muslims, and 10% would have problems living next door to Jews. (http://www.hlsenteret.no/aktuelt/2012/HL\_Rapport\_2012\_web.pdf..).

Main stream parties’ attitude, anti-immigrant rhetoric and immigration policy have combined in Norway to maintain and justify a continuing discrimination against immigrants and foreigners that ultimately legitimises physical violence.

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