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The Sweden Democrats Came In from the Cold: How the Debate about Allowing the SD into Media Arenas Shifted between 2002 and 2010

Simon Oja and Brigitte Mral

This chapter explores some problems experienced by the Swedish media and the political establishment in relation to media exposure of *Sverigedemokraterna* (SD), the Sweden Democrats, a nationalist populist party. Since the SD was founded in 1988 the party has had an upward trajectory in its number of votes in parliamentary elections. They did not even experience a setback in 1991 when another right-wing populist party, *Ny Demokrati* (NyD), the New Democracy, came more or less out of the blue, winning 6.7 per cent of the vote and securing 25 seats in parliament. In 2010 SD reached its long-time goal when they gathered 5.7 per cent of the votes and thereby managed to exceed the threshold of 4 per cent representation for the first time, resulting in 20 seats in the parliament.

The SD has a different background than other right-wing populist parties in Scandinavia. The party did not emerge from criticism of high taxes and bureaucracy. Instead, its historical heritage is racism and neo-Nazism, and the party has links to fascist and Nazi ideology through individuals and personal relationships. These affiliations are especially evident in the party's early years. The SD has moved away from this complex background over the past few years, and in many respects has become a different and 'cleaner' party than when it was first founded. So even if SD has been a right-wing populist party in the past, we believe that the term 'national xenophobic party' is a more accurate description of the current party. Additionally, the SD's Nazi history has also led most politicians and the media to consider it, to a greater or lesser degree, to be a threat to democracy. In this chapter, we will present a brief history of the SD and discuss some arguments *pro et contra* allowing the SD into the media and various debate arenas.¹ We will especially focus on the debate about allowing the SD to buy advertising space in newspapers and on TV.²

¹ The debate concerning access to media and debate arenas is not unique to Sweden. In 2009 there was, for example, a lengthy debate in Great Britain concerning whether the British National Party (BNP) should be allowed to appear on the prime time show *Question Time*. See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8321683.stm> [accessed 17 February 2012].

² This text summarizes some of the results from a larger project in which both themes are studied during the pre-election periods of 2002, 2006 and 2010.

The Sweden Democrats: An overview

The history of the SD is complicated and the origin of the party is subject to different historiographies. The SD's jubilee publication, *20 röster om 20 år: Sverigedemokraterna 1988–2008* (20 voices about 20 years: the Sweden Democrats 1988–2008), states that the party was formed by approximately 20 people in an apartment in Stockholm on 6 February 1988 (page 194). A book by Stieg Larsson and Mikael Ekman, *Sverigedemokraterna: Den nationella rörelsen* (The Sweden Democrats: The National Movement), presents a slightly different picture. According to Larsson and Ekman, only 7 people were present when the SD was formed (2001: 108). The discussion at that meeting about how to name the party (both 'Sweden Democrats' and 'Swedish Fatherland Party' were proposed) is described in the SD's jubilee publication but not the party's historical links. That there are two different versions of the same story is not unusual per se, but this disparity highlights the complicated relationship that the SD have with their history.

The SD was formed from the openly racist organization *Bevara Sverige Svenskt* (BSS), Keep Sweden Swedish, and a central figure behind the formation of both BSS and the SD was Leif Zeilon who had a background in *Demokratisk Allians*, Democratic Alliance, a relatively unsuccessful extreme right-wing organization (Larsson & Ekman 2001: 56, 108). Another central figure was Sven Davidsson who began his political career in the *Nysvenska Rörelsen*, the New Swedish Movement.³ Davidsson was the first chairperson of BSS (ibid.: 62). Ekman and Larsson maintain that BSS had a solid background in what they call the 'national movement' (ibid.: 66). The national movement can be described as a heterogeneous, extreme, right-wing, ideological and political movement centred on the ideas of both a strong national state and opposition to a multicultural society. The BSS was not a traditional party but rather like a campaign organization that lobbied for a more restrictive immigration policy and the repatriation of immigrants who were already in Sweden. In a historical perspective, BSS constitutes a kind of bridge between the nationalistic ideas and opinions of the post-war period's national movement, and the nationalistic populism of the SD today. BSS was supposedly an attempt to think innovatively. The goal was to create an organization without becoming a party. The SD is the result of the same persons' attempts to transform the new strategies into a political party. The party has been significantly shaped by the agenda of the party leaders. This makes the history of the party very much a history about its different leaders.

The first leader of the SD was Anders Klarström, who led the party between 1992 and 1995. Klarström came from a background in the national movement and began his political career in the Nazi party *Nordiska Rikspartiet*, the Nordic National Party, and its *Riksaktionsgrupp*, National Action Group (ibid.: 125). The next leader of the SD was Mikael Jansson, who led the party between 1995 and 2005. Unlike Klarström, Jansson received his political schooling in an established party, *Centerpartiet*, the Centre Party, and was therefore familiar with running an election campaign and with the significance

³ Sweden's only pure ideological fascist party according to Lodenius and Larsson.

of a media image. It was Jansson who began weeding out visible symbols that linked the SD with Nazism (ibid.: 163). The measure that probably attracted most public attention was the ban on uniforms, which was one of Mikael Jansson's first initiatives as party leader. The uniform ban message was repeated in a number of internal bulletins over a period of three years (ibid.: 168–9). Mikael Jansson mentions in his jubilee publication text that the 'ban on uniforms' was an initiative that managed to solve a problem with skinheads who were not welcome at meetings (Jansson 2008: 50). On the other hand, the party chose to retain the torch as party symbol, which strongly resembles the symbol of the Neo-Nazi BNP (Larsson & Ekman 2001: 170).

The third and current leader of the SD is Jimmie Åkesson, who has held the position since spring 2005. Jimmie Åkesson is the first leader who was politically schooled in the SD. Just like Mikael Jansson, the image of the SD is important for Jimmie Åkesson. For a brief period after the SD was formed, the party's symbol was a forget-me-not, but this flower was quickly replaced by the torch (Mattsson 2009: 24). During the spring of 2006, the party executive decided to let members vote on whether the party symbol should be changed; the outcome was to replace the torch with a blue anemone (2008: 204).⁴

Although Jimmie Åkesson was born in 1979, he is a party veteran who joined the SD when he was 15 years old, just when Jansson replaced Klarström as the party leader. Regarding the party's ideology Åkesson sees an unbroken line from when the party was formed until the present day (Lodén 2009: 22). According to Åkesson, the party took a giant step forward in 1999 when its programme was rewritten. This revision eradicated the 'remains of the party's worst years' (Åkesson 2008: 10). Demands for reinstatement of capital punishment and nationalization of the banking and insurance sectors were abandoned. The party's immigration policy agenda became 'more aligned with reality' which, according to Åkesson, probably was the most significant change. In the same year, 1999, three of the perhaps most notoriously violent crimes connected to the Swedish ultra-right movement took place. An organized syndicalist⁵ was murdered by three activists with connections to *Nationell Ungdom* (NU), National Youth. Additionally, two policemen were murdered in Malmö by bank robbers with connections to Nazi movements including the *Nationalsocialistisk Front* (NSF), National Socialist Front. Two journalists in Nacka were also the targets of a car bomb attack (Larsson & Ekman 2001: 172). In a joint article on 30 November 1999, Sweden's four largest newspapers published the names and photos of 62 Nazis and motorcycle gang members who threatened democracy (AB 30 November 1999, DN 30 November 1999, Exp. 30 November 1999, SvD 30 November 1999).⁶ This unique co-publication was a direct response to the escalating violence. The initiative created a major political problem for the SD, especially when Aftonbladet published an article in which the SD was described as a forum for people with Nazi sympathies (Gustafsson 1999).

⁴ The symbols can be found in the SD's jubilee publication, *20 röster om 20 år*, page 213. The former party symbol the torch and the current blue anemone can both be found on the official website for the Sweden Democrats, the forget-me-not is only mentioned in the text. <https://sverigedemokraterna.se/vart-parti/partihistorik/> [accessed 7 June 2012].

⁵ A labour movement that advocates a form of socialist economic corporatism.

⁶ Aftonbladet (AB), Dagens Nyheter (DN), Expressen (Exp.) and Svenska Dagbladet (SvD).

These acts of violence led to Mikael Jansson distancing himself and the party from Nazism at the beginning of 2000 with an article headlined *Vår avsky för nazismen*, Our loathing of Nazism, in which he wrote that it is 'the democratic parties' responsibility not to sanction or harbour anti-democratic forces' and that: 'As a SD I can ascertain that the sanitation of Nazism is working well' (Jansson 2000).⁷ The article is complicated and not explicitly related to the headline, but at the same time this disassociation from Nazism had never been articulated before (Larsson & Ekman 2001: 170–2). One and a half years later, the SD split into two groups – although this seemed due to personal rather than ideological differences the breakaway group claimed that the SD was in the process of being liberalized (ibid.: 183–5). According to Åkesson, the splitting of the SD in 2001 when the breakaway group formed *Nationaldemokraterna* (ND), the National Democrats, was to be seen as one of the most significant events in the party's history. It meant that 'the fools who were still in our party could now leave and join the others' (Åkesson 2008: 11). The advantages of the party split – part of the so-called normalization of SD – can be described as 'radical flank effects' (Rydgren 2005: 129). The radical breakaway group, because of its new stance as a more radical alternative – in this case the ND – normalizes the original party. It is now possible for the moderate group to gain more acceptance for the same position that it previously held because of the breakaway group's more radical stand. Another possible effect is that as the more radical group becomes marginalized, the more moderate group becomes a potential actor for other parties' to open communication with because of the new dynamics.

The SD have continued to win more votes in every election since 1988, when they won a modest 1,118 votes. In the 2002 elections the SD gathered 1.4 per cent of the votes nationally. This big success put them on the national political map. In the 2006 elections, the SD was about one percentage point from entering the Swedish parliament. The party's numbers of votes had more than doubled since the last election, and it received 162,463 votes (or 2.9%). In municipal elections, the party won an entire 281 mandates across 144 municipalities (Expo). The 2006 election signified the passing of yet another important perimeter, specifically the 2.5 per cent mark, which means that the SD qualified for government party support (SCB 2006: 198). In Skåne County⁸ the SD was represented in 32 of 33 municipalities after the 2006 election (Mattsson 2009: 118). In the lead up to the 2010 election, there was no doubt that the SD intended to win seats in the parliament. They had reached well over the 4 per cent threshold in several polls (DN, 19 October 2009). By the election 2010 they managed to get 339,610 votes (or 5.7%), which was a number large enough that the party gained representation. They also managed to get seats in the last municipality in Skåne and are now represented in all 33 municipalities.

The election figures for the SD are not remarkable; there are right-wing populist parties across Europe that have achieved far better election results. The success of the SD, however, is an obvious trend (see Figures 19.1 and 19.2).

⁷ Translations from Swedish by the writers.

⁸ Skåne County is the most southern administrative county of Sweden.

Figure 19.1 Number of votes in parliamentary elections.

Figure 19.2 Percentage of votes in parliamentary elections.

Media treatment of the Sweden Democrats

The established parties and society at large have distanced themselves from the SD. Up until the 2006 election, the media tried to restrict the SD's media exposure. The parties in parliament also had a joint strategy of avoiding debating with them (Lodenius 2009: 17). Swedish parties have also sought to maintain a *cordon sanitaire*, which means that they have not collaborated with the SD in any way or accepted their anti-immigrant rhetoric or political programmes (Rydgren 2005: 115). But since the SD has continued to gain popularity, there is reason to question this strategy. *Publicistklubbens årsbok*, The Publicists Yearbook for 2007, asked whether the time had come to take the SD seriously (Lodenius 2007). *Expo*, an organization that studies and maps anti-democratic,

ultra-right and racist trends in society, has published study material on the SD together with Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (ABF), the Workers' Educational Association. For example, a guide to handling debates with the SD (ABF and Expo 2007, Bengtsson 2008). In the afterword to *The Sweden Democrats – a national movement*, Larsson and Ekman write: 'The Sweden Democrats cannot be fended off with boycotts, scorn or social welfare initiatives. They can definitely not be fought with knuckle-dusters or violent attacks. This is a political movement and must be addressed as such, with a political opposition that upholds democratic values and freedom of expression' (2001: 327).

The SD today comply with democratic principles and seemingly act within the framework of democracy. For example, they have no obvious, hidden agenda for introducing a dictatorship, according to Lodenius (2009: 35). It could be argued, however, that a party can be democratic in form but not in content. The UN Declaration on Human Rights contains a list of rights that the party does not acknowledge, such as the right of asylum and freedom of religion (ibid.: 35). Expo's Alexander Bengtsson makes a similar analysis and maintains that there are no grounds for calling the SD an anti-democratic party. 'Their views of how democracy should function could be questioned though,' he says (Bengtsson 2008: 14).

The established parties began to take the SD's successes seriously after the 2002 election – particularly the *Socialdemokraterna* (the Social Democrats). In March 2003, the party secretary, Lars Stjernkvist, presented a programme that explained that the Social Democrats would not take part in debates with the SD in a public arena, but that their party politics would be addressed in other forums like municipalities. The Social Democrats also introduced training programmes for municipal politicians to equip them with arguments (Åkervall 2009: 123). After the 2006 election, a certain degree of self-criticism was expressed by the established parties. The Social Democrats, probably one of the most driving parties in this cause, formed a working group for democratic debate where one of the topics would be how to address the SD (ibid.: 131).

The success of the established parties' strategies should be debated. Studies show that the party was successful in the 2006 elections in municipalities where, after the 2002 election, new party coalitions were formed in an attempt to exclude the SD. In fact, the party was more successful in these municipalities than in those where no similar initiatives were taken (Bengtsson 2009b: 149). This same pattern is also reported by Ulla Ekström von Essen in DN after the 2006 election (24 September 2006). In hindsight it is easy to make judgements about different choices that were made, but at the time the reasons might have been good and relevant. But choices of strategy are not final and irreversible, and in this case there were probably good reasons to rethink the strategy. The political parties have, however, never really reversed any strategy decisions; instead, they have gradually changed them. Before the 2002 election, for example, none of the established parties were of the opinion that the SD should be debated. In August 2006, a little over a month before the election day, Erik Ullenhag, representative for Folkpartiet, the Liberal Party, set out a new strategy: the SD should be debated where they were active (Exp., 10 August 2006). And after the election in 2006 the position changed again. Sven-Otto Littorin, representative for Moderaterna,

the Conservative Party, declared that the SD should be debated. By this time the Social Democrats had the same strategy as in 2002, but during 2007 they also changed their position. The established parties have not really reversed any strategy, but rather have tried to adapt to the new situation. The same cannot be said for the publicists in the advertising debate. We will now focus on the advertising debate and look at the argumentation as well as the different positions publicists have taken over the years and the reasons given for these stances.

The advertising debate

This analysis is part of a larger study of the public debate about allowing the SD access to the media and political arenas. The analyses of different themes are based on a method that is inspired by and founded on classical pro et contra theory and that also relies on modern argumentation theory (Govier 2001, van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004, Kock, 2011). Classical pro et contra theory here means Protagoras' theoretical understanding of argumentation. This theory is built on the concept of *dissoi logoi*, that is that any topic of argumentation has at least two sides, one for and one against. (Mendelson 2002) The pro et contra theory has its strength in that it is generated from the practice of debate and highlights the polarization of public debate as a concept. For this reason it makes for an excellent method for structuring modern public debate, as politicians and the media tend to polarize opinions and arguments. However, it is not sufficient to understand and explain the individual arguments in a merely descriptive way. In order to deepen the analysis the method has to be combined with modern argumentation theory. The theory that we found most useful for this is Stephen Toulmin's argumentation model and related terminology. The terms included in the model are data, warrant, backing, claim, qualifier and rebuttal (Toulmin 1958). Data is the information regarded as the base for the argument and claim is the position to which the arguer wants to move the recipient. Warrant is information that gives a reason to move from data to conclusion and in order to make the warrant stronger there can be a backing to the warrant, that is, additional information to support the warrant. Qualifier signals how confident the claim is perceived to be and the rebuttal states conditions in which the claim is no longer valid. Here the Toulmin model will only be used in a modified basic construction concerning data, claim, warrant and backing. By employing the terms it is possible to not only structure what is said but also to determine what is inferred and relevant for the arguments.

The argumentation analysis has a normative part and for that we apply a model for evaluating argumentation used by informal logics. This model for evaluating argumentation functions as a method for making conclusions about the relevance and validity for the various arguments.⁹ The argumentation will be analysed in three steps:

⁹ This methodology is still under development as it is a part of the thesis work of Simon Oja.

1. Acceptability of the argument;
2. Relevance of the argument;
3. Value of the argument.

The first question about the acceptability of an argument aims to investigate if the foundation of the argument is solid, and its meaning based on grounds that we can accept and acknowledge. If we find that the argument is solid we move on to the second question: whether the argument is of any relevance to the issue in question. If we find the argument acceptable in terms of construction and relevant to the issue that is being debated, the third and final step is to evaluate the argument. To analyse argumentation is in itself an argumentative act and it is therefore especially important to disclose the process of the work so that it is clear how and why a specific conclusion is reached. Arguments are not absolute, they can be stronger or weaker and they can shift position. This perhaps makes the third step the most difficult but also the most important. As decisions are made, arguments are evaluated and weighed against one another. Rhetorical argumentation analysis has to include this step as well in order to move beyond a mainly descriptive approach.

In this chapter we present arguments that were given for and against a specific issue in the public debate. We have chosen to focus on the national election campaigns of 2002, 2006 and 2010 and the theme of allowing the SD to buy advertising space in newspapers and on television.¹⁰

The debate regarding the SD flares up in connection to every election. This trend has been proven throughout the 2000s regardless of whether the issue has been if the SD should be allowed to buy advertising or if the other parties should debate them. Our first example of this is the advertising debate from 2002, which started when the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) refused to publish an ad from the SD in the early summer (Bergström, DN, 7 July 2002).¹¹

Other newspapers continued to make the same decision as *Dagens Nyheter* during the course of the summer, and just ten days before the parliamentary election, *Svenska Dagbladet* also decided to boycott election ads from the SD. All major newspapers had now taken a clear position against publication (*Journalisten*, 6 September 2002). There was a consensus among legally responsible publishers to not allow the party access to their advertisement spaces. What arguments did this group make for boycotting election ads from the SD in 2002? To start with the publisher of the liberal morning paper *Dagens Nyheter*, Hans Bergström, gave two arguments. His first claim was that 'The party has a strong racist streak' which was supported by the warrant that '[the SD's] standpoint is that adopting children from non-European countries should be prohibited.' This warrant was backed up by an example: 'A two-month old baby from North Korea has not been culturally influenced. The notion must be based on racism.' Further, Hans Bergström maintained, as a second argument, that '[the SD's] democratic credentials cannot be trusted' (TT, Göteborgsposten, 8 August 2002), a claim for

¹⁰ The data is collected through searches in media archives to identify occasions when the debate arises in media and then manually locating relevant articles in connection to the debate.

¹¹ All articles can be found in Appendix I.

which he gave no warrant or backing. In an article in *Journalisten* (6 September 2002), Bergström gave another reason for his decision: '... I felt extremely uneasy about the idea that DN would be taking the fore and giving legitimacy to the Sweden Democrats in the election campaign.'

When *Svenska Dagbladet* decided to boycott ads from the SD at the end of August, the argument was: 'If we were the only Swedish newspaper that accepted an ad from them [SD], our readers would find that even more offensive' (TT, DN, 23 August 2002). Here one interpretation could be that *Svenska Dagbladet* relied on the same data as those *Dagens Nyheter* had put forward as a claim, namely that SD are racists. Then *Svenska Dagbladet's* claim that ads would be offensive is supported by a warrant grounded in doxa that racism is offensive in Sweden.

The only pro argument that could be found for publishing ads on this occasion was in a letter to the editor in *Dagens Nyheter* where a reader writes: '... boycotting their (or any other party's) ads is a serious move against democracy and freedom of expression in Sweden.' The editor-in-chief of *Dagens Nyheter*, Hans Bergström, responds to this with a counter argument: 'DN has no obligation to give space to Nazi parties, violence-prone parties to the right or the left, or parties with a racist streak' and '[DN] is a free newspaper.' (Bergström, DN, 16 August 2002). The argument pro is based in the data that Sweden has freedom of expression with the implicit claim that SD should be allowed to buy advertising space. The warrant for this could be that Sweden is a democracy with the implicit backing that democracies should allow all parties to buy advertising space. The counter argument uses the fact that the newspaper is independent and not obliged to publish any ads as their data. The claim is that they do not publish ads from Nazi parties, violence-prone parties or racist parties with the implicit warrant that they regard the SD as a racist party.

If we summarize the topics, the justification for refusing to sell advertising space was that the newspapers did not want to support Nazi, violence-prone or racist political parties, that they did not want to give the SD legitimacy, that the SD's democratic credentials could not be trusted, that readers may consider the ads offensive, and that editors in chief were entitled to refuse advertising. This makes the arguments a combination of principles, facts and emotional reasons. On the other hand the advocates for allowing the SD to buy advertising space find their justification in abstract arguments about democracy and freedom of expression.

A similar discussion took place around the same time concerning ads for the SD on Malmö's metropolitan buses. Ads for the party were boycotted and the Managing Director of the bus company Skånetrafiken, Gösta Ahlberg, told the newspaper *Sydsvenskan* that his company did not want to be associated with 'these kinds of parties': 'It's not good for our reputation' (Orrenius, *Sydsvenskan*, 2 June 2002).

Two years later, in 2004, a similar debate about advertising on buses in the Skåne region flared up again. Metropolitan buses in Malmö had agreed to accept ads from the SD. This time, Ahlberg says that Skånetrafiken cannot 'act as a kind of jury' and decide who can and cannot advertise. 'The Sweden Democrats are allowed to take part in Swedish elections. It would be very strange if we decided that they couldn't make their voices heard.' And the manager of metropolitan buses in Malmö, Göran Lundblad, said: 'We consider the message, not the sender. According to our agreement

with advertising company Clear Channel, we are not entitled to refuse ads unless the message is derogatory or offensive' (Ivarsson, *Sydsvenskan*, 4 June 2004). Two years after dismissing the SD with ethical and ethos-arguments in 2002, the only grounds for refusal were now offensive messages because the party now was considered democratically legitimate. The change here was not a shift in the SD politics, as one might assume. Instead, the change from 2002 was that the SD had gathered more votes in the elections in 2002 than they had before. The legitimization therefore lies not in the party's political opinions but in its acceptance in the public sphere and its political support as measured in voters and mandates.

In the lead-up to the 2006 elections, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Svenska Dagbladet* and several other newspapers choose to accept advertising from the SD. The new editor-in-chief for *Dagens Nyheter*, Jan Wifstrand, motivated the decision as follows:

There is no justification today, in my opinion, for boycotting ads from the Sweden Democrats. They should be judged on each individual message and the design of each ad. A newspaper like DN should have a broad framework for freedom of expression. As long as advertisers do not blatantly violate the constitution or human rights or commit gross ethical errors, they can advertise in DN. (DN 16 June 2006)

This approach in 2006 was new, but soon constituted the journalistic approach towards the SD from most Swedish newspapers. The argumentation has some similarities with the one in Malmö in 2004, most notably in regard to the message being in focus rather than the sender.

Since the election in 2002, the SD had increased from 8 mandates in 5 municipalities to 49 mandates in 29 municipalities. *Svenska Dagbladets* editor-in-chief Lena K. Samuelsson argued that the SD now was so well legitimized that an advertising boycott could no longer be justified. 'The party has simply become more established in our democratic system.' Several ads had already appeared in the local press, including *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*. *Sydsvenskan's* editor-in-chief Peter Melin says, 'We have problems with the Freedom of the Press Act as it is. My task is not to restrict it any further' (Letmark, DN, 16 June 2006). Lena K. Samuelsson's argument is very similar to the arguments from the debate in Malmö in 2002. However the argument Peter Melin makes is quite difficult to understand. According to Melin there is a problem with the freedom of press act, but the nature of this problem is not explained.

On 11 August 2006, *Svenska Dagbladet's* editor-in-chief Lena K. Samuelsson wrote:

A xenophobic cloud hangs over the SD. This is a marginal party whose values are shared by very few thinking people. Even so, the SD became an established party within our political system after the last elections and won seats in a number of democratic assemblies. Boycotting ads from this party does not seem to be the right approach. As a publicist, standing up for freedom of expression is vital. / . . . / And for that reason, any new ad requests from the SD will be judged on the same basis as always: the contents must not be illegal or grossly offensive/violating. (SvD, 11 August 2006)

Samuelsson concludes by making a relatively illogical interconnection between defending democratic values and advertising: 'Svenska Dagbladet and Sweden's other major newspapers stand for strong democratic values, freedom, diversity and openness. Values that conflict directly with the SD's concept of reality. / . . . / To claim that we and other newspapers are helping a xenophobic party is absurd'. Lena K. Samuelsson tries to argue that strong democratic values, support for freedom, diversity and openness counterbalance the power of xenophobic parties. It is as if ads from the SD would work less well in *Svenska Dagbladet* because of the paper's liberal profile. On the editorial pages this might be correct, but the connection between the newspapers editorial texts and ads are much harder to see. Especially when part of being legitimized comes through being accepted in public arenas as newspapers and their ads. Another interesting aspect of Samuelsson's argumentation is that she still viewed the SD as a party whose ideology was structured around conflicts but that the language and categorization had changed. In 2002 the SD were racists but in 2006 they were xenophobic.

Of all the national newspapers, only *Expressen* retained its general advertising boycott from the previous election campaign.¹² *Expressen's* editor-in-chief Otto Sjöberg says, 'I have made a publishing decision: Last year's decision concerning a general boycott remains intact'. His assessment is that the party represents anti-democratic values, regardless of any messages in its ads. In editorial spaces ' . . . *Expressen* reports on issues that are journalistically motivated' and 'The party will be reviewed in terms of size and content' according to Sjöberg (Letmark, DN, 16 June 2006). This shows that *Expressen* still viewed the SD in the same way as in 2002, but when it comes to news reporting the paper will treat them as any other party. This statement might be a response to the critique of giving the SD too much coverage in relation to the size of the party and its possibility of influencing politics.

In a leading article in *Expressen* 6 August 2011, Richard Slätt writes that the party's politics have not changed over the past four years.

The party itself has never initiated the removal of racist formulations in its programs or other official documents. Racist points were only removed after confrontation with the media or political opponents. Before 2002, their program stated that Sweden should be both ethnically and culturally homogeneous. After the National Annual Meeting in 2005, the wording became 'a demographically homogeneous society has better prerequisites . . .' So what is the difference? Nothing. The Sweden Democrats still dream about a White Sweden. Free from 'foreign' influence. (Exp., 6 August 2011)

Richard Slätt targets the problem with the editors' new approach to the SD and that is that nothing has changed when it comes to ideology and politics. Slätt only goes back four years, but as we have mentioned before Jimmie Åkesson regards it as much longer.

¹² Aftonbladet would also allow ads from the SD if the content was not illegal. Response from the editor-in-chief Anders Gerdin in a reader's question. Published on the same day as the election in 2006.

The argument here is that the editors' cannot justify their change in standpoint as they do. If they viewed the SD as racist in 2002, they still are racists in 2006; that has not changed. So if ads from the SD were dismissed in 2002 based on the party's ideology that policy should stand in 2006 as well, given that the tolerance for the party's opinions and ideology had not developed.

Slätt argues that advertising in newspapers you do not own is not a legal right and concludes with a historic parallel: 'Did the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) become more legitimate because they came into power in Germany after 1933?'

In this round, the advocates based their arguments on the principle of the freedom of the press and how the SD now had become more 'legitimate' and how advertising should be based on the content, not the sender; while opponents claimed that the SD represented anti-democratic values, regardless of the content in their ads and – in the long-term – regardless of whether they were democratically elected into municipal or any other kind of assembly.

The lead-up to the parliamentary election in 2010 was the first occasion that the commercial station TV4 was allowed to broadcast political ads in connection with national elections, and the channel immediately agreed to sell advertising space to the SD. The managing director of the TV4 Group, Jan Scherman, commented on the decision in *Dagens Nyheter*,

We have looked into all the rules and regulations and decided to offer space to all parties who support a democratic constitution in their party programs and comply with the democratic principles described in the Radio and Television Act. We cannot choose advertisers because of how much we value their individual appearances. The Sweden Democrats have won seats in a number of democratic assemblies – and if we say no, they could take the case to the European Court of Justice. (TT, DN, 1 July 2009)

All newspapers except for *Aftonbladet* and to a certain extent the free newspaper, *Metro*, were now willing to accept ads from the SD. The responsible publisher for *Dagens Nyheter*, Torbjörn Larsson, says, 'We have freedom of expression in Sweden and we make a decision about each individual ad. Whether we publish or not depends on the content' (DN, 17 September 2009). *Expressen's* editor-in-chief Thomas Mattson says:

If they [the ads] fall within the framework of the Freedom of the Press Act and are not offensive or violating, then the principled approach should be to publish. *Expressen* is a liberal newspaper, we believe in free speech, the power of debate and democratic discourse. I do not therefore support a general boycott. An SD ad that claimed that all crime is carried out by immigrants would be stopped but an SD ad that claimed that child benefits should be raised by 75 SEK would be accepted. (DN, 17 September 2009)

On the same day, *Aftonbladet* published an explanation of its negative attitude under the heading 'Why we stop the SD's election ads'. The newspaper stated that 'A populist,

xenophobic movement is taking hold of the public discourse and in the long-term, politicians. As publicists, we have no desire to sit on the sidelines and watch this happen' (Helin & Mellin, AB, 17 September 2009).

Aftonbladet also addressed the argument that there was no reason to boycott the SD if their ad texts did not break the law. *Aftonbladet* called this a 'passive and convenient journalistically-correct line' and that it 'dodges an important debate and paves the way for a xenophobic agenda in Sweden's public discourse'. *Aftonbladet* also speculated that the factual content of SD's ads will, in all probability, be harmless: 'A child in an idyllic setting ("Bullerbyn" – Noisy Village) under the word "freedom", type of thing'. But, they wrote, 'the emotions that the Sweden Democrats are appealing to are not harmless. The emotional rhetoric of the Sweden Democrats has a double agenda that we do not want to convey. The core is always to define the unknown as a threat, that immigrants are a problem.'

Aftonbladet's argumentation for boycotting ads from the SD even though they might not break the law shows obvious similarities with *Expressen's* argumentation from the previous election campaign in 2006. There is also another similarity to *Expressen's* argumentation in the article. Like Richard Slätt four years earlier – although less explicitly and more generally – *Aftonbladet* makes a connection to the situation prior to the Second World War by stating that '[the SD has] the same ideologies that the National Movement has held since the 1920s'.

As a small point of interest, *Metro*, the free commuter newspaper that survives on advertising revenue, circumvented issues related to both freedom of the press and politics by rejecting the SD with a marketing argument. Swedish *Metro's* managing director, Andreas Ohlson, said on 19 October 2009, 'We want to offer an attractive advertising space to our advertisers and must therefore reserve the right to refuse advertising space at our own discretion' (Schori, Dagens Media). Consideration for other advertisers was the reason given – in other words: they did not want to risk losing customers.

The main lines of argument are thus fairly obvious. The actors who advocate accepting ads from the SD quote freedom of press and freedom of expression arguments and that they judge the content of the ads, not the sender. Neither of these arguments are particularly sustainable because the immediate objection is that the newspapers would hardly publish advertising from explicit Nazi or left-wing radical groups even though the message were supposedly harmless. Freedom of press and freedom of expression are important and central in a democracy, but that alone does not make them sustainable arguments in this debate. The possibility to advertise in media is not the same thing as an absolute right to have ads published. Advertising is a business deal and it is up to each newspaper and TV channel to make its own choices. This is not to be confused with the freedom to express opinions. Freedom of the press is not just the freedom to publish without governmental oversight, it is also the freedom to choose to not publish.

Critics and others who refuse to sell advertising space to the SD do so because of the party's ideology, which they maintain is xenophobic and right-wing populist even though the advertisers' messages seem harmless. An example of how ads from the SD look like is a poster/ad used in the election to the European parliament in 2009. The poster shows a gravelled road on the countryside with tall grass on the sides and a lake

in the background. On the road there are two blond children walking, a girl with a basket in one hand and flowers in the other and a boy with a fishing rod in one hand and box for his fishing equipment in the other. Above them there is a text that reads: *Ge oss Sverige tillbaka!* (Give us Sweden back!). On a white banner below them it reads: *Sverigedemokraterna. Trygghet & tradition* (Sweden Democrats. Security & tradition).

This shift towards a softer public image has created a problem for the advocates for boycotting the SD ads on grounds that they are anti-democratic. The party has worked hard to exonerate itself and during the process won representation in municipals, gathered more votes on the national level and become an alternative for a larger group of voters.

Worth noting, however, is how fast most newspapers have changed their policies and how the reasons for publication that were considered weak in 2002 – arguments for democracy and freedom of expression – are now relied upon by most newspapers. This is particularly evident in the case of *Expressen* and *Dagens Nyheter* where the opinions of the editors-in-chief in both 2002 and 2006 are diametrically opposed to those of the current editors-in-chief. As a consequence *Dagens Nyheter* and *Expressen* accepted political campaign ads from the SD in the 2010 election campaign. *Aftonbladet* on the other hand had a new editor-in-chief and went back to their previous position as of 2002 and refused to print political campaign ads from the SD, regardless of how harmless the message might have been.

The SD are now represented on all levels in the Swedish democratic system and still remain a controversial party. There are valid reasons and arguments to be made for both sides in the debate on the publishing of political campaign ads. As we have illustrated, valid arguments are not exclusive to one side or the other. And the answer of how to handle the situation of political campaign ads from controversial parties is not in any way a given. The decisions in Swedish media are not final. This is a debate that will probably rise again, if not before, then in connection with the election in 2014. And as these decisions have become a topic for public debate, the argumentation should be made as clear as possible and the arguments should be well-founded, because exposure within the media implies legitimization of a party. If the media have doubts about the politics of the SD it is not enough to say, for example, that the newspaper has a liberal view and embodies democratic values. That response represents a mixed argument and is not constructive in forming an opinion as to the appropriateness of publishing ads. The main objective for public debate should be to make it easier for the public to form an opinion. If that can be achieved, then it is perhaps also more likely that we as a society make decisions that we are satisfied with, even in retrospect.

Appendix I

Aftonbladet

Aftonbladet, 'De vill störta demokratin – Unik kartläggning: 62 av Sveriges värsta nazister och MC-kriminella', *Aftonbladet*, 30 November 1999.

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Linderborg, Å., 'Stoppad av Sverigedemokraterna', *Aftonbladet*, 20 October 2009.

Dagens Nyheter

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— 'Den råa högerpopulismen', *Dagens Nyheter*, 7 July 2002.

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— 'Hotet mot demokratin: Våldet skrämmar till tystnad', *Dagens Nyheter*, 30 November 1999.

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