

= Refugee controversy in Sjöbo =

The refugee controversy in Sjöbo , Sweden , refers to the surrounding events of the 1988 referendum that banned Sjöbo Municipality from admitting foreign refugees . In 1987 , despite opposition and demonstrations , local Centre Party politician Sven @-@ Olle Olsson ( 1929 ? 2005 ) , who was Sjöbo 's municipal commissioner at the time , was successful in gaining the support of the Sjöbo municipal assembly to hold a referendum to decide if Sjöbo should ban the acceptance of foreign refugees . The controversial referendum passed with a 67 @-@ 4 % majority for the ban in 1988 , gaining Olsson and Sjöbo much publicity in the Swedish media . The outcome was heavily criticized by Swedish media and politicians ( including then @-@ Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson ) .

Olsson was in turn expelled from the Centre Party following the referendum which led to the forming of the nationalist Sjöbo Party ( Swedish : Sjöbopartiet ) in March 1991 . In the municipal elections the same year , the party received 31 % of the votes . This led to Olsson once again becoming Municipal Commissioner , a position he held until 1998 , when his party 's support was reduced to 15 % in municipal elections . Following the Sjöbo party 's loss of support , the ban was overturned by Sjöbo 's municipal assembly , and Sjöbo accepted its first refugees for more than a decade in 2001 .

= = Background and motion = =

In 1977 , while a member of the Centre Party , Sven @-@ Olle Olsson , a former farmer , was elected as Sjöbo 's Municipal commissioner. The Centre Party in Sjöbo , led by Olsson , motioned before Sjöbo 's municipal assembly in June 1987 for a referendum on the acceptance of foreign refugees in the municipality . The motion came after a proposal that fifteen refugees be accepted into the municipality , an idea Olsson disliked . It has been speculated that the reason behind the motion was not these fifteen refugees , a small number for the municipality , but , instead , Olsson 's idea to create a protest against Sweden 's positive stance on refugees . Despite heavy protests from most of the country , Sjöbo 's municipal assembly decided in October 1987 to go through with the referendum in 1988 . If the referendum passed , it would completely ban Sjöbo from accepting foreign refugees .

= = Referendum = =

= = = Debate and media attention = = =

The municipality 's decision to go through with the referendum was met with even more criticism from the rest of the country . Immigration minister and Social Democrat Georg Andersson described the vote as a " macabre expression of egoism , and a violation of the refugees ' human dignity . " A majority of the population in Sjöbo , however , was in favor of the referendum . One citizen stated that " Foreigners just create problems . It 's only democratic to vote about this . I 'm all for it . "

It was , however , reported , that several of those who were in favor of accepting refugees , were afraid of expressing their opinion in public . On the day of the vote , 18 September 1988 , the Associated Press reported that the refugee issue had split families , friends and even the town 's only church . "

The referendum and the protests against it also drew attention abroad . On 12 September 1988 , The Philadelphia Inquirer wrote : " A referendum on accepting refugees in this quiet Swedish town has flared into an ugly battle watched closely by a country that prides itself on its tolerant attitudes and absence of racism . "

Madeleine Ramel , a baroness , and the head of the local Social Welfare Board that was planning on taking care of the refugees , said : " a lot of people are very ashamed . It 's terrible . The town has changed . " Ramel was Olsson 's strongest opposition in Sjöbo at the time . The Baroness became a symbol of the minority who supported the acceptance of refugees into the municipality .

According to the local newspaper Skånska Dagbladet , " the Swedish media , especially the evening newspapers , loved the polarization between the simple farmer who did not want foreigners in the village and the baroness who wanted to take in the needy with open arms . "

Olsson 's main argument in the debate leading up to the day of the referendum was that foreigners would not be able to fit into a community such as Sjöbo . He repeatedly stated that these people come from " unknown cultures " and that it would be impossible for them to integrate into the Swedish society . Per @-@ Ingvar Magnusson , the then @-@ chairman of the Sjöbo branch of the Center Party , stated to the media that the referendum had nothing to do with racism ; he claimed that the reason for the vote was that Sjöbo lacked housing and jobs . He said in an interview that he was surprised by the attention the town had received in the media : " They make us out to be stupid , fools , farmers who live in isolation . The town simply wants to take care of its own first . "

= = = Result = = =

The referendum was held in Sjöbo on 18 September 1988 , the day of the Swedish general election , and passed with a 67 percent majority of the votes ( 6 @,@ 237 for and 3 @,@ 000 against ) , which led to even more criticism from the Swedish population . Then @-@ Prime Minister of Sweden Ingvar Carlsson said the results were " tragic " , and the then @-@ leader of the Centre Party , Olof Johansson , called the ban " improper " . The result of the referendum led to concerns from the Swedish government that other municipalities would follow in Sjöbo 's footsteps . The day after the vote , Madeleine Ramel commented : " This is a sad result . Everyone is a loser . It is unfortunate for Sjöbo . "

Heléne Lööw , a Swedish historian , stated that one of the likely reasons for the relatively large xenophobia in Skåne County at the time was the high unemployment numbers . The county had accepted a large amount of refugees compared to the rest of Sweden , and many saw this as the reason for the lack of jobs . Lööw also stated that the xenophobia could have been strengthened by local traditions . Nazi groups were " relatively strong " in Skåne in the 1930s .

= = Aftermath = =

The ban was heavily discussed in the Swedish media . Following the criticism , and after claims that Olsson was associated with the New Swedish Movement , the Centre Party decided in 1988 to exclude Olsson and his companions Börje Ohlsson and Per @-@ Ivar Magnusson from the party . They responded by forming the nationalist Sjöbo Party ( Swedish : Sjöbopartiet ) in March 1991 . In the municipal elections the same year , the party received 31 percent of the votes . This led to Olsson once again becoming Municipal Commissioner , a position he held until 1998 , when the party 's support was reduced to 15 % in the municipal elections . Following Sjöbo party 's loss of support , the referendum was overturned by Sjöbo 's municipal assembly , and Sjöbo accepted its first refugees since more than a decade in 2001 . Although Olsson died in 2005 , the party is still active , and in the 2010 municipal election the party received 11 @.@ 4 % of the votes , making it the third largest party in Sjöbo .