

Family policy

General election day, September 17th, is the day when Sweden's future is to be decided, and it will be up to you and me to cast our vote. We all share the same responsibilities, and all votes are equal. Should we further and improve our welfare system, or should we downgrade by taking one out of every five tax krona out of the public coffers? Should we continue developing the Swedish welfare model – or should we abandon it?

We, the Social Democrats, want Sweden to be the world's best country for children. All children must be able to grow up in safe, secure surroundings, to develop and realise their dreams. All parents must be able to combine work with family life. Our highly successful family policies have enabled women to go to work at a far greater extent than in many other countries and have given Sweden a higher birth rate than most other countries in Europe.

Insurance for all parents

We have one of the world's most generous family insurance schemes, and it covers everyone. What's more, families with children enjoy great flexibility in adapting their insurance coverage to their own particular needs.

We've improved parental insurance coverage by extending it by one month and raising the basic level, the lowest level of benefit payable, to 180 kronor per day for children born after 1st July this year. As of 1st July this year, the ceiling payable under the scheme will be just over 33,000 kronor per month, meaning that almost all parents will receive 80 percent of their normal income during their statutory parental leave. The rules pertaining to care of sick children have also been improved, so that it is now possible to take out more than 120 days per year and child if your child is severely ill.

One obstacle in the way of increased equality is that fathers tend to make use of far too small a proportion of the parental leave to which they are entitled. Although over the past few years fathers have been



increasingly taking advantage of their right to parental leave, the number of those who do so is still much too small. This means that children have less access to both their parents. The rise in the parental insurance income ceiling will help encourage parents to make more equal use of the parental leave system, although efforts will still have to be made to strengthen the position of women in the labour market. We are also prepared to look into ways enabling a greater portion of parental benefits to be linked to each of the parents individually. Our ambition is clear. We, the Social Democrats, want parents to make more or less equal use of the parental insurance scheme.

Good pre-schools for all children

Good pre-schools are essential, with educational programmes that provide children with all the learning, playtime enjoyment and sense of security that they need. Pre-school is an important element of the life-long learning process and must be a place where children from different environments and backgrounds can meet and segregation can be discouraged. No child should be excluded because pre-school is too expensive or because the parents are unemployed or have to stay at home to look after the child's younger brothers and sisters. Maxtaxan – the maximum charge system – has proved extremely effective and has meant extra money for many families with children. Our pre-schools are good. However, we still want to cut down on the number of children per group. Pre-schools need more staff, and we're currently well on the way towards fulfilling our promise of providing them with 6,000 extra employees.

Financial support for all families with children

Child allowance is a general benefit payable to all children in Sweden. It has been raised on several occasions, most recently in October, 2005, when it was increased by 100 kronor at the same time as additional child supplement became payable as of the second child. Together, the child-care maximum charge system and the increases in child allowance have given a two-child family with average incomes an extra 20,000 kronor per year.

This year, we're increasing the support available for the financially most vulnerable families. Maintenance support is going up by 100 kronor, while the housing allowance payable to families with children is being raised by 100-150 kronor per month. In addition, we're introducing a child supplement for students. We, the Social Democrats, want Sweden to remain the world's best country for children. That's why we want to go providing all the support we can for families with children.

The alternative

Against our commitment to families and children stands the Moderated right-wing alliance, which wants to see a Sweden of a different sort altogether. They want to shorten parental leave by four months and



lower the benefit rate to 75 percent. The Moderates also want to cut the number of days you can stay at home to look after a sick child to 15 days per child and year. This would affect about 60,000 children every year. Is it reasonable that sick children should have to stay at home alone just so that the Moderates can lower taxes for those who earn the most money?

Several Moderate-controlled municipalities have introduced a municipal child-care benefit scheme. For us, the Social Democrats, this is unacceptable – the money for this scheme is taken from the pre-school budget and therefore puts the quality of pre-school itself at risk. What's more, the child-care benefit scheme puts women in a no-win situation and this means that an increased number of women will stay at home with no means of providing for themselves.

In our Sweden, everyone is welcome. Which Sweden will you choose?

