

Adult education

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?

Lifelong learning for everyone

For us, the Social Democrats, it goes without saying that everyone is entitled to lifelong learning, regardless of background. Indeed, if Sweden is to be able to meet the demands of today and tomorrow for a well educated workforce, it is essential. That's why we, the Social Democrats, have given top priority to pre-school and nine-year compulsory school. Our Adult Education Initiative – *Kunskapslyftet* – has given 800,000 people a new chance of receiving a decent education. We've expanded the teaching capacity of colleges and universities all over Sweden. We've founded four new universities and two new colleges and increased research funding by a substantial amount.

Education is everybody's right. Shared knowledge grows greater, which is why we're working to ensure that more people with a short previous education can begin to study. To narrow the knowledge gap, adult education is vital.

Each year, the Social Democratic government sets aside 1.8 billion kronor to enable local authorities to offer some 80,000 full-time places in adult education. These places are offered primarily to people who have received only a short education. Without this support it would be more difficult for adults to learn anew and tackle new subjects.

To provide further incentives for people with a short previous education to start studying, the Social Democratic government also puts over two billion kronor into a particularly generous study support



scheme. Among other things, this enables 25,000 people who are unemployed or face unemployment to be brought back to school with the aid of student support providing a 100 percent grant for one year. Study support of this nature is an essential tool in bridging the knowledge gap.

We, the Social Democrats, want to put more resources into vocational training, both in and after upper-secondary school. We're continuing to develop vocationally oriented programmes in upper-secondary school. The number of participants in advanced vocational training courses has increased from 846 in 1996 to 27,000 in 2005. Now we want to take a further step forward and give more support to the vocational training available through the municipal adult education schemes. In our view, adults should have the same opportunities for vocational training as young people at upper-secondary school.

We also want to continue giving support to popular adult education. Each year, over 1.5 million men and women attend courses organised by the adult educational associations. One hundred thousand people are enrolled in long-term or short-term courses at regional colleges. Popular adult education is an important component of the lifelong learning process.

The alternative

Against our policy of ensuring everyone's right to lifelong learning stand the Moderates and their right-wing allies. The Moderates want to cut back state support for adult education. That means that at least one out of every three places in adult education will be lost. What's more, they want to abolish the special student aid giving those with the greatest needs better chances of making ends meet. They also want to diminish the support given to popular adult education, which would result in the demise of one out of every three study groups.

Sweden must grow through knowledge. Bridging the knowledge gap is the best way of reducing financial and social discrepancies. That's why we Social Democrats want to give as much support as we can to adult education, especially for people with only a short previous education.

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

