

Extra Congress
17-18 March 2007



With a view to the future

Thoughts to inspire

Social Democratic Party of Sweden | WITH A VIEW TO THE FUTURE

“Social democracy is a popular movement rooted in democracy. The political vision of the party for society presupposes a close contact between members and voters. The party must therefore be an active modern popular movement firmly rooted in the everyday lives of people.”

From the constitution adopted at the party congress, Malmö 2005

The extra congress in Stockholm will provide a starting point for the work of mapping out the road we will take towards the general election in 2010. We have in front of us four years of hard work in regaining the trust of the voters. It will require an intensive, sustainable and constructive role in opposition – at the national level and in many municipalities and county councils.

The energy needed to bring about change will be drawn from our will to reduce social divisions, divisions between people and between different parts of the country. Sweden needs more jobs and our overriding concern is employment – on this issue there can be no room for doubt about our intentions. Since losing the election much has been changed.

Unemployment insurance, labour market policies, and social security have been changed for the worse while the tax cuts have mainly benefited those who are already well-off. Social divisions are widening. The main thrust of the changes has been directed at those who are sick, on early retirement, on parental leave and unemployed.

We social democrats must conduct a broad debate on the possibilities and challenges, the injustices and social issues of our time and of the future. At the extra congress we will begin this discussion on two of the most important challenges: Jobs and the environment.

The inspiration and questions in the texts that follow are not to be seen as formal proposals subject to congress decisions. They shall serve, however, as the starting point for a discussion during congress under the heading general policies. The minutes recording the contributions in the course of the debate will provide the basis for the national executive in their continued work of preparing for the ordinary national congress to be held in 2009.

The questions – and later the report on the discussions in congress – together can be used to advantage in local party associations, municipal organisations and the party district organisations.

Employment

“Work is a precondition for welfare, prosperity and peoples’ personal development. People who have a job have higher self-esteem, better health and experience greater freedom than the person who is out of a job. That is why full employment is the predominant aim of Social Democracy.”

“We will build a bridge to a future with full employment. An active labour market policy, a stable economy and world-class industry form the basis. We will compete with competence – not lower wages! The bridge will be built on enterprise and a strengthened international trade union struggle. We will fight for collective agreements at a time when the security of wage earners is challenged by right-wing forces.”

From the Policy Guidelines adopted at the national congress, Malmö 2005

Working life is changing by the day. New businesses are starting up; old companies are being closed down or bought up. New jobs and new branches are emerging, old industries are disappearing. The labour market today is more complex and makes for higher demands in terms of variation, diversity and a change-over than the old labour market. The labour market of tomorrow will make even higher demands on us.

On a fundamental level this is something positive. Welfare increases. Old and often environmentally dangerous and humanly wearing production system is being replaced by new technology. The technical developments and globalisation of industry and commerce open up new possibilities but they also lead to greater demands for security in a process of adaptation. The role played by the policy of industry and commerce is becoming more and more vital. For us it is a question of being better at making the most of the resourcefulness of the country as a whole.

Greater demands will also be made on the educational system and on labour market policies in providing people with active support in acquiring the new skills needed for working life. There will likewise be greater demands on industry and commerce to facilitate the change-over to new jobs for those who lose their jobs as a result of closures and restructuring. And it means greater demands on the community sector to set the trend. The importance of collective social security systems that provide support for each and every individual to cope with the changes will increase.

No one should be left on their own to pay the price for those changes that development calls for and that society as whole gains from.

This development which bears with it tremendous possibilities also involves risks. Social exclusion in working life increases when the rate of change is speeded up, the nature of stress changes. The risks of wider social divisions increase, there is a risk that new – and revived – forms of injustice will re-emerge.

Today's Swedish labour market all too often divides people into groups. On the one side we have the people who can work a hundred percent and most often have a job. On the other side we have those who, for a number of reasons do not have the ability to work to one hundred percent and who are often sorted out from workplaces. This is a waste of human resources that leads to consequences for both the individual and society. Sweden needs more people in work in order to secure welfare, improve security and reduce injustices. If we are to enjoy a sustainable level of welfare everyone must be given the chance to make a contribution and be able to work according to their ability.

The questions of equality as well as of the conditions of working life – not least from a perspective of gender equality – must top the agenda of the social democrats and provide an important meeting point for cooperation between the party and the trade unions. We social democrats have put employment at the top of the European agenda. This work must continue especially in the field of international political and trade union cooperation.

A modern labour market must offer more opportunities for development and good working conditions. It is not a question of lower wages, a poorer working environment and poorer working conditions or of wider social divisions and insecurity.

Questions to think about

1. In what ways can we contribute to the rise of new jobs and new employers in sectors and branches that are based on knowledge and competence?
2. How do we reinforce and develop the policy of work first. How do we combat social exclusion and create conditions that make it possible for all those who want to and can work to get a job?
3. How do we best match the skills of people with the needs of the new labour market?
4. How should responsibility for the rights of each and every person to life-long learning be divided between the educational system, labour market policy and employers?
5. How do we make the most of everybody's desire to work and how do we combat discrimination on the labour market?
6. How can the opportunities for growth, entrepreneurship and small businesses in Sweden be improved in the longer term?
7. What role can industrial policy play in the transformation of working life and structure of companies?
8. What can be done to make Sweden's urban areas an important hub for European development and to ensure that they do well in comparison with the rest of the world?
9. What needs to be done in order to achieve equality between women and men in working life?
10. How can unemployment and sickness insurance improve cooperation to ensure that no one falls between two stools or runs the risk of losing contact with the labour market?

Environment/Climate

“Sweden has become a leading country in the adaptation to ecological sustainability. But it is not enough... We Social Democrats are firmly resolved to achieve the aim of overcoming the large environmental problems of today within one generation.”

“The Swedish success in energy adaptation is now threatened by the demands for increased market control and lower ambitions in the environmental field. Instead, we Social Democrats want to build the green “People’s Home”. This development must be stimulated both through the tax system and by means of economic support towards the process of change-over.”

From the Policy Guidelines, adopted by the Party Congress, Malmö 2005

The climate changes we witness today will alter dramatically the conditions of life for ourselves and for future generations. We must reverse this development, not lower our ambitions. International cooperation and solidarity are decisive factors in ensuring our success.

The threats to the environment call for long term decisions of the type that the market with its short term perspective and more limited economic demands seldom risks taking. Sustainable growth can never be created through the exploitation of people and the environment. This undermines the foundations for the whole economy. Political decisions are needed if change is to take place.

We social democrats will continue to march in the forefront for an ecologically sustainable development in the same way as we have done when it was a question of the socially sustainable society. We have prepared a solid foundation for this development with extensive measures aimed at a better energy savings, a reduction in emissions and more materials and production processes adapted to the environment. Environment technology has become a growth industry.

We social democrats must defend Swedish tradition and shoulder our responsibility. The time has come for the next leap forward in the development of knowledge, creativity and employment.

Questions to think about

1. How can we use economic means to steer society and our lifestyles in more environment friendly direction? What can we do together and what can we do as individuals?
2. In what ways can we strengthen the environment friendly forces in the community sector and how can we stimulate consumers to push development in a green direction?
3. How do we use the changeover to a sustainable society in order to strengthen the policies of redistribution?
4. How can tomorrow's infrastructure contribute to a better environment?
5. In what way can we make the environmental changeover work as a competitive advantage for Swedish companies and stimulate the emergence of "green jobs"?
6. How can we improve cooperation with other countries and with international organisations in the work for our common environment?
7. How can we encourage the production of goods in Sweden to become more sustainable from an environment point of view?
8. What needs to be done if we are to end our dependence on oil?
9. What can we do to strengthen the link between industry and commerce and world leaders among Swedish companies in the field of environment research in Sweden?
10. How can we continue to reduce our use of resources without posing a threat to growth?



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