



# The Swedish Social Democratic Party

An introduction



# Some facts about Sweden



Sweden is a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy. The monarch has purely representative functions. In the constitution it is stated that all power emanates from the people and that parliament is the foremost expression of the people's will. Since 1921 we have had universal right to vote. Today citizens from the age of 18 have the right to vote.

Sweden has been a member of the United Nations since 1946 and of the European Union since 1995. It belongs to the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Co-operation and Security in Europe. We are also members of the Nordic Council.

Sweden now has a population of close to 9 million inhabitants. Roughly one million are immigrants – citizenship can be granted after a period of residence of 5 years.

At present the open unemployment is about 4 %, 78 % of the women and 80 % of the men of productive age are in gainful employment. 85 % of all employees belong to a trade union. Collective wage agreements are applied throughout the labour market.

# Parliamentarism

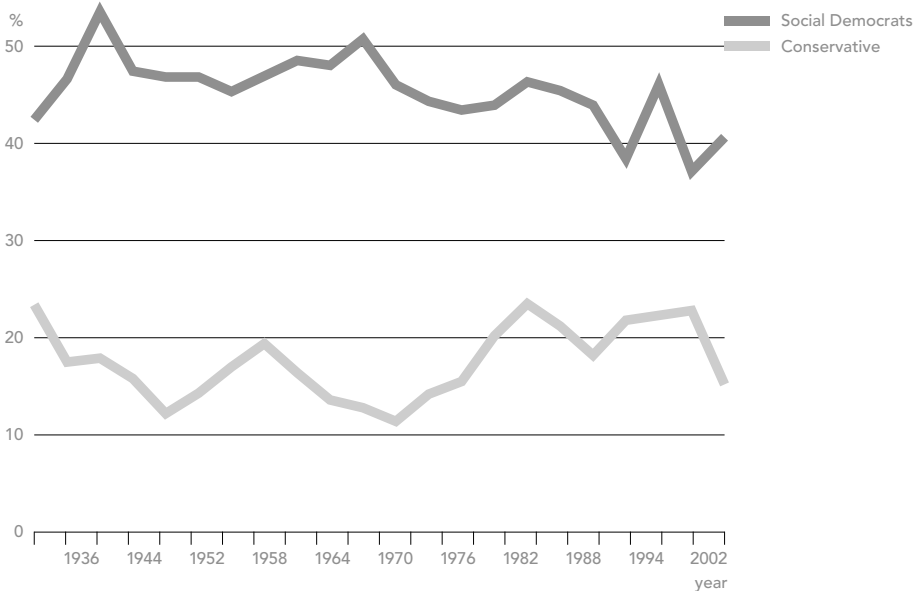
The Swedish Parliament (Riksdagen) has 349 members and is elected in a general election every four years. County council and municipal council elections are held at the same time.

Parliament makes decisions on laws and constitutional matters, it decides the state budget and elects the Prime Minister – the rule is that if the candidate gets no more than 174 votes against her/him, the candidate goes on to form the government.

# Parliamentary elections, the basis of power

The Swedish Social Democratic Party, SAP, was founded in 1889. As universal suffrage was not introduced until 1921, the party was under-represented in parliament for the first three decades of its history. In 1917 the party went into government for the first time, forming a coalition with the Liberal party in order to complete the democratisation of Sweden.

## Parliamentary elections



The party has been strong over the last 70 years – for 61 of those Sweden has had a government led by the Social Democrats. Throughout period five to seven parties have been represented in parliament.

Results from the period 1932–1968 are for the second (lower) chamber which was directly elected. From 1970 we have had a one-chamber parliament with a 4 % threshold for representation.

In the period 1932–1968 the elections to the directly elected second chamber took place every four years. In 1958 there was an extraordinary election. In the period 1970–1994 the elections to the new one-chamber parliament took place every three years. From 1994 the election period has been again four years.

Our electoral system is a strictly proportionate one – to win an absolute majority a party has to reach 50 % of the popular, valid vote.

For a multiparty system the Swedish elections have provided remarkably stable result over the years. The Socialist bloc, composed of Social Democrats and Communists/ex-communists, has been standing against a non-socialist bloc, with Conservatives, Liberals and Center party. In later years the Christian democrats have filled out the non-socialist side, while the Greens have been a non-predictable factor in between the blocs.

The Social Democrats have normally formed minority governments with a nego-

tiated support in parliament. From 1951 to 1957 they formed a coalition government with the Center party (former Farmers' union). During World War II there was a grand coalition with all parties except the Communists.

As can be seen from the diagram the Social Democrats reached 50 % only twice, in 1940 (53,8 %) and in 1968 (50,1 %). In both cases external factors played a dominant role – in 1940, after the Finnish loss against the Soviet Union in the winter war and after the German occupation of Denmark and Norway, in 1968 after the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia. Otherwise domestic policy and the opposition's inability to find a common strategy have influenced election results more.

The somewhat shakier position for the Social Democrats in the 1990s can be explained by certain reluctance among left voters to accept the opening of Swedish economy to the global markets and movements of international capital. For the first time in modern history unemployment became an issue in Swedish politics, followed by rising national debt. When Social Democrats came back to power in 1994 they had to reform the welfare state and reduce benefits in a somewhat unbalanced system, which led to big losses to the left in 1998: these losses were mostly regained in 2002.

Since 1998 the Social Democrats have had parliamentary co-operation with the Left party and the Greens on economic

policy. This co-operation didn't include foreign and security policy, mainly because both these parties are against Swedish EU membership.

## Social Democracy – theory and practice

Over the years programmatic changes have occurred in line with experience. Traditional socialist thinking never had a dominant influence over policies: already in the 1930's ideas about the nationalisation of the means of production were dropped. Swedish industry was always in private hands to more than 90 %.

In the latest party programme from 2001 the key values are freedom, equality and soli-

arity. "The human being is a social creature who develops and grows in co-operation with other people..."

"Common good presupposes solidarity... the unity that originates from the insight... that the best society is the one that is built on co-operation..."

"Solidarity does not exclude striving for individual development and success."

"Social democracy wants the ideals of democracy to characterise society as a whole..."

Our aim is a society without...class differences, sexual segregation or ethnical divisions..."

In the latest programme the difference between the market and capitalism was made clear:

"The market is necessary for efficient production that creates and recreates the



resources for welfare. Capitalism and market economies must be kept apart. The market economy is a system of distribution where goods and services change owners with money as the medium of exchange. Capitalism is a power system with a return on capital as the overriding norm.”

During the 1950’s, 1960’s and 1970’s the modern Swedish welfare state was built by the Social Democrats. The economy was strong and expanding, public finances were good. The “Swedish model” became world famous. Pragmatism rather than theories characterised the policy. Most of the social reforms were realised on the municipal and county level, which made it easier for the citizens to understand and accept them. Decentralisation became the method for welfare policies.

From the 1980’s the favourable climate for social democratic policies changed. The oil crises in the 1970’s and a hard debate about energy systems brought new dimensions into politics. The growing globalisation of the economy made it more difficult to shape economic policy on a national level – the old cooperation between the labour movement and Swedish capital was withering away.

The early 1990’s were the years when neo-liberal ideas reached a peak in Sweden, inspired by the USA and Great Britain. Egoism became the new ideal. This was combined with populism flavoured by xenophobia, a mix which social democracy could not really handle – in 1991 the Social Democrats lost power.

During the period of opposition 1991-1994 a large amount of effort was invested in discussing how to reform the welfare state and restore the economy. After the victorious 1994 election these economic reforms were put into practice. In the period 1998-2002 there was a growing acceptance of these policies, helped by an improving economic situation.

## Challenges for the future

The challenges for the future are, as always, how to defend democracy against the forces of the market. In other words, to combat neo-liberal thinking. In later years, there have been attempts from neo-liberal parties to weaken, even destroy, the common or public sector of health, education and social services. In fact, the 2002 election was a victory for social democratic ideas about the public sector. The voters rejected efforts to privatise health, educational and social services and introduce an element of private profit-making into these sectors.

In the struggle for equality environmental issues are becoming more important. The present-day economy is not sensitive enough to take into consideration the misuse and exploitation of resources needed for future generations.

“Today’s generations do not have the right to impoverish the natural resources and physical environment that form the basis

also for the life of coming generations”, says the party programme.

“The policy on equality must be directed at all forms of social ranking”, according to the party programme. Inequality based on gender must be combated. Equal rights and equal responsibilities for women and men in family, professional and social life are demands that justify naming the Social Democrats as “feminist”.

Sweden today is a multiethnic society. Immigration has brought more than a million people of different ethnic origin to our country. Fighting discrimination against these new groups of citizens is another challenge for the future, underlined by recent electoral success for populist, xenophobic parties in other European countries.

## How have the Social Democrats been able to maintain their strength?

The social democratic movement has left its mark on the development of Sweden over the past century. A basic explanation for this is that it has been more than just a political party, it has been a popular movement.

When today we are asked to give advice to the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe we advise them to build the “civil society” that is to ask the citizens to

take part in developing their own society, to take responsibility. This is what happened in Sweden a hundred years ago: trade unions, temperance lodges, youth organisations, co-operative shops all contributed to develop the idea that people should run their own lives in co-operation with others. This is how the “Sweden of popular movements” was started – even today, the average Swede belongs to at least five associations. By working in popular movements people get used to taking responsibility for their own society and learn how a democratic organisation should function. These organisations train their members how to work in a democratic way. You can say that popular movements act as a complement to parliamentary democracy.

For the Social Democratic Party it has become natural to seek contact when new popular movements show up and help them to give a political profile to their message. One example is what happened after the referendum on nuclear energy in 1980, when the party invited the activists to join: the party got new, active members, and the internal debate became livelier – and more difficult to handle.

All this means that there are times when party members and local organisations find themselves in opposition to their own party, especially when the party is in government. It should be noted that from the local organisation up, independence from higher organs is the rule. This of course gives the party a lively internal debate.

## Co-operation with the trade union – LO

The most important co-operation with other actors in society is, however, the close links between the party and the trade unions. The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) was founded in 1898, and from the start contacts with the SAP became strong and intensive. This has been the case ever since – whenever relations have been strained, the election results of the party have gone down. The LO and its affiliated unions have two million members, a considerable part of the electorate of 6,5 million. Other unions have about 1,4 million members, unions with no party connections.

For a long time the LO had industrial workers as their base. Today it is the workers in the “service sector” (public and private) that form the majority of the LO.

The LO and its affiliates play an important role in the work of the party. The LO president is always in the 7-member party executive committee, for example, and on every organisational level the LO has a considerable influence. In return, the party can count on large election contributions. As can be expected, this has always been a target for attacks from other parties and interest groups. However, this co-operation has guaranteed wage earners a voice in Swedish politics.

## The party organisation

### National level

There is a certain parallelism between the organisation of the state and the organisation of the party. The national Parliament and the Central Government rule the country. On the national level the Party congress comes together every four years. It has 350 delegates, nominated by the party districts based on members’ votes. It elects the national board, party leader, secretary general, executive committee, decides about party statutes and the party programme. Individual members and lower party organisations have the right to send motions to the congress.

Between congresses, the National Board is the highest decision-making body of the party. It has 33 members and 15 deputy members. The party headquarters in Stockholm is the secretariat of the board. It is led by the secretary general, who is elected by the congress, and it has around 60 employees.

### District level

On the county (regional) level the County council is the highest decision-making body, mainly responsible for medical care and hospitals and with the right to tax its citizens. The corresponding party organisation is the party district. There are 23 counties but 26 party districts, due to extra divisions in the



*34th Party Congress in Västerås.*

big cities. The party district is responsible for county policy and nominates candidates for the parliamentary elections, based on the results of elections in the municipal organisations. The district also nominates candidates to the County council.

The party district organisation leads and co-ordinates organisational, educational and information activities within its sphere of responsibility. It also plans the election work in the district and provides support for the local party organisations. Each district has an office with at least one full-time officer and staff.

## Local level

In Sweden the municipalities play a very important role. The 289 municipalities independently tax their citizens' income, and most of this revenue stays at the local level. For the Swedish wage-earner local and county taxes are much more important than state taxes. This means that people can see, and hopefully accept, how their tax money is used.

The municipal party organisation, the labour commune, represents the Social Democrats in all municipalities. The name expresses the tradition of creating an admi-

nistration based on the needs of Labour. In the day to day work of the party the municipal level is the most important one.

The labour commune is run by an executive board where both local party organisations and local LO organisations are represented. Women, youth and immigrants are today quite active on this level. The modern welfare system is very much run by the municipalities, while the national government co-ordinates the welfare system.

The labour commune has an executive board, but the most important decisions are made by a general members' meeting or, in larger municipalities, by a meeting of representatives. Most of the labour communes have an office with a full-time staff.

Today the party has 152 000 members. As with other parties, the numbers have been declining for the last ten years, but this year, 2003, we have noticed a slight increase. 41 % of our members are women.

The lowest organisational level is the local party association or branch. The normal type covers a smaller geographical area, part of a municipality. There are also branches in work-places, a few organise special immigrant groups, and pensioners have their "old guard" groups. At present we have around 2.500 branches.

The local party association/branch is where our members can exercise influence, since these units are independent parts of the party. They can express opinions on all political matters, they can write motions to con-

gresses, they can bring up local problems to the municipality etc. The association/branch has the important task of organising studies and carrying out opinion-forming activities.

In conclusion one can say that the Social Democratic party's long-term strength in Swedish politics rests on the following pillars: co-operation with the trade unions, strong local self-government combined with a good party organisation on all levels, a certain capacity of being in opposition to itself and keeping a lively internal debate going.



## Publications

The party publishes a weekly newspaper, *Aktuellt i Politiken* (Current Political Affairs), which mirrors the current political debate in the country and in the party. The party also edits a magazine for debate and ideological discussion, *Tiden* (Time), which has six issues per year.

# Party finances

All political parties in the parliament have signed a voluntary agreement to report their incomes each year. The work of the party is basically financed in four different ways:

## Membership fees

Each level of the party decides about the membership fees. All members pay fees to the local branch, the Labour Commune, the



party district and the central organisation, which means that fees may differ from one part of the country to another. The average annual fee is 30 Euro.

## Public funding

Parties that have been elected to Parliament, county councils and municipal councils receive public funding based on the number

of seats they hold. This funding provides an important source of income for all parties and reflects the Swedish view that political parties are the bearers of parliamentary democracy.

## Lotteries

In Sweden lotteries can be run by the State and by non-profit-making organisations. The party runs extensive lotteries that provide income to all levels of the party organisation involved in the sale of lottery tickets.

## Donations

Donations to the party are made by private individuals as well as organisations. As mentioned earlier, election campaign donations from trade unions are of special importance.

# Swedish Social Democracy, part of a world-wide movement

Social Democrats have a world-wide co-operation within the Socialist International, started in 1889. It is the largest political family and is still growing. The number of member parties is at present 142, from all over the world. Since 1989 a number of new members have joined from central-eastern European countries. Peace, freedom, demo-

cracy, justice and human rights are the common goals.

Social Democratic sister parties in the EU countries and Norway are members of the Party of European Socialists, PES. Like-minded parties in the applicant countries are associated. The idea is to develop European co-operation on a popular base. The PES group in the European Parliament is at present the second largest in the parliament.

The Swedish Social Democratic members of the European Parliament have an office of their own in Brussels-Strasbourg to support their work. There are also four regional offices in Sweden at their disposal.

The Social Democratic parties and the trade union confederations in the Nordic countries have their own committee of co-operation (SAMAK) to promote an exchange of views at top level. In this way the Nordic labour movement has developed social democratic thinking.

The Olof Palme International Center serves the Swedish labour movement in its efforts to give international assistance and increase knowledge about international affairs. The center publishes reports and arranges seminars. It also co-ordinates support for democratic development and solidarity work with third world and central-eastern European countries.

## Other organisations within the labour movement

There are independent organisations, so-called “side” organisations, for groups within the social democratic movement that also operate at local, regional and central level.

**SSU** – the social democratic youth organisation. Full member of IUSY, International Union of Socialist Youth.

**s-kvinnor** – organises women and is a member of SIW, Socialist International Women.

**Studentförbundet** – the social democratic student organisation. Full member of IUSY.

**SKSF/Broderskapsrörelsen** – the Christian Social Democrats, member of ILRS, International League of Religious Socialists.

All these organisations are represented in the leading organs of the party.

## A brief history

- 1881** August Palm, radical tailor from the South of Sweden, returns from Germany and gives his first public speech in Sweden titled “What do the Social Democrats want?”
- 1889** The Swedish Social Democratic Party is founded at a congress in Stockholm where a majority of the delegates were elected by trade unions.
- 1896** Hjalmar Branting is elected to Parliament as the first Social Democratic member.
- 1898** The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) is founded.
- 1917** The Social Democrats co-operate for the first time in a coalition government with the Liberals. The youth organisation leaves the Party and founds the Communist movement.
- 1918** The struggle for universal suffrage is crowned with success. Parliament accepts the constitutional reform bill, which becomes law in 1920.
- 1920** Hjalmar Branting forms the first Social Democratic government. The majority in parliament was, however, non-socialist.
- 1921** The first election with universal suffrage for women as well. Democracy is achieved.
- 1925** Branting dies. Is succeeded by Richard Sandler as Prime minister and by Per Albin Hansson as party leader. The government resigns in 1926.
- 1932** After a landslide victory Per Albin Hansson forms a government. During the major reforms are introduced, including unemployment benefits, improved retirement pensions, holidays, dental care, public works to combat unemployment.
- 1939** The second World War, broad national government. The Social Democrats pre pare a peace programme of their own aimed at full employment, just redistribution and improved standard of living.
- 1946** Per Albin Hansson dies and is succeeded by Tage Erlander as Prime Minister and party leader.
- 1951** Coalition government with the Farmers’ Union, now known as the Center party. The 1950’s saw investment in education and research, housing construction, sickness benefits and after a major struggle including a national referendum and a Social Democratic government of its own after 1959 a general service pension.
- 1954** All restrictions on travel, residence and free movement of labour between Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden are removed for Nordic citizens.

- 1964** The “million-homes” programme aimed at constructing one million new dwellings in the course of 10 years is started up. During the 1960’s major investments were made in the development of care for the elderly, education and hospital care.
- 1969** Tage Erlander is succeeded by Olof Palme as party leader and Prime Minister.
- 1971** At the start of the 1970’s labour market reforms are introduced: laws on co-determination, security of employment and health and safety at work. Legislation on parental insurance, public free school education and dental insurance.
- 1976** The Social Democrats lose the election after 44 years of continuous government and a non-socialist coalition is formed, led by Torbjörn Fälldin from the Center party. During the following six years the coalition collapsed no fewer than three times.
- 1980** The referendum on nuclear power. The alternative of a long-term phasing out of the industry proposed by Social Democrats and Liberals wins a simple majority of the votes.
- 1982** Social Democrats win the election, and Olof Palme forms the new government. The struggle with economic crisis and unemployment is the most important task for the government. Collective wage earners’ investment funds are introduced after a hard political struggle, only to be dismantled in 1991.
- 1986** Olof Palme is murdered on 28 February. Ingvar Carlsson is appointed party leader and Prime Minister.
- 1991** The Social Democrats lose the election and a government consisting of four non-socialist parties is formed, led by Carl Bildt from the Moderate party.
- 1994** The Social Democrats win the election. More jobs and reconstruction of government finances are given the highest priority.
- 1995** Sweden becomes a member of the European Union after a referendum held in November 1994, in which the Social Democrats were split.
- 1996** Ingvar Carlsson is succeeded by Göran Persson as party leader and Prime Minister.
- 1998** The Social Democrats get their lowest election result since 1928 but stay in government after a parliamentary agreement with the Left and Green parties.
- 2001** The 34th party congress which adopts a new party programme.
- 2002** The Social Democrats win back some of its election losses from 1998 and continue in government backed by the Left and Green parties.
- 2003** National referendum on the Euro.



**Göran Persson**  
Party chair and Prime Minister



**Marita Ulvskog**  
Secretary General



**Laila Freivalds**  
Member of the Executive committee  
and Foreign Minister



**Wanja Lundby-Wedin**  
Member of the Executive committee and  
President of the Trade Union Confederation

## Welcome to The Swedish Social Democratic Party

### OUR POLICY AND PRIORITIES

We have come a long way when it comes to welfare in Sweden but we have not come far enough. Despite the successes of the past few years – a strong economy, strong growth, low unemployment – the feeling of insecurity has increased. There is the issue of stress – at work and in everyday life. There is the worry of falling victim to crime or of not getting proper care in time. Too many people feel that our society is becoming colder and harder.

We must turn this development around. We can only achieve this by working together. Security and justice can only be developed in a climate of solidarity and co-operation.

We Social Democrats are proud of Sweden, but we are not satisfied. We have very real successes behind us. That said, we have much greater challenges in front of us.

Ever since the act of terrorism on the 11th of September 2001, developments in the international economy have been uncertain.

There is very real concern about the direction of the European economy. What is called for now, is responsibility and cooperation:

The Social Democrats will never contribute to undermining the economy of Sweden. For this reason all reforms must be financed. New resources must be used first of all to increase security and

justice. This must take priority over large tax cuts.

Our country is too small for major conflicts. What is needed instead is a new spirit of co-operation that aims at modernising Sweden and making the country more secure. We want to see broad agreements across traditional barriers and borderlines.

We want to see a Sweden with full employment where income gaps shrink and where greed takes a back seat.

We want to shape a society where economic, social and ecological goals are in balance with one another.

We want to see Sweden as a forerunner among countries when it comes to a changeover to an ecologically sustainable world. Sweden must be the land of many opportunities and not the land of major polarisation.

#### THE ELECTION 2002

Eligible voters	6 722 152
Votes	5 385 430
Turnout	80,1 % (-1,3)
Social Democratic Party (s)	39,8 % (+3,5)
Moderate Party (m)	15,2 % (-7,7)
Liberal Party (fp)	13,3 % (+8,7)
Christian Democratic Party (kd)	9,1 % (-2,6)
Left Party (v)	8,3 % (-3,6)
Centre Party (c)	6,1 % (+1,1)
Green Party (mp)	4,6 % (+0,1)

#### SEATS IN THE SWEDISH PARLIAMENT 2002–2006

Party	Men	Women	Total
(s)	76	68	144
(m)	33	22	55
(fp)	25	23	48
(kd)	23	10	33
(v)	16	14	30
(c)	11	11	22
(mp)	7	10	17
Total	191	158	349

Göran Persson was elected Prime Minister after a negotiated deal with the Left Party and the Green Party, providing support in the Parliament for everything apart from foreign and security policy. The present government has 22 ministers, 10 women and 12 men.

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## Swedish labour movement

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www.s-studenter.org

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**SAMAK** – Nordic social democratic  
labour movement  
www.samak.info

**PES** – The Party of European Socialists  
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**SI** – Socialist International  
www.socialistinternational.org



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