The Swedish Social Democratic Party
An introduction
Index

An introduction .................................................................................................................. 3
Social Democracy - theory and practice ........................................................................... 4
Challenges for the future ...................................................................................................... 6
How have the Social Democrats been able to maintain their strength? ................................................................. 6
Co-operation with the trade union - LO ............................................................................ 7
The party organisation ....................................................................................................... 7
National level ......................................................................................................................... 7
Regional level ........................................................................................................................ 8
Local level ............................................................................................................................... 8
Publications .......................................................................................................................... 9
Party finances ....................................................................................................................... 9
Membership fees .................................................................................................................. 10
Public funding ....................................................................................................................... 10
Lotteries ................................................................................................................................. 10
Donations ............................................................................................................................... 10
Swedish Social Democracy, part of a world-wide movement ............................................. 10
Other organisations within the labour movement .......................................................... 11
Some facts about Sweden .................................................................................................... 11
Parliamentarism ................................................................................................................... 12
A brief history ....................................................................................................................... 12
An introduction

The Swedish Social Democratic Party, SAP, was founded in 1889. Like in other Nordic countries, the foundation of the party took place in close co-operation with the trade union movement. The issue of equal rights to vote was the first and most important demand and a symbol for the party’s will to work democratically through reforms. By then the working class was excluded from the right to vote, since only the rich could vote according to the current laws. The issue was disputed at the congress in 1917, when the party was split between the parliamentary way and the revolutionary way.

General suffrage was not introduced until 1921, so 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 finalise the democratisation of Sweden.

In 1932 SAP wins a landslide victory and Sweden has since then had governments led by the social democrats in 65 of 81 years. All this period five to eight parties have been represented in parliament.

For a multiparty system the Swedish elections have been remarkably stable over the years. The left-wing bloc, composed of Social Democrats and Communists/ex-communists, has been standing against a right-wing bloc, with Conservatives, Liberals and the Center party. In later years the Christian Democrats have filled out the right-wing bloc, and the Green party entered into parliament, but with a less clear block position even if they mostly have co-operated with the left-wing bloc.

The Social Democrats have normally formed minority governments with a negotiated 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.

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 ability 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-wing voters to accept the opening of Swedish economy to the global markets and international capital flows. Unemployment becomes a very important 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 oversized system, which led to big losses to the left in 1998, these losses were mainly taken back 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, since both these parties are against Swedish EU membership.

The Social Democrats lost the elections in 2006 against the right-wing bloc. For the first time the right-wing bloc had formed an electoral bloc with a common electoral platform, called Alliance for Sweden.

In 2007 the Social Democrats elected Mona Sahlin as its first female Party Leader. In 2009 the Social Democrats, the Left party and the Green party, form the red-green coalition, and develop common positions in several policy areas, a joint budget motion, an electoral platform with a red-green campaign in the elections 2010. The red-green coalition lost the elections. For the first time the xenophobic Sweden-Democrats are elected to the Swedish Parliament.

After the election a crisis commission was formed to make a long-term analysis of the party’s situation. After the crisis commission delivered its’ report further work on renewing the party’s direction was done throughout the entire party. The result is called The Social Democrats – the party of the future, a strategy encompassing policy-, organisational- and communications development for the coming five years. The Social democrats shall be the party that has the answer to the great challenges of the future, with clear priority on jobs and education.

Social Democracy - theory and practice

In the party programme from 2001 the words of honour are freedom, equality and solidarity. "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 cooperation.." "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 program from 2001 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 1950s, 1960s and 1970s 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. Decentralisation became the method for welfare policies.

From the 1980s the favourable climate for social democratic policies changed. Oil crises in the 1970s and a hard debate about energy systems brought new dimensions into politics. Growing globalisation of the economy made it more difficult to wage economic policy on a national level - the old co-operation between the labour movement and Swedish capital was withering away.

The early 1990s were the years when neo-liberal ideas reached a peak in Sweden, inspired from 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 we lost power.

During the time 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, 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 fight 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 in these sectors.

In the struggle for equality environmental issues are growing more important. Present-day economy is not careful 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 fought. Equal rights and equal responsibilities for women and men in family, professional and social life are demands that justify naming the Social Democrats "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.

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 we co-operate with 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 and to take responsibility. This is just 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 take 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 sometime 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 inner 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 Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO). 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 1.5 million members, a considerable part of the electorate, 7 million. Other unions have about 1.8 million members, unions with no party connections.

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

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 member voting.
It elects the national board, party leader, secretary general, executive committee, decides about party statutes and party programme. Individual members and regional/local 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 has around 95 employees, including those working for the Parliamentary Group.

**Regional 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 26 party regional districts. The party regional 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 for the County council.

The party regional district organisation is leading and co-ordinating organisational, educational and information activities within its sphere of responsibility. It is also planning the election work in the district and provides support for the local party organisations. Almost every 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 290 municipalities independently tax their citizens’ income, and most of this stays on 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 represents the Social Democrats in all municipalities. In the daily work of the party the municipal level is the most important one.

The local branches 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 is co-ordinating.
The local branches have an executive board, but the most important decisions are made by a general members’ meeting or, in larger municipalities, by a meeting of representatives.

Today the party has 100,000 members. Like for other parties, the numbers have been decreasing for the last twenty years.

The personal membership of the party is the local association or club. The normal type is covering a smaller geographical area, part of a municipality. There are also clubs in work-places, a few are organising special immigrant groups, pensioners have their "old guard" groups etc. At present we have around 2,800 branches.

The local Party association/club 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 congresses, they can bring up local problems to the municipality etc. The association/club has an important task of organising studies and carry out opinion-forming activities.

In conclusion one can say that the Social Democratic party’s long-time strength in Swedish politics rests on the following pillars: co-operation with the trade unions, strong local self-government combined with good party organisation on all levels, a certain capacity of being in opposition to itself and keep 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), with six issues per year.

**Party finances**

All political parties in the Parliament have signed an agreement to voluntary 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 association/club, the local branch, the party regional district and the central organisation, which means that fees may differ from one part of the country to another. The average fee for a year 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 carriers 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 give income to all levels of party organisation involved in the sale of lottery tickets.

Donations
Donations to the party are given from private individuals as well as organisations.

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. However, Europe is the main ground for social democracy. Since 1989 a number of new members have joined from the former Soviet bloc. Peace, freedom, democracy, 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.
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. This way the Nordic labour movement has developed social democratic thinking.

The Olof Palme International Center is serving the Swedish labour movement in its efforts to give international assistance and increase knowledge about international affairs. The centre publishes reports and arranges seminars. It also co-ordinates support for democracy 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.

S-kvinnor - organises women and is a member of SIW, Socialist International Women.

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

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

Socialdemokraterna för tro och solidaritet – the Christian Social Democrats, member of ILRS, International League of Religious Socialists.

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

**Some facts about Sweden**

Sweden is a parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy. The monarch has purely representative functions. In the constitution it is said 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 with 18 years of age 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.

**Parliamentarism**

The Swedish Parliament (Riksdagen) has 349 members and is elected in a general election every four years. At the same time, county councils and municipal councils are elected as well.

The Parliament makes decisions on laws and constitutional matters, it decides about the state budget and elects 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.

Results from 1932-1968 are for the second (lower) chamber, directly elected. Since 1970 we have had a one-chamber parliament with a 4 ¥ threshold for representation.

1932-1968 elections to the directly elected second chamber took place every four years. 1958 was an extra-ordinary election. 1970-1994 elections to the new one-chamber parliament took place every three years. From 1994 the election period is 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.

**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 1930’s major reforms are introduced, including unemployment benefits, improved retirement pensions, holidays, dental care, public works to combat unemployment.

1939-45 - The second World War, broad national government. The Social Democrats prepare 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 in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden are removed for Nordic citizens.

1964 - The million-dwelling 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 Prime Minister and party leader.

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 running down of the industry proposed by Social Democrats and Liberals win 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 disbanded 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 Swedish Conservative 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, where 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 - Foreign Minister Anna Lindh is murdered in the end of the referendum campaign. Sweden says no to join the Euro

2006 - The Social Democrats lost the election to the Alliance, the right-wing bloc. Göran Persson resigns as Prime Minster and Party Leader


2008 - The Social Democrats, The Green Party and The Left Party strengthen their cooperation and agreed to work for a red-green Government led by the Social Democrats in the next election

2010 - The Social Democrats lost the election to the Alliance, the right-wing bloc. For the first time the xenophobic Sweden-Democrats are elected to the Swedish Parliament.

2011 - Håkan Juholt succeeds Mona Sahlin as party leader.

2013 - The 37th party congress adopts a new party programme and elects Stefan Löfven as new party leader.