

# General Elections in Sweden

## 19<sup>th</sup> September 2010

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### ANALYSIS

On 19<sup>th</sup> September next 7 million Swedes are being called to renew all of their MPs: both national (members of the Riksdag, the only Chamber of Parliament) and local (town councils and county councils).

Norwegians and Icelanders who live in the kingdom, those with a nationality of another State but registered as resident in Sweden for the last three consecutive years and citizens of the 26 other EU Member States will be entitled to vote in the local elections.

With regard to the general election voters can vote by post in advance in all of the country's post offices during the 18 days preceding the election i.e. as from 1st September. If they so wish they can cancel their postal vote by returning to the ballot box on Election Day. 497,000 Swedes will be voting for the first time on 19<sup>th</sup> September next i.e. +15% in comparison with the last general elections on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2006, representing 9% of all voters. Finally 132,780 Swedes living abroad will be taking part in the election.

Just one month from the election the result is still uncertain. Many political analysts believe that the election will be fought out in the centre. In a SIFO poll in July 36% of Swedes said they tended to the right, 24% to the left and 33% to the centre. Another poll in July showed that 46% of voters thought that the Alliance forces, in office at present, were going to win on 19<sup>th</sup> September whilst 40% were forecasting a change in government and therefore a victory for the left. The Swedes, who were for a long time loyal all of their life to the same party, now tend just like their European counterparts to be more volatile. Their vote fluctuates depending on the electoral context or the position adopted by the parties with regard to the various themes. All of this makes the general election results less certain than in the previous decades with the end result remaining a mystery until the last minute. In addition to this the election campaigns are increasingly focused on the two main political leaders – Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt for the Alliance and Mona Sahlin for the left coalition – the candidates' personality usually plays a lesser role in Sweden than in other States. The debate of ideas is still elementary and voters always votes primarily according to each party's economic programme and the ability to govern.

### The Swedish Political System

Sweden has a unicameral Parliament, the Riksdag that includes 349 members elected every four years on the third Sunday in September by proportional representation. For the elections the country is divided into 29 electoral constituencies each electing on average 11 representatives to the Riksdag. The largest of these constituencies is that of the capital Stockholm which elects 38 members of parliament.

The mode of election is proportional with votes being distributed according to the Sainte Lagüe modified method with a primary divisor of 1.4. 310 seats are distributed amongst 29 constituencies, the other 39, called compensatory constituencies, are attributed to the various parties in order to ensure them the best possible representation on a national level. The candidates who are elected for compensatory seats win them in constituencies where their party enjoys the greatest remainder. To take part in the distribution of seats a party must

have won 4% of the votes cast nationally or 12% within a given constituency.

Since the elections in 1998 in addition to being able to vote for a party, voters have also had the opportunity of having a preferential vote for one of the candidates on the lists offered to them by the parties and as a result they have had more influence over the attribution of seats to the various parties. During the count the number of seats won by each party is decided first before the candidates on each list having won the greatest number of votes are declared elected. Nevertheless in order to be elected according to the preferential voting system a candidate has to have won at least 8% of the vote won by its party in a constituency.

7 political parties are represented in the Riksdag at present:

- the Social Democratic Party (SAP), the main opposition party led by Mona Sahlin since 2007; this party has dominated Swedish political life for the last 70 years. It has 130 MPs;
- the Moderate Party (M) led by outgoing Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt lies to the right and has 97 MPs;
- the Centre Party (C), a former farmers' party led by present Industry Minister, Maud Olofsson; it has 29 seats;
- the People's Party-Liberals (FpL), whose leader is the present Education Minister, Jan Björklund; it has 28 seats;
- The Christian Democratic Party (KD), a conservative party created in 1964 led by Göran Hägglund; it has 24 seats;
- the Left Party (Vp), formerly the Communist Party whose present leader is Lars Ohly with 22 seats;
- the Environment Party-Greens (MP), a leftwing party created in 1981, represented by two people, Peter Eriksson and Maria Wetterstrand, with 19 seats.

### **The Alliance: results of four years' of government**

In office since 2006 the Alliance that rallies the four rightwing parties (M, C, FpL, KD) is proud that Sweden was not as badly affected as most of the other EU Member States by the international economic crisis. Sweden, which is an extremely open country and therefore highly affected by the collapse in world trade did not however experience such as severe recession as the other coun-

tries because of the support given to domestic demand and public finances that made it possible to limit the decline in the GDP. The latter did however decrease last year to settle at -4.7%. Inevitably the recession led to an increase in unemployment; this now totals 9.5% of the working population (June 2010) but this includes 21.2% of young people aged 20 to 24 and this in spite of that fact that the Alliance won the previous elections on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2006 with the promise of reducing unemployment.

When they came to office the four parties in the Alliance struck the unions and unemployment funds managed by the latter by increasing the cost of union contributions. As a result the country experienced a decline in union support (500,000 Swedes did not renew their subscriptions) which represented a decrease of unionised employees between 2006 and 2009. In addition to this the State withdrew from the funding of unemployment benefit organisations with its contribution falling in January 2007 from 95% to 55% (i.e. savings of 10 billion crowns – 900 million € – for the State coffers over 2007). The conditions required to be able to receive a basic daily benefit of 320 crowns (29€) have been tightened up. A person now has to have worked 80 hours in the month (in comparison with 70) or 480 hours out of 6 of 12 of the last 12 months at a rate of 50 hours monthly. Finally the amount of benefit is now based on the average income received over the last 12 months (instead of 6). Many Swedes therefore receive daily benefit that is lower than the basic benefit of 329 crowns. The measures taken by Fredrik Reinfeldt's government have affected the weakest Swedes since they mainly involve those who not employed according to an open end contract, i.e. 571,000 people out of 4 million wage earners. The government also reduced the advantages enjoyed by employees in terms of paid sick leave (previously unlimited in terms of time) by establishing new rules in July 2008. Only people who are extremely sick can benefit from long term sick leave. Others receive 80% of their salary for a year (the limit has been set at 2,000€). This period can be extended by 550 days (with 75% of the salary being paid). After this time people lose their right to sick pay.

In an interview in the newspaper Expressen Fredrik Reinfeldt maintained that his government *"had contributed to the establishment of a more effective employment*

*policy that was an attempt to put an end to a specific culture of passiveness.*" He said that youth unemployment could be explained by the fact that many leave the education system without any qualifications. *"Hence the usefulness of the reforms we have established with regard to coaching and the development of apprenticeships,"* he said, adding, *"on the other hand this means not being choosy about accepting work at McDonalds. After all having paid work is a good thing."* In its programme put forward on 8th May the government said it wanted to step up work on apprenticeships. The Peoples Party-Liberals said it was convinced that this measure encouraged employment thanks to lower salaries. It is proposing the employment of an apprentice under a new specific work contract for young people under 24. The Prime Minister rejected criticism about his reform of sick pay which says that it is hard. *"I simply said that we tend to believe rather too rapidly that such and such a person is no longer apt for work,"* he declared.

*"We want to continue on this path. Our public finances are in order. We do not have debts like other European countries that were incurred during the budgetary crisis,"* declared Fredrik Reinfeldt, who is running again for office as head of government. He promised to make education his priority in the fight against unemployment. His programme is based on budgetary responsibility. Although the country's public finances are strong (the public debt totalled 42.8% of the GDP in 2009), the four parties in the Alliance want to review the finance law to include an objective of public surplus. They are planning however to increase that budget that town councils devote to the care of the elderly and education. Finally mid-August the government decided to devote 5.4 million euros to a programme designed to improve the housing of the elderly.

Economy Minister Anders Borg (M) indicated that the parties in the Alliance were planning to sell the shares held by the State in several major companies for a total of around 100 billion crowns (10.46 billion €). *"We hope to achieve an income of around 25 billion crowns per year during the next term in office. This money should help to pay off the public debt"* he said. Finally the Prime Minister promised to continue decreasing taxes notably in support of the retired who, if public finances return to the black, should witness a decrease of 20 billion crowns (2.1 billion €) in their taxes over the next four years.

The Moderate Party likes to stand as the *"workers' party"*. *"We have the employment policy that the Social Democrats do not have. We are the only ones to guarantee the creation of jobs,"* he maintained.

In terms of foreign policy the government said at the beginning of August that it was planning to extend the presence of Swedish troops in Afghanistan. *"Sweden must take part in the work to manage the international crisis with a clear legal mandate so that it shows its involvement and responsibility in world events. The Alliance parties want to extend the mandate of the Swedish forces and are open to increasing our military contribution if the situation requires it,"* wrote the Defence Minister Sten Tolgfors (M), in a column published in the daily Dagens Nyheter. Sweden is officially a neutral country, it is not a member of NATO and it has been taking part in the international force in Afghanistan since the start of 2002.

Foreign Minister Carl Bildt (M) denounced the danger the leftwing would cause the country and the *"crude anti-Americanism that typifies the opposition's programme,"* (demanding the closure of American bases abroad). *"If we give the Social Democrats the chance of allowing the former communist left to enter government it will be an open door to the implementation of a policy the result of which unfortunately leaves no room for doubt: a government without unity and a weakened Sweden,"* he declared.

Although the rightwing is presenting a united front just one month before the general election several parties are questioning their individual weighting within the coalition. The Moderates led by Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt who have chosen the motto *"Framåt tillsammans"* (Forwards together) enjoy a high popularity rate, but achieve this to the detriment of the other three parties. The People's Party-Liberals rally the Swedes living in the major towns and the most qualified as well as a high contingent of teachers whilst the Centre Party is more that of the rural areas. According to an interview published by the daily Aftonbladet on 26th July the party's chair, Industry Minister Maud Olofsson re-iterated her ambition to make it *"the party of entrepreneurs and rightwing ecologists."* Even though traditionally it is against the nuclear industry the party approved Parliament's adoption of the building of new nuclear reactors in replacement of the ten old ones (that cover 42% of

the country's energy requirements) when they come to the end of their time (a text that was only just approved in the Riksdag 174 votes in favour, 172 against). *"The Centre Party has not changed its opinion and is still promising renewable energies but chose to accept a compromise which means the replacement of the ageing reactors for new ones,"* indicated Maud Olofsson after the vote. The Christian Democratic Party seems to have been marginalised with its new concept of *"real people"* struggling to find support. Its chair, Göran Hägglund, indicated that this term was directed at all of those *"who sometimes felt left out or ill treated by the authorities and the intelligentsia."* Its programme focuses on three points: the creation of new jobs, notably thanks to a decrease in employers' contributions; increased freedom for citizens notably thanks to a limiting of the political sphere of influence and better quality of services provided by the State. The elderly are at the heart of the party's target which wants to reduce the difference in terms of taxes between the retired and those at work (273 million € in tax reductions) but it also wants to raise the maximum age of retirement from 67 to 70.

Finally the People's Party-Liberals have chosen to place education at the heart of their electoral programme. At the beginning of August its leader, Education Minister Jan Björklund said that *"school was not designed to raise children in the place of parents"*. He said that parents whose children were a problem should be allowed to attend certain lessons with their children so that they could see the situation in the classroom for themselves. The minister hopes to open *"some elite classes"* in colleges and high schools. *"Gifted pupils have the right as much anyone else to feel comfortable at school without being forced to listen to lessons that are not on their level. After 1968 we reduced our level of requirements and gave pupils too much power. It is prohibited to give them marks before the 11<sup>th</sup> year (16)! The result of this negligence is that teachers are no longer respected,"* he said. A poll by the research centre FSI published in the Dagens Nyheter reveals that education is the principle concern of Swedes ahead of health, the situation of the elderly and employment.

Today the parties on the right are facing two major issues just one month before the general elections. The first is this: apart from the Moderates and the People's Party-Liberals will the two other parties in the Alliance

– the Centre Party and the Christian Democrats – rise above the 4% threshold of votes cast necessary to be represented in Parliament on 19<sup>th</sup> September? The second involves the far right: what will the score of the Sweden Democrats (SD) be in this election? Will they deprive the rightwing of its absolute majority in Parliament?

### Can the Social Democrats return to power?

On the left the Greens are moving ahead well and are approved in the polls whilst the social democrats are struggling. Social Democratic leader Mona Sahlin is still not very popular amongst the Swedes and faces strong competition on the part of Maria Wetterstrand, the extremely popular Green spokesperson. Mona Sahlin suffered greatly in the 1990's due to the so-called Toblerone scandal. In 1990 and 1991 when she was Employment Minister she used her professional bank card to make private purchases on several occasions. Amongst the articles she bought were two Toblerone bars. The Greens' second spokesperson Peter Eriksson is concerned about Mona Sahlin's low popularity rate which in his opinion might cost the leftwing its victory. *"She is an element of discouragement,"* he declared. The chair of the Social Democratic Party said *"that he was at ease with the feelings she caused" and stressed that she had always been "loved or hated"*. *"At least people take up a position,"* he concluded.

The Social Democratic Party was qualified for a long time as the *"most effective political party in the world"*. It has to be said that it dominated Swedish political life right through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But the socio-professional categories that guaranteed its victory (workers and poorly paid employees) are slowly turning away from the party for two reasons: voters' identification with a political party is now very weak and the former working class is disappearing. The most important parties on the left have recovered the support of new voters such as Swedes of foreign origin, but whose numbers are not adequate to help it recover domination of the political arena. The Social Democrats are presenting the general elections on 19<sup>th</sup> September next as a time of choice between *"a policy that will create more employment and equality between the sexes and a policy that increases inequality and which excludes."* The party has chosen the motto *"Vi kan inte vänta"* (We cannot wait).

On 7<sup>th</sup> December 2008 the leftwing came together within a coalition called Rödgröna (Red/Green coalition) in the ilk of the rightwing in 2006 when they rallied under the label of the Alliance. The union of leftwing parties came about because of the Confederation of the Unions of Sweden (LO) that drew closer to the Left Party to the detriment of the Social Democratic Party. If it wins the general elections the Social Democratic Party will govern with two "small" parties – an all time first in the kingdom. But the leftwing, which led in the polls for a long time is now lagging behind the Alliance.

The Greens' electorate is young, urban and highly qualified. They are campaigning for the opening of the country's borders (even though Maria Wetterstrand has said that her party would give up its demand for the legal settlement of illegal immigrants) in Sweden, a moratorium on the building of hypermarkets in the suburbs of major towns, a twofold increase in the use of public transport over the next ten years (they want to increase the number of rail and tramways). Maria Wetterstrand defines herself as a "Green liberal". She is against the State taking up too great a position; she is also against centralisation and hopes to privatise several state companies. Eurosceptics for a long time, the Greens have now been converted over to the European Union thanks to the influence of Maria Wetterstrand.

Peter Eriksson has said he is open to working with "the small conservative parties". It is indeed highly that neither the Alliance parties nor the leftwing achieve a majority in Parliament on 19<sup>th</sup> September next and that the far right Sweden Democrats find themselves in the position of referee. Since all of the political parties have excluded working with the latter the two blocs may be obliged to "attempt the recruitment of one of the parties in the coalition opposite". Political analysts believe in this case that the Alliance parties may convince the Greens to join them if they achieve the greatest number of MPs. In an interview in the Expressen Fredrik Reinfeldt did however exclude all cooperation with the Greens in the next term in office. "They are clearly far too opposite us in terms of employment," he indicated.

The Left Party (Vänsterpartiet), that is an assembly of former communists, associative militants of immigrant descent and militants opposed to "American imperialism" chose to change its name in this electoral campaign. It now defines itself as the Valfärdspartiet (V), the Welfare

State Party, of which it would like to stand as the most vigorous defender which includes going against the will of its coalition partners – the Social Democratic Party and the Greens. It sees the Alliance's results as head of the country as a "major failure". It is campaigning for the opening of the frontiers, a six hour working day, the sharing of parental leave (at present assumed to a total of 80% by mothers) between both parents, the opening of infants schools in the evenings and at night and the withdrawal of Swedish troops from Afghanistan. With regard to this it is echoed by the Social Democrats whose leader, Mona Sahlin says she plans for a return of Swedish troops stationed in Afghanistan since the region which they are in charge of should be amongst the first to be transferred back over to Afghan responsibility. "If this is the case and if the Afghan election on 18th September next (general elections will take place in the country the day before the Swedish election) goes off well then it seems clear that we shall start to reduce our presence there during the next term in office," she indicated. On 6<sup>th</sup> August Mona Sahlin wrote in a column published in the daily Aftonbladet: "To succeed totally the country needs our help and support. Sweden has been one of the main contributors in terms of aid to Afghanistan for a long time. But military assistance has taken over development aid. We want to overcome this situation so that development aid is at least equal to the military effort. If security conditions improve the time will have come to think about our withdrawal. However it is vital that civilian assistance lasts well after the departure of Western troops."

On 29<sup>th</sup> July last a poll revealed that 41% of Swedes believe that the Swedish presence in Afghanistan is unjustified (35% thought this in February), 42% were in favour (46% in the last poll).

Mona Sahlin has promoted the unity of the red-green coalition with regard to taxation, integration and even foreign policy insisting on the idea of solidarity which in her opinion is the heart of her programme. Hence the left coalition has established a joint strategy with regard to education promoting amongst other things school marks at the end of the first part of the secondary school period. It qualifies the present suggestions put forward by the Education Minister as "a step in the wrong direction". "Teachers are perfectly able to spot the most advanced pupils in their classes and adapt their methods

to the level of each one individually. We simply have to create more jobs," she declared to the daily Aftonbladet. "We shall dedicate 12 billion additional crowns (1.2 billion €) to education and healthcare. The survival of the Welfare State is more important than tax reductions," promise the leftwing forces. According to the opposition spending should create between 10,000 and 15,000 jobs. The Social Democratic Party has qualified "youth employment" as put forward by the Alliance as "cheap labour" and says that new training was required so that young people were not relegated to the bottom of the ladder and so that they were not offered salaries lower than those earned by other wage earners.

The leftwing would like to see an increase in public spending, a rise that would be funded by an increase in taxes that would however remain "moderate" for most Swedes. Taxes on alcohol, tobacco and fuels would rise. On 15th August last Mona Sahlin accused Prime Minister Reinfeldt of having weakened the Swedish social model during his term in office and that he is continuing on the same path, which in her opinion is damaging, since he is promising to decrease taxes. "The Moderate Party thinks that reducing taxes is the priority. They only talk of that. Nothing else counts in their opinion, neither youth unemployment, nor the exclusion of the sick, nor the growing inequalities between Swedes. Is this really the Sweden we want? Is this the country in which we want to live? No, a thousand times no! she declared.

With regard to taxation the opposition would also like to continue tax reductions in support of the retired; the latter would be granted 7.5 billion crowns in tax relief. "Sweden is one of the rare countries in the world which taxes the retired more than wage earners," wrote former Social Democratic Prime Minister (1986-1991 and 1994-1996) Ingvar Carlsson in an article in the press. In addition to this, whilst average Swedish income increased by 32% between 1999 and 2008, that of the retired increased by 24% (and that of elderly single women by 19%). The over 65's represent 18% of the Swedish population.

The opposition is accusing the Fredrik Reinfeldt's government of having failed from an economic point of view and denounces the rise in unemployment – at its highest rate since the end of the economic crisis of the 1990's. "The government cannot be held responsible for the world crisis but it is responsible for the fact that

the collapse of the labour market in Sweden is worse than the average in the European Union," repeats the leftwing. It says that the youth and immigrant unemployment rate in Sweden is "one of the highest in the EU" and that Swedish productivity and competitiveness have decreased to the point that "Sweden's place in Europe" is in danger. The leftwing wants to increase the upper limit of unemployment benefits (680 to 950 crowns) reduced by the Alliance in 2006.

With regard to transport the opposition wants to introduce a single tariff for transport in Stockholm. All trips would cost 35 crowns (3.65€) and children under 12 would travel free. The left coalition would like to create new high speed rail links (between Stockholm and Göteborg and between Göteborg and Malmö. Investments in the rail industry would increase by 120 billion crowns (12.51 billion €) Finally the three parties want to facilitate entrepreneurship or reduce employers' contributions and to help craftsmen they would grant further tax relief on all renovation work on buildings that leads to a reduction in energy consumption.

### **Will the far right makes its debut in Parliament?**

The possible entry by the far right in the Riksdag is one of the vital issues in the electoral campaign. Until now the country has been spared extremist trends. The nationalist party, Sweden Democrats, founded in 1988 and led by Jimmie Akesson has made constant progress in both general and local elections. It won 2.9% of the vote (nearly 10% in Scanie, a border area with Denmark, during the last election on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2006). The Sweden Democrats therefore made their entry into three regional parliaments and won 20 town council seats.

In the polls they achieve good results amongst young voters, particularly amongst those voting for the first time. The party that has historical links with the neo-Nazis (which it drew away from in an attempt to become more respectable) and which emerged from a racist movement "Keep Sweden Swedish" is both conservative and social in terms of its ideology. It wants to restrict access to abortion and put an end to what party secretary, Björn Söder qualifies as the "normalisation of homosexuality", it is against feminism etc ... But like the leftwing (and the far right movement the Danish People's Party, DF) it stands as the defender of the Welfare State.

In a country in which one inhabitant in four has a parent who was born abroad, the Sweden Democrats support a reduction in immigration so that Sweden can remain an "homogeneous society". They want to see a 90% reduction in the number of immigrants and asylum seekers, the establishment of a residence permit that is only temporary, the obligation for asylum seekers and future immigrants to undergo a DNA test and also examinations to check them for TB and to see whether they are HIV positive. "Most Swedes share my ideas with regard to immigrants. In this country if you criticise the immigration policy you are seen as being racist or xenophobic. It is difficult to make people stand up and for them to say "this is what I think". Swedes are very tolerant but I believe that a great part of the electorate thinks that the immigration policy has been too lax and far too generous," says Jimmie Akesson who talks of "Swedishness" – a term he uses not to qualify a "skin colour or part of our body" but rather "our values and our behaviour". For many years the national trend (anti-globalisation – anti-European) was the realm of the country's leftwing. In 2003 the then Prime Minister Göran Persson (SAP) advised on a restrictive approach to border controls, notably with regard to workers from the Baltic States. He spoke of "social tourists" who might undermine the Welfare State. The rightwing like the left has excluded any collaboration with the far right after the general elections on 19<sup>th</sup> September next.

During this term in office (2006-2010), the leftwing came out ahead of all rightwing parties in all opinion polls. The last poll published on 20<sup>th</sup> August last credits the Alliance with 47.9% of the vote in comparison with 46.3% for the opposition (the Social Democratic Party is still Sweden's leading party with 32.7% of the vote). The difference between left and right is therefore very narrow. The Sweden Democrats are due to win 4% of the vote and would therefore make it into Parliament. Finally 22% of those interviewed said they still had not decided to whom they would grant their vote. The difference between the two coalitions is very narrow and is tending to grow even narrower as the weeks go by. "It is likely that the situation will be extremely muddled after the election," analyses Carl Melin from the pollster United Minds. "If neither of the coalitions succeeds in achieving an absolute majority a government might be formed but if it rejects the support of the Sweden Democrats it would be highly unstable," indicates political expert Peter Santessen-Wilson from Institute Ratio. "The Sweden Democrats may vote with the opposition on the law governing the budget, which would cause real political chaos and force the government to resign," he added.

In conclusion the Swedes preferred the right to the left only twice in the kingdom's history: in 1991 and 2006 i.e. two electoral years that witnessed victory for the rightwing.

#### Reminder of the General Election Results of 17<sup>th</sup> September 2006 in Sweden

Turnout: 81.99%

Political Parties	Number of votes won	% of votes won	No of seats
<b>Social Democratic Party (SAP)</b>	1, 942, 625	34.99	130
<b>Moderate Party (M)</b>	1, 456 014	26.23	97
<b>Centre Party (C)</b>	437, 389	7.88	29
<b>People's Party-Liberals (FpL)</b>	418, 395	7.54	28
<b>Christian Democratic Party (KD)</b>	365, 998	6.59	24
<b>Left Party (Vp)</b>	324, 722	5.85	22
<b>Environment Party-Greens (MP)</b>	291, 121	5.24	19
<b>Sweden Democrats (SD)</b>	162, 463	2.93	0
<b>Others</b>	1, 034, 432	2.79	0

Source : <http://www.val.se>

## D-7

7 days before  
the poll

Just one week before the Swedish general elections on 19th September, the Alliance coalition that rallies the Moderate Assembly (M), led by outgoing Prime Minister, Fredrik Reinfeldt; the Centre Party (C), the People's Party-Liberals (FpL) and the Christian Democratic Party (KD) seems to be running ahead of the Red/Green Coalition (Rödgröna) (that rallies the Social Democratic Party (SAP) led by Mona Sahlin, the Environment Party-Greens (MP) and the Left Party (Vp).

Fredrik Reinfeldt's, (Head of Government) popularity rate, is much higher than that of his rival, Mona Sahlin, who remains unpopular amongst the Swedes unlike her coalition partner, Maria Wetterstrand, the Green spokesperson. Within the SAP many speak of a "hate campaign" against Mona Sahlin, a permanent target of the media in their opinion. The two leaders had a debate on TV

According to the polls the Swedes are expecting a victory on the part of the Alliance forces. At the beginning of September 62.4% of them say the right are in the lead in comparison with 19.3% who anticipate a victory for the left. Amongst the opposition supporters 38% believe that there may be a change in view.

The retired (around 20% of the electorate), who have witnessed a decrease in their pensions over the last few months (the level of pensions in Sweden is indexed against economic growth), are at the heart of the end of the campaign. Some of the pensions are based on capitalisation and are therefore affected by the financial crisis. Pensioners are taxed more than those who work and they have been given tax rebates over the last few years, since the Alliance said explicitly it wanted to privilege work.

The Alliance forces have indicated that if they win they will reduce pensioners' taxes by five billion crowns and the left are promising that if they come to power they will do away with the difference in taxes between the retired and the employees. At the beginning of September the government announced that it would consent to a 2.5 billion crown reduction in taxes for the retired (€271.5 million), a reform that would enter force in 2011 and it might foresee a further reduction in taxes to a total of 2.3 crowns (€249.7 million) if public finances return to the black. The proposals of the Alliance forces may therefore total 10 billion crowns (around €1.1 billion) in tax reductions for the retired. As for the Red/Green coalition it is promising a decrease of 17.5 billion crowns in taxes in all (€1.9 billion).

The campaign also focuses on issues of taxation and rather resembles a tax reduction competition (Sweden is one of the countries where the tax burden is the highest in Europe). It seems to be a long time ago that the difference between the right and the left was that the former favoured a decrease in taxes and the latter stood as the

protector of the Swedish model. In all the government has promised to reduce taxes and public spending to a total of 32.7 billion crowns (€3.55 billion) if they win.

The left has declared that it will not go back on the 90% in tax reductions approved by the outgoing government. They hope to reduce taxes on pensions and unemployment insurance contributions and are advising on a VAT reduction in the restaurant industry. However they are planning to raise the minimum tax rate on a house from 4.5 million crowns (which would give rise to the payment of an additional tax), to increase some income taxes and on petrol and to re-introduce a wealth tax. They hope to abolish the reduction on the domestic services tax (reduced by 50% at present), a reduction that would be compensated by decrease in VAT on the very same services. This is a programme which led the outgoing Prime Minister to suppose that the opposition wanted "to decrease taxes for all, except for the Swedes who work."

Mona Sahlin has accused Fredrik Reinfeldt of weakening the Swedish social model during his mandate and of diminishing the funding of the Welfare State with his new promises to reduce taxes. "The Moderate Assembly Party thinks that the priority is to reduce taxes. It cannot see any others. Neither youth unemployment nor the exclusion of the sick, nor the growing inequalities between people," she declares. In her opinion the Head of Government supports tax reductions "to the detriment of increasing the numbers of workers in the healthcare, and education sectors, of having greater ecological ambitions and the possibility of Swedes living a

richer life." "Tax reductions cost. I am certain that the price will be paid by the Welfare State," she maintains. The leftwing is promising to devote 1.5 billion crowns (out of the 4.6 billion promised for the entire term in office to come) as from 2011 to the care and well-being of the elderly. They are planning for a rise in the means devoted to small children, education (a rise in student allocations, a capping of enrolment fees to infants' schools and an increase in the number of teachers) and to the Welfare State in general.

Fredrik Reinfeldt is relying on the results of four years at the head of the party to make further careful promises. Amongst the strongest countries in Europe from an economic point of view (Sweden lies second behind Switzerland in the international competitive ranking published by the World Economic Forum), Sweden is experiencing full recovery (4.5% GDP growth planned for in 2010). Its public finances are healthy (public debt totalled 42.8% of the GDP in 2009), the budgetary deficit represented 0.5%), the Swedish crown has gained around 20% over the euro since March and the Swedish Central Bank (Riksbank) raised its interest rates at the beginning of September by half a point (from 0.25% to 0.75%) for the second time this year. Of course the unemployment rate remains high (8% of the working population, 21.2% amongst young people aged 20 to 24) and the cuts in social spending that have sometimes been severe in a country that is extremely attached to the upkeep of a powerful Welfare State (Folkhemmet, i.e. the house of the people) have affected the most vulnerable Swedes.

The Alliance forces have made employment their priority and present their tax reductions policy as the only effective way to create jobs. "Tax rebates will create jobs and will encourage people to work," declared Fredrik Reinfeldt who presented together with Economy Minister Anders Borg (M) his "employment package" the cost of which is estimated at 3 billion crowns (325 million euros). These measures involve young and the long term unemployed, notably an improvement in the opportunities for the professional integration of young graduates, an extension of the coaching system (aid to complete the job application forms etc ...) which will be funded to a total of 1 billion crowns (108.5 million euros).

"We are ready for four additional years," declared the

Head of Government. In all the Alliance forces are promising – if they win – to allocate 32.7 billion crowns (€3.2 billion) to a social reform plan. They want to sell certain shares that the State owns in several public companies such as the electricity company Vattenfall, Nordea bank and the telephone operator TeliaSonera. The leftwing opposition is much less in favour of any privatisation policy and wants to retain Vattenfall within the State's fold.

"I am doing exactly what I promised the Swedes: the protection of the social system is the priority," declared Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt adding, "most of the money that we engage will go to education, healthcare and social services."

Fredrik Reinfeldt has every interest in bringing about debate on socio-economic issues. His results and the guarantee of stability and consolidation of the acquis of the previous term in office that its programme is supposed to stand for seem to be attracting the electorate. Without necessarily approving the liberal doctrine the Swedes show, like many European citizens, that they need stability and that they have greater confidence in the efficacy of the rightwing parties to manage the economic crisis in the face of the turmoil experienced by society.

The leftwing is struggling to embody a real alternative capable of mobilising the electorate. The Red/Green Coalition is suffering due to its heterogeneity. Hence the Left Party is eurosceptic contrary to the Social Democratic Party and the Environment Party-Greens. In addition to this more working class socio-professional categories find it difficult to identify with the ecologist party, defender of homosexual identity. The opposition lacks strategy (the Alliance forces have asserted their political agenda – notably with regard to taxation – in the electoral campaign). Finally it is suffering from a leadership problem caused by Mona Sahlin who is not very popular.

This situation is bad for the left because although the personality of the candidates plays a lesser role in Sweden than in other European states the legislative campaign has crystallised around two main political leaders – Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt for the outgoing government coalition and Mona Sahlin for the left coalition. The idea that the electorate forms about the ability of each of these to govern is due to be vital in the choice

that they make. *"We only have two main candidates and the general elections are like a presidential vote;"* declared journalist Fredrik Furtenbach. *"It is a major change for the Social Democrats who have to accept that they are no longer the centre of the political game. It is also a great change for the electorate who have a real alternative,"* indicated Henrik Brors, a political analyst.

Jimmie Akesson, the Sweden Democrat leader (SD), a far right party has presented its electoral programme. Employment, well-being and security are the three main themes even though everyone believes in reality the fight against immigration that is at the heart of the programme. As the election approaches the tone of the far right is toughening up against the integration policy and Islam. An electoral video showing an elderly woman try to reach a service counter and who finds herself trapped behind a group of women wearing the niqab caused a scandal. The TV channel TV4 refused to broadcast it.

Jimmie Akesson speaks in manner that reflects the traditional ideology of the far right. *"The apostles of cultural diversity and the entire establishment have robbed Sweden,"* he said. He stresses that his party has no interest in addressing the issue of employment *"since all of the other parties are already talking about it,"* and he said that he wanted to turn *"against the immigrants who work in Sweden to replace them by Swedes."* *"Our message is designed to cause controversy. If the establishment parties set against us then it's a good thing. This enables debate and makes people talk about our priorities,"* he indicated.

The Red/Green coalition clearly declared that it would never form a government with the Sweden Democrats and that it would never accept any type of parliamentary support on their part.

The last poll published by Dagens Nyheter on 10<sup>th</sup> September credits the Alliance forces with 50.5 % of the vote (48.4% in a survey on 8<sup>th</sup> September) and the Red/Green coalition with 42.2% (44.9% in a survey on 8<sup>th</sup> September). The Sweden Democrats are credited with 6% (4.7% in a survey on 8<sup>th</sup> September). Hence they will enter parliament.

The two main parties are running neck and neck in the polls and the Social Democratic Party (30% of the vote) has witnessed a threat to its position as the leading Swedish party on the part of the Moderate Assembly Party (29.9% of the vote).

Whatever happens the general elections on 19<sup>th</sup> September next will be an historical election in Sweden.

Either they will approve the outgoing Alliance coalition and the government led by the Moderate Assembly Party will undertake a second term in office – which has never happened to date; or they will provide victory to the Red/Green bloc and Sweden will be led by a unique coalition rallying social democrats, ecologists and former communists. In the last option Mona Sahlin would become Prime Minister – an all time first in Sweden. Finally the election might be that of the far right and see it enter the Riksdag for the first time.

## Results

### The outgoing right coalition wins the general elections in Sweden and the far right makes its debut in Parliament.

The Alliance coalition led by outgoing Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt came out ahead in the general elections in Sweden on 19<sup>th</sup> September. Together the four Alliance parties – the Moderate Assembly Party (M), the Centre Party (C), the People's Party-Liberals (FpL) and the Christian Democratic Party (KD) – won 49.2% of the vote (+1 in comparison with the previous general elections on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2006) and 172 seats. The Alliance failed however to win an absolute majority in the Riksdag, the only Chamber in Parliament (175 seats). The Moderates won 30% (107 seats, +10), the Centrists 6.6% (22 seats, -7), the Liberals 7.1% (24 seats, -4) and the Christian Democrats, 5.6% (19 seats, -5). The four rightwing parties pulled ahead of the red-green coalition (Rödgröna), led by Mona Sahlin, which won 44% of the vote (-2.1 points) and 157 seats. The left bloc rallies the Social Democratic Party (SAP) which won 30.9% of the vote (113 seats, -17), the Environment Party-Greens (MP), 7.2% (25 seats +6) and the Left Party (Vp), 5.6% (19 seats, -3).

The Moderate Party is the grand winner of this election with the SAP only just pulling ahead of it – this

is a unique political situation in a country that was dominated by social democracy during the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Sweden Democrats (SD), a far right party led by Jimmie Akesson succeeded in making a breakthrough winning 5.7% of the vote (+2.8 points) i.e. nearly double the percentage they won four years ago. This party will therefore be making its debut in Parliament.

Turnout, which is traditionally high in Sweden, rose to 82.1% i.e. nearly the same as that recorded in the election on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2006 (81.99%). Around 2.2 of the 7.1 million Swedish voters made their choice ahead of time i.e. +400,000 in comparison with 2006.

Outgoing Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt (M) won but did not succeed in maintaining his absolute majority in the Riksdag in spite of the many warnings he made during the electoral campaign. "We called on the Swedes to be careful and responsible and to vote clearly to continue with a majority government," he declared on the day of the election. "If you want to wake up on Monday morning with a stable, majority government then the Alliance government is the solution," he repeated. "The biggest bloc has to govern and it is the Alliance," he maintained after the announcement of the results. Fredrik Reinfeldt has succeeded where no other had succeeded before him in Sweden: to retain power after completing a full term in office.

"It is not the result I had hoped for in these elections," he declared excluding government in coalition with the far right. "I was clear. I am not going to cooperate or be dependent on the Sweden Democrats," he repeated. Speaking of the possibility of his coalition failing to achieve the absolute majority in Parliament the Prime Minister said he might try to find support with the Environment Party-Greens. This is a possibility which the spokespeople of both ecologist party, Peter Eriksson and Maria Wetterstrand firmly rejected before the election. Several ecologist personalities have said they are ready to work with the Alliance forces to avoid the far right from having any influence over work in Parliament. "It will be very difficult for us, after this campaign, to look our electorate in the eye and say that we will cooperate with this government," stressed Maria Wetterstrand.

"We have a scenario that most of the Swedish electorate wanted to avoid which means that a xenophobic party is the king maker. It is likely that Fredrik Reinfeldt will open negotiations with the Greens. I do not believe he will offer them a seat in government but he may try to convince them to enter a certain kind of cooperation and seek their support of the government with respect

to some subjects, this will enable them to influence political work," declared Ulf Bjereld, political scientist at the University of Göteborg.

"Even if no bloc wins a clear majority I believe that we will be able to continue government. We can undertake our policy quite well within the context of a minority government. This of course is on condition that the left does not join the far right to approve a motion of censure. But I do not believe in this hypothesis. What might happen is that the Sweden Democrats, without prior warning, will approve proposals put forward by the social democrats at the last minute. This already happened in the 1990's when New Democracy (a far right party that sat in the Swedish Parliament from 1991-1994) was represented in Parliament," declared the leader of the Christian Democrats, Göran Hägglund.

With 30.9% of the vote the Social Democratic Party has achieved the poorest result in its history. "We have lost. We were unable to win people's confidence back. It is now that Fredrik Reinfeldt should say how he plans to govern Sweden without allowing the Sweden Democrats any room for influence" declared Mona Sahlin. The SAP has undeniably suffered because of its leadership; Mona Sahlin, who is not very popular, struggled against the competition put up by Maria Wetterstrand, the highly popular Greens spokesperson and she found it difficult to provide real cohesion to the coalition that she led. The party seems to have seen the defection of some of its electorate because it did not understand or accept its alliance with the Environment Party-Greens. According to some exit polls the far right took advantage of the discontent of former social democrat voters.

More generally the left forces which stood together in an extremely heterogeneous coalition did not succeed in putting forward a real alternative to motivate the Swedes during the electoral campaign in which the outgoing Alliance coalition managed to assert its agenda. "The

*2006 defeat can be explained in the main by the fact that the social democrats ignored the growing problem of unemployment. Since then the Liberals have succeeded in pushing through with their political agenda as well as their vision of the issue. Whilst they thought it would be easy for them to take the upper hand in these elections after four years on the opposition benches the social democrats seem, on the contrary, to be a party that has not reformed offering the same old faces and the same old discourse,"* analyses Andreas Johansson, professor at the University of Göteborg.

The difficulties experienced by the Swedish left are common to all of the social democratic parties in Europe who are struggling to reform and appear credible in the face of the right which is in power in nearly 4/5<sup>ths</sup> of the EU's States. *"The Social Democrats are encountering the same problems as those like them elsewhere in Europe. They cannot adapt to the economic transition which is taking us over from industrial capitalism to globalised capitalism,"* indicates Marie Demker, professor of political science at the University of Göteborg.

*"The irony of it is that the decline of the left is happening at a time when all political parties and society are accepting the model it has been building since the 1930's. For a long time the right campaigned denouncing "socialism" and the Swedish Welfare State. But this approach cannot be adopted any longer. On the contrary it has accepted the social democratic heritage and has totally integrated the social democratic system into its discourse, just adding modernisation in small doses,"* notes journalist of the daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter, Henrik Brors.

With the entry of Sweden Democrats into Parliament Sweden is *"conforming"* with a trend within the EU since

up until now the country was one of the rare ones in which the far right was absent from Parliament. The Swedish integration model, as others in Europe, is struggling. Recent immigration, different from that of previous years, seems not to be as easily accepted in an extremely homogeneous country which questions its identity and the future of its social model in a globalised world. These questions are shared by other Europeans. Some days before the elections Jimmie Akesson (DS) was already celebrating: *"Just the simple fact of us being in parliament will frighten them and we shall force them to adapt to our position, notably with regard to the migration policy because they are afraid of losing votes in the following elections,"* he declared. He promised *"not to cause problems in the Riksdag."* *"We shall assume our responsibilities. This is my promise to the Swedish people,"* he indicated.

Björn Söder, secretary general of the Sweden Democrats said he hoped that the Alliance forces would negotiate with his party. *"We hope to be contacted tomorrow by the other parties,"* he said.

The Alliance coalition is due to form a minority government. This might win the support of the Environment Party-Greens. The re-election of the right in Sweden has put an end to the hegemony of the Social Democratic Party. The country now has political alternation just like its European neighbours. The famous Swedish model has been weakened. *"An era has come to an end,"* was to be read in the editorial in the daily Dagens Nyheter. The Alliance's victory however is not so much a schism but rather it bears witness to a deep change in society. The Svenska Dagbladet maintains that it is time for the Swedes to invent *"a new national image"*.

**General election results 19<sup>th</sup> September 2010 in Sweden**

Turnout: 82.10%

Political Parties	No of votes won	% of votes won	No of seats won
<b>Social Democratic Party (SAP)</b>	1 780 974	30.9	113
<b>Moderate Assembly Party (M)</b>	1 729 010	30	107
<b>Environment Party-Greens (MP)</b>	415 879	7.2	25
<b>People's Party-Liberals (FpL)</b>	407 816	7.1	24
<b>Centre Party (C)</b>	380 215	6.6	22
<b>Sweden Democrats (SD)</b>	330 157	5.7	20
<b>Christian Democrat Party (KD)</b>	324 715	5.6	19
<b>Left Party (Vp)</b>	321 854	5.6	19
<b>Others</b>	80 644	1.3	0

Source : <http://www.val.se> Source: Internet site Swedish elections (<http://www.val.se/val/val2010/valnatt/R/riks/index.html> ).

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