

## History

The Left Federation of Swedish Women has in brief the following history:

In 1914 the doctors Ada Nilsson and Julia von Schneider Kinberg founded the Society for liberal-minded women under the following banner: *"Against war psychosis, for democracy and equal rights for women"*. The society achieved nation-wide status in 1920. After the successful struggle for women's suffrage two members were elected to Parliament, Elisabeth Tamm and Kerstin Hesselgren. With the objective of educating women for their new responsibilities in society the Women's School of Civic Studies was started at Fogelstad in 1925. It continued giving courses until 1954.

The society concentrated on four key issues: democracy and women's rights, children's health and upbringing, the land issue and the issue of war and peace. The latter proved to be the most important for a number of years.

Between the years 1923 and 1936 the journal Tidevarvet (approx: The Times) was published with Elin Wägner amongst the editors. The journal spurned nazism, advocated humane refugee policies and initiated the "Women's unarmed insurrection against war" in 1935.

In 1931 the society assumed its present name and widened its collaboration with women who wished to see society move towards the left.

During the war members were deeply involved in aid for the victims of war, whilst working to safeguard human rights.

Once the war was over the LFSW joined the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), a newly founded organisation for peace and equal rights, and has remained a member since. The WIDF has consultative status in the UN and is thus able to influence efforts to improve women's living conditions around the world. The LFSW participated during the 1950s in the campaign against Sweden becoming a nuclear power and has continued to strive for disarmament, the resolving of conflicts by peaceful means and international solidarity. Through the years many projects have been launched in countries abroad to support women's struggles.

During the post-war years there was an active commitment in the numerous local branches to improve Swedish women's lives in such areas as individual taxation, child care centers and longer parental leave. In collaboration with other women's organisations the LFSW has struggled for sustainable development and for the rights of women and children, and against nuclear power. Members celebrated the international socialist Women's Day on the 8th of March as early as 1947. 25 years later they started celebrating the day together with The Women's League (Kvinnoligan) and Group 8 (early grass roots feminist groups). Since then 8 March activities together with other women's organisations are the order of the day.

The struggle continues for an even distribution of power and responsibility between women and men, for gender equality at all levels, for fair wages and shorter working hours, for the improvement of women and children's health and the eradication of violence against them, for parents to share caring responsibilities equally and for a society built on solidarity and concern for future generations.

The LFSW journal People (Vi Mänskor) has been published since 1947.



## Platform

### **The Left Federation of Swedish Women is a party-politically, independent, feminist and pacifist women's organisation.**

The LFSW is an independent organisation with no party-political adherence. The orientation towards *the left* where women's issues are concerned is based on a striving to do away with the patriarchal exercise of power and to act in the interest every woman's right to self-determination and integrity, to lead a full life free of abuse.

*The feminist* orientation is based on regarding gender as a political category and ourselves as actors in a radical process of change in society. As a women's organisation we seek to articulate problems arising from the circumstances that have shaped us as women in a society where the male norm prevails. When these circumstances are focused on, it is evident that political activities cannot be gender neutral. The experience and knowledge we have gained help us to formulate our own political agendas.

*The pacifist* orientation is based on the rejection of violence and acts of war as ways to solve conflicts, including arms production and preparation for war. The immense resources invested in arms around the world should be invested in efforts to abolish poverty, to build societies where people's needs are satisfactorily met and they can feel secure. We wish to promote international solidarity.

## 1. Gender equality between women and men

Persistent gendered power structures and values must give way to a society where women and men work together in all areas on a basis of equal power and responsibility. Gender equality is a prerequisite for a more just society. Caring responsibilities towards children, the elderly, the sick and disabled should be shared by all, by men and women. We aim at enabling girls and boys to grow up with opportunities to develop all-round personalities, free of constricting gender patterns. A wider choice of vocation can lead to a less segregated labour market where neither wages nor tasks to be performed are determined by gender. Working hours should be more flexible, adapted to human needs, full time employment be the norm. We support gender quotas as a means of achieving gender equality. If there is to be real change, there is a need, over and above political activism, to learn more about how gender is created and power is structured. Hence the LFSW emphasises the importance of further gender research.

## 2. Strengthening democracy

The key issue for the organisation is still, after more than 90 years of uninterrupted efforts, women's power to influence the democratic process, their participation in all sectors of society irrespective of class, ethnicity, age, sexual preference or disability, in order that they may influence political decision-making and thereby our common future. We demand equal gender representation in political assemblies, recognising the need to apply a gender perspective in evaluating the work they do, such as budgets. We also need to examine informal power structures and obsolete gender patterns of thought in the field of politics.

Besides a fair distribution of resources, a democratic society requires high standards of services that meet our common needs such as child care, education, health services, care of the elderly and



other forms of support. Added to these are functions such as town planning, housing, transport, technical services and cultural activities. It is important to uphold the common sector as an area of political responsibility under democratic control. Improved funding is a vital issue.

The aim of the LFSW is to help create a society without discrimination, facilitating communication and mutual understanding between people from different cultures with different outlooks. Each individual should know he or she has a right to influence public opinion, to act and to protest by peaceful means. We question attempts to control the thoughts and activities of citizens in their daily lives by monitoring their means of communication and by police intervention. We need humane refugee policies providing asylum seekers with the same access as Swedes to education, health care, housing and upkeep. The LFSW is sceptical to the European Union, mainly because of its undemocratic structure, its male dominance, lack of solidarity with poorer countries and its build-up as a military power.

### **3. The protection of women and children against violence and commercial exploitation**

Women have the unequivocal right to decide over their own body and their own future. Society must provide support through education and social care structures so that women freely can choose how to live their lives, choose careers and lifestyles, have the option if and when to marry or have children, break destructive relationships and express sexual preferences. They have a right to abortion. They must never be subjected to genital mutilation. We must combat violence against women, trafficking and prostitution by all conceivable means.

### **4. A secure society in which children learn to be democratic, self-reliant citizens, ready to practise solidarity**

All social planning must take into account the needs of children and adolescents. Our goal is for every child to have the right to attend non-fee-paying pre-school and after-school centers, well staffed and offering stimulating activities. Schools, the work place of young people, must maintain high quality levels and be based on sound gender didactics. There must be sufficient resources provided for children with special needs. Access to well equipped recreational centers and leisure activities are favourable to young people's development, preventing crime and the use of drugs. School health services and mental health services for the young should be well developed. Children and adolescents should have a say in the shaping of their own environment.

### **5. Working for peace, against war and imperialism**

The world is becoming more and more militarised year by year. New military bases are being built and nuclear weapons technology is spreading to new countries. The militarisation of space is well under way. The world is becoming a less secure place and the future seems more threatening. Our vision is total and universal disarmament.

Sweden contributes towards this development with its space expertise, arms exports and these days also with soldiers being sent to trouble spots. The LFSW demands the immediate banning of nuclear arms and of bacteriological and chemical weapons. All stocks should be destroyed. The Lisbon Treaty, the new constitution of the EU, requires all member states to increase their military spending and to prepare for a common defence structure. We therefore oppose this treaty, as we



oppose membership of NATO. Security must build on civil cooperation, not on threats of military action.

The LFSW is anxious to show solidarity with women and children who are the victims of war. We strongly support the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. It underlines the importance of women's active participation in efforts to prevent conflict, in the solving of conflicts when they arise and in reconstruction in the aftermath of war. The experience women have in answering for day to day survival of their families is invaluable in efforts to find lasting solutions to current conflicts.

## **6. A society based on sustainable development**

The LFSW supports the change-over to renewable sources of fuel, especially those that replace the dangerous use of nuclear energy. We perceive it as deeply lacking in solidarity to hand over radioactive waste to future generations. We who live in the richest parts of the world must consume fewer resources. Our consumer culture, frequent air travel, heavy dependence on petrol-driven cars, the production of unnecessary disposable articles are examples of a way of life that heavily taxes the world's limited resources. We therefore support fairtrade and environment-friendly consumption patterns.

## **7. An economy based on the fair distribution of the world's resource**

Globalisation must be based on conditions favourable to the people, not dictated by capital. Sustainable development rests on the redistribution of resources from rich to poor. It is unacceptable that so many people are starving and ruthlessly exploited in today's world with so much wealth to offer. The free movement of trans-national corporations must be restrained and an economy based on speculation be controlled by national and international legislation. Local production for a local market should be encouraged, as should policies of full employment. International trade must be conducted on fair terms. After one financial crisis after the other, it is evident that the new liberal economy cannot be allowed unlimited expansion and the right to determine the rules.

A radical redistribution of wealth, a new direction for the economy from a quantitative to a qualitative system of values can open for a radical change in the life styles and living conditions in our rich societies. Basically, economic planning, instead of production, should have reproduction as its starting point, what is needed for new generations to grow up under favourable conditions. The vision of the LFSW is the replacement of the current culture of competition by a culture of cooperation between the peoples of the world.

