

BPW Congress, in Stockholm 2006  
Women and the labour market  
Opening speech, 3 minutes. Ann Falkinger, speaker

### **Women and Labour market in Sweden**

Sweden has come far ahead when it comes to gender equality on the labour market as well as elsewhere but, we still have a long way to go.

I will in short mention 3 reforms that have promoted gender equality and then 3 changes that we need to get.

#### **3 good reforms:**

1/ subsidized child care. We have had it for almost thirty years now. And today the cost for the family is very, very low. And is the same regardless of income.

2/ Individual income tax, not family based.

3/ Fifteen month of parental leave. Where the main part of the leave is a kind of insurance where the parent who is home with the child gets a rather good part of her/his salary paid by the state up to a certain level. And addition to that more and more companies, and other employers, pay the gap between what the state pays and the person's own salary.

Those three reforms have made it more possible to combine a job with a family life. I see even more progressive steps in the labour market and I will come back to that in our work shop.

But, on the other hand, we nowadays also can see a backlash. Women are still having the main responsibility for the home and the children. Men's attitudes are still old fashioned in many ways, at home as well as on the working place. They need to upgrade the role of women – and men. This has led to that too many women are burnt out. They leave the career ladder or other full time jobs because it is still too tough to combine job and family life.

**This leads me to wish for at least 3 changes** to improve the gender equality at the labour market

1/ make it possible to buy help at home to reasonable prices. And then I talk about not only cleaning help but also help with the garden, reparations and other necessary help we need when we live in a house, which most of families with children do in Sweden.

2/ Enlarge the salary spreading. In Sweden, who has been run by a socialistic party for so many years, the salaries, especially in women dominated jobs – the so called dead end jobs, are too squeezed together. As well as it is between career jobs with much responsibility and none career jobs. Add to this the fact that Sweden has very high income taxes. These facts contribute to a situation where too many women find it meaningless to take career jobs. A more gender equal based economy in the families would of course be of advantage for the women.

3/ Make it easier to combine a job and a family by making the working hours more flexible and make it more easy to work from home. Here some companies are progressive and we can see good examples of how they have implemented this. I will come back to that as well in our work shop.

Thank you.

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