

# Speech by Mrs Katarina Runske-Norén

Speech by Mrs Katarina Runske-Norén at the annual meeting of home-makers (Femmes au Foyer), Dublin, Ireland, 1994.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends.

Until some years ago, Sweden was my home country. Sweden the model for the rest of the world, a country where everything functions, where everyone is happy, the sun is always shining. Why did I choose to live in Ireland ? Where the sun is not always shining and sometimes very little functions? The answer is simple. In Ireland you can still live with dignity as an individual. You can live very well in Sweden, that's for sure. It might be the fairy country for women. Sweden, the country where everything is based on equality and where you are looked after from cradle to grave.

The perfect situation for a woman in Sweden is to be divorced, 3-4 children and work in a day care centre or similar. You will be well looked after by the social welfare. Your children will have priority for day care centres and not cost you much either.

So what more will you get?

1 month paid sick-leave for every child under 12 years.  
3 children means 3 months paid leave.

You have the ordinary child allowance and you yourself have 4-5 weeks paid holiday, you get paid sickleave for yourself and a pension.

If any child has to go to the dentist or doctor, or has to be trained into the school or day care centre you get some days off with full salary of course. You are also entitled to a pension and you would probably get some extra money for housing and maybe clothes. And to finish the list you get status that you are supporting yourself.

Who ever considers what the children need or want. Have you ever met a child who is dying to spend their childhood in a day care centre where the staff change and they are forced to live a very unnatural life?

No one ever talks about the costs for a day care centre. One place costs more than you might earn for a whole year. But you fulfil your life according to womens lib. You have an income and you are free, you are somebody.

So what is left for me as an ordinary house-wife. Not very much I believe. I get the ordinary child allowance and that's it. I am worth nothing in the eyes of the society, what my family thinks is different. I am not even in the Swedish codex any more.

There, the word family is changed to household to get rid of any sentimental feelings. I am not even worth respect in the eyes of my fellow sisters as I am just a dumb housewife. I ought to be taken to the backyard and be shot, but I am probably not worth the bullet.

So money-wise everything goes to the one who leaves the home and the children to be looked after by others. I have 3 children and I have "lost" about £150,000 from the state as the poor things were brought up at home by their parents. With all these examples, I don't mean to say that it should be a must for every mother to stay at home to nurse her children. But I do think that every child should be worth the same treat. If I choose to work I should be able to get the help my children need. I might want to work half-time and maybe use someone in the family to look after my children, get a young girl in or maybe a granny. But in Sweden today it is only the day care centres that count. It is just like the choice of colour of the Ford long ago. Choose what colour you like as long as it is black. It has gone so far that in Sweden today, it is a legal right to get a place, seat in a day care centre. The state has to provide it if you ask for it. And what more the socialist women's party wants a law that every child will have to attend a day care centre as the parents are not good for them. The parents could cause damage if they look after their own children as they need trained staff to look after them.

So why are the day care centres so important? They are used to educate the children and there are special books for the teachers to show them how to do it. And as the staff is mainly from the left you can imagine what kind of education they get. The children can take part in demonstrations in the streets, they are brought to theatres and the shows are picked out by the teachers.

So what is the result after about 5-6 years in a day care centre. Well, ask the teachers who will take care of the children in schools. They have got a more or less impossible task and many of them have left their jobs as they simply can't stand it any more. It takes about a year to get the children to sit down and concentrate and talk not shout. It takes a long time before they can start with what they are supposed to do - teach them to write and read. There is also a severe problem with violence as the children are not used to ordinary rules.

Can you get further than this? Is this what every woman wants? To be free and have an income and change partner and divorce or just live together and have a weekend life with the children? Should we not ask the children what they want? Do the children profit from a fight between the women working at home and those working outside the homes? Should it not be a free choice according to what the children need. To look after your children for a couple of years is not a sentence to prison. It is a joy and a gift and it will never come back.

As I said before, I think it should be a free choice to stay at home and work or get a job outside the home. But after over 15 years working with family matters I have an opinion that the one who chooses to have children also has the responsibility to look after them the first so important years. And for this job, for it is a job, an important job, the family

should get support and above all respect from the rest of the world. Also a chance to get back to work outside the home when the children are ready to fly.

But every child is different and they don't all start to fly when the state tells them to. You have to be able to adjust to your children. Our children are our future and if you want to live in a decent society you just have to bring up your children to be decent human beings. Bringing up children is not something you do after office hours. You have to be there when the children need you and that might be on rather odd hours. If you are not there they might turn to friends, to drink, drugs and other things.

And don't blame this on the children. It is your choice. I have lived in a society without families and I can't recommend it to anyone.

So I came to Ireland and found the opposite to Sweden. Here the family is the most important in the society. The families are big 10-12 children is not unusual. You see children everywhere, they are a part of life.

I have not seen one day care centre since I came. I know they exist. What amazed me most was to meet children on an ordinary weekday in the shop, on the street, and they were not in the way. In Sweden you hardly see children apart from on super-values during a weekend together with stressed parents. Here children are a natural part of daily life. When I first brought a pig to the butcher it was not easy. I had never done it before and I was fond of that big pig. The butcher expected me to help with the slaughter. I said I would until I saw the pig. No way I said. Well the butcher calls his son, aged 8, who first took care of me and then the pig, together with his father. Nothing unusual. The plumber's son can hold a tool etc. They all will be well prepared for the grown up life.

The lorry, which delivers soft drinks has a nice young boy when the school is on holiday. Wherever you go you see the same. Children are forced to go home to an empty flat or a house. And in Ireland you never have to be alone for you will have relatives living close. There is always someone to stand in if there is a problem. I envy all this and I hope it will last at least my lifetime. Of course there are problems in Ireland and not so long ago we got awful information on what can happen if the family is too strong. Lots of people saw what happened within the family, but as the family in itself is such a strong institution no one did anything.

I can also in the daily papers read about the demands from women to get day care centres, education, jobs. I can see all over again how young women will get manipulated in the way of thinking. Not that women should not get the same education as men. But through many newspapers and fancy magazines you get the impression that life is nothing but money and a good position.

When I ask the girls who help me in the kitchen in my restaurant what they want to do, I very often get the answer, hairdresser. Well a good hairdresser is better than a bad solicitor. One of them is very bright, and I do what I can to encourage her to go on with

her studies. These young girls are so good and they work so hard and I like them so much. I have learned a lot from them as I was so used to the fed up Swedish youth. To cover up some of the unemployment young people go on studying in Sweden - they get paid for it. Not all that is a lie, but they can get very good allowances from the state and even with very bad notes you can go on to the university. If you choose a typical male subject, as a girl there is no problem to enter. Same goes the other way round. So all girls apply for a male education and all the men want to become nurses. So after 1-2 terms they change and start with what they really wanted, nursing for the girls and mechanics for the men. So the problem is solved by itself and the cost of year's study maybe. There is of course more to Sweden than these short glimpses. It is a wonderful country with a wild nature not so far from the beauty in Ireland. There is not more than 8.5 million so there is plenty of space for everyone. Right now Sweden is in deep difficulties as the economy is the most severe problem. The Swedes have lived over the limits and borrowed money abroad and suddenly they realised that it was the end of the line. A country where 63% of every earned krona goes to the public sector cannot survive like that.

I don't know what the Irish woman wants, but I would like to warn her of the Swedish model. There are some good things in it I know that when all this started many years ago no one could ever have dreamed that it would end like Sweden today. Empty homes, high suicide, unhappy people, severe drug and alcohol problems, problems in the schools, high divorce rate, increasing abortions, a law that gives every child a right to be educated in a day care centre.

From the beginning there was not hatred between women at home and women outside the home. But after a good job of the women's lib th7 women at home started to feel that they were worth nothing and many of them got a job outside the home just to show that they were able to - not they really wanted. Don't force this to happen. Support your housewives, they are worth it. They don't have an easy life especially here with the big families and a high unemployment.

Sweden is as far as possible from Ireland on the European map and also in family matter. I hope Ireland can find a solution and the only thing I finally want to say is don't sell your children, the future for status or freedom. Enjoy your children when you can, they grow so fast. It is not worth giving them up just because someone called you "just a housewife". Stand up for your family and you will be greatly rewarded.