Published on *Adam Smith Institute* (http://www.adamsmith.org)

A flawed revolution [1]

Written by **Anton Howes** [2] | Monday 5 October 2009

Anders Hutin, one of the chief architects of the much vaunted Swedish schools reforms claims that the Conservatives are missing a crucial ingredient in their proposed attempts to recreate the Scandinavian policy phenomenon. Profit. In an article for the Telegraph, he explains that about 75% of the new 'free schools' created after the reform are profit-driven. By leaving the 'revolution' to non-profits and parents, Hutin points out that the emphasis will be on increasing waiting lists, as they mark out the desirability of a school. For-profit schools on the other hand are more likely to see every pupil as a potential new source of income, and will expand their capacity in order to accommodate them.

Michael Gove, the Shadow Schools Minister, despite recognising the desperate need for liberation of the state-funded schools sector, seems afraid to be seen to be privatizing state-run education, even though it is a continuation of Lord Adonis' Academies scheme. If these reforms are so central to the Conservative agenda, as Cameron keeps claiming, it is only right that the full extent of their intentions are made clear. Hopefully, the rapidly approaching conference will shed some light on whether or not Gove will make the right call on for-profit 'free schools'.

The Conservatives should certainly not be so complacent as to hope that their reforms can act as merely the next stage in liberating the state-funded supply of schools. As Sweden showed, it takes time for the grassroots revolution to take root, and if it progresses too slowly, the entire venture could be scrapped or stalled by a future administration. Gove's reforms will need all the boost they can get if they are to be both successful and lasting. Once they are established and recognised as an invaluable policy, the likelihood is that even Labour will cease to oppose the use of profit, much as their Swedish counterparts, the Social Democrats have done. Regardless of the political reality, Hutin explains that Britain is perhaps best-placed to benefit from the reforms that he designed, due to the high demand and extraordinary lengths that parents will go to in order to secure a good place - although this offers hope to reformers, it is a savage indictment of state education in this country.

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