



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on June 29, 2010

## Sweden Bans Home-schooling, Religious Instruction

The Kingdom of Sweden took a dramatic turn toward totalitarianism with the adoption of a sweeping new education “reform” package that essentially prohibits home schooling and forces all schools to teach the same government curriculum.

The draconian 1,500-page law — deceptively referred to by the Swedish government as [“The new Education Act - for knowledge, choice and security”](#) — was approved by Parliament last week amidst strong criticism and opposition. When it goes into effect next year, the entire educational system will be transformed, and alternative education abolished.



So-called “independent schools,” already financed and largely controlled by government, will now have to submit to the same regulatory framework as regular government schools. They will also be required to follow state-issued syllabi and curricula.

“[Religious schools] can’t make any children to pray or confess to the God, but they will still be allowed [to exist],” Education Ministry press secretary Anna Neuman told *The New American* in a telephone interview. Essentially, there will no longer be any difference between “private” schools and government schools, she explained. And there will be no other option.

In addition to abolishing any remaining distinctions among schools, the new education act also prohibits home schooling for religious or philosophical reasons. Home education can be allowed only in “exceptional circumstances” like extreme bullying, Neuman explained. Lawyers have said the new condition basically means never.

Regulation of home schooling was already impossibly strict in Sweden, where, as reported recently by [The New American](#), social service workers took a seven-year-old boy from his parents because he was being educated at home — even when it was technically legal. But under the new rules, home education will be all but done away with.

“It’s a fear that [home schooling] doesn’t work appropriate[ly],” press secretary Neuman explained, though she admitted there was no report or evidence to back up the fear.

But Swedish home schoolers (and indeed, home schoolers around the world) disagree with the notion that home schooling doesn’t work, and they have fought a valiant battle against the new ban. “[[The Swedish Association of Home Education](#)] ROHUS has vigorously, with its limited resources, worked to stop this new law since it was suggested,” ROHUS President Jonas Himmelstrand told *The New American* in an e-mail.

The group wrote a 228-page report for the Ministry of Education, lobbied members of Parliament, worked with the media, and tried unsuccessfully to meet with the Education Minister. “In the last week before the vote I, as the President of ROHUS, wrote one e-mail a day, each with a new argument, to all



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349 members of parliament,” Himmelstrand explained. Unfortunately, the bill passed anyway.

“Basically, it seems that the 50-100 Swedish homeschooling families are too few to matter politically — human rights notwithstanding,” he said, noting that the group had tried to educate officials on the benefits of home education using solid evidence.

But the battle is not over. For one, there is a Parliamentary election coming up in September. Even though the new law is not expected to be changed much, there is hope that the draconian restriction on home schooling could be loosened if enough pressure is applied. But even if the prohibition remains in place, the fight will go on.

“The Swedish political authorities have deeply underestimated the convictions of Swedish homeschoolers,” Himmelstrand said. “Most will not accept the new law. They will respond with civil disobedience, or political exile.”

When asked about the thought of Swedish home-schooling families fleeing from government persecution (like German home schoolers granted asylum as refugees in the United States), Education Ministry spokesperson Neuman dismissed the idea. “Right now there are only about 200 children that have home schooling, so it doesn’t concern a lot of families,” she said.

But for the families involved, it’s a big deal. They plan to take the issue all the way to the Swedish Supreme Court and even the European Court of Human Rights if necessary. And there is still hope.

“The situation may be brighter than it looks, as this year long struggle has shown that there is a small, but strong and intelligent, opposition to restricting home schooling in Sweden, and that this opposition has many international friends,” said Himmelstrand.

The international friends are already getting involved, too. “We’re consulting with various organizations to determine how to move forward,” explained Mike Donnelly, the director for international relations and a staff attorney with the U.S.-based [Home School Legal Defense Association](#). “Of course we’re disappointed that the Swedish Parliament would do this ... but we’ll be supporting the home schoolers however we can,” he told *The New American* in a telephone interview.

In an [analysis](#) of the new law on ROHUS’ website, an even greater matter is also raised that supporters hope could become a catalyst for serious change in Sweden. “The new school law has brought into the open a much bigger issue than the question of home schooling. No democratic Government should have the possibility to abolish a human right through law. There needs to be rules to what a Government can do. In other countries this is called a constitution. Sweden lacks a true constitution and an elected Swedish Government has great freedom to do whatever it wishes,” Himmelstrand explained in the piece.

“Human rights do not have strong support in Sweden,” he added. “In Sweden it is possible for a human right to be abolished in Parliament based on prejudices and ignorance - this is exactly what we witnessed just now. This is the ultimate reason for home schooling being restricted as close to being fully illegal as can be. The worst part is that the present Swedish Government actually used this democratic weakness. It is hard to write in a civilized way what Swedish homeschoolers feel about this.”

The law has been fiercely criticized in Sweden far beyond the small community of home schoolers. Even the Swedish Supreme Court’s advisory council, which examines proposed laws, attacked the new education act with 77 pages of “devastating” criticism, saying the “exceptional circumstances” requirement for home schooling was too vague, among other problems.



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Media commentators also blasted the new law on several fronts. “The new Education Act poses a threat to educational diversity,” wrote Jim Whiteford on a Swedish political news website in an article entitled ‘New school law a step backward.’ “The state will exert more and more power over the pupil, and an outdated view of knowledge learning is increasingly prioritized and systematic.... We stand in dark times.”

Whiteford said the law “reduces both the students’ and their parents’ choice, increasing state control,” adding that he hoped voters would question the welfare state at the next election. “When looking at Sweden’s constitutional laws for the defense of individual rights against state power eager pursuit, there is nothing at all,” he said. “Once upon a time someone said that the Swedish Constitution is to protect the state rather than to ensure its citizens’ rights.” And that seems to be an accurate description, to the extent that it can even be considered a “constitution” in the true sense.

Even a member of the political party sponsoring the new education act refused to support it because of the restrictions on home schooling and fears that it could be a prelude to mandatory day-care and pre-school. The opposition parties in Parliament voted against the law for several reasons. Among them: It was rushed, and the Supreme Court’s advisory council criticism was not properly taken into account.

Other changes in the new law include tougher standards for becoming a teacher, and the idea that government day-care (for children as young as one year old) should be considered “school.” The act will also give the “Swedish Schools Inspectorate” the authority to shut down educational institutions that do not bow down to the government’s rules.

Regimes that have banned home schooling in the past include the National Socialists (Nazis) in Germany, since Hitler feared it could lead to “parallel societies,” and the Soviet communist dictatorship, where government was the sole arbiter of what children would learn.

Most Western nations still allow home schooling, including other Scandinavian countries. It is to be hoped that the Swedish government will reconsider violating such a fundamental human right, lest home schoolers be forced to flee their home country in search of educational freedom.

*Photo: Swedish Riksdag (Parliament)*



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