

Kåre Willoch, in memoriam



Written by Erna Solberg, Leader of the Conservative Party of Norway

Norway's past Prime Minister and Leader of The Conservative Party, Mr. Kåre Willoch, passed away on December 6th 2021.

Few individuals have had the impact on modern Norwegian society as Kåre Willoch who, since he was first elected as the youngest Member of Parliament in 1957, was one of the foremost contributors to Norwegian political life and public debate. Throughout his life, he was renowned as the nation's most important advocate of conservative thought.

His social awareness and commitment ran wide and deep. Although he was intellectually anchored in the liberal-conservative tradition, he displayed an ability to offer creative and even unexpected analyses of matters of the day. And yet, despite his razor-sharp reasoning, his manner of expression was always courteous and considered. He never departed from his personal maxim — be strong in message, yet gentle in delivery.

Kåre Willoch's contributions to Norwegian life were vast, but he will most likely be remembered primarily for his achievements during his years as leader of the Government. In 1981 he led the Conservative Party to a decisive election victory where he, together with Party Chairman Erling Norvik, garnered the highest electoral support in our Party's modern history to this date. This earned Willoch the position at the helm of the first Conservative majority Government since 1928, which was two years later expanded to include The Centre Party and the Christian People's Party.

Prime Minister Willoch's Government spearheaded a host of reforms, including press freedom and trade liberalisation, overturning years of political stagnation. The monopoly of our national broadcasting services was lifted. The restrictive opening hours for retail stores were liberalised and the housing market regulation was updated. These reforms were pioneered despite massive resistance from the parties in the opposition. History has since shown that these reforms were critical for the development of our modern Norway.

As a political figure, Willoch was internationally respected, becoming the leader of the International Democratic Union, the global political family for centre right conservative parties, from 1987 and 1989.

We will forever remember him with deeply felt gratitude and humble respect.