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978-0-521-57129-6 - Working Parents and the Welfare State: Family Change and Policy Reform in Scandinavia

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Excerpt

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## 1 Introduction: changes in the social order

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Throughout the Western world questions concerning the sustainability of the welfare state have been given new impetus during the 1990s, a period of prolonged economic problems and comprehensive structural and institutional change. Globalising economies, far-reaching restructuring of labour markets, rapid development and spread of new technologies are adding to welfare state constraints. Desires to limit or downscale public spending and a demand for privatisation of public provisions and services, advocated especially under neoliberal politics, have sharpened the debate about the future of the welfare state. In welfare states of different description, calls for restructuring, overhaul or reform are commonly voiced.

Family and demographic change have served to increase conflicts over welfare state policy. Ageing populations and falling birth-rates project a rapidly increasing 'care deficit' (Hochschild 1995) in the societies of European welfare states. An ongoing diversification of family forms, a weakening of marriage and increased employment of women all indicate a fragmentation of the safety net once represented by family and kin, and show how the capacity of families to provide welfare and social care can no longer be taken for granted. In post-industrial societies, processes of globalisation and individualisation are interpreted as undermining traditional loyalties and obligations to family and kin (Beck 1992, 1996).

During a period of labour market transition and spells of high unemployment in several countries, the economic activity rates of women and mothers reflect a long-term increase in the majority of the western welfare states. In this respect, welfare states are gradually converging. The 'arrangement between the sexes', to use Erving Goffmann's term (1977, p. 301), is finding new forms, in families, in the labour market and the welfare state. As mothers

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have entered employment, the everyday time structure of the family has become reorganised. At work and at home the relationship between genders and generations is altering, and the meaning and content of family obligations and parental rights and obligations are being redefined. No wonder social analysts are pointing to a social revolution taking place in the welfare states of the West.

Analysing structural and institutional change, an OECD report (1994) points to a comprehensive transformation of the traditional social order: the traditional 'gender contract', which defined the arrangement between women and men in the family by the normative ascription of breadwinning to men and family caring and domestic work to women, is breaking down.<sup>1</sup> No longer does it serve to support the general 'employment contract' based on the male as breadwinner within a two-parent family. Thus, the relationship between the genders in the labour market is under challenge, too. A shifting gender balance of employment has come to characterise both the 'post-industrial labour markets' and the dominant family form of late modernity. Indeed, according to the report, the time has come to update the normative basis of the gender contract.

The rise in the labour-market participation of mothers has actualised reconsideration of the responsibility of the welfare state and the family in regards to welfare provision, and the public and policy debate about family obligations and values has intensified. While the unpaid female labour reserves of the families are shrinking, in several welfare states families are called upon to shoulder a greater part of welfare provision or costs. A desire for the revival of family values is commonly expressed, and proposals to 'refamilise' responsibilities for care provision are being put forward. At the same time, 'defamilisation' of family obligations is advocated as welfare states are denounced for neglecting to meet the needs for social care and welfare (Saraceno 1997; Bettio and Prechal 1998). When demand for care and domestic labour is not met by local supply, but by the international migration of 'mobile maids', nannies and child-minders (e.g., Brochmann 1993; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1997; Williams 2001), social care services and domestic work are being integrated into the globalisation of the service economy. Looking at childcare in particular, Arlie Hochschild (2000) points to 'global chains of care' as

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one, problematic, response to the shortage of care resources in Western societies.<sup>2</sup>

Increasingly, the structural incompatibility between the labour market and the family has prompted questions concerning the welfare states' response to new family forms, and particularly to employed mothers and dual-earners. Which family models (if any) should welfare states facilitate, by what means, and why? For example, should welfare states support either families in which the mother goes out to work and takes on a larger share of the breadwinner responsibilities, or families in which the mother stays at home depending economically on a husband or partner as provider? Even although some common policy approaches to working parents are discernible, no single blueprint for how to combine work and family obligations is offered (e.g., Kamerman and Kahn 1991; Hantrais and Letablier 1996; European Commission (EC) Childcare Network 1996). However, the work-family issue is being politicised and put on the political agenda not just of individual welfare states but also of the European Union.

This book is about the most comprehensive change in family form witnessed during the past fifty years, the shift from the gender-differentiated nuclear family to the family in which the mother as well the father of young children go to work for pay. Focus is on the balancing of work and family and on the welfare policies aimed at facilitating the process, taking as the main case the dominant family form among families with young children, namely the dual-earners. The continuing transformation of motherhood, childhood and family life generated by the mass entry of mothers into the labour market has revived the issue of responsibility for children's care: What are the respective responsibilities of the state and parents in the fostering, caring and rearing of new generations, and who should shoulder the costs? What is the welfare state's approach to reconciling work with responsibility for children's care? How are the boundaries between the welfare state, the labour market and families to be renegotiated when the labour force includes a considerable proportion of workers with responsibilities for the care of young children? And, what are the caring responsibilities of the fathers and mothers when both parents are breadwinners of the family?

Special attention is therefore paid to the reconceptualisation of childcare in welfare state policies.<sup>3</sup> Of particular interest is, first,

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the transformation of childcare from being a responsibility of parents to encompassing a basis from which working parents are entitled to make claims on the welfare state, that is, childcare is conceptualised as falling within the framework of social citizenship; and, second, the use of childcare policies to update the 'gender contract' and facilitate a shift in the gender balance of both employment and care for young children. Included for analysis are three sets of policies that in different ways illustrate a rethinking of childcare, and bring different implications for gender equality: the state funding of day-care services for children, the provision of parental leave, and the institution of cash benefits for childcare. Roughly speaking, these policies may be linked with three different family models: the cash benefit for childcare schemes encourage the gender-differentiated family; childcare services facilitate the dual-earner model; while parental leave legislation encourages dual-earning and care-sharing parenthood. I also examine the impact of these policies on the gendered division of paid and unpaid work and care. The dual-earner family is therefore a good case for exploring how the relationship between the welfare state, labour market and family is being restructured along gendered lines. Throughout, the interplay between family change and policy reform is a main issue for discussion.

### **The balancing of work and family**

Since the end of World War II the relationship between production and social reproduction, between the occupational system and the family, has been central in social research and policy analysis. Social research dealing with the growth in mothers' employment and the rise of the dual-earner family has focused mostly on the interface between families and labour markets, and has offered different 'model families' in response to the issue of reconciling the demands of the family and work. Three models, to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, deserve special mention. The first one presumes a *specialisation* of the roles of the mother and the father, the second argues for the *sequential employment of mothers*, and the third takes *shared societal roles* for parents as the framework for analysis. According to the first one, which is often referred to as the 'model family of industrialism', work and family are to be combined by way of a differentiation in the parental roles of the

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mother and the father, as homemaker/carer and economic provider respectively. Potential conflicts of interest are defined away by assuming the domestication of women as 'natural', leaving the breadwinning for the male head of household. This family form is known in social analysis particularly through the work of Talcott Parsons (1955).

The second model, a modification of the Parsonsian one, includes the sequential employment of mothers. Acknowledging that women's employment was rising, Alva Myrdal and Viola Klein (1956) advocated a family form in which mothers take on more of the economic provider responsibilities during periods when paid work did not conflict with motherly duties. The domestication of women is therefore denaturalised and the male breadwinner privilege is less confined. This early version of a dual-earner family model attained international interest with the publication of their book *Women's Two Roles*.

A very different arrangement between parents underpins the 'shared roles model' presented by Rita Liljeström (1978). Presuming the capability of both mothers and fathers for employment and the care of children, this is an early identification of a dual-earner, care-sharing family, – a family model that proved highly controversial and is still contested.

In condensed form, all three models convey important interpretations of 'family' and 'family values' in Western societies and show the influence of different cultural and political traditions. As normative statements concerning the arrangement of 'good' motherhood, fatherhood and childhood, the models also point to conflicting norms and interests within the societies in which the policy response to accommodate work and family is moulded (see for example the analysis by Knudsen and Wærness (1999)).

Ever since the Bismarckian social reforms of the late nineteenth century, welfare states have been analysed as compromises between capital and labour and between welfare and control (Seip 1986; Dahl 1987). What has been less often observed is that welfare states also involve compromises between women and men, mediated through their different position in the labour market and the family (Leira 1994). Welfare state analysis has argued that the dual-earner family necessitates the intervention of the welfare state in order to 'harmonise' the conflicting demands of work and family (e.g., Esping-Andersen 1996). This, however, is to overestimate

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the readiness of welfare states to support new family forms. Different forms of the welfare state have responded differently to the employment of mothers and the dual-earners, and show a diversity of approaches to mothers and fathers as parent-workers. While change to motherhood to comprise employment has preceded policy reform, policy reform instituting a right of fathers to be the personal carer for a child has preceded large-scale change to fatherhood.

On the whole, policy analysis has focused on the mothers who joined the labour market, for commodification as paid labour, and the impact of policies on how mothers managed work and childcare. This book takes a different perspective: I argue that policy analysis needs to consider both fathers and mothers as economic providers and as carers for children, and to closely examine the reconceptualisation of childcare. In doing so, I give more attention to fatherhood change.

While not underestimating the importance of a wider set of family-related policies, legislation and regulations, I take childcare-related policies as the main starting point in the discussion of the welfare state's approach to working parents and the dual-earner family.<sup>4</sup> Thus, included for analysis are policies aimed at 'commodification' and 'decommodification' of parents' labour and at 'familisation' as well as 'defamilisation' of the care of children. These policies, however rudimentary they may be, entail a rethinking of the welfare state's relationship to the labour market and to families, a rethinking in which the responsibility for childcare is pivotal. From being a core element in family obligations, the care of children is transformed into a joint venture between the state and parents. In this process, childcare is reconceptualised as an entitlement of the parent, or as an element in social citizenship. Moreover, in politicising childcare the work-family issue is being redefined away from a problem of individual women towards a challenge to labour-market organisation and the policies of welfare states. In addition, the combination of work and family is being reformulated to refer to working parents, both mothers and fathers.

Childcare-related policy reforms affect sole providers as well as dual-earners. In several welfare states the proportion of parents, and particularly of mothers, who experience periods as sole or main providers for young children is on the increase. A number of recent studies show the different approaches of welfare states

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to lone mothers and their children (e.g., Sørensen 1999; Hobson 1996; Millar 1996; Bradshaw et al. 1996). In the following, the impacts of the policies discussed on lone mothers are touched upon, but not discussed in any detail. The shift from the gender-differentiated family to the dual-earners is but one of the processes that influence family diversification, as witnessed in the weakening of marriage as the framework for family formation and parenting, in the increase in cohabitation and extramarital births, and in the rise in the number of couples breaking up. These processes, the current economic constraints of welfare states mentioned above, and shifting political ideologies do form a background for the different policy approaches towards dual-earners, but are not a major theme of the book.

The shifting gender balance of employment and the rise of the dual-earner family illustrate general trends of change taking place in European families, labour markets and welfare state societies, but they started earlier in the Nordic countries, as did the politicisation of childcare to serve the reconciliation of work and family. While utilising data sets and policy research from Western Europe, I take the Scandinavian or Nordic welfare states of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden as my main frame of reference when discussing the reconceptualisation of childcare and the impact of childcare policies on the gender division of employment and care for children.<sup>5</sup> I use data from other welfare states of Western Europe for comparison, and sometimes to contrast the Scandinavian approaches to dual-earners. The empirical material dates mainly from the late 1980s to the late 1990s. However, I also draw upon earlier debates concerning the employment of mothers and the politicisation of childhood to elucidate the interplay of family change and policy reform.

### **Workers, carers, citizens**

As an analytical tool I introduce the concept of employed parents as wage-workers, carers for children and citizens of welfare states (see also Leira 1992). These are the main criteria on the basis of which the employed mother and father are entitled to make claims on the welfare state.<sup>6</sup> As a citizen, the employed parent is entitled to claim the social rights universally available, and as a worker has access to employment-related services and benefits. What care-related social rights might actually be is often less well defined.

However, during the recent decades, care-related rights for employed parents have been conceptualised as including benefits in cash as well as access to services, the right to be a carer for children as well as a right not to be a full-time carer.

From the work of T.H. Marshall fifty years ago to that of Walter Korpi and Gøsta Esping-Andersen in the 1980s and 1990s, the social rights of wage-workers have been central in the study of the development of social citizenship. The social rights of unpaid carers have been the subject of less comment. They perhaps represent what is sometimes alluded to as ‘supply-conditioned rights’. Compared to employment-related rights, such as the right to leave of absence from work – and with pay – under specified conditions, the rights of unpaid carers to be relieved from care responsibilities, are incomplete (Ketscher 1995). For example, in several welfare states, state-sponsored services for childcare are in short supply. For fathers, the ‘right’ to be exempted from care has generally been taken for granted, while for mothers who, from necessity or choice, want employment to replace full-time childcare, it has been rationed.<sup>7</sup> Since the 1970s the right of employed parents, fathers as well as mothers, to leave of absence from work to be the carer of a young child has become increasingly important, as illustrated in parental leave legislation. These care-conditioned rights add to the employment-related rights of working parents and may serve to reduce the gender typing of parental rights and responsibilities.

Analysis of the construction of the social rights of employed parents has to reflect on changes in the relationship between welfare state, labour market and family, and on the different ways in which welfare states recognise paid and unpaid work and care. In everyday life the employment- and care-related rights of parents are often interrelated. Analytically, however, it is important to distinguish between the policies aimed at facilitating the employment of parents and those orientated towards facilitating the carer responsibilities of being a parent-worker. Moreover, the impact of the often gender-neutral legislation on the working mother and father needs to be considered for both parents.

### **Politicising childcare**

The politicising of childcare as a means of influencing the balance of work and family and elaboration of the social rights of employed parents as carers for children is evidence of profound structural



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and cultural change in society. A rearrangement of the relationship between the welfare state, labour markets and the family is emerging in which the content and meaning of parental rights and responsibilities are being redesigned. Public support for childcare in the form of benefits and services has meant a redrawing of the boundaries between the public and the private, between the state and the family.

Three interconnected processes highlight the change in the relationship between the welfare state, labour market and the family: first, ‘modernisation of motherhood’, i.e., the mass movement of mothers into the labour market; second, ‘collectivisation of childcare’, i.e., state sponsorship or provision of different forms of childcare; and, third, what is termed ‘the familisation of fatherhood’, i.e., the expansion of the rights of working fathers to care for children. To a varying extent, these processes are seen throughout Western Europe (EC Childcare Network 1996; Moss and Deven 2000b).

Responsibility for generational reproduction and the care of children, once the private domain of the family and household, is placed in a new setting when publicly sponsored childcare services are developed for ‘mass consumption’, promoted as educationally advantageous for children or advocated as facilitating the employment of mothers and fathers. Parental rights and responsibilities with respect to the care of very young children are further redefined in parental leave legislation as applying to both public and private sector employment and modifying the standard employment contract. This effort to transform the traditional gender division of paid and unpaid work and care aims even further, since parental leave legislation includes the domestic arena and intra-family arrangements in the field to which gender equality policies legitimately apply.

Elaborating the concept of childcare from its present, central element of parental obligation to offspring by including a basis from which the parent is entitled to make legitimate claims on the state, expands the social rights of citizens as parents and workers. This reconceptualisation includes positive and negative entitlements, that is, care-related rights entail a right to be the personal carer and a right not to be a full-time carer for young children. The right to leave from full-time childcare has been of special importance to mothers, who by tradition have been charged with the responsibility for the care of children. Men have collectively

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opted out of childcare, observes Robert Connell (1987), that is, the male right *not* to engage in the care of children apparently has been widely accepted.

Childcare-related policies of special relevance for working parents include benefits in cash and kind. Publicly sponsored services for childcare supplement care for children provided in the home, and augment the parents', and particularly the mother's opportunities not to be a full-time carer-parent.<sup>8</sup> Part of the care for children is defamilised and responsibility collectivised. Parents' time is 'liberated', for example, for labour-market participation, that is, for 'commodification' as paid labour. When state-sponsored day-care for children is universally provided, or parents are entitled to claim such services, access to publicly funded childcare attains the character of a social right.

Childcare-related entitlements are also about the right to time for care. Parental leave legislation institutes the right of parents to give children's care precedence over the demands of the job. Childcare is refamilised. Including fathers among those entitled to the right to care represents an innovative, potentially very radical, approach to the gender division of childcare. If parental leave includes an entitlement to wage compensation, a 'decommodification' of labour occurs (Esping-Andersen 1990).

In addition, welfare states may provide cash benefits to be used for extra-parental, private childcare arrangements, or, alternatively, for the support of parental care in the home, as commodification of care.

### **Why Scandinavia?**

The fragmentation of the traditional gender contract as witnessed in the changing gender balance of employment and shifting family forms is not peculiar to any region, but illustrates general trends in the changing of European families, labour markets and welfare state societies. Formal obligations to family are differently defined from one welfare state to another, and policy response to dual-earner families with young children varies (e.g., Millar and Warman 1995).

This book draws upon empirical data sets and policy research from Western Europe, where questions concerning the reconciliation of work and family are set in highly diverse political and