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

Arnlaug Leira

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## Working parents and the welfare state Family change and policy reform in Scandinavia

The mass entry of mothers into the labour market, the decline of the male breadwinner norm and the rise of the dual-earner family have all profoundly transformed the societies of the Western world. How do welfare states approach the reconciliation of paid work with the responsibilities for the care of young children? Arnlaug Leira's timely book examines the politicising of childcare: childcare is reconceptualised as a joint venture of parents and the welfare state, and as an entitlement or social right of working mothers and fathers.

Drawing upon new empirical material from Scandinavia, Leira's thoughtful analysis centres on the interplay of family change and policy reform. At times, social change precedes policy reform – motherhood changed to include employment, then policy was altered; sometimes policy change comes first – the political promotion of fathercare has preceded large-scale change to fatherhood. Fathers less than mothers use the right to be carers, and gender-neutral childcare policies usually reinforce the gendered division of work and welfare.

**Arnlaug Leira** is Professor of Sociology at the University of Oslo. She is the author of *Welfare States and Working Mothers: The Scandinavian Experience* (Cambridge University Press, 1992). Recent work includes *Gender, Welfare State and the Market*, co-edited with T.P. Boje. She was also the volume editor of *Yearbook of Comparative Social Research, Family Change: Policies, Practices and Values* (1999).

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## Preface

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During the 1990s a substantial part of my research has focused on the interplay of family change and policy reform in Scandinavia, and especially on the welfare state approach to the dual-earner families with young children. For this book I have drawn upon the empirical data collected, and have frequently revisited my earlier writing. In developing my ideas I have benefited from participation in several European research networks and projects, and from stimulating exchanges with colleagues, particularly in the research networks on Women, Welfare State and Citizenship organised by Trudie Knijn, University of Utrecht; Gender and Citizenship: Social Integration and Social Exclusion in European Welfare States co-ordinated by Birte Siim, University of Aalborg; Working and Mothering: Social Practices and Social Policies co-ordinated by Ute Gerhardt, University of Frankfurt; and the research project Defining Family Obligations in Europe co-ordinated by Jane Millar, University of Bath.

A number of individuals and institutions – too numerous to mention – have in different ways contributed to the book. An added bonus is discussions with students who have followed my classes. Several dissertations by the students are cited in the text.

The greater part of the manuscript was drafted during a sabbatical spent at the Institute for Social Research in Oslo. The hospitality and generosity of the institute and its director, Fredrik Engelstad, is much appreciated, as are the always excellent services of the institute library, headed by Sven Lindblad. I am grateful for a grant from the Norwegian Research Council's programme Welfare and Society that allowed me to take time off from work to finish the manuscript. Special thanks are due to Halvard Leira, who has served as my research assistant, and for his dealing with the bibliography and cross-checking of references.

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Joan Acker, Anne Lise Ellingsæter, Fredrik Engelstad and Dag Gjestland have read and commented upon various chapters during different stages of the writing. Discussions with Chiara Saraceno have helped to clarify my thinking about concepts of care. I am much indebted to them all, for constructive criticism and comments.

My most sincere thanks to my son and his father for readiness to listen to, comment upon and challenge my ideas.