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Equality, Parity
and Democratic Politics in Europe

The kind of sex equality a country adopts reflects its political setting. The place of ideas of equality in the political culture, the effectiveness of women's organisations and political opportunity structure largely determine whether a policy with sufficiently wide remit to remedy gender inequalities is adopted. This article considers the requirements for successful sex equality strategies in contemporary European democracies.

Le genre d'égalité des sexes adopté par un pays reflète son cadre politique. La place des idées d'égalité dans la culture politique, l'efficacité des organisaions féminines et la structure d'opportunité politique déterminent largement l'adoption d'une politique ayant des attributions suffisamment larges afin de remédier aux inégalités des sexes. Cet article considère les exigences en vue d'une stratégie d'égalité des sexes couronnée de succès dans les démocraties européennes contemporaines.

Die Form der Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter, welche ein Land sich zu eigen macht, widerspiegelt seinen politischen Rahmen. Der Stellenwert von Gleichberechtigungsideen in der politischen Kultur, die Wirksamkeit von Frauenorganisationen und die politische Chancenstruktur bestimmen zu einem grossen Teil, ob eine Politik zur Behebung von Geschlechterdiskriminierung mit genügend breitem Spielraum eingeschlagen wird. Dieser Artikel betrachtet die Voraussetzungen für erfolgreiche Gleichberechtigungsstrategien von Mann und Frau in den zeitgenössischen europäischen Demokratien.

I. Introduction

The democratic political systems of Europe offer both problems and opportunities for the development of equality policies. On the one hand they provide the democratic resources of citizenship that permit feminists to get such policies on to the political agenda. On the other hand the European democracies are predicated on asymmetric power relations between the sexes which exclude women from full citizenship and place their participation in the establishment, maintenance and development of public policy at a disadvantage. Experience in contemporary Europe shows that democratic politics has mixed effects on gender relations. At the same time as they favour the dominant sex, the ideals of democracy are a resource for the subordinate sex in that they invite women to demand and take up rights. However the arrangements for making demands and taking up rights are organised to ensure that such claims are made from outside the institutional channels of influence and according to rules designed to suit masculine life styles. Those lifestyles are themselves dependent on the maintenance of men's power over women, particularly the relationship between paid and unpaid work. This dependence ensures «private» man will resist women's attempts at altering gender imbalances even where «public» man appears to be convinced of the arguments for change and supportive of movements to secure change.

Supporters of equality policy are aware of the contradictory effects of democratic arrangements on their political project. Feminists have long been mindful of the dangers of incorporation that are imposed by a strategy of playing the political game. It is difficult to argue against such caution. The effects of equality policies tend to be mixed at best. For example, the gap between men's and women's pay has ceased to diminish or is actually widening in many European countries. Equality agencies tend to be underfunded, they lack prestige, they are insufficiently powerful, accounts of their results make depressing reading and so on, ad infinitum. In such circumstances is it worth expending the precious political energies of feminist activists on developing state equality policies?

To answer this question it is necessary to consider developments both in the policy and amongst its advocates. Equality policies are not uniform in their content, implementation, goals or results. Feminist political practice has changed greatly since the early separatist days of the new Women's Liberation Movement. It is difficult to generalise about either the content of sex-equality policies or the strategies of their advocates. Both vary considerably over time and by country and these variations need to be described and discussed. Thus in this article I attempt to analyse examples of state equality strategies and of feminist participation in their development. The discussion falls naturally into five parts. First is an account of the origins and nature of equality policy. Second, the experience of feminist engagement of equality and other relevant state institutions is summarised through a brief summary of contemporary feminist theories of the state. Third, the effects of legislating equality between the sexes on the empowerment of women are considered. Then the first three parts of the discussion are drawn together in a discussion of the shift from goals of equality which are compatible with the traditional

rules of the political game to goals of parity which are not. Finally, four contrasting examples of equality strategies are considered: the elite based strategies of the French Ministry for Women's Rights, the grass roots generated initiatives of the British local authority equality committees, the integrated elite and grass roots approaches of Norwegian equality advocates and the absence of support for sex-equality that has characterised the transitional regimes of East and Central Europe.

II. Origins and Nature of European Equality Policy

So intertwined are the factors that play a part in the shaping of sex-equality policy that it is difficult to separate cause from effect. Arguably, much of the variance in the effectiveness of the sex equality policies of the European democracies is a product of their political setting and the political will of particular regimes. Different states have implemented such policies for different reasons and in different circumstances. Nevertheless there are some common characteristics to such policies. Notably, three pre-conditions make successful sex-equality policy more likely. These are first, a political culture that is hospitable to the idea of equality; second, effective women's agency, that is, widespread and effective organisation at all levels of the system of women who understand and will utilise the rules of the political game and third, the development of policies with sufficient remit to treat the wide ranging and complicated causes of inequality between men and women.

The language of policy analysis facilitates the identification of common features of the content and focus of sex- equality policies. In common with other public policies sex equality goals may be symbolic or substantive. Often what is thought of as symbolic policy is not policy at all, but the incorporation of a rhetoric about sex-equality into the pronouncements of politicians. Substantive policy is normally categorised according to whether it is distributive, regulatory or redistributive. Distributive policies involve the distribution of new benefits to individuals or groups, normally in the form of a government subsidy. Regulatory policies involve government regulation of practices, for example of professional qualifications or the like. Redistributive policies involve the transfer of benefit from one group to another. In general distributive policies are relatively uncontroversial, regulatory policies may meet with moderate but not insurmountable resistance and redistributive policies are highly controversial and meet high levels of continuing resistance (Lowi 1964). Sex equality policy in liberal democracies often begins with rhetorical strategies in which obeisance is made to the need to end the subordination of women, but substantive policies tend to come harder and later. This has been the pattern in the European democracies. Equality between the sexes first appeared on political agendas in the nineteenth century. But substantive sex equality policies did not become common until much later, and have been particularly in evidence since the 1960s. At first these were mainly distributive and regulatory, but

by the 1980s redistributive policies were sought by many members of equality policy communities and they were implemented in a number of systems.

The major focus of contemporary European sex-equality policies has been the labour force and the stated goals are, *inter alia*, to achieve equal treatment in the pay, conditions and prospects of men and women employees. Legislators under pressure from organised women and, in the case of EC members, from Community law, devised two types of instruments. Procedural laws concentrated on banning sex discrimination, on removing the obstacles to equality; while active, radical laws complemented unfair discrimination prohibitions with positive action and, in some countries (e.g. Sweden), a requirement on the part of employers to work actively for equality. Most countries also set up policy making institutions with a brief to promote equality for women, sometimes with enforcement or other quasi-judicial functions. These bodies were also required to monitor the impact of legislation and make recommendations for change (Vogel-Polsky 1985). Similarly, international organisations took up issues of sex equality and, during the 1970s and 1980s, began to press hard for them, supporting, and sometimes establishing, national and international equality networks. Apart from the European Communities however, the role of international organisations is one of information and development, of persuading sovereign authorities to address equality issues. These roles are more than symbolic and have the potential to influence the nature and the structure of national policy and institutions .

Campaigners for sex equality traditionally grounded their arguments in meritocratic notions of justice derived from social contract theory. According to contract theory society is a contract between equal individuals who agree to transfer their sovereignty to a central government in order to protect their own interests. In this framework equality is conceptualised as equality before the law (Meehan and Sevenhuijsen 1990). Laws which do not distinguish between individuals are deemed to confer equality. This way of thinking is imbedded in many of the legal systems of contemporary democracies and in the prevalent discourse on justice. Many claimants for equal rights for men and women have drawn on this conception of equality which, in situations where the legal system explicitly underpinned female subordination, was a considerable resource. Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, pillaged liberal thought for arguments that discrimination on the basis of sex should be ended in just society. Drawing on liberal conceptions of rational human nature, her case generated three basic demands. These were first, that women should have economic independence; second, they should have equal legal and civil rights to men and third, the relevant necessary changes in education and socialization practices should be made (Wollstonecraft 1978).

Following such reasoning, feminist equality campaigners focused on the removal of legal barriers to women and the introduction of competition on the basis of merit which was regarded as an equalisation of starting points. It was thought that equality was a *procedural* matter, a removal of legal obstacles. These are referred to in the equal opportunities literature as **liberal** or **liberal-rational** equality strategies. Although radical in Mary Wollstonecraft's day, this procedural conception of equality proved to be a severe constraint on the policies to emancipate women that

were devised during the 1970s. By their nature they tended to overlook the materiality of power differences between the sexes and to institutionalise longstanding inequalities. Critics of the meritocratic model object to the definition of equality it establishes. Such procedural definitions of equality imply that all individuals in a competition are judged according to the same criteria which ensures that the outcome, whatever it is, is fair. The problems with this, although much discussed, are worth rehearsing. Reducing the argument to its essentials, it goes like this. Not all individuals start from the same place. This means that they do not arrive at the competition in the same condition (Carling 1991). For equality to have substantive meaning, the different circumstances of different groups of individuals have to be taken into account. Effects of histories of unfavourable discrimination are imbedded in the contemporary culture and are known to cause handicaps of various kinds. Policies designed according to meritocratic principles will therefore produce outcomes which reflect rather than adjust social inequalities. They will not deliver equality of outcome. To provide equality of outcome a policy must be capable of providing redress for handicaps on the competitors which are caused by previous discrimination or by bigotry on the part of the competition managers. In short the policy must accommodate preferential treatment for its target groups.

Inevitably, dissatisfaction with the outcome of procedural strategies led to attempts to devise policies which emphasised equal outcomes. **Radical** strategies are those which seek to intervene directly in the workplace in order to achieve a fair distribution of rewards among employees, perhaps by offering special training or accelerated promotion to members of disadvantaged groups.

Like meritocratic models, radical models of equal opportunities policies have been largely directed at women's employment roles, taking other roles into account only in so far as they affect employment capacities. Nevertheless they are predicated on an understanding that something «extra» must be done for the disadvantaged group if its members are to fulfil their potential and secure fair rewards. Both strategies are flawed. The meritocratic model rests on a fiction of universalism which has been criticised by feminist theorists (Pateman 1988). Widespread support for this model creates a strategic dilemma for feminists who must make demands for women's rights in the terms of the prevailing discourse, and are forced to stress the similarities between women and men if they are to have any chance of success. Not only did this lead to a considerable distortion and oversimplification of feminist understandings of the differences between and within the sexes, it produced policies which made unrealistic assumptions about the position of women in the labour market. Radical policies, where they emerged, proved little better. They were situated in traditions of collective responsibility where the notion of class solidarity took precedence and the totality of women's experience was lost in policies which emphasised their experience as workers but neglected their other roles. In short, in practice both meritocratic and radical strategies were based on the similarities between men and women and largely ignored their differences. They implicitly underlined the view that, to end their subordination, women should become like men rather than the other way around. They did not effectively challenge the separation of personal and public life. This is not to say the strategies

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had no effect. Individual women benefited from the procedural strategies in all the countries where they were adopted and groups of women benefited from radical strategies, particularly in the strong welfare states of Scandinavia.

Despite their often disappointing effects, the experiences of devising, supporting and implementing meritocratic and radical equality policies affected the politics of gender relations in four beneficial respects. Women (1) increased their purchase on state institutions and political structures, (2) becoming more proficient at the rules of the game at the same time as (3) they challenged those rules. (4) Equality policy goals were assessed, re-considered and extended in scale and scope. During this period feminist strategies became more state directed. But at the same time the necessity to maintain grass roots women's organisations was underlined.

III. The Gendered (Fraternal) State and the Empowerment of Women

Feminist thinking about the state is relevant to this discussion because it addresses the nature of political institutions and structures, the obstacles they place in the way of empowering women and the opportunities for feminist intervention and political change. It is now commonly argued that the state is gendered, that the social contract is not inadvertently disadvantageous to women, but that it is inevitably so because it is a fraternal contract made between men. Such insights have evolved only gradually. Interest in the gendered nature of the state has steadily increased during the twenty years of the women's studies movement. An early interest in the effects of state policies on gender relations (Land 1976, Walby 1986) gradually evolved into a theoretical preoccupation with the gendered structures and processes that comprise the state (Savage and Witz 1993).

During the 1980s, a number of feminists became interested in the analysis of the state as an important arena of feminist practice. Carole Pateman's view that the state is in important respects a «fraternal organisation» was developed by Sophie Watson, an English feminist scholar who adapted Foucauldian understandings of the shifting character of state organisations to analyse Australian state feminism. She drew attention to the possibilities of intervention by feminists into the competition, negotiations and struggles that are the permanent condition of state agencies and organisations. In Watson's work, the combined notions of relational power and shifting state forms allow the insight that, although the balance of power between the sexes favours men, women have power and use it, taking advantage of the opportunities offered within organisations (Watson 1990) .

Such approaches offer an important new way of seeing gender and politics, but, used without reference to the material conditions of power (i.e. money, budgets, political authority and such everyday matters as presence in decision making arenas and networks etc.), they will inevitably produce work which emphasises the power women have and tends to ignore the areas where they have none. But, used with caution and in combination with an understanding of difference which highlights the mediation of gender by class, race, ethnicity, sexuality etc., this notion of

the gendered but relational nature of state power may facilitate our understanding of the politics of sex-equality policy.

Following such logic, we may distinguish between nominal, substantive and organisational fraternal power where **nominal** fraternalism suggests that (a) women will have a disproportionately low share of senior positions in all agencies and organisations and, (b) where women and men have similar status, men will have better individual qualifications and resources. **Substantive** fraternalism suggests that (a) men will be even more dominant in the prestige core policy areas, (b) where women predominate or are significantly more numerous agencies and organisations will be regarded as less prestigious and influential and (c) identifiably women's issue areas will be extensively feminised but poorly funded and weakly organised. **Organisational** fraternalism suggests a division of labour characterised by hierarchy, separation of policy making and implementation, and between agency and client. Evidence of successful feminist intervention would include the establishment of non-hierarchical organisational structures in which policy development was shared and differences between agency and client are blurred. Where feminist strategies were well established, we would expect «state feminism» to develop.

In short, feminist interventions are more likely to be successful the more women there are in the relevant arena. If sympathetic elites are a requirement for the development of adequate sex-equality strategies, then elites must be feminised. But, important though developments in state institutions are, they are only part of successful equality politics. It is also necessary to keep in mind that their successful entry into decision making arenas is not regarded by feminists as a replacement for an autonomous women's movement whose energising force is thought to be essential to sustain effective action in mainstream political and state organisations. Nor is it independent of the kind of state in which it takes place.

Indeed, the welfare context which applies is particularly important. Here it is useful to distinguish between (1) a rights based model of provision where benefits are determined by citizenship; (2) an insurance based model in which benefits are determined by contributions; or (3) a residual model in which benefits are determined by need (Ware and Goodin 1990). Most welfare states are a mixture of all three principles. In general, women fare best where universal provisions are most developed because only under such circumstances is it possible to construct sex equality machinery which will adequately address the relationship between paid and unpaid work. Accordingly, the division between paid and unpaid work and how it is treated by tax, social security, and social service provision are all indicators of the kind of emancipation strategies which are possible (Lewis 1993). Women tend to do best in terms of pay, conditions, and social provision in systems where they have high labour force participation rates. The Scandinavian welfare states are notable for their social provision and for the large scale employment of women in the public sector. This gendered pattern of employment according to which women are providers of welfare in systems which support women's work by offering publicly funded caring contributes to an occupational segregation of men and women that is amongst the strongest in Europe and which brings its own particular problems of gender subordination and domination. Nevertheless, it is in

these states that women's wages are highest relative to mens' and, whatever their pitfalls, these are the states which have the strongest and most effective official emancipation strategies.

IV. Sex-Equality and the Policy Process

It is clear from the discussion so far that the wide potential remit of sex-equality policy requires a multi-dimensional approach to treat the injustices which stem from in equalities of gender. There are four interdependent overlapping phases to such policy: (1) investigation, (2) implementation, (3) evaluation and (4) review. Each of these stages is controversial and each must be adequately resourced and must involve appropriate consultation and participation mechanisms so that the relevant groups are involved and the policy process is a continuing one. By this I mean that the capacity exists for policy development and change as the four stage cycle reveals new methods of remedy and new areas for remedy. Successful policy-making in such a controversial and politically contested area has implications at the level of the **political system**, the «client» **groups** and the **policy community**. At the level of the political system success will mean changes in the political culture, in political institutions and of the political agenda. As objects or what Hernes has called «policy takers» the status and position of the client groups will change. The sex equality policy community must be established, articulated and integrated. Let us consider each of these levels of policymaking in detail.

1. The political system

Experience in the USA and the UK shows that sex-equality policy requires vigorous legal guarantees of social and political rights with a resultant well-developed legal expertise in civil liberties (Sacks 1986). Attitude change, which is a goal of well conceived equality policy, requires a sustained, widespread and popular debate about the impact of gender on social, political, cultural and legal rights. The policies need energetic and committed support from established politicians and its goals should coincide with and reinforce other important political goals. Initially supporters of sex equality policy may be content with seemingly narrow labour market oriented objectives such as equal pay, but experience of implementation invariably leads to a perception by equality experts that policy in this single area will not alter the totality of women's experience, that gender inequalities at work are a function of disadvantages elsewhere. Efforts are then made to deal with structural impediments such as occupational sectorialisation, the intractability of pre-established collective bargaining structures and the primacy of other interests. Even where initial efforts are widely supported, such extensions of the policies will meet with considerable political resistance. This has been the case throughout Western Europe and in the United States and in Australia. The result is at best an interruption in the policy cycle, at worst policy retrenchment.

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A crucial lesson of efforts so far is that for progress to be made in the political system it has to be made in several areas at more or less the same time. Agencies established to undertake investigation, implementation, monitoring and review tasks need to have adequate authority to work in advance of attitudes. Often this infrastructure of state feminism is deformed at the outset by tri-partite or corporatist considerations whereby representatives of industry rather than of women's interests are given responsibility to oversee the policy. (Lovenduski 1986). In such cases the rules of the political game give employers and unions what amounts to a monopoly over collective bargaining and employment policies and women's interests must compete for a place in the crowded and pre-structured agenda.

Change is necessary in this area, and it happens. In Britain during the 1980s the systematic destruction of trade union political power led to the exclusion of the TUC from the established tri-partite government bodies which were so powerful during the 1970s. Unemployment was also a pressure and union membership declined dramatically. Where new jobs developed they were service sector, part time and often women's jobs. The unions, looking for new members, had to think about recruiting these women workers. Meanwhile the TUC, deprived of its tri-partite role, had to seek new ways of justifying its existence. Influential women trade unionists were successful in committing the TUC to the equality issue. By the end of the 1980s the TUC was an active component of the gender equality policy community, pledged to continue to commit its (dwindling) resources to the development of strategies to negotiate equal pay and opportunity deals, training packages for women workers, codes of practice about sexual harassment and parental leave and childcare provision for workers. Change was possible in this case because the declining fortunes of a political institution made it receptive to the demands of new constituencies. Moreover, there were active and influential feminist insiders in a position to take advantage of the opportunities offered here.

Another crucial turning point occurs when policymakers seek to integrate sex-equality policy in the employment arena with family, child care and reproductive rights policies. This transition is essential if gendered disadvantage is to be countered and women's movement demands met, but it is a difficult one for the political system to make because it entails changing the priorities of traditional organisations · *Attitude change is vital here* and much will depend upon the capacity of the policy community to generate public discussion about the issues. A powerful, high profile national body at the centre of government appears to be the best way to do this. The French example suggests that an energetic communications- minded, cabinet level political presence attracts the attention of the intelligentsia, interests informed opinion and the media and provides the necessary clout to make things happen. (Reynolds 1988) The British, West German and Australian models indicate that local (state) level activity and experience root such a ministry in a network of support (see below) and British and American experience underlines the necessity for a law enforcement agency. Experience everywhere for which there is evidence suggests the importance of the research community in monitoring, evaluating and developing policy. In other words, efforts need to be made at local, regional and national levels and in political, legal, social and educational institutions.

To summarise this section, political system change should include institutional innovation, institutional transformation, the development of a new policy community, and changes in popular attitudes.

2. The client group

The idea of client is perhaps a misnomer in the context of sex-equality policy. In one sense the «client» is the population of women, politically it is the organised communities of women, more specifically it is the women's movement. Whichever formulation is used, sex equality strategy must address the fact that women are a diverse constituency which may have contradictory needs. Policy needs to be sophisticated, sensitive to differences of race, class, ethnicity and generation as well as gender. This, almost common sense level point, is often overlooked by the women's movement, the policy makers and the dominant group of male politicians. The most important change which occurs in the «client» group is the realisation of its internal differences, a process which is sometimes imperfect, usually painful and always necessary. Gender is mediated by other lines of social cleavage. Although it is logically prior to class, age and nationality it is not subsumed by them. Whatever its long-term effects, successful sex-equality policy will increase the importance of gender to the formation of positive political identities and as a foundation of political behaviour. This is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of successful equality strategy.

3. The policy community

Related to this process is the development of the equality policy community. Sex equality law generates new institutions such as equality agencies and equal opportunities boards and commissions. It also places equality officers in firms, unions, educational institutions and other organisations, but the community will be larger than that. Pressure groups of various kinds begin to mobilise equality demands in society at large and in the representative political structure. Thus a community of experts is created. Often these experts cooperate with equality officers in other areas (e.g. race equality, opportunities for disabled people) and with their opposite numbers in different institutions, that is with each other. The monitoring, evaluation and review function of these officers gives them at least a formal access to the political agenda. Ideally the community will grow in strength and influence until it develops an identity and a momentum of its own. New institutions will appear (e.g. equality ombudsmen -sic!) and existing institutions will acquire new functions.

A strata of femocrats often forms in the equality agencies, boards and committees. Feminists become a more significant force in the political parties and interest groups which have power. The business community will begin to respond to the needs and demands of talented women managers and of organised women consumers. Such developments are well advanced in the Netherlands, the USA and the

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Nordic states and are also present at least in embryo in many other European countries. The rules of the political game demand that the policy community should be established in most, if not all, of the relevant structures, that it should be aware of itself as a community and that it should be of a certain size (a «critical mass») before policy success is assured.

The number of women representatives is an important indicator of whether the diversity of the community of women is taken into account and it is also a good indicator of other aspects of sex equality policy. The most advanced and effective packages of policies in terms of women's pay as a proportion of men's, of women's access to educational and employment opportunity, of the provision of good quality child care schemes, of support in a range of public and private institutions for equal opportunities employment policies all occur in those liberal democracies where women achieved high levels of political representation during the 1970s and 1980s, that is in the Nordic states, especially Norway and Sweden (Lovenduski and Norris 1993).

V. Goal Change: From Formal Equality to Political Parity

At this point the analysis can be extended and deepened by the addition of the insights offered by feminist accounts of the construction of gender identities. These offer an explanation for the limitations of most existing equality machinery, its narrowness of scope. As I have stated above, the considerable political purchase of formal equality goals in democratic systems is both a resource and a problem. Although the goal of equality is a necessary starting point it is also an impediment to the ending of women's subordination to men. This is why, by the beginning of the 1990s it was becoming more common for sex equality experts to argue that **parity**, rather than equality is the more appropriate goal · The idea of parity takes into account the differences between the sexes, but asserts they should not be an impediment to equal treatment. Equal treatment formulae therefore need to take into account the ways that men and women are different, otherwise they will not have the desired effect. Differences between women and men are central to gender inequality at work. At the heart of the subordination of women in employment is the complex relationship between their paid and unpaid work. As Jane Lewis (1993: 4) has observed women draw income from men, the labour market and the state in different proportions which vary by the type of state, by women's life styles and, to some extent by choice. But such differences may be overlooked when formalistic definitions of equality are written into law. Practices vary. European governments differ considerably in the extent of their acknowledgement of the unpaid work of women in their sex equality and welfare strategies. In Britain the way work in the family is divided is regarded as a matter to be determined within the family and treated by recent governments as though it is a matter of freely expressed choice by women who are also officially free to enter a labour market in which equality regulations are sometimes, but not always enforced. The French government has expressed a desire to find a «neutral approach that would enable

women to make a genuine choice as to whether to engage in paid or unpaid work and has experienced mixed success.» (Lewis 1993) In Sweden all adult women are treated both as paid workers and mothers in a system in which the issue of how to assure unpaid childcare work, for example, gets done. German and Italian policy assumes women will be primarily unpaid workers in the home, but addresses the issue of caring for children while the Irish government actively promotes women's roles as wives and mothers but also offers procedural equality policies in paid employment and education. (Lewis 1993) These different policy emphases have been adopted in the context of similar social trends. Since the 1960s, fertility rates have fallen, divorce rates have risen, illegitimate birth rates have risen, women's labour market activity rates have increased. But the results have been more differentiated, reflecting the different opportunity structures different kinds of states offer women.

The argument that political parity is a desirable goal is both ethical and practical and may be inferred from a comparative investigation of the experience of sex equality politics. The reform of the status of women is always a political matter which, in any system must treat a pre-structured policy process. Interested parties must take into account the rules of the political game and, if they are to prevail, must stay in the contest until the policy is successful. This implies a long term commitment. One reason for the disappointing effects of the laws that were passed during the 1970s and 1980s in Europe was that they were seldom fully implemented. Initially they were also too narrow, but it proved difficult or impossible at first to expand them. This was partly due to the constraints of «simple» equality strategies, as discussed above. But it is also apparent that the political conditions for optimising the development of early policies were often absent. Without an active pressure group presence and a diverse, attentive women's movement, the relevant policy communities did not develop the political will and strength to prevail. In addition, analysis of successful practice suggests that sustained pressure from political elites is necessary. In short, key structures of political recruitment and decision-making need to be colonised by committed feminists.

A consideration of the appropriate scope of equality policy illuminates the importance of accomodating difference and of political organisation. The policy chosen should have a sufficiently wide remit for the causes of disadvantages to be tackled. In this way the diversity of women's roles may be taken into account. Although the first phase of policy tends to be rather modest, substantive success means that schemes to bring women into political life will be required as will support for changing the domestic division of labour. To get elite support for gender parity a significant political representation for women is necessary (Dahlerup 1988). However, such representation is necessary, but it is not sufficient. The mere presence of women in the arenas of power will not secure the empowerment of women. The vital, inescapable element of any sustained strategy of women's emancipation is **women's agency**, defined as the political efforts, organisation and pressures women themselves bring to bear on the policy process. There must be diverse organised communities of women pressuring to establish and maintain policies and policies must be so structured as to incorporate and utilise the energies

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of those communities. The machinery of equality must have the capacity to ensure women's voices and arguments are heard, engaged and accommodated.

VI. Examples: The Importance of the Rules of the Game

There are a number of instances in which women's political presence has made a difference and there are examples of political support from established male elites. But it is in the maintenance and development of policy that the importance of the rules of the political game becomes most apparent and the constraints of the employment equality goal most evident. Four contrasting examples illustrate these points. Experiences in France and Britain illustrate the fortunes of elite generated and women's movement generated policy. Both show how policy is allowed to lapse when pressures from women to maintain it lapses or has not been forthcoming. A counter example is Norway where the political opportunity structure has been relatively hospitable to women and feminists have not only mastered the rules of the game but have altered them. There, sustained action at all levels by a well organised community of women generated one of the most effective existing examples of a comprehensive equality machinery. In France initiatives came from women in the political elite, in Britain from the grass roots women's movement and in Norway from an extensive and increasingly well established network of women in key political institutions able to operate in grass roots women's movements and in political elites. The fourth example, of the experiences of the recent erosion of women's rights in East and Central Europe, show how rapidly women lose ground when there is neither elite support nor an organised women's movement to press for effective equality strategies.

1. Elite initiatives: France

Yvette Roudy's ministry for women's rights was, for a brief time in the early 1980s, an initiative which had all the hallmarks of political success. It was an expansion of a previous policy, it resulted from the courtship by the French Socialist Party of the women's movement and it was led by a committed and successful politician who had her own power base in the governing party. Its weaknesses were that there was practically no feminist organisation within the governing party and none in the opposition parties either. The Roudy ministry was aware of the need for grass roots support and attempted to develop a sustained dialogue with the French women's movement. Funding for both the autonomous feminist and the traditional women's movements was an important part of its activity. In addition, the Ministry undertook a substantial legislative programme. Other ministries were compelled to consider how each of their policies affected women. Although responses varied, the initiative met with many early successes. The Ministry for Research and Technology agreed to co-sponsor assemblies leading to a national conference on feminist studies which was held in Toulouse in 1982 and attended by

over 800 women. A three year government programme of research on women and politics was inaugurated. The ministry of National Education agreed the establishment of University posts in women's studies, creating four new chairs in January 1984. Feminist ideas penetrated government and state feminism appeared to be taking hold. The ministry itself was housed in a building which displayed and celebrated women's achievements and which Roudy herself appeared to have regarded as a «temple» of feminism. The ambit of Roudy's ministry was wide. It was empowered to ensure the respect of women's rights policies, to eliminate unfair discrimination against women because of their sex and to establish guarantees of equal treatment in social, cultural and political life. It had the right to be involved in the preparation of any policy it thought might affect women, hence it could scrutinise the work of other branches of government and address issues of constitutional law, reproductive rights and cultural determinants of gender roles. It was a pathbreaking experiment. However, it proved very short lived (Reynolds 1988). When the Socialists lost power in 1986 the Ministry was downgraded, its temple broken up as its treasures were returned to the storerooms of various museums or redistributed and the building was put to other purposes. Equality inspectorates had their budgets and staffing reduced as, without Roudy, the political will to run the machinery she had established was lost. When the Socialists returned to power they did not reinstate the ministry and Cabinet level. Only 5 per cent of deputies were women and politically mobilised women had long since turned their attention to other issues, notably ecology and peace.

One of the problems illustrated by the French experience is that of how to harness the energising and sustaining effects of the women's movement into equality machinery without destroying its autonomous base. Elite feminism is a political resource for the movement and equality machinery creates a class of femocrats in the public administration system. But how are they to be sustained, made accountable and developed?

2. Grass Roots Strategies: British Local Government

The example of the British Local Authority Women's Committees of the 1980s is also instructive. Britain is a very centralised state. In the absence of a sympathetic party in central government, the autonomy of local authorities is a crucial part of the calculation which political interests must make of their resources. The British women's movement used these resources skilfully for as long as they lasted. During the 1980s, municipal feminism, as it came to be known, was a major project of organised feminists working in the Labour, Liberal and Social Democratic parties. They were well aware of the need to maintain contact with and nourish the grass roots of the women's movement. The initiative was taken with the Women's Committee of the Greater London Council (GLC) which was established in 1982. A GLC Women's Committee was set up because the council's leader, Ken Livingstone was committed both to channelling resources to London's disadvantaged communities and because organised feminist pressure was a strong political force

in London. The Labour left, which controlled the GLC, were looking for new political constituencies and feminist were looking for new political roles. The GLC was more than a simple equality agency. Like Roudy's ministry in France, it had a wide remit covering employment, cultural and social inequalities. The Women's Committee movement spread from London and is an important part of the sex-equality policy community. Most of its ideas and much of its energy came from its capacity to harness the communities of organised women. Its weaknesses stemmed largely from its inability to attract sustained elite – support a product not only of the ideology of the governing party but also of the absence of committed women in national government. The rules of the political game require support at Westminster and feminist politicians in political office.

3. Toward Parity: Norway

In Norway women in the political parties combined with old and new branches of the women's movement to establish the relevance of gender differences in politics. At the same time as party women were successfully seeking a greater share of political representation, women's organisations were directly addressing political elites to develop gender sensitive public policy and discourse. At first, as in Britain and France, they had to rely on sympathetic men. They sought support partly by mobilising arguments which maintained women were entitled to equal substantive rights to men. But at the same time they argued women's experiences differed from men's, hence women's participation would be a valuable contribution to political decision making, or that the conflicting interests of the sexes required a balanced representation of both. As this process went on, women acquired a greater share of political representation and equality machinery developed which had the support both of organised communities of women and of substantial sections of the political elite(Skjeie 1990, 1993).

4. Elite hostility and grass roots indifference: East and Central Europe

The antipathy of women and men in East and Central Europe to feminist emancipation strategies in the period since the transition began is now very well documented (Corrin 1992; Feminist Review Collective 1992; Podskaya 1991; Rai, Pilkington and Phizacklea 1992; Watson 1993). Women's right's under state socialism were largely built around the needs of the Labour market and were created and maintained in ways which did not take account of their needs and wishes. As a result the grass roots support required to sustain what was valuable about the equality machinery of the previous regimes was not forthcoming. At the same time women's political representation was not sustained and political elites have been hostile to strategies of women's emancipation. The result has been huge increases in women's unemployment, closure of childcare facilities, loss of reproductive rights and the absence of voices on behalf of gender equality in the restructuring process. As Barbara Einhorn (1991: 25) has written

«This raises the whole issue of rights under the tutelage of a paternalistic or even patriarchal socialist state as having been ‹given›, ...[rather than] won». State socialist bans on oppositional activity also leave their residue. The two factors combine to leave women with «...no tradition of public involvement or grass roots struggle to win or defend rights.»

These examples show how important the political opportunity structure is to the business of establishing adequate equality machinery.

Conclusions

I have shown both by argument and examples of particular policies and practices that effective feminist intervention in state institutions is necessary, possible and difficult. Meaningful equal opportunities policy is redistributive, radical and controversial. The overall thrust of the policy must be to remedy. But remedy will be perceived as redistributive and the dominant group has many resources at its disposal when it opposes such a policy. The different experiences of sex-equality policy show that feminists must engage mainstream politics, that such an engagement will be affected by the rules of the game and that the rules of the game favour men. Against the contention that liberal democracy may be thought of as a resource for sex-equality advocates, Carole Pateman (1988) argues that the democratic revolution was only half a revolution which brought women into civil society not as individuals but as subordinates of husbands or fathers, in a system she refers to as fraternal, meaning governed by men. She shows how women are excluded by their cultural association with «naturalness» and the private sphere in a system in which politics is formalised, ritualised and public, conceived around the characteristics associated with men. The exclusion of women is reinforced and institutionalised through traditional and common constructions of liberal democracy which are predicated on asymmetric power relationships between the sexes. These deny women effective citizenship and place their participation in the development of policy goals and mechanisms at a disadvantage. The disadvantaged participation of women was a major impediment to the installation of equality policies in the past and today it is one of the factors which impedes development from goals of equality to those of parity. From the very first stage the policy process will distort the intended effect of sex- equality policy. The conditions of the foundations of the European democracies ensure this. Through such distortions the rules of the political game continue to maintain male power. They must be changed if successful emancipation strategies are to be devised and implemented.

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