

*Women in the Swedish 'People's Home':
Gender and the Social Democratic Welfare State*

Kimberly Earles
PhD Candidate (ABD)
Department of Political Science
York University
kim@kimearles.net

Draft: Please do not cite without permission

While social democracy is a much-analyzed area of political science, there remains a gap in our analysis and understanding of how women and gender relations fit into the realm of social democracy. Since Sweden is often viewed as the best example of a social democratic welfare state, and Sweden is also regularly named as the most gender equal country in the world, it is crucial to explore the relationship between the two. While it is clear that social democratic states such as Sweden have not achieved full gender equality, there remains something unique about social democracy that has led to many advancements in women's emancipation and in gender equality as a whole. Throughout the twentieth century, gender increasingly became an important issue in the analysis of welfare states. As Daly and Lewis argue, gender has been propelled to the forefront of welfare state policy (2000). This is particularly true in Sweden, where the welfare state is often described as 'woman-friendly,' which is meant to convey women's strong representation in positions of political power, as well as their high levels of participation in education and the labour market (Kjeldstad, 2001). This is all possible due to a number of factors, including the welfare services available to women so that they may better balance work and family life. If we can locate and analyze this uniqueness we may uncover lessons for gender relations in Sweden in the future, and in other contexts. Of course, there is not one simple reason why Sweden has achieved a greater measure of gender equality than other countries. It is a combination of many factors, from the Swedish model's interrelated goals of full employment and equality, to the dominance of the Social Democratic Party in Sweden since the 1930s, the unique path of the Swedish women's movement since the 1960s, particularly its' strategy of state feminism, as well as the state's encouragement of women's entry into the labour force in greater numbers to fill a labour shortage during the 1960s and 1970s, and the dominance of the dual-earner model in Sweden which has followed as a result. It is also the sum of all of these factors, representing a certain path pursued by Sweden in the post-war era.

Central to the analysis of the Swedish welfare state is the role of gender in the 'People's Home' and the relationship between gender and the 'People's Home.' Here I argue that there is indeed an important relationship between social democracy and the level of gender equality achieved in Sweden. Women and the state have become very much interconnected in Sweden since the 1960s, through the women's movement's decision to pursue a strategy of state feminism, and through women's high levels of political representation. Women's relationship to the state is further engrained by the social democratic welfare state, which not only offers programs and services such as childcare and parental leave, which facilitate women's paid employment, but which also offers an important source of employment to women. Therefore, it is clear that any changes to the Swedish welfare state will have a direct impact on women and gender relations in Sweden.

In contrast to other European welfare models, the Scandinavian model to which Sweden belongs, is more state-based, meaning that the state is engaged in the organization and financing of social security and welfare, and in the organization of the largest sector of the economy – the public sector (Ervik and Kuhnle, 1996). This crucial role of the state has also meant an increase in the legitimacy of the state and state intervention in the Scandinavian countries (Ervik and Kuhnle, 1996). This is key to understanding the role of the state in the Swedish context. The strength of the state, the institutionalization of class coalitions (working and middle classes), and the historical

legacy of the social democratic regime in Sweden have all shaped the relationship between gender and the 'People's Home' over time.

In the early twentieth century, the concept of the welfare state, or the 'People's Home' was developed to encompass the ideals of social democracy, including equality, full employment, and a comprehensive welfare state. This notion of the 'People's Home' was developed by the Social Democratic Party (SAP), in coalition with farmer organizations (Esping-Andersen, 1990), which proved to be a fruitful coalition for the development of the Swedish welfare state. The term the 'People's Home' was coined by Social Democrat and future Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson in 1928 and was meant to convey the feeling that all Swedes should feel as though they are members of a family, regardless of social or economic status (Meidner, 1993). The 'People's Home' was an effort to "rewrite the relationship between citizen and state, an affirmation that welfare and capitalism need not be incompatible" (Esping-Andersen, 1999, 34). Thus, the concept implied that socialist ideals could be achieved through the welfare state (Meidner, 1993).

Later, in the mid-twentieth century, the working class turned to the emerging white-collar, middle-class to form a coalition in support of the welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990). This coalition saw the beginning of a welfare state which combined universal entitlements with high earnings-graduated benefits (Clement and Mahon, 1994), thus becoming a welfare state supported by the vast majority of the population – the working and middle classes. This is particularly important in Sweden, which has the largest middle-class of any industrialized nation, with close to 80 per cent of the population belonging to this category (Olsen, 2002). This political coalition was not only important in developing the Swedish welfare state which exists today, but is also important in determining the form of the Swedish welfare state in the future. By creating a two-tiered welfare state, the middle-class became "wedded to its defense" and guarded against backlash (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 69). As such, the future of the Swedish welfare state depended on middle-class support (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, social policy was used as a means of "profound social reform and also... as an instrument aimed at reducing class conflict and preventing social unrest" (Leira, 1993, 53). This was also a crucial time for gender equality, as the traditional relationship between women and men was being contested through women's demands for the right to vote (Leira, 1993). This was accompanied by a negotiation of the boundaries between public and private, between what was deemed the responsibility of the state versus that of the family or the individual (Leira, 1993). It was during this time that women's organizations began to emerge to fight for women's rights. For example, in 1884, the Fredrika Bremer Association was created with the aim of promoting "equal legal, civic, economic and political status for women" (Elman, 1996, 17).

From 1932, the Social Democratic Party became the driving force behind social reform and the welfare state in Sweden (Leira, 1993), as it began its uninterrupted forty-four year reign until 1976. This is when the Swedish model began to take shape, as "the welfare state... began to unfold between the 1930s and 1960s in an effort to rewrite the social contract between government and the citizenry" (Esping-Andersen, 1999, 33). But even prior to the 1930s, Swedish women were exercising their voice and their desire to be included in the process of developing Sweden. For example, in February 1920, the

women's league of the Social Democratic Party, known as the Social Democratic Women's Federation (SSKF), held its first congress, with representatives from 120 women's clubs from around Sweden (S-Kvinnor). Just eight years later, at the 1928 SAP congress, the SSKF announced "we women do not want to be invited into the People's Home only after it has been completed; we will be happier if we take part in laying the foundations" (Jenson and Mahon, 1993). Yet, women's role in developing the People's Home was quite limited in the beginning. Swedish women were expected to maintain a 'good home' for their families (Jenson and Mahon, 1993), and there was little room for any other role for women at the time. During this time gender difference was celebrated, with women and men largely occupying separate spheres of society (Jenson and Mahon, 1993). Some feminists were unhappy with the rigid definition of housewife for women and sought to break through these confines. For example, in 1934, the editor of the SSKF's monthly paper laid out a gendered conception of Keynesian demand management, arguing that "Housewives are the workers' employers – they shape consumption and hence production" (Jenson and Mahon, 1993, 82).

It was during the 1930s that Alva Myrdal, a prominent Swedish feminist began writing about population policy. Myrdal framed her discussion of population concerns in terms of the welfare of children and in terms of women's rights within the process of democratization (Holmwood, 2000). Myrdal argued that women's employment was often necessary in order to meet the needs of the family, particularly the costs of children (1968). For Myrdal, women not only worked in order to support their families, while at the same time reducing the size of their families, but many women were choosing work *over* family for the independence employment provided (Holmwood, 2000). As such, the economic and cultural dimensions of women's work had to be addressed in social policy (Holmwood, 2000). For Myrdal, in comparison to men, women were disadvantaged in their attempt to combine work and family and thus the response should be collectively organized publicly provided childcare (Holmwood, 2000). This was a step towards equalizing the costs of child-bearing, as well as improving the welfare of children (Holmwood, 2000). However, Myrdal's conception of equality was not limited to women being able to better balance work and family, as she also argued for the greater participation of men in unpaid work and in child-rearing duties (1968). Myrdal has been credited with bringing gender issues to the fore of the policy debate from the late 1930s and through the post-war era (Holmwood, 2000). For Myrdal, the social democratic welfare state was not inherently patriarchal and, in fact, was open to issues of women's rights, but a strong state was needed in order to realize these rights (Holmwood, 2000).

During the 1960s the SSKF really began exercising its influence on the SAP and on Swedish social policy. In 1960 the SSKF persuaded the SAP to create a committee on women's issue with Tage Erlander, party leader and Prime Minister, as honorary chair and Inga Thorsson, SSKF President, as working chair; the committee published a report entitled "Women's Equality" in 1964 (Burness, 1999). This led to a follow-up all-party report five years later, which stated that equality between men and women, was an "integral part of the parties' aspirations to achieve equality" (Sainsbury, 1993, 280). These reports led to a broader acceptance of the goal of gender equality by most, which aided Swedish women in their pursuit of gender equality. As such, the committee was not directly involved in the creation of new policy, but rather helped to change the environment so that such policy could be created and better accepted in the future. There

were many such activities that helped to change attitudes during the 1960s. For example, it was during this time that the Fredrika Bremer Association launched its 'Stop Helping Mother With the Housework' exhibit which encouraged family members to no longer see their task as 'helping mother' but as performing "a rightful share of the household duties" (Lovenduski, 1986, 99).

The 1960s also saw the opening up of the 'sex-role debate' in Sweden. This debate harkened back to Myrdal's more radical vision from the 1930s and challenged the vision she and Klein had laid out in *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work* (1956) of women as mothers and wage-earners but in sequence, not together. Bergman argues that within this debate "academics emphasized the socially constructed and thus changeable nature of sex roles," and advocated "a more equal division of labour between women and men... so that both sexes could have a professional as well as a family role" (2004). An important early entry in the sex-role debate was Eva Moberg's 1961 article "Women's Conditional Liberation," which raised demands such as the reduced workday, which would later become important in the Swedish women's movement (Jenson and Mahon, 1993).

Up until the 1960s the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) representing blue-collar workers had remained rather focused on class and rather dismissive of women and gender issues. Even well into the 1960s LO's demands remained largely focused on industrial policy and class (Jenson and Mahon, 1993). However, it was during this time that LO started to change and began to embrace working women as wage-earners (Jenson and Mahon, 1993). LO began to see the benefits of women's labour force participation in the tight labour market situation it found itself (Jenson and Mahon, 1993). In the early 1960s LO and the Swedish Employers' Association (SAF) negotiated an end to a separate women's wage classification (Statistics Sweden, 2006) which, together with their policy of solidaristic wages bargaining, meant a successful reduction in the gender wage gap in the years to follow.

It was also during the 1960s that women began to occupy a place in the People's Home not as housewives but as workers. The second-wave women's movement of the 1960s challenged the identities of 'woman' and 'worker' and opened a space to reconsider the two (Jenson and Mahon, 1993). When asked what it was about Sweden that has lead it to achieve such a great measure of gender equality, Anna Hedborg, former SAP Member of Parliament and Director-General of the Swedish National Social Insurance Board, simply answered "Work, it's easy" (2005 Interview). The Scandinavian social democratic welfare states "substantially increased the opportunity costs of being a housewife, and thereby... played an important role in the emergence of greater gender equality at home and at work" (Sørensen, 2001, 114). Many see the dramatic increase of Swedish women into the labour market since the 1970s as part of a deliberate social democratic project to promote gender equality and women's economic independence in Sweden (Anderson and Meyer, 2006; Leira, 1993). For example, Ingemar Lindberg, member of the commission which created the Swedish parental leave system in 1974, argues "a positive attitude to, not just a neutral, but a positive attitude to women taking up employment, was characteristic of Sweden I think earlier than any other countries" (2005 Interview). This, of course, was related to the strong emphasis on full employment found in Sweden (Lindberg, 2005 Interview). In fact, in the late 1960s, the Scandinavian countries were the first to abandon the assumed male breadwinner model and adopt a

dual-earner model (Esping-Andersen, 1999). As a result, Scandinavian women are far less dependent on their partner financially, there are far less married women in these countries without earnings, there are more couples that have similar earnings, and it is more common in these countries for women to earn more than their spouse (Sørensen, 2001).

As a result of women's increasing employment and demands for equality, the 1970s saw even more feminist challenges. As a result of some of the more radical groups which emerged, the SSKF began a process of radicalization also. For example, they claimed abortion on demand prior to the release of the government-appointed commission's report on this issue – an unusual step within the norms of Swedish politics at the time (Jenson and Mahon, 1993). Members of the SSKF also appeared at the 1975 SAP congress wearing t-shirts with the words 'women's struggle' on the front to bring attention to the issue of unequal power relations (Jenson and Mahon, 1993). The SSKF also published a key document entitled *Families in the Future: A Socialist Family Policy* in 1972, which linked their demands for gender equality to the LO's demands for industrial and economic democracy (Jenson and Mahon, 1993). This document outlined many significant feminist demands such as the six-hour workday, adequate public childcare, housing reform, and work for all (Jenson and Mahon, 1993). The demands from the SSKF, as well as women within the labour movement and those outside of the political sphere, created pressure on the state to enact reforms, such as parental leave in 1974 and increased childcare availability throughout the 1970s and beyond. In 1976 the SSKF put forward a motion to parliament for compulsory paternity leave, contrary to the wishes of the SAP, and forcing the SAP to deal with the issue in their family policy program later that year (Jenson and Mahon, 1993).

While the 1980s and 1990s were often difficult in economic terms, women still made many advances during this time, particularly within the labour movement. For example, the first conference of LO women took place in 1988, demonstrating how far the confederation had come in terms of recognizing women not only as workers but also recognizing that they have their own unique issues and demands as workers (Jenson and Mahon, 1993). That same year, Lillemor Arvidsson was elected as the first woman leader of a LO union – the Municipal Workers' Union (*Kommunal*), and she became an outspoken critic of the government's labour policies (Jenson and Mahon, 1993). In 1991 LO amended its statutes to include the goal of equal representation of women in all union activities and on all union boards and committees (Jenson and Mahon, 1993). That same year LO also sent a team of LO women as its official contribution to the SAP election campaign, demanding women be given a higher profile in the campaign (Jenson and Mahon, 1993). The 1990s also saw the rise of 'the Support Stockings,' a group of women dissatisfied with the results of the 1991 election as well as the inroads neoliberalism was making in Sweden at the time, which will be discussed in further detail below.

The Swedish welfare state today reinforces a different norm for women than that of 'housewife' or 'mother;' rather both men and women are viewed as 'worker.' As such, Swedish women are not expected to be housewives, but they are expected to be workers. Thus, the welfare state plays a role in shaping societal expectations regarding family and work. In Sweden the norm of the housewife, popular less than half a century ago, now no longer exists. This demonstrates how quickly a new norm can not only be implemented, but also how quickly it can become entrenched as dominant. This can be seen through the

provision of childcare services, as well as programs such as parental leave, and childcare credits within the pension system. These components of the Swedish welfare state reinforce the norm that everyone in society should participate in paid labour, while recognizing the reality of parents with children and the need to take some time away from the labour force when children are young or sick.

Feminism, or the women's movement, has expressed itself in different ways in different contexts. In Sweden state feminism has been a popular form of feminist organizing, particularly since the mid-1970s. State feminism involves feminists acting through the state and state institutions such as political parties and the bureaucracy in order to advance their demands for gender equality. It is also related to the creation of state institutions formed to further gender equality and women's interests (Kjeldstad, 2001). McBride Stetson and Mazur look at state feminism and how it is conceptualized and operationalized differently in different settings; they define state feminism as, "activities of government structures that are formally charged with furthering women's status and rights" (1995, 1-2). In a discussion focused more on Scandinavia, Hernes sees state feminism as an, "interplay between agitation from below and integration from above" (1987, 11).

Sweden's particular version of state feminism has meant the incorporation of women's concerns directly into the institutions and policies of the political system. Since Swedish women fought for and won the right to vote early in the twentieth century, their concerns have generally been successfully incorporated into the state, reducing the amount of fighting from the outside and increasing the amount of cooperation between women and the state. Scholars such as Norris argue that societies with consensual rather than conflictual women's movements, such as Sweden, are more likely to have "low-profile" feminist movements, and are more willing to accept feminist demands (1987). And, while this may not be true in all cases, it certainly appears to hold true in the Swedish case. Women's concerns are addressed through legislation, creating a climate of cooperation and reducing resistance to the women's movement and its demands. Hernes argues that all of the Scandinavian countries, including Sweden, have a state form that makes it possible for them to transform into 'woman-friendly' societies (1987). The implications of this are that, while Swedish state feminism is not perfect and has not yet led to substantive equality between men and women, it is an avenue that offers many possibilities for equality. State feminism manifests itself differently according to setting, but in Sweden it has manifested itself in such a way as to give women a voice within government structures and within the policy-making process.

Those Swedish women who are politically active have become so generally through membership in the women's sections of political parties or in unions, rarely through independent grassroots organizations. Women's political participation takes place within the political system and is seldom a fight against the system from the outside – women and their concerns are incorporated into the state and are therefore well represented on government bodies and in legislation. Most feminists in Sweden today work toward their goals within governmental bureaucracies or within political parties (Elman, 1996). However, not all women's organizing in Sweden has occurred directly within the state, but most does remain focused on the state as *the* location for change. Sainsbury argues that there was a generational renewal in the Swedish women's movement in the 1990s as more young women got involved, mobilizing around the

welfare state and around women's representation after it decreased in 1991 (2005 Interview). Women's mobilization is important and the women's movement has been very critical and has pushed continuously for its demands (Sainsbury, 2005 Interview).

This can be seen in the emergence of the Support Stockings, a network of feminist activists unhappy with the drop in women's representation in the 1991 national election, as mentioned above. They linked this decrease in women's representation to a concern with the overall direction of the welfare state in Sweden, thus making it more political than just a matter of numbers or percentages (Burness, 1999), as it was linked also to the rise of neoliberalism in Sweden. From the 1970s women's representation in the Swedish legislature, or *Riksdag*, had been steadily increasing to the point where it had reached 38 per cent in 1988. When women's representation fell to 32 per cent in 1991 with the election of a bourgeois government for only the third time since the 1930s, Swedish feminists were outraged. They formed a temporary network and called themselves the Support Stockings, whose primary goal was to make sure that women's representation increased again in the 1994 national election, ensuring that the decrease in 1991 did not signal a trend, and they were successful. The 1994 election saw the return of the SAP to power, and the proportion of women in the *Riksdag* increased to 40.4 per cent, with equal numbers of men and women in the cabinet (Burness, 1999). The Support Stockings achieved their goals and proved that even in Sweden a force from outside of the system is sometimes needed to change things within the system. And like most independent women's organizing in Sweden, the group disappeared after it had achieved its goal, leaving the women inside the parties to continue the struggle for gender equality in government.

The biggest and perhaps most important form of political mobilization, or resistance, which has emerged in Sweden in recent times, is the Feminist Initiative (Fi), launched on April 4, 2005. This organization-turned-political-party represents feminist concerns with neoliberalism and with the pace of gender equality in Sweden. This is a clear example of women organizing through a system of state feminism, seeking their demands through the political party system rather than autonomously. As *de facto* party leader Gudrun Schyman explained the Fi as "women who have been working for different organizations on questions which affect women's lives... [have] joined forces" (Butterworth, 2005). This was a different type of organization, one that did not follow the norms of political organizing in Sweden. It also included a number of different movements and, as founding member Tiina Rosenberg describes it, "this is the modern way of dealing with feminist politics. It is about gender, but it's also about sexuality, it's about ethnicity, it's about class, it's... bringing all of these perspectives into feminist politics" (2005 Interview).

In terms of the timing of the launch of the Fi, it is very much linked to the timing of the emergence of the Support Stockings fourteen years before. Both are, in many ways, a feminist response to a perceived neoliberal threat. While the Support Stockings were focused more on the singular issue of women's representation in the Swedish parliament, they saw the losses which occurred in the 1991 election as part of a broader neoliberal agenda that could see the rolling back of women's gains during the post-war era. The Feminist Initiative also sees the current neoliberal climate as a threat to women's gains, and are not only fighting rollbacks, but are also pushing for further movement in the direction of gender equality instead of maintaining the status quo. Following its

launch, the Fi highlighted five issues it would work on, from changing the rape laws to eradicating discrimination in the health sector, addressing the wage discrepancy between male- and female-dominated professions to reducing inequalities in parental leave, sick leave and other job market issues, and ensuring women can seek asylum in Sweden for persecution due to their sex (Butterworth, 2005). However, due to internal conflicts and negative media coverage, support for the party declined leading up to the 2006 election. In the end, the Fi managed to get less than 1 per cent of the vote in the September 2006 national election, and thus is not currently represented in the Riksdag. Yet the party remains active, and depending on how it is organized in the future, it could certainly have an important influence on gender politics in Sweden.

In Sweden, like in other countries, women's political representation at all levels of government was low until the 1960s and 1970s. However, widespread beliefs in equality and justice did legitimize women's claims over the years in Sweden, making it impossible to continue to ignore women's demands to share political power with men. The multiparty proportional representation electoral system in Sweden is an important factor in facilitating women's entry into political life, as it is a system that also allows for preference voting at the local level. Preference voting is a system, which allows voters to change the order in which candidates appear on party lists. Cumulative voting is another technique that has been helpful in getting more women elected as it involves listing the same candidate twice, which, in effect, gives one candidate two votes. These techniques have been used to women's advantage through campaigns to get more women elected since the 1970s.

As a result, Sweden has seen a marked increase in women's political representation in the past forty years. More and more women were elected to public office at all levels of government during this period. Women also became party leaders and more women were successful in being chosen for cabinet positions. Women even broke the barrier of being assigned traditionally female cabinet portfolios such as health and education and were placed in charge of portfolios such as justice and foreign affairs. There are a number of contributing factors as to why Swedish women have achieved such electoral and policy success, and space prohibits their discussion here, but they include women's organizing within the political system, the political party system, the electoral system, the welfare state, and labour policies. As a result of these factors, in today's centre-right coalition government there are 47.3 per cent women in parliament and 43 per cent of Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt's cabinet ministers are women.

As discussed above, while Anna Hedborg was able to provide a one-word answer to the question of gender equality in Sweden, the necessary conditions for the vast majority of women to be able to work are actually much more complex, and the result of a number of factors. Ann-Zofie Duvander, researcher at the Swedish National Social Insurance Board, argues that there are three important elements in Sweden when it comes to women's labour force participation: separate taxation, the expansion of childcare, and the parental leave system (2005 Interview). A country's tax system is important in that it can either penalize wives' employment or encourage it (Esping-Andersen, 1999). In Sweden, separate taxation, introduced in 1971, encourages women's labour market participation after marriage by taxing individuals rather than couples or families. Many of the people I interviewed claimed that this was one of the most important reasons behind women's increased labour force participation since the 1970s.

Another factor is the social democratic welfare state and the opportunities it provides for women in Sweden. The welfare state and the institutions that existed previously “created the logic” for the introduction of childcare and parental leave after women began entering the labour force in greater numbers (Ferrarini, 2005 Interview). An inevitable consequence of the welfare state is that it makes women more independent of men (Pettersson, 2005 Interview). “I think that rather early our welfare system is a system based on individuals not on families” (R. Andersson, 2005 Interview). The welfare state allows women to become commodified, or dependent on the market, rather than dependent on the family for their welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1999), as discussed above. This focus on the individual rather than the family in taxation and in welfare policy has provided the climate and the incentives for women to become more economically independent.

The development of childcare and parental leave “has, to some extent, to do with a quite unified women’s movement... a big part of women’s organizations... have fought for childcare and then the possibility to combine working and having family” (Bergqvist, 2005 Interview). The Swedish women’s movement of the 1970s really succeeded when it came to childcare and parental leave, which made it possible for women and men to work and to have a family (M. Andersson, 2005 Interview). The women’s organizations in Sweden worked very hard over the years in order to further gender equality in Sweden. This combination of a strong women’s movement, particularly within the political parties and the trade unions which held power, and a social democratic welfare state have been crucial to the design of welfare programs such as childcare and parental leave that have advanced the issue of gender equality.

The economic context played a significant role as well, particularly in the 1970s when Sweden experienced labour shortages and made some decisions at the time which turned out to be crucial for the advancement of gender equality. A number of feminist political economists see this as a turning point for women’s equality (Bergqvist, 2005 Interview; Wennemo, 2005 Interview). Prior to this the SAP had not placed a great deal of emphasis on issues of gender equality. However, the demands of the women’s movement and the egalitarian ideals that already existed in welfare state institutions and the need for female labour all combined during this time for a change in orientation for the SAP (Ferrarini, 2005 Interview). As such, the political context and the strength of social democracy and the SAP have also played a crucial role in the promotion of gender equality. Due to the fact that the SAP had worked towards class equality for a long time, it was easy to expand this to include gender equality (Korpi, 2005 Interview; Lindvert, 2005 Interview). The party’s support for gender equality and all of the measures that have been taken over the years to further this goal have really placed gender equality high on the political agenda.

The dominance of the SAP and its equality agenda during the twentieth century in Sweden has meant that even the more centrist and conservative parties have also included gender equality as one of their goals (Kjeldstad, 2001). This has resulted in all seven of Sweden’s major political parties claiming to be ‘feminist’ (Thoursie, 2005 Interview). From the 1960s and 1970s, the SAP has come to recognize the political importance of (working) women, and began to court their support (Mahon, 2000). “[I]nstead of social class they are now talking much more about gender issues” (Lundberg, 2005 Interview). The SAP’s interest in women as political supporters has led to a situation where women

have been very successful at getting their demands met through the party, particularly since the party was in government for so long.

The lack of strong resistance is another important factor in terms of gender equality and women's labour force participation in Sweden. "[C]onservatism as an impulse has been there of course in Sweden as in... all other countries. But conservatism as an idea or a set of principles of a coherent body of thought has been very poorly represented in Sweden over the last hundred years. So there was a total lack of opposition" to women entering the labour market and the welfare services that were developed in order to encourage this (Linder, 2005 Interview). This lack of a conservative opposition to gender equality and women's paid employment can be traced, in part, to the lack of religious influence in Sweden, where there's been "nothing like the Catholic Church, for instance, that's been very crucial in other countries where the divisions are bigger" (Linder, 2005 Interview).

A major commitment of the Swedish welfare state has been to full employment. In fact, only Norway and Sweden were able to translate their commitments to full employment into reality for most of the post-war period (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Until the 1980s, open unemployment in both countries was under 3 per cent (Esping-Andersen, 1990), exceeding this benchmark only three times from 1950-1991 (Olsen, 2002). This figure is even more remarkable in the Swedish case, when one considers the high levels of female participation in the labour force as well (Olsen, 2002), particularly since the 1970s. By the early-1990s, women constituted 48 per cent of the Swedish labour force (Olsen, 2002), the highest percentage anywhere in the world. Since this time, women's percentage of the labour force has not wavered from 47-48 per cent (Statistics Sweden, 2007).

The Swedish version of full employment was unique, particularly due to two interrelated factors: high rates of women's employment, and high levels of employment in the public sector. As Myles describes, the Swedish version of full employment also meant high employment, as it relied on most people working most of the time in order to support the system (1994). The financial underpinnings of the Swedish welfare state depend on maximizing the tax-base, meaning that as many people as possible must work, and as few as possible should depend on benefits (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The major mechanism used by the state since the late 1960s and early 1970s to ensure this high employment (and high wages) was employment inside the welfare state (Myles, 1994). Over time, the Swedish welfare state became the leading force in sustaining full employment, partly as direct employer, and partly through subsidies (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The state even went so far as to accumulate large government deficits to finance employment and to escalate public sector employment (Esping-Andersen, 1990). This demonstrates the strength of the state's commitment to full employment. Such a system created wage pressure that forced out less efficient, low-wage jobs, resulting in fewer 'working poor' (Myles, 1994), and a larger middle-class. Also, under Swedish full employment, those who do not work, such as the elderly, can be provided with high incomes through the income security system, as there are enough people in the labour force to support such a system (Myles, 1994).

In order to fulfill its commitment to full employment, the Swedish welfare state developed policies which encouraged women to balance both family and paid employment. Coulson, Magas and Wainwright argue that Sweden's high demand for

women's labour resulted in the extension of the welfare state into areas traditionally reserved for domestic labour (1975), which has meant that services such as childcare are provided through the state. Edwards emphasizes the parental leave policies, the reduced working day, and the opportunities and choices available to both parents when it comes to balancing paid employment and family (1989). Daune-Richard and Mahon cite the close link between childcare and employment policies in Sweden as an expression of the state's commitment to gender equality in the labour force (2001). Esping-Andersen reiterates from his earlier work, that a current challenge to welfare state policy is the maintenance of the compatibility of parenthood with work, or a 'woman-friendly policy' (2002a). The majority of Swedish women take advantage of these woman-friendly policies and opt for both lifetime employment, with few or no interruptions, and motherhood (Esping-Andersen, 2002b).

However, the Swedish labour force remains highly segregated. Most women work in traditional female occupations, and many employed women work part-time (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Due to the parallel expansion of the welfare state and women's entry into the labour force, what has occurred in Sweden is a feminization of the welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990). For example, in the 1980s, the public sector accounted for 80 per cent of new jobs, with 75 per cent of these being female (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The expansion of the welfare state was actually only possible through the recruitment of women to part-time employment, which led to this feminization of the waged labour force (Ryner, 1999). Yet, part-time jobs in Sweden are not necessarily the same as part-time jobs in other parts of the industrialized world, as they are highly unionized, are accompanied by relatively high wages, and allow women flexibility in their work hours.

It is important to understand women's employment from the 1990s, particularly in the context of the economic crisis of the 1990s. The 2002 report from the government-appointed Welfare Commission concluded "the employment crisis did not lead to women leaving the labour market to become housewives" (2002, 37). Instead, men and women suffered equally through the employment crisis. Women's labour market participation rate fell from 79 to 70 per cent throughout the decade, while men's fell from 83 to 75 per cent (Welfare Commission, 2002). These rates have since increased to 76.3 per cent for women and 80.9 per cent for men as of May 2007 (Statistics Sweden, 2007). At the same time, unemployment figures have decreased to 3.7 per cent for women and 4.1 per cent for men (Statistics Sweden, 2007). As such, it is obvious that even a severe economic crisis will not affect the norm that both women and men are expected to and expect to be engaged in the labour force in Sweden.

Yet, problems remain in terms of women's employment, particularly related to the types of work women are concentrated in. Issues of pay and part-time versus full-time hours continue to plague these sectors. As a result, the Swedish Salaried Employees Union (HTF) is fighting for the individual right to full-time work so that no one who wants to work full-time hours can be forced to work part-time (Carlén, 2005 Interview). They are also fighting for the individualization of parental leave (Carlén, 2005 Interview), something that many other groups in Sweden are also fighting for. This issue of having a right to full-time work was actually on the political agenda in 2005, with a few ministers interested in the proposal due to its relation to the issue of economic autonomy, particularly for women (Montanari, 2005 Interview). The Swedish Federation

of County Councils and Municipalities opposed putting this into legislation, but the Head of the Division for Economic Analysis at the Federation states that it is “an ambition to give all those who want to work full-time an option to do so” (Ackerby, 2005 Interview). The issue is whether this should be legislated from above or optional for employers.

The issue of raising the pay for female-dominated sectors has been on the political agenda for some time in Sweden. The fact that over 90 per cent of childcare workers are women is often seen as an issue due to low pay. However, the gender make-up of the workers is not seen as a union issue, and Kommunal, the union representing childcare workers, has not made it part of its policy to change the composition of the workers (R. Andersson, 2005 Interview). Instead, it focuses on trying to raise the wages in the sector (R. Andersson, 2005 Interview). Across contexts, within the welfare state, “women’s labour is systematically undervalued and women receive lower benefits for their labour” (Fudge and Cossman, 2002, 8). This is an ongoing battle, which will not be won in a single round of negotiations, but over time and through changing attitudes and priorities. In the end, “gender equality in earnings has not been achieved, but... the earnings of Nordic women and men are considerably closer” than in other countries (Sørensen, 2001, 113). By the end of the 1990s, women in Sweden were earning an average of 82 per cent of men’s wages (Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications, 2000).

Even though there is gender segregation in the Swedish labour force, there is a trend of desegregation in traditionally male-dominated occupations. Women are entering these fields in higher numbers, “but men are not entering into female highly dominated occupations because they are usually very low waged” (Gonäs, 2005 Interview). Korpi agrees that the issue of men moving into traditionally female-dominated occupations has been more difficult (2005 Interview). The issue of job segregation is also a political one for many Swedish researchers and economists. They point out that while the Swedish labour market is viewed as very highly segregated by gender, Sweden also has the highest proportion of women in the labour force, thus how can this be compared to countries that do not have a high proportion of women in their labour force (Korpi, 2005 Interview; Thoursie 2005 Interview). Korpi points out that the quality of jobs is not measured in labour indices, and that even though childcare might be female dominated it is a rewarding job that involves interaction with other human beings (2005 Interview). Kjeldstad argues that gender segregation is not an important impediment to gender equality since ‘male’ and ‘female’ occupations in Sweden are similar in terms of pay, status, and possibilities of promotion (2001), which is not the case in most countries. As such, the issue of gender segregation in the labour market is complicated.

In the late 1990s, over 40 per cent of women in the labour market and only 9 per cent of men worked part-time in Sweden (Wadensjö, 2006). The Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications concluded “Men’s and women’s choice of occupation is affected to a high degree by the opportunities for combining work and family life, as well as work and leisure” (2000, 11). However, the instances of part-time work have been declining over the years. In 2001, the percentage of Swedish women working part-time hours was 34, which was a decline of 12 per cent since 1980 (Anderson and Meyer, 2006). It appears though that each generation of women entering the labour market works more full-time hours than the one before (Sundström, 2005 Interview). However, there is a life cycle pattern that is detectable, where women work

more full-time hours when they first enter the labour market and establish themselves, and then after they have children, they work more part-time hours for a number of years, and then they work full-time again towards the end of their careers (Sundström, 2005 Interview). This clearly illustrates that Swedish women largely use part-time work as a means to balance both work and family life. This also appears to be an issue of class, with white-collar and professional women steadily increasing their average working time over the years, whereas blue-collar women have stalled since 1990 (Nyberg, 2005 Interview).

The development of social democracy and gender equality have been interconnected in Sweden for a number of reasons. First, the two main goals of the Swedish social democratic model have been full employment and equality, both very much linked to women's economic independence. Second, beginning in the 1960s the Swedish state needed women in the labour force and the majority of women needed the state in order to facilitate their entry into the labour force. As such, there was a mutually beneficial relationship between the two, where the state provided services and programs such as childcare and parental leave which facilitated women's entry into the labour force, and as a result women were able to fill the labour shortage in Sweden at the time and were able to become workers, paying taxes which support the welfare state. In addition, the large public sector developed by the Swedish state in order to meet the needs of working women also provided a 'woman-friendly' sector in which women could work. Third, the strategy of state feminism also played a crucial role in this situation, as women were active within the political parties and unions, making their demands heard. As such, women and the state worked together in the development of a 'woman-friendly' social democratic welfare state in Sweden.

The results of this close relationship have been increased gender equality, including women's economic independence and to a lesser degree, a slow change in gender roles in terms of unpaid labour. There has been a shift in terms of the amount of fathers taking more parental leave over the years, yet this has been a very gradual shift. Women have advanced far more in terms of paid work than men have in terms of unpaid work, yet there remains room for improvement in both areas. Issues such as involuntary part-time work for women and sex segregation in the labour market persist, although the situation appears to be slowly getting better over time. The conditions necessary for women to enter and remain in the labour market are in place in Sweden and they have had a tremendous impact in changing Swedish society from a male breadwinner to a dual-earner society. However, it is apparent that these conditions alone are not sufficient for substantive gender equality, and that more must be done particularly in the area of men's unpaid work. "Harmonizing motherhood with employment will help establish the preconditions for, but will not ensure, gender equality," as men must also embrace a more feminine life course in order for there to be true gender equality (Esping-Andersen, 2002b, 94-95). PJ Anders Linder argues that there is not much debate within Swedish society about being pro- or anti-gender equality, but the debate surrounds how best to achieve gender equality, "through coercion or evolution" (2005 Interview). Women's economic independence appears to be a non-issue these days, while the unequal division of labour within the home remains a source of tension. "[T]he Swedish state really managed to get women out in the labour market... but they didn't manage to get the men back into the household" (Lindvert, 2005 Interview). But the situation is hopeful in that

the state is very influential when it comes to gender equality policies and has used its influence in the past to move society further down the path of gender equality. While Sweden does face serious challenges today, both from external and internal forces, the foundation is there for a strong social democratic welfare state and this has lead many to be hopeful about the future of gender equality in Sweden.

References

Interviews

- Ackerby, Stefan. Head of Division for Economic Analysis, Swedish Federation of County Councils and Municipalities. Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. June 9, 2005.
- Andersson, Magdalena. State Secretary, Ministry of Finance. Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. May 17, 2005.
- Andersson, Rolf. Head of Research, Swedish Municipal Workers' Union. Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. May 19, 2005.
- Bergqvist, Christina. Professor, Department of Political Science, Uppsala University. Interview, Uppsala, Sweden. June 14, 2005.
- Carlén, Stefan. Economist, Swedish Commercial Employees' Union. Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. May 10, 2005.
- Duvander, Ann-Zofie. Researcher, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency. Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. May 30, 2005.
- Ferrarini, Tommy. Professor, Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI). Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. May 18, 2005.
- Gonäs, Lena. Head of Gender and Work Research Program, National Institute for Working Life. Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. June 1, 2005.
- Hedborg, Anna. Former MP, Social Democratic Party Member and Member of the Parliamentary Working Group on Pensions; Former Director-General of the Swedish National Social Insurance Board; and Current Government-Appointed Investigator into the Future of the Swedish Social Insurance System. Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. April 22, 2005.
- Korpi, Walter. Professor, Social Policy, Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI). Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. June 1, 2005.
- Lindberg, Ingemar. Member of Commission that created the Parental Leave system in 1974. Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. April 26, 2005.
- Linder, PJ Anders. Chief Political Editor, *Svenska Dagbladet* (daily newspaper). Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. May 17, 2005.

- Lindvert, Jessica. Researcher on Labour Market Policies, Stockholm Centre for Organizational Research (SCORE). Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. May 18, 2005.
- Lundberg, Urban. Researcher, Institute for Future Studies. Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. April 20, 2005.
- Montanari, Ingalill. Professor, Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI). Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. May 13, 2005.
- Nyberg, Anita. Researcher, Department for Labour Market & Work, National Institute for Working Life. Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. May 12, 2005.
- Pettersson, Lars-Olof. Privatization Expert, Unionkonsult. Interview, Spånga, Sweden. April 27, 2005.
- Rosenberg, Tiina. Professor of Gender Studies, Stockholm University and Member of the Feminist Initiative. Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. June 13, 2005.
- Sainsbury, Diane. Professor, Political Science, Stockholm University. Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. June 7, 2005.
- Sundström, Marianne. Professor, Economics, Swedish Institute for Social Research (SOFI). Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. May 11, 2005.
- Thoursie, Anna. Senior economist, LO. Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. June 13, 2005.
- Wennemo, Irene. Head of Economic Policy, LO. Interview, Stockholm, Sweden. April 15, 2005.

Primary Documents

- Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications. "Sweden's Action Plan for Employment," May 2000. http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/employment_strategy/nap_2000/napsv_en.pdf (accessed June 28, 2007).
- Statistics Sweden. *Women and Men in Sweden: Facts and figures 2006*. Stockholm: Statistics Sweden, 2006. http://www.scb.se/statistik/publikationer/LE0202_2006A01_BR_X10ST0602.pdf (accessed April 30, 2008).
- . "Labour Force, by sex 2000-2007," 2007. http://www.scb.se/templates/tableOrChart_23369.asp (accessed June 28, 2007).

Welfare Commission. *Welfare in Sweden: The Balance Sheet for the 1990s*. Stockholm: Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2002.

Secondary Sources

Anderson, Karen M. and Traute Meyer. "New Social Risks and Pension Reform in Germany and Sweden: The Politics of Pension Rights for Child care," *The Politics of Post-Industrial Welfare States: Adapting Post-War Social Policies to New Social Risks*. Eds. Klaus Armingeon and Giuliano Bonoli. London: Routledge, 2006. 171-191.

Bergman, Solveig. "Collective Organizing and Claim Making on Child Care in Norden: Blurring the Boundaries between the Inside and the Outside," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society*. 11.2 (2004): 217-246.

Burness, Catriona. *A Swedish Exclusive?: the 'Support Stockings' and Increasing Women's Parliamentary Representation in Sweden*. Orebro: Orebro Universitet, 1999.

Butterworth, Andy. "Schyman launches 'Feminist initiative,'" *The Local*, April 4, 2005. <http://www.thelocal.se/article.php?ID=1223&date=20050404> (accessed April 6, 2005).

Clement, Wallace and Rianne Mahon. "Swedish and Canadian Perspectives on the Swedish Model," *Swedish Social Democracy: A Model in Transition*. Eds. Wallace Clement and Rianne Mahon. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 1994. 1-12.

Coulson, Margaret, Branka Magas and Hilary Wainwright. "'The Housewife and Her Labour Under Capitalism' – a Critique," *New Left Review* 89 (1975): 59-71.

Daly, Mary and Jane Lewis. "The concept of social care and the analysis of contemporary welfare states," *British Journal of Sociology* 51.2 (2000): 281-298.

Daune-Richard, Anne-Marie and Rianne Mahon. "Sweden: Model in Crisis," *Who Cares? Women's Work, Childcare, and Welfare State Redesign*. Eds. Jane Jenson and Mariette Sineau. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. 146-176.

Eduards, Maud L. "Women's Participation and Equal Opportunities Policies," *Social Change in Sweden No. 41*. New York: Swedish Information Service, 1989.

Elman, R. Amy. *Sexual Subordination and State Intervention: Comparing Sweden and the United States*. Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996.

- Ervik, Rune and Stein Kuhnle. "The Nordic Welfare Model and the European Union," *Comparative Welfare Systems: The Scandinavian Model in a Period of Change*. Ed. Bent Greve. London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1996. 87-107.
- Esping-Andersen, Gøsta. *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- . *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- . "Towards the Good Society, Once Again?" *Why We Need a New Welfare State*. Ed. Gøsta Esping-Andersen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002a. 1-25.
- . "A New Gender Contract," *Why We Need a New Welfare State*. Ed. Gøsta Esping-Andersen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002b. 68-95.
- Fudge, Judy and Brenda Cossman. "Introduction: Privatization, Law, and the Challenge to Feminism," *Privatization, Law, and the Challenge to Feminism*. Eds. Brenda Cossman and Judy Fudge. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. 3-37.
- Hernes, Helga Maria. *Welfare State and Woman Power: Essays in State Feminism*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1987.
- Holmwood, John. "Three Pillars of Welfare State Theory: T.H. Marshall, Karl Polanyi and Alva Myrdal in Defence of the National Welfare State," *European Journal of Social Theory* 3.1 (2000): 23-50.
- Jenson, Jane and Rianne Mahon. "Representing Solidarity: Class, Gender and the Crisis in Social-Democratic Sweden," *New Left Review* 201 (1993): 76-100.
- Kjeldstad, Randi. "Gender policies and gender equality," *Nordic Welfare States In the European Context*. Eds. Mikko Kautto et al. London: Routledge, 2001. 66-97.
- Leira, Arnlaug. "The 'Woman-Friendly' Welfare State?: The Case of Norway and Sweden," *Women and Social Policies in Europe: Work, Family and the State*. Ed. Jane Lewis. Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1993. 49-71.
- Lovenduski, Joni. *Women and European Politics: Contemporary Feminism and Public Policy*. London: Wheatsheaf Books Ltd., 1986.
- Mahon, Rianne. "Swedish Social Democracy: Death of a Model?" *Studies in Political Economy* 63 (2000): 27-59.
- McBride Stetson, Dorothy and Amy G. Mazur. "Introduction," *Comparative State Feminism*. Eds. Dorothy McBride Stetson and Amy G. Mazur. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995. 1-21.

- Meidner, Rudolf. "Why Did the Swedish Model Fail?" *The Socialist Register*, 29 (1993): 211-228.
- Myles, John. "Decline or Impasse?: The Current State of the Welfare State," *Swedish Social Democracy: A Model in Transition*. Eds. Wallace Clement and Rianne Mahon. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 1994. 137-166.
- Myrdal, Alva. *Nation and Family: The Swedish Experiment in Democratic Family and Population Policy*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1968.
- Myrdal, Alva and Viola Klein. *Women's Two Roles: Home and Work*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1956.
- Norris, Pippa. *Politics and Sexual Equality: The Comparative Position of Women in Western Democracies*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1987.
- Olsen, Gregg M. *The Politics of the Welfare State: Canada, Sweden and the US*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Ryner, J. Magnus. "Neoliberal Globalization and the Crisis of Swedish Social Democracy," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 20 (1999): 39-79.
- Sainsbury, Diane. "The Politics of Increased Women's Representation: The Swedish Case," *Gender and Party Politics*. Eds. Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris. London: Sage Publications, 1993. 263-290.
- S-Kvinnor (Social Democratic Women's Federation) website.
<http://www.socialdemokraterna.se/s-kvinnor> (accessed April 28, 2008).
- Sørensen, Annemette. "Gender equality in earnings at work and at home," *Nordic Welfare States In the European Context*. Eds. Mikko Kautto et al. London: Routledge, 2001. 98-115.
- Wadensjö, Eskil. "Part-Time Pensions and Part-Time Work in Sweden," Institute for the Study of Labour (IZA) Discussion Paper No. 2273, August 2006.
<http://ssm.com/abstract=928825> (accessed August 28, 2007).