

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

ARNLAUG LEIRA, *Working Parents and the Welfare State: Family Change and Policy Reform in Scandinavia*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. 190 p. £ 40.00 hardcover, £ 14.95 paperback.

This book discusses the transition from the male-breadwinner family (or the "gender-differentiated nuclear family") to the dual-earner family in Europe, which the author describes as "the most comprehensive change in family form witnessed during the past fifty years"(3). Leira focuses on the history of work and family policies in the Scandinavian countries but also offers considerable statistical and policy information from other European nations to provide points of comparison. The book examines the recent history of policies to help parents balance work and family, as well as the continuing transformation of motherhood, childhood and family life. Leira seeks to answer the following question: how are the boundaries between the welfare state, the labour market and families to be renegotiated when the labour market includes a considerable portion of workers with responsibilities for the care of young children?

The re-conceptualization of childcare in welfare state policies forms the focus of the book, especially the transformation of childcare from a responsibility of parents to a social right or entitlement. Leira examines the use of childcare policies to update the "gender contract" and to facilitate a shift in the gender balance of both employment and the care of young children. She notes that although women's employment is now widespread within European countries, there is considerable policy variation in how to deal with the social issues arising from these demographic trends. European social policies, she argues, differ by the structure of the welfare state, which support different forms of family. Theorists such as Esping-Anderson (1990) have categorized welfare states into liberal, corporatist, and social democratic welfare regimes. Leira argues that these categories tend to correspond to three models of family in European countries: the gender-differentiated family, the dual earner family, and family with dual-earning and care-sharing parents.

The Scandinavian countries have moved toward the dual-earning and care-sharing model earlier and more fully than other European countries. For this reason, Leira discusses how this family model came about in the various Scandinavian countries. She notes that the prevalent view is that Scandinavian welfare states promoted "the modernisation of motherhood," offering mothers both jobs and social care services in the 1970s. However,

Leira argues that women's opportunities and desire to work for pay preceded the public provision of childcare in all Scandinavian countries. For financial and feminist reasons, women entered the newly developed social service positions in education, health and social welfare, making their own private childcare arrangements, usually with parent co-operatives. Partly because women's new jobs did not offer a serious challenge to men's traditional work, there was little public opposition to the entrance of mothers into the labour force. Later, women's groups lobbied for day care and improved parental benefits, and formed coalitions with feminists in high-level government positions to gain statutory rights to these benefits. There is, however, little discussion in the book of the politics involved in gaining these rights.

Despite the Scandinavian transition to the dual-earner family, Leira shows that fathers are only beginning to share caring work and women remain more supportive of this family model than men do. Mainly mothers use parental benefits even though they are legally gender neutral, and only in Sweden do fathers take more than 10% of their days of parental leave. Yet the Scandinavian lead with this family model has meant that childcare is now a public policy issue throughout Europe, and has been redefined as a joint venture between parents and the welfare state. Few fathers are fighting for time off work to care their children. Yet, this has also become a European social policy issue. Nevertheless, social policy responses to childcare and parental leave vary cross-nationally and tend to mirror the different models of family favoured by individual European nations.

Working Parents and the Welfare State is a very readable book, theoretically useful but uncomplicated in writing style. It summarizes well the various political and feminist debates relating to family policy in Europe and also provides valuable comparative material about policy reform in European Union countries and the various Scandinavian nations. For these reasons, it would be quite useful for scholars of the welfare state and postgraduate students focusing on family policies.

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