

What Kind of “Social Europe”? The Example of Child Care

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The example of child care

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Childcare is central to contemporary welfare state redesign. The “defamilialisation” of care, resulting from women’s rising labour force participation rate, is generating demands for states to take on new responsibilities, as families cannot rely exclusively on markets to meet these needs. As the OECD noted, “In many countries, the education and care of young children is shifting from the private to the public domain, with much attention to the complementary roles of family and early childhood education and care institutions in young children’s early development and learning” (2001: 9). There are, however, different ways of addressing the “care deficit” and each holds different implications for equality in general, and for gender equality in particular. In Europe, there are three rival models: a “Third Way”¹ design, inspiring childcare policy reforms in the Netherlands and the UK; the neo-familialist turn taken in Finland and France, and the egalitarian horizons of Danish and Swedish childcare policy. Each approximates one of Nancy Fraser’s (1997) alternatives to the male breadwinner model that formed the postwar norm.² These are examined in section two.

Globalisation is altering the environment in which states make choices, however, especially in Europe. While national politics still matters, the struggle to build a “Social Europe” is engaging member states in reflexive practices, opening them to new and different ideas for welfare state redesign. The third section accordingly examines the way in which early childhood education and care (ECEC) now forms part of the agenda for a Social Europe. Initially brought onto the agenda as part of the EU’s growing interest in gender equality, childcare has become part of the post-Delors employment strategy. Like the European Monetary Union, the employment strategy utilizes a new method of governance, “open method coordination” (OMC), in which European guidelines and benchmarks play a critical role.³ We ask which of the competing models of care provision, if any, has come to define “best practice” for Europe and what does this tell us about the contours of “Social Europe”?

On the agenda: Childcare and welfare state redesign

During the 1980s and 1990s, considerable attention was focused on the politics of welfare state retrenchment, driven by “globalisation”, the demographics of ageing, and the shift to post-industrialism.⁴ Yet the pressures driving retrenchment are only part of the broader process of welfare state redesign. New patterns of risk are emerging and states are being pressed to take on new responsibilities in response. The provision of extra-familial care is one of these. Concerns about access to, and the quality of, care both speak for some form

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of public role. Welfare state redesign at the dawn of the twenty-first century therefore includes the reconfiguration of public and private responsibility for the financing and provision of childcare (Jenson and Sineau, 2001; Michel and Mahon, 2002).

The forces behind the “defamilialisation” of care constitute an important set of pressures leading states to assume new responsibilities. Changes in labour markets (notably, women’s rising labour force participation rates) and in families (rising rates of divorce, separation and lone parenthood) are undermining the male breadwinner family norm that formed one of the core assumptions of postwar welfare regimes across the OECD. It thus can no longer be assumed that care – for young children as well as for the frail elderly, the sick and the disabled – will be provided as an unpaid “labour of love,” by women, within the private realm of the family. The need for new care arrangements is also underscored by the way defamilialisation intersects with debates about the shift to a post-industrial economy. There is a growing chorus of experts arguing that early childhood education and care is necessary to lay the foundation for subsequent “life long” skill acquisition, a requisite for effective participation in the emergent knowledge-based economy and society. As the authors of an influential Canadian study put it, “The entrants to the workforce of 2025 will be born next year. From this generation will come a key factor in determining the wealth base of Ontario.... Brain development in the period from conception to six years sets a base for learning, behaviour and health over the life cycle. Ensuring that all our future citizens are able to develop their full potential has to be a high priority for everyone” (McCain and Mustard, 1999, 2). In addition, policies that support non-familial care can be seen as critical to a post-industrial full employment strategy. The time-pressed dual-earner (or lone parent) family needs to be seen a potential source of demand for job-rich personal and social services (Esping-Andersen, 1999). Such families find it difficult to avoid substituting external sourcing for self-provision and they are more likely to have the disposable income to purchase at least some of these services. Policies that support the development of non-parental childcare thus can come to form an important component of an effective post-industrial employment strategy.

Families cannot rely solely on markets to deliver the quality and quantity of care required, however. Some form of public support is required, especially financial support. States can use regulation and the provision of training to address issues of quality and they can help remove information barriers to the effective functioning of a “market” in childcare spaces. Such policies will mean little, however, if the question of cost is ignored. Childcare provided on the black market by untrained childminders strains the budgets of lower income families. Even for many middle-income families, quality childcare is beyond reach without some form of subsidy. In this context, the latter may turn to the import of nannies from Third World countries (Arat-Koc, 1989; Hondagneu-Soletto, 2000). As the OECD noted, “While early childhood education and care may be funded by a combination of sources, there is a need for substantial government investment to support a sustainable system of quality, accessible services.” (2001: 11).

For all of these reasons, public childcare policies form an integral component of welfare state redesign. As in the past, however, there are different blueprints – or, as T.H. Marshall put it, “designs for community living” (1963: 109) - reflecting different understandings of what is both desirable and possible.⁵ In this context, it is important to



consider which alternative models are on offer, and to probe their ethical-normative foundations. While in North America, attention has focused on the neo-liberal challenge to the ideals that inspired postwar institutional designs, in Europe, three other models enjoy greater currency: the neo-familial, the “Third Way” and the egalitarian models.

The neo-familialist model draws on, while seeking to modernize, conservative views of gender difference. It shares with neo-liberalism an emphasis on “choice,” but here choice is understood as women’s right to choose between a temporary housewife-mother role and labour force participation, rather than as choice amongst different forms of non-parental care.⁶ Thus neo-familialists advocate public support for childcare leaves, with a marked preference for longer term (three to four year) leave packages. In this respect, the neo-familial model approximates Fraser’s “caregiver parity” model. As we shall see, this model falls short not only when it comes to gender equality but also with regard to class and even racial-ethnic equality.

The Third Way model embraces a form of gender equality that differentiates it from the “new familialism” - a conservative response to women’s rising labour force participation rates. Whereas the latter seek solutions that permit elements of the older “gender difference” model to survive, Third Way advocates favour a gender sameness view in which gender equality comes to be defined largely in terms of policies designed to enable women to (re-)enter the labour market. In this sense, they seek to universalize the breadwinner model. As Fraser argues, however, rather than addressing the unequal distribution of the care work that remains within the home, Third Way advocates largely focus on public support for non-parental childcare. Publicly funded parental leave, with the right to return to one’s job, is acceptable - but only in the form of relatively short-term leave (6-12 months) to prevent the devaluation of women’s human capital.

The Third Way’s interpretation of a post male breadwinner gender order has to be seen as part of its broader effort to “adapt” social democracy to postindustrial conditions. That is, Third Way advocates argue that welfare state redesign necessarily includes a “normative recalibration” (Ferrera et al., 2000: 74-75). At the root of this is the belief that post-industrialism has rendered equality “in the here and now” no longer feasible due to the stubborn (and growing) productivity gap that exists between the goods-producing and service sectors. As net job growth will have to occur in the latter sector, politicians have to choose between equality and employment.⁷ In this context, departures from equality can be justified to the extent that they are designed to improve the lot of the worst off. Core workers should thus be induced to accept some deregulation of labour markets, including greater wage dispersion, in the interests of promoting job growth for the less skilled (Ferrera et al., 2000: 74). Many of these jobs are likely to be unstable “non-standard” jobs – part time, temporary or self-employment – usually offering low wages and limited fringe benefits. Unlike neo-liberals, however, Third Way advocates see a role for governments, and the “social partners,” in mitigating the impact.⁸

Third Way advocates also justify the abandonment of equality in the “here and now” in favour of policies promoting equality over the life cycle. Here Schumpeter’s poverty bus metaphor is invoked. In other words, the emphasis shifts to policies that enable those who are in low wage jobs today – women, immigrants, youth – to get off the poverty bus in



the future (Esping-Andersen, 1999: 182). Thus for Third Way advocates, “In knowledge-intensive economies...the equality that matters has to do with those resources which allow people to ‘keep pace’ and cope with change. This means focusing on how effectively (and equitably) such resources are delivered by high quality education, health care and social services and how successfully opportunities for mobility provide escape routes from permanent entrapment in conditions of disadvantage” (Ferrera et al., 2000: 75).

From a Third Way perspective, public support for early childhood education is “good” because it helps children ultimately to leave the bus – or to avoid boarding it altogether. Second, childcare subsidies can be targeted at the “working poor” as a way of inducing people to accept low wage employment. The Blair government’s Working Families Tax Credit is a good example of the kind of childcare policy sanctioned by this logic.⁹ Non-parental childcare can also be treated as one of those low waged post-industrial occupations whose expansion government policies should encourage in order to absorb the low skilled.¹⁰ Accordingly, there is little need to upgrade skills, from untrained child-minders to preschool teachers with post-secondary education.

Third Way advocates thus envision a more positive role for the public sector than neo-liberalism and a more egalitarian “gender contract” than modern conservatives. At the same time, they accept that growing labour market inequality is a necessary feature of a dynamic post-industrial economy. In the name of “social inclusion”, they accept policies that support the formation of a market for personal and social services as low wage, low skill jobs (Levitas, 1998). With this comes the growth of non-standard (though not necessarily “precarious”) employment – part time, temporary work, self-employment – and women hold a disproportionate share of such jobs. Blindness to the link between persistent gender inequality in the distribution of non-standard employment and women’s continued primary responsibility to provide care is consistent with their acceptance of the (partial) “masculinisation” of women, while balking at the “feminisation” of men.¹¹ In this sense, they share with their conservative counterparts an acceptance of a one and one half earner model (Lewis, 2001).¹²

As we shall see, both the neo-familialist and Third Way models have their advocates within Europe and each figure in the remodeling plans of certain member states. Yet they are not the only possible alternatives. Just as Third Way advocates challenged neo-liberalism’s claim that “there is no alternative” so, too, can the argument that in the post-industrial era, it is impossible to combine job growth, equality and a sound fiscal policy, be challenged.¹³

The argument for accepting greater inequality “in the here and now” rests on Baumol’s hypothesised “cost-disease,” which assumes a systematic and growing productivity gap between the goods-producing sector, where productivity gains mean fewer workers are required to produce more, and the service sector, where most of the new jobs are being generated. This ignores the contribution of the service sector to productivity and lower costs in the goods-producing sector. It also assumes that, with some exceptions, there are limited opportunities for productivity gains in the service sector. Not only is there room to enhance service productivity through more extensive and effective use of information



technologies. Productivity gains can be achieved through the application of strategies that recognize the particular nature of service production, as Herzenberg et al have so cogently argued (1998). The key point here is that such strategies can be used to enhance performance in the social services, including care work, and thus provide the material basis for rising wages in this sector too.

It may be economically feasible to achieve a more egalitarian socio-economic order than the Third Way admits, but it will only be possible politically if the accepted “design for community living” hews to a radical vision of equality such as that which inspires Fraser’s “universal caregiver” model. The latter aims to make it desirable and possible for men and women to provide care and to participate in the labour market. As Nancy Fraser has argued,

The trick is to imagine a social world in which citizens’ lives integrate wage earning, care giving, community activism, political participation, and involvement in the associational life of civil society – while also leaving time for some fun. This world is not likely to come into being in the immediate future, but it is the only imaginable postindustrial world that promises true gender equity. And unless we are guided by this vision now, we will never get any closer to achieving it. (1997: 62)

Such an approach agrees with the Third Way that equality “in the here and now” may be utopian today, but it develops the Marshallian view of citizenship¹⁴ the insight that such utopias must not be abandoned for they establish a horizon of legitimate expectations needed to animate the struggle to realise equality in the longer run. In other words, collective endorsement of a “utopian” egalitarian blueprint is important precisely because it can inspire and support the very forces needed to sustain the drive to achieve it.

A childcare policy inspired by an egalitarian blueprint might incorporate the following features:

1. Parental leave structured to actively foster an equitable sharing of domestic childcare between fathers and mothers;
2. Provision of universally accessible, affordable, non-parental care services;
3. Children have a right to early childhood education and care, whether or not their parents are working or involved in some form of training;
4. Care is provided by skilled providers and the value of such skills is recognized through equitable wages and good working conditions;
5. Provision is made for democratic control, including parental and community “voice”.

As we shall see, this kind of vision has inspired certain actors within the European Union. Nor is it an impossible utopia for post-industrial societies. Although two member states (Finland and France) appear to have exchanged this blueprint for a neo-familialist one, two others (Denmark and Sweden) continue to be guided by it.

European responses to defamilialisation: three blueprints in practice¹⁵

Pressure for the (partial) defamilialisation of childcare began earlier in some European countries than in others, but it is now being felt in all, albeit unevenly. Thus countries like



Finland, Denmark and Sweden began an accelerated move toward the dual earner family form in the sixties and seventies and women's labour force participation rates in these countries remain the highest in the EU (64.4 percent, 71.6 percent and 71.0 percent respectively in 2000).¹⁶ Now, however, most northwestern EU member states are not far behind. By 2000, women's labour force participation rates had reached 64.6 percent in the UK; 63.7 percent in the Netherlands; 59.4 percent in Austria; 57.9 percent in Germany; 55.3, percent in France; 54 percent in Ireland; 51.5 percent in Belgium and 50.3 percent in Luxembourg.¹⁷ With the exception of Portugal (60.3 percent), women's labour force participation rates in the member states to the south remain substantially lower: Greece, 40.9 percent; Spain, 40.3 percent; and Italy, 39.6 percent. Even here, however, the trend is for participation rates to rise and this is especially marked among women in their prime childbearing years.¹⁸

In this section, we examine the childcare policies of three groups of countries, each following one of the blueprints for welfare state redesign sketched above: the neo-familial, Third Way and egalitarian models. We begin with the countries – Finland and France – that abandoned the egalitarian design conceived in the 1960s and 1970s for a neo-familial blueprint. We then turn to the Netherlands and the UK, two countries that are pioneering a Third Way trajectory. Finally, we look at steps taken by Denmark and Sweden, which have hewed to an egalitarian design.

From Egalitarian Ideals to the New Familialism: Finland and France

Developments in France and Finland reflect a move away from earlier attempts to institutionalise childcare as a right of social citizenship, pertinent to achieving both equality of the sexes and equal opportunities for children, toward the new familialism (Jenson and Sineau, 2001a: 259). In both Finland and France, “the 1970s emphasis on building up publicly funded collective childcare provisions has been eroded by a relative consensus on the necessity of developing cash benefits, framed as a means of ensuring ‘parental choice’, as well as addressing what was presented as a budgetary ‘fatality’” (Heinen and de Koenigswater, 2001: 172). “Choice” has a dual meaning in this model: choice between (temporary) homemaker status and paid employment; and choice among different forms of non-parental care. Each of these has significance for class, gender and racial-ethnic equality.

As in Fraser's caregiver parity model, neo-familialist strategies provide support for those who choose to stay at home, and not only those who choose to work. A key feature of this model therefore is a child home care allowance that enables “parents” to stay at home for up to three years after the birth of a child.¹⁹ The Finnish allowance was introduced in 1986 as part of a compromise package combining the care allowance, for those who wished to stay home, with a guarantee of the right of a child to a place in municipal childcare for those who wanted it. Like other child home care allowances, it is based on the less generous flat rate principle, rather than income replacement.²⁰ Eligibility was restricted in 1995, by deducting the allowance from unemployment insurance – which eliminated most of the father caregivers.²¹ In combination with the economic crisis, the new policy has visibly affected women's labour force participation. Thus the labour force participation rates of mothers with children under 12 fell from 76 percent in 1985 to 53



percent in 1991 (Salmi, 2000). Although Finnish municipalities are still obliged to provide a childcare place for those who want it, 60 percent of Finnish two year olds are cared for at home, normally by their mothers. A similar allowance was introduced in France in the mid-1980s for families with three or more children.²² Like the Finnish allowance it was a flat rate allowance, well below the minimum wage. In 1994 the programme was revised, making it available after birth or adoption of a second child. It was also now possible to keep the allowance while working part time (Jenson and Sineau, 2001a: 105).

The second way in which “choice” is transforming the 1970s citizenship ideal in these countries is through the opening up of new, lower quality jobs in childcare. Here France has led the way. In 1986 new legislation was introduced, offering to cover the social security costs for parents hiring a nanny as well as a tax credit to reduce the actual salary cost to parents (Jenson and Sineau, 2001: 102). In 1994, the programme was extended to families with children 3-6 and new incentives were offered to choose family home care.²³ In Finland, too, parents can request a private childcare allowance to cover some of the costs of non-parental care in the home or offered by a private day care centre.²⁴

Both policies break with the egalitarian ideals of the 1970s. The child home care allowances deal with the pressure for defamilialisation by making the choice of “temporary homemaker” status attractive, at least for some. Though the language is often gender neutral, the underlying philosophy is clearly one of gender difference: “mothers perform a large part of all unpaid care work, work that profits the entire society. For the sake of equity, it is therefore necessary to provide individual remuneration and social security during this phase” (Schattovits, 2000: 15). The effect is to reinforce gender inequality in the labour market. The allowances reinforce employers’ views that women will be absent for sustained periods and this affects recruitment choices and wages, not to mention the career development prospects of those whose “human capital” has been devalued by relatively long spells of absence from the labour market (Salmi, 2000). Yet such allowances do not affect all women equally. As the OECD noted, “Mothers with lower levels of education, who have worked in less skilled occupations are most likely to take these low-paid leaves, which may further marginalise them from the labour market. In some cases, children are not allowed to attend public early childhood education and care during the leave period which raises equity concerns” (2001: 33).

These policies also favour the growth of labour market flexibility through the expansion of low wage, part time employment for women. As Jenson and Sineau note, a new model has emerged in which “some women would work part time and care for their own children part time. Other women would be employed to care for the children of women who were working full or part time” (2001: 106). Rather than supporting the expansion of secure, reasonably skilled jobs in the public (or para-public) sector, subsidies for non-parental care in the home (the child’s or the providers’) support the expansion of low wage, low skill work for women. There has been a substantial growth in part time employment in France to 32 percent – though it remains relatively low (17 percent) in Finland (Heinen and de Koenigswater, 2001). In Finland, however, two fifths of women under thirty are in temporary jobs. This might be dismissed by Third Way advocates as a tolerable “inequality in the here and now” because it affects youth - of both sexes. The



rate, however, is higher for women than for men and, while the latter seem to turn temporary into permanent jobs as they enter their thirties, this is much less true for women (Salmi, 2000).

Part of the explanation for breaking with the egalitarian path of the 1970s clearly has to do with the fiscal and economic crisis that hit France in the 1980s and Finland in the early 1990s. Childcare provided by stay-at-home parents or by childminders is cheaper than care provided by professionals in crèches and age-integrated childcare centers. As Martin et al point out, “institutional care is considered too costly compared to family-based childcare, mainly because of the higher quality of services required in terms of facilities, number of qualified employees and higher wages. The job of employees in the home and of childminders are precarious, low paid, of limited duration, most often part time, with flexible hours and few prospects” (1998: 154). Yet economic circumstances do not dictate policy: there are different blueprints for welfare state redesign and, as we shall see, some countries have held to the egalitarian model despite economic pressures. Politics matters and an important part of the explanation for moving toward a neo-familialist model is the political effectivity of “pro-family” forces.²⁵

A Third Way View of Childcare: The Netherlands and the United Kingdom

Whereas Finland, France, and Belgium had earlier moved toward the egalitarian model, neither (liberal) Britain nor the (conservative) Netherlands did much to support the development of non-parental childcare until the 1990s. The struggle had barely gotten off the ground in the UK before Thatcher’s victory put a neo-liberal chill on the very idea of public support for childcare (Randall, 2002). Pressures for the defamilialisation of childcare began to mount in the 1960s and 1970s but it was only with the election of Blair’s government that public policy began actively to encourage the provision of childcare, establishing the goal of a preschool place for all three year olds by 2004.²⁶ The Netherlands had once been known for its generous support for the male breadwinner family (Sainsbury, 1996) and defamilialisation pressures here remained low throughout the 1970s.²⁷ The crisis of the early 1980s triggered a major process of institutional redesign, which involved a precocious experiment with Third Way “activation” strategy. The new strategy had marked gender implications, taking at least a half step toward the universal breadwinner model.

Set within a discursive frame of “reconciliation,” part time work plays an important role in the Dutch employment strategy.²⁸ For some, like the Dutch Equal Opportunities Council, the ideal is that both fathers and mothers will participate in the labour market less than the old standard forty hour week and will share responsibility for unpaid work (Plantenga et al. 1999: 103). Ferrera et al in fact suggest that the Netherlands is on the way to achieving such a model: “A new model of employment relations is in the making whereby both men and women share working time, which enables them to keep enough time for catering after their families. If part-time work is recognised as a normal job, supported by access to basic social security and allows normal career development and basic economic independence...part time jobs can generate gender equality and active security of working families” (2000: 49).



Steps have indeed been taken to increase the attractiveness of part time work in the Netherlands.²⁹ Yet only 15 percent of Dutch men - and 7 percent of fathers of younger children – work part time (Kremer, 2001) and the gap in normal weekly working hours of men and women remains high.³⁰ As Plantenga et al. admit, “the once strict division of labour between breadwinner and care-provider has been transformed in the space of a few decades into a one-and-a-half earner model, with women emphatically in the role of secondary earner” (1999: 102). Women’s employment pattern in the UK matches that of the Netherlands. Both countries stand out not only for the high rate of part time employment, especially among women,³¹ but also for the high rates of short time employment.³²

Childcare arrangements cannot be seen as “the” cause behind the move toward the one and a half earner solution, but they certainly contribute. In the UK, policy instruments such as the Working Family Tax Credit, which only require parents to work sixteen hours a week or more, reinforce this pattern, “making (short part-time) work pay” - just as the Dutch “flexicurity accords” do. In both countries, moreover, preschool programs are normally offered on a part time basis so that parents have to turn to relatives, childminders and playgroups – or work part time, with schedules adjusted to fit preschool hours. The Blair government’s plans to increase the supply of childcare places in fact assumes that each place can be used by three children because “parental choice and work patterns mean that many parents use facilities part time or not at all” (OECD, 2000: 11). In other words, mothers’ (short) part time working pattern is taken as a given. Moreover, little is being done to support the development of quality non-parental care for under-threes in either country. “Playgroups” and informal arrangements remain the norm.³³

Just as the Third Way seeks to promote “diversity” and “choice” by affording more of a role to markets than postwar social democracy so, too, do the British and Dutch childcare policies. In both, parents pay a substantial share of the costs – averaging at 44 percent in the Netherlands and between 30-60 percent of the costs in the UK (OECD, 2001: Table 3.4). In both, moreover, governments have exhibited a preference for demand-side incentives via tax relief for parents and/or companies.³⁴ To improve the functioning of local childcare markets, the UK government is supporting the development of information services.³⁵ The Blair government has committed a substantial amount for childcare (1998-2003) through the Early Years Partnerships,³⁶ but it explicitly eschewed a role in provision³⁷ (OECD, 2000: 22). This approach does little to overcome class inequality in access. As the OECD noted, “Despite the availability of fee subsidies, affordability is cited as a major barrier to access to non-school ECEC services in countries [which rely primarily on them], including the UK, the Netherlands and the US, leading to a lower percent of low income families enrolled than higher income families” (2001: 92).

Of course, while the Third Way accepts a growing inequality on the labour market, it is prepared to mitigate the effects by increased targeting of social policies and “social investment” in children at risk of boarding the poverty bus of their own accord in the future. This is visible in the childcare policies of the UK and the Netherlands. The Blair government’s Working Parents Tax Credit, the value of which declines as income rises, is one such measure. Its “Sure Start” programme aims at preventing poverty in the future, by investing in enriched ECEC for children in low-income families.³⁸ Like Sure Start (and the US Head Start programme on which it is modeled), the Dutch have integrated



extra funds for quality ECEC into their national policy for big cities, aimed at enhancing social infrastructure in areas with a higher proportion of low income and “at risk” families. The idea here is that targeting low-income areas, often with a higher concentration of immigrants and visible minorities, avoids the stigma associated with means-tested programs. It shares this feature with the recourse to tax credits (working parents) rather than the older means-tested transfers.

Finally, the demand-side orientation of Dutch and British childcare policy does little to support the development of high quality supply – provided by qualified providers at decent wages. In the Netherlands, childcare workers are “not always perceived as professionals and they are not accorded a high status by society,” and this is especially the case for those providing care for under-3s (OECD, 1999: 21). This is also the case in the UK, although there have been some marginal improvements. Thus the enactment of minimum wage legislation is expected to benefit the lowest paid childcare workers. The UK nevertheless remains behind the Netherlands when it comes to associate social benefits (OECD, 2000: 19). The Blair government has also set up an Early Years National Training Organisation “to improve the knowledge and skill of workers in each sector” (OECD, 2000: 28). At the same time, inclusion of key childcare providers in the jobs-training programme for unemployed 18-24 year olds has given rise to concern about the quality of training on offer (Beddows-Wilkinson, 1999).³⁹

The childcare policy trajectory being followed by Britain and the Netherlands thus goes some way toward addressing the pressure to deal with the defamilialisation of care. Like the neo-familialist model, however, it does so in a way that may be more “women-friendly” but is hardly egalitarian in gender or class terms. As Plantenga et al note, “a gender-friendly working-time regime, does not imply gender-equal working times” and a marked gender gap in paid working time exists for both countries. Their childcare policies are consistent with the institutionalisation of the “one and a half earner” model. The choice of policy instruments, focused on the demand side, does little to encourage the development of a high quality childcare infrastructure, offering good jobs to those who provide care. Nor does it do much to counteract inequality in market power, though enrichment programmes for designated areas may improve access for the very worst off.

Hewing to the Egalitarian Course: Denmark and Sweden

Both the “new familialist” and Third Way responses to defamilialisation involve abandonment of the (class and gender) egalitarian ideals that had come to inform the Left’s project by the 1970s. At least part of the rationale for this break is that living in a globalised, post-industrial world means facing the “trilemma,” a tradeoff pitting equality against employment and sound fiscal policy. It is, however, still possible to keep equality as a central principle of welfare state redesign, as the Danish and Swedish experience suggests. It may be argued that these countries have been able to do so because they got an earlier start, which they did - yet so did France and Finland. Yet what is impressive is that, even in the tougher years, Denmark and Sweden managed not only to maintain what had earlier been achieved, but also to come closer to their egalitarian ideal. This happened not as a result of a technocratically-conceived plan, but rather because the “legitimate expectations” embedded in their citizenship regimes nourished political



forces that could be mobilised repeatedly to fight for reforms in the spirit of the universal caregiver model.

The deepening commitment to gender equality in the sharing of care work is clear in the parental leave arrangements for care of infants adopted in both. Legislation giving parents the right to leave was introduced in Sweden in 1974 and in Denmark a decade later (Bergqvist et al., 1999: 127, Table 7.1).⁴⁰ In both countries, the leaves are generously financed, based on the income replacement principle (80-90 percent) that should make it attractive to the often higher-earning fathers. When it became apparent that this was not enough of an incentive,⁴¹ in 1994 the Swedish government allocated one month each exclusively to the father (and one to the mother). In 2002, parental leave was increased by 30 days, to a total of 480 days – with the addition of another “daddy month.” In 1998, the Danes added two additional weeks of paternity leave (at 100 percent replacement rate), which had the same effect.⁴² Although a “care allowance” similar to the Finnish one was briefly introduced in Sweden in 1994, it was abolished as soon as the social democrats returned to office later that year. Both countries offer incentives for parents to share infant care for the first year, albeit not on a 50-50 basis, and both keep the leave period short enough to limit adverse effects on parental income and careers.⁴³ In this sense, they come closer to the egalitarian view of what it means to reconcile work and family life than does either of the competing blueprints.

Generous but bounded provisions for parental leave are complemented by publicly financed, and largely publicly provided, non-parental childcare services. As we noted above, Denmark and Sweden lead the league when it comes to provision of non-parental care for 1-3s and are among the top in terms of preschool provision. The foundations for a universal childcare system were laid in more prosperous times – though the Danish system had to withstand an early test, as unemployment soared in the 1970s (Borchorst, 2002). Both countries continued to expand during the 1980s and 1990s, however. Concern about unequal access across classes helped fuel the expansion of Swedish childcare in the 1980s.⁴⁴ In 1995, it became a legal obligation for Swedish municipalities to provide a place for all children over a year old, within “a reasonable time” (i.e., three months) (Bergqvist and Nyberg, 2002).⁴⁵ Denmark too made access to publicly-financed childcare an entitlement for all children from 1-5⁴⁶ and all six year olds have the legal right to free preschool in both countries. Though parents may have to pay up to one third of the costs in Denmark, fees are based on a sliding scale. In Sweden, parents are normally expected to cover between 10 and 20 percent of the costs. When it became apparent that parental share was beginning to vary substantially across municipalities, moreover, the national government introduced legislation effectively establishing a cap on fees (“maxtax”).

Even more impressive is the move to make early childcare a service that is as universally available as education. Thus when Sweden was suddenly confronted with both soaring unemployment and burgeoning deficits in the 1990s, it became apparent that the system offered no guarantees to the children of the unemployed, a disproportionate number of whom were immigrants.⁴⁷ The government allocated special funds to ensure that all children of immigrant parents (or living in poor areas) were guaranteed access to 525 hours of ECEC per annum from the age of three.⁴⁸ In the debate that ensued, it also



became apparent that children of parents who were on leave were also being excluded. As of July 2002, all six year olds are guaranteed at least 525 hours and by 2003 all four and five year olds will be included. In 1991, the Danish government made it explicit that children of the unemployed should not lose their place and it is now mandatory to offer ECEC to the children of “bilingual” (i.e. immigrant) parents from the age of four.

These moves suggest that while gender equality constitutes an important part of the underlying rationale for Danish and Swedish childcare arrangements, access to quality childcare is also understood as a right for all children. In fact, from the outset,⁴⁹ Danish and Swedish childcare policy sought to combine care and education in one system (Borchorst, 2002; Lindberg, 2002). This orientation was strengthened considerably in Sweden in the latter part of the 1990s when Ministry of Education and Science assumed jurisdiction over care for the under-3s. The new nationally designed curriculum for preschool centres nicely balances the “child as investment” and “child as a special stage” philosophies of ECEC (OECD, 1999a: 18-19). The establishment of an integrated “preschool” system for children from 1-6 was feasible because the long-standing emphasis on education and care had led successive national governments to induce local authorities to expand age-integrated centre-based care relative to family day care from the 1970s on (Daune-Richard and Mahon, 2001; Lindberg, 2002).⁵⁰

The structure in Denmark differentiates more sharply between care for 1-3s, with nearly half that group in family day care and only 14 percent in the age-integrated facilities that predominate in Sweden. It should, however, be noted that Danish family day care providers are organised by the municipality into networks, which reduces isolation among providers (OECD, 2000: 16; OECD 2001: 85) The majority of 3-6 year olds are in all-day preschool and one third are in age-integrated centres. There is no national curriculum as there is in Sweden. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Social Affairs has been working with the National Association of Local Authorities and the National Union of Child and Youth Educators on a “quality initiative” since 1996 and there have also been efforts to promote closer collaboration between the childcare and school systems (OECD, 2000, 31). As in Sweden, the new training programme for preschool teachers has courses in common with those for elementary school teachers, to facilitate children’s progression from ECEC to school (European Childcare Network, 1996: 33).

What of democratic control over the childcare system? The neo-familial and Third Way blueprints address this by stressing “choice” – between parental care and non-parental and between different forms of care. The Danish and Swedish systems have also evolved so as to permit greater choice – and “voice”. While municipal provision remains the predominant form,⁵¹ there has been an opening to private, even commercial, provision over the last decade or so and the Danes have become well known for innovatory forms such as their “forest kindergartens” which embody Green values.⁵² At the same time, the vast majority of private provision is publicly subsidised and private providers must follow the same rules as municipal centres. There is also greater room for parental and community voice. The Danish Social Services Act, introduced in the 1990s, moreover, requires municipal childcare centres to establish parent boards and establishes the basic parameters of their authority,⁵³ while in Stockholm, there are numerous experiments with the



“Reggio-Emilia” model of parent and community involvement (OECD, 1999: 29). There are also efforts to give children themselves a say (OECD, 2001).

Decentralisation, too, has been framed as a move to democratise by bringing decision-making closer to those being served. This is a trend across all countries being examined, though for the most part, insufficient attention has been paid to maintaining/achieving equity while permitting greater diversity.⁵⁴ In Sweden, however, when the government shifted to block funding, it also passed the law requiring municipalities to provide places for children who wanted it, without reasonable delay.⁵⁵ When it found that some municipalities were charging parents much more than others, it developed strong incentives to encourage the adoption of the “maxtax”. While the Danish system is much more decentralised, the national government also establishes a ceiling on fees. In both countries, then, greater diversity – and local democracy – have been permitted, without sacrificing national concerns for equity (Jenson and Mahon, 2002).

Finally, as the Danish and Swedish systems are built on the principle of universally-accessible, quality childcare, they have also contributed to the more egalitarian pattern of post-industrial employment growth (Esping-Andersen, 1990). This is not to suggest that there are no issues. Thus Danish and Swedish women still take the majority of “parental” leave, despite the daddy quota and domestic childcare still remains primarily – though no longer exclusively – a feminine responsibility. This is reflected in the gender difference in working time and wage levels. Here too mothers are more often found in part time jobs – roughly one-third of Danish women and 37 percent of Swedish women (Daly, 2001: 475). The gender gap in working time is substantially lower,⁵⁶ however, than it is in the UK or the Netherlands (Eurostat, 1995: 45; Daly, 2001: 475). More importantly, the 1970s feminist ideal of reducing the normal working day for all has not disappeared from the agenda.⁵⁷ A gender wage gap remains – but in Denmark and Sweden, for less educated women, it was in the order of 70-75 percent as compared to 45 percent for the UK.⁵⁸ And in Sweden, the issue of pay equity remains very much on the agenda.⁵⁹ Thus equality in the here and now has not been attained in these countries either – but it remains very much part of the “horizon of legitimate expectations”.

Childcare as a “European” issue

Until recently, much of the literature on welfare states focused on the national level. The late twentieth century discovery of “globalisation” challenged that, but the debate tends to pit those who argue that “globalisation” is leading to convergence around a neo-liberal norm against those who argue that common challenges are not experienced in the same way as a result of cross-national differences in welfare state design. In the European context, the debate sets “neo-functionalists,” who look to the development of new European capacities as a way of shifting people’s allegiance from the national to the supra-national level against those who see Europe as simply another arena of inter-governmental relations. Neither view is capable of grasping the complex multi-scalar mode governance that is emerging within the EU (de la Porte, 2001a; Teague, 2001). The thickening of a European discursive (and legislative) space in turn opens up the possibility of injecting new ideas and different ways of doing things into national regimes, altering the logic of path dependency.



This insight is beginning to infiltrate the European literature on welfare state redesign. For instance, Ferrera et al suggest that, “while this sequence of institutional experimentation has primarily taken place at the national (in some cases, sub-national) level, an increasingly important role has been played by the supra-national level as a catalyst for learning.... EU institutions have been active promoters of change by channeling information and facilitating the exchange of experience but above all, by providing specific incentives and ‘focusing events and procedures’.” (2000: 66-67). Esping-Andersen, whose earlier work established the main typology of welfare regimes, also seems prepared to acknowledge that the rule of path-dependent change may have to be relaxed, at least for Europe, where learning explicitly takes place in a multi-scalar world: “welfare reform in the first decade of the 21st century will increasingly involve a combination of domestic learning, learning from and with others, possibly ahead of failure in Europe... Moreover, innovative combinations of domestic policy (failure induced) learning and supranational learning (ahead of policy failure) may cause considerable hybridisation in welfare and labour market policy” (Esping-Andersen et al., 2001: 252).

During the 1970s and the Delors years, the main instruments for introducing European elements into national policy and practice were the enactment of “hard laws” (e.g. directives and regulations, backed by rulings of the European Court of Justice).⁶⁰ In the current period, more emphasis is being placed on “soft” measures, notably the “open method of coordination” (OMC). Initially used to secure the convergence in monetary policy considered essential for European Monetary Union, the Lisbon Council extended this to social policy goals (reform of social protection and measures to counteract social exclusion). As de la Porte et al argue, this method seems well designed for multi-scalar governance:

Whereas subsidiarity defines the level of power that is most appropriate for each sphere of action, OMC recognizes the interrelation between different spheres, promoting interaction between different levels of power and spheres of action. Moreover, the principle of subsidiarity is often associated with the principle of proximity... while OMC underlines the need to proceed via a widely meshed interactive process, in which the actors – ranging from those at the European to the local level – have to articulate their strategy and actions in a multi-level logic (2001a, 294).

What OMC entails is a combination of the establishment of European guidelines, which involves reaching a consensus on common challenges, objectives, and indicators⁶¹; the preparation of “national action plans” (NAPs) through which member states define how they, in conjunction with sub-national units and the social partners, are planning to meet these; and peer assessment of the annual reports. This encourages a degree of concertation of national processes of policy reflexivity. Where benchmarks are established, it is also a way of injecting “best practices” from other systems, thus engendering the formation of hybrid, if not identical, social policy regimes.

While directives and OMC refer to important processes through which national regimes are opened to “European” learning, they say nothing about what is being learned. In other words, what “design for community living” informs the drive to establish a “Social



Europe” and what are the gender dimensions of this? An analysis of (changing) European views on childcare can offer insight here.

Although several member states had begun to deal with the issue of childcare arrangements in the 1960s and 1970s, childcare appeared as little more than a footnote during Europe’s first decade of activism, aimed at moving toward to equality of the sexes in work life. Thus the 1974 Social Action Programme, which helped to launch directives concerning equal pay, equal treatment in employment, vocational training and promotion as well as in social security, simply noted that lack of adequate facilities contributed to inequality between men and women in the labour market (Ross, 2001: 180). Over the course of the next decades, however, childcare policies came to form part of a series of broader agendas for “a Social Europe.”

Childcare became part of the European social agenda during the 1980s. The First Action Programme (1982-1985) for Promoting Equal Opportunity⁶² may only have reiterated the link between availability of non-parental childcare and equal opportunity initially suggested in the 1974 document, but the second Action Programme, prepared on the eve of Delors’ Presidency, was prepared to go further, inspired by an egalitarian vision of what it took to reconcile work and family life. In this period, the concept of “reconciliation” acted as “the bridge concept that allowed the Commission to slide towards new areas whose treaty base was shakier than the solidly grounded Directives of the 1970s. The logic...was clear. In order for women and men to be equal in the labour market...the indirect, non-market relationships between them had to be reconciled” (Ross, 2001: 183-4). The second Programme explicitly called on member states to improve childcare facilities in order to promote such “reconciliation”.

Unless they were enshrined in directives, however, such statements could be taken as little more than wishful thinking. Recognizing that a directive on childcare was not on at this juncture,⁶³ the Equal Opportunities Unit established a mechanism to pave the way for future action. In 1986 a new European Commission Network on Childcare was created.⁶⁴ With a director committed to an egalitarian vision of care and work not all that different from Fraser’s universal caregiver, and encouraged by Delors’ determination to create a Social Europe, the Network began to develop a blueprint for a European childcare strategy. The instruments used to enlist support for its vision included the collection and dissemination of comparative information,⁶⁵ the formation of links with childcare and feminist circles across the member states, and the production of reports connecting childcare to the Commission’s core agenda.

The Network did attempt to persuade the Commission to develop a framework directive. It envisaged “requiring member states to develop publicly funded services for children up to at least ten years of age, with suggested minimum targets for expansion” (Randall, 2000, 355). The targets were modest, however. It sought approval for a goal of public support for five to ten percent of under-3s, preschool for 60-79 percent of 3-6s, and after-school care for 10-15 percent of children 10-15, to be achieved over a five year period. While the Women’s Committee of the European Parliament supported this, the Commission was not prepared even to go that far. It did, however, back a “recommendation” on childcare, which was ultimately agreed to by the Council of Ministers in 1992. This



recommendation blended the tamer version of the “reconciliation” discourse that had developed around Article 119, with the Network’s vision, seeking to transform the very division of care work in the family (Ross, 2001: 194-195).

The Council recommended “that Member States gradually develop and/or encourage measures to enable women and men to reconcile family obligations arising from the care of children and their own employment, education and training.”⁶⁶ The vision of childcare services underlying the recommendation had much in common with the egalitarian blueprint. It sought affordable ECEC, available in urban and rural areas alike, and greater flexibility to meet different needs, but not at the expense of an overall coherence. A positive work environment for care workers, moreover, was understood to mean establishing systems in which “the training... of workers in childcare services is commensurate with the great import and social and educational value of their work.” Finally, sharing the democratic ideals of the egalitarian blueprint, the Council encouraged childcare services to work with parents and local communities.

In 1998 a report on the steps member states had taken to implement the recommendation was filed. The report reaffirmed the “central role” of childcare measures in reconciling work and family life. It went on to note, however, that “only some of the Member States are known to have taken initiatives specifically to implement the recommendation” and that none had established the capacity to monitor their national systems.⁶⁷ To be sure, provision for over-threes had improved and “laggards” like the UK and Portugal were poised to launch major efforts to catch up.⁶⁸ A general move to decentralisation and increased “choice” – both in line with its emphasis on greater flexibility - might also have been noted.⁶⁹ The report, however, went on to document the continued paucity of arrangements for under-threes, children of school age and families with special needs (e.g. bilingual immigrant children). Nor were member states treating childcare as a way of generating good postindustrial jobs: “in spite of growing number of jobs generated by the sector, efforts to re-evaluate the importance of people employed in childcare services and in ensuring adequate training remain modest.”

The report was received in a context that had changed, however. The Network had been disbanded in 1996, not long after the Delors’ Presidency came to a close and a backlash against “Commission activism” had set in (Ross, 2001). This is not to suggest that childcare dropped from the agenda nor that those efforts to create a “Social Europe” came to a standstill. High unemployment and concerns about the political and social repercussions of the European Monetary Union sparked the development of a European employment strategy and efforts to coordinate social policy renewal. Cutting across both is a commitment to gender equality.⁷⁰ Thus employment and gender equality were incorporated into the Treaty of Amsterdam⁷¹ as areas for Community action. Subsequent Council meetings have sought to put them into practice.

There is a pronounced “Third Way” cast to the new employment agenda: “Investing in people and developing an active and dynamic welfare state will be crucial both to Europe’s place in the knowledge economy and for ensuring the emergence of this new economy does not compound existing social problems of unemployment, social exclusion and poverty” (EU, 2001: 2). In other words, “social investment” – e.g. activation and



preventive measures – is to be emphasized over the “social consumption” orientation of the Keynesian era. Guideline 14 spells this out in concrete terms: each member state is committed not only to reducing taxes in general but to reducing fiscal impediments to job creation for the low skilled and to removing “poverty traps” from social programmes. This is to be complemented by making “flexicurity”⁷² central to employment and social policies at the European, national and regional/local levels. Measures supporting the emergence of two-earner (or working lone parent) families clearly form part of this agenda.

The employment policy objectives agreed to at the Lisbon Council⁷³ in March 2000 included the objective of reaching at least 60 percent employment rate among women within a decade. While this level is well below that achieved by the majority of member states, it does represent a policy challenge not only for Italy, Spain, and Greece, but also from Belgium and France. Public support for non-parental childcare is clearly understood to form an important part of the solution. Accordingly, childcare has been incorporated into the European employment strategy.⁷⁴ According to Guideline 18, “Member States and the social partners will design, implement and promote family friendly policies, including affordable, accessible and high quality care services for children and other dependents (including national targets), as well as parental and other leave schemes” (EU, 2001: 107).

No benchmark has yet been established for childcare, however.⁷⁵ There are those who advocate a Third Way approach. For example, an expert report to the Belgian President rejects the egalitarian blueprint pioneered by Denmark and Sweden, given the constraints imposed by the monetary union and the hypothesized “trilemma” of post-industrial growth.⁷⁶ Rather, the Dutch solution is seen as the more “realistic” (2001: 233). In their report to the Portuguese President, Ferrera et al also reject the Danish/Swedish blueprint for the Dutch (2000: 41).

Although these recommendations fit the Third Way thrust of European employment policy, other documents suggest the presence of the other contenders’ models. Thus the Commission’s assessment of national action plans on employment and social goals for 2001 defines a “good” package as one that combines “provision of care services with basic adequate leave time (preferably paid) plus a temporary reduction of working time or other flexible working time arrangements for both parents” (EU, 2001: 108). On the surface this seems to favour an egalitarian model but on closer examination, it fudges the distinction between the neo-familialist and egalitarian blueprints. Thus France and Finland, as well as Denmark and Sweden, are cited as “good examples.” This leaves open important questions such as how long is an “adequate” leave time. It also skirts the critical issue of whether, and at what level, parents are compensated for leave time.⁷⁷ It may sanction the reduction of working time “for both parents,” but says nothing about what might be done to ensure that both parents share, and equally, in working time reduction. It is silent on the need for measures to ensure the sharing of leave time itself.⁷⁸



Conclusions

The parameters of “Social Europe” have yet to be decided. As the childcare example suggests, at least three alternatives jostle for support. Does it matter which, if any, of three is chosen? The thrust of our argument is that it does. While each seeks to address the challenge posed by the defamilialisation of childcare, only one aims to do so in such a way as to foster (class and gender) equality. As the Swedish and Danish examples suggest, equality is not something that can be achieved overnight but what matters most is the “horizon of legitimate expectations” established in the blueprint for welfare state redesign (Marshall, 1963: 108). It is this which sustains those forces that continue to push to achieve it “in the here and now”. Students of national welfare regimes should not find this surprising (Esping-Andersen, 1999: chapter 9). In the past, however, it was domestic visions, and the domestic politics that they both developed out of and inspired, which were decisive. The formation of a “Social Europe” has not replaced national politics, but European guidelines can affect national outcomes, by shifting the political opportunity structure and/or introducing new discursive elements (de la Porte and Pochet, 2001b: 48). It thus does matter which vision of a post-male breadwinner world the EU embraces. Embedding the universal caregiver model in European benchmarks and guidelines can contribute to the establishment of a new horizon of legitimate expectations, encouraging egalitarian forces in all member states and thus helping to shift the balance in their favour.

Notes :

¹ The term “Third Way” has come to refer to the programmatic response of some left-liberals and social democrats to the neo-liberalism’s claim to represent the only possible response to contemporary challenges. The policy claims of the Blair, Schroeder and Clinton governments are often considered exemplars but earlier reforms in the Netherlands, Denmark and the Antipodes paved the way. The Third Way has been taken up by scholars such as Giddens (1998), Ferrera *et al* (2000) and Esping-Andersen *et al* (2001).

² These are: the universal breadwinner model, the caregiver parity model and the universal caregiver model. See Olson (this volume) for an interesting engagement with Fraser’s approach.

³ De la Porte and Pochet (2002b) provide the most detailed assessment of OMC and its impact available to date. Teague (2001) helps to situate OMC as part of an emergent pattern of multilevel governance, which stops short, however, of fully formed model of European citizenship.

⁴ See especially Iversen and Wren (1998) and Pierson (1998). Esping-Andersen takes up the question of the challenges posed to postwar regimes by these forces but shifts attention to the “new” pattern of risks and thus the positive pressures on states.

⁵ Or, as Olson (2002) puts it, different welfare regimes “naturalize” distinct visions of society. Both of us examine the underlying ethical-normative foundations of these visions but we develop the argument somewhat differently. While Olson emphasizes the impact of gendered welfare cultures on individual choice, I will stress the “political culture” – i.e. the way the visions embedded in different welfare regimes shape the horizons of (manifest and latent) collective actors by legitimating some claims and marginalising others.

⁶ Looking at the Belgian debates, Marques-Pereira and Paye characterise the new familism as a blend of equality and difference arguments: “It both accepts women’s right to lead a life, especially a work life, equal to that of men, and seeks to protect women’s right to continue certain traditional activities, such as devoting themselves to child rearing when their children are young” (2001, 70)



⁷ Iversen and Wren (1998) call this the post-industrial “trilemma”, arguing that states can simultaneously pursue two, but not all, of the following goals: employment, equality and fiscal balance. As a result of financial liberalisation, however, policies that lead to growing deficits are all but ruled out by the global financial institutions.

⁸ Governments would thus replace universal with targeted policies designed to “make work pay” while the social partners would be induced to negotiate equivalent hourly wages for part-timers and pro-rated benefits packages.

⁹ In 1996, the Blair government introduced a Working Families Tax Credit guaranteeing low income working parents a minimum level of income and an allowance to cover childcare costs. In 1999 the level was raised to £70. This policy is reminiscent of the welfare reforms of the Clinton administration. See Michel and Levy, (2002).

¹⁰ Writers like Esping-Andersen (1999, 103) and Ferrera et al (2000, 50) see personal and care services as largely low-skilled occupations, externalising work once done in the private sphere of the home. See Jenson (1989) for a critique of this view.

¹¹ Esping-Andersen et al consider the feminist demand for a more egalitarian distribution of care work in the home but conclude that it remains largely utopian: “the masculinisation of women’s lives reaches limits if they want children, or prefer part-time employment, regardless of how ‘women friendly’ is policy” (2001, 80).

¹² This refers to the model pairing a male full time earner with a woman working short (twenty hours or less a week) part time.

¹³ See Mahon (2000) for a more developed version of the argument that follows.

¹⁴ As Marshall put it, “Expectations officially recognized as legitimate are not claims that must be met in each case when presented. They become, as it were, details in a design for community living.” (1963:109). This Marshallian insight is developed in the literature advocating a “constructivist” conception of citizenship. See, inter alia, Jenson and Phillips (1996) and Shaw (2000) for a discussion of this literature.

¹⁵ Daly (2000, 487-492) sketches three different patterns of childcare provision. The first, in which care is privatised to the family with little to no state support especially for under-3s, includes the Mediterranean countries and Ireland. For the others she follows the standard comparative model – Scandinavian social democracies with generous cash benefits, parental leaves and childcare services and the continental model, typified by Austria and Germany, with generous support for parental (maternal) care and childcare offered primarily as a part time education service. She acknowledges as does Esping-Andersen, that France and Belgium do not fit easily within this scheme. Kautto’s (2002) analysis of the pattern of public investment in social services, however, shows a strong affinity between France and the Nordic countries, especially Finland. As I am primarily interested in welfare state redesign – rather than welfare regimes that have – at least as yet – to modify their childcare arrangements to meet the challenge of defamilialisation, however, I focus on the three dominant trajectories of change.

¹⁶ All figures cited in the text of this paragraph are taken from Esping-Andersen, Gallie, Myles and Hemerijck (2001, 204, Table 4.1). Labour force participation rates for women aged 15-64 and they include those employed part time, as well as full time employees.

¹⁷ While labour force participation rates have risen over the last two decades in all of these, the rise is sharpest in the Netherlands (from 39.7 percent in 1985). For the UK, 32 percent of women with children under five in 1990 (OECD-UK, 2000); Belgium, from 37.2 percent in 1985; Luxembourg, from 40.1 in 1985. See Ferrera, Hemerijck and Rhodes (2000) Table 3.17 page. The labour force participation rate of Irish women aged 25-34 rose sharply from 34 percent in 1980 to 71.5 percent in 1999. See OECD, 2001, 26, Figure 2.1.

¹⁸ Thus the employment rate of women 25-34 years of age rose from 49 percent in 1980 to 51 percent in 1999 in Italy and even more dramatically in Spain (from 32.4 percent to 54.1 percent) over the same period. OECD, 2001, Figure 2.1, page 26.



¹⁹ At least two other countries have adopted similar measures. Belgium best matches the French and Finnish cases (Marques-Pereira and Paye, 2001). Other countries forming part of the “northwestern” conservative regime seem also to be embracing the new familialism. Thus, in July 2000, Austria replaced its two years parental leave policy with a new childcare benefit. It involves a flat rate cash payment to parents of a child less than four years (436€ per month) plus individual social security coverage for one carer for pension, health and accident insurance. A third portion comes in the form of a childcare voucher to purchase care for children aged 4 to school-start. Interestingly, Daly ranks Austria with Finland and Belgium in terms of extent and continuity of women’s labour force participation. Frenchwomen enjoy a somewhat lower degree of continuity, but have higher labour force participation rates than Belgium (Daly, 2000, 500, Figure 10.9).

²⁰ In 2000 this was 1500 Finnish marks per month for the first child under three, with 500 additional marks for other children under three and 300 for those over three. Municipalities can make available as much as 1000 marks more, on a means-tested basis. (Korpinen, 2000).

²¹ Between 1993 and 1995, 15-18 percent of the recipients were men. When the new rule was introduced, recipients fell substantially (6,000-7,000), much more than were affected by the 23 percent rate cut the following year (4,000), according to Korpinen (2000: 180).

²² There were actually two bills introduced. The first was conditional on previous labour market attachment while the second effectively severed this link (Jenson and Sineau, 2001a: 100-101).

²³ Employed in networks of family daycare providers, the assistants are registered for five years after a visit of a social worker to the home, a medical exam and a “moral” investigation. Since 1992, they also have to undergo at least 60 hours of training. (Martin et al., 1998: 144).

²⁴ This consists of a basic allowance of 700 Finnish marks per month, with a possible supplement taking it to 800 marks, dependent on income and family size. Here the allowance is paid to the provider as part of her taxable income. (OECD, 2001a: 12). Only 5 percent of Finnish children are in private non-parental care however.

²⁵ For an analysis of the political forces shaping the choices in France, see Jenson and Sineau (2001a), Morgan (2002) and Morgan and Zippel (2002); for Belgium see Marques-Pereira and Paye (2001) and Kremer (2002). With regard to Finland, the OECD report suggests that the Lutheran church and the Mannerheim league have been important in raising the question of whether “we have gone too far in our search for benign institutions which support the child, while removing some of the duties of the parents in the process” (2001a, 18).

²⁶ The Blair government announced an ambitious and wide-ranging National Childcare strategy in 1997. The OECD (2000) provides useful details while Randall (2002) puts the current move in a broader historical perspective.

²⁷ Daly’s data show that women’s labour force participation rates began to rise during the 1980s, from a low of about 35 percent in 1980 to over fifty percent in 1990. They continued to rise in the 1990s, reaching over sixty percent by 1996. (2000: 473, Table 10.2).

²⁸ According to Visser, Dutch feminists and the trade unions were initially hostile to part time work. For Visser, “the demand for flexibility and part-time jobs rose as an unintended consequence of the [unions’] campaign for reduced working hours” (2002:30). He acknowledges, however, that in the 1980s, women active in the unions embraced part-time work and persuaded the unions to support this. In the 1990s, the Centre-Left and Lib-Lab governments made it an important element of their Third Way welfare state redesign (Visser, 2002: 31-34).

²⁹ In 1993, the legal minimum wage became applicable to part time workers. In 1996 a new law prohibiting unequal treatment in working hours came into effect (Plantenga et al, 1999:108). Ferrera et al note that the “flexicurity” accord included union agreement to abandon opposition to part time work and negotiate hourly wages at the level enjoyed by full time workers and taxation policies compensating low-income workers (2000, 49).



³⁰ Dutch women work two-thirds the hours of Dutch men – as compared to an 80 percent average for women in the EU (Plantagina et al, 1999: 101, Table 1). The British gender gap is about the same (women working 69 percent of the hours of men).

³¹ In 1993, 55 percent of Dutch women and 46 percent of British women worked parttime. Eurostat 1995:44). The only other European countries nearing this level are the Swiss and the Norwegians.

³² One third of Dutch women and nearly one quarter of British women work less than twenty hours a week (Lewis, 2001). Of European countries, only the Swiss come near this (Eurostat, 1995: 45).

³³ In the Netherlands, over 50 percent of 2-4 year olds are in municipally-subsidised playgroups run by private, usually non-profit groups, offering places for children twice a week for 2-3 hours at a time. In the UK, 20 percent of two year olds, and 55 percent of three year olds are in playgroups, most of which are run by churches or the voluntary sector (OECD, 2001: Appendix 1). Preschool classes for three and four year olds run for two and a half hours a day.

³⁴ The “Stimulative Measures” of the 1990s, which did increase supply, marked a major push to increase supply in the Netherlands focused on tax incentives for employers. While the government’s share fell from 55% in 1989 to 33 percent in 1996 and employers’ share rose from 7 to 25 percent in 1996, parents’ share rose from 35 percent to 42 percent (OECD, 1999: 20). UK parents currently pay as much as 93 percent of the cost of non-parental childcare for under-3s.

³⁵ The Blair government’s childcare strategy includes Childcare Information Services “a resource and referral service in each local authority area to advise parents regarding the quality of childcare and the range of choices available” and a pilot “Childcare Link” that aims to connect data bases and signpost childcare information services (OECD, 2001: 21).

³⁶ The Early Years Partnerships bring local education authorities together with other local services (health, social services), employers, trainers, advisors for “New Deal for Lone Parents” to assess current provisions, draw up annual plans and develop local information services.

³⁷ Of the estimated 1.6 million new childcare places it expects to see created by 2004, it anticipates that 80 percent will be provided by playgroups, voluntary and private providers. (OECD, 2001: 179)

³⁸ Child poverty is high in the UK (19.8 percent after taxes and transfers vs 11.9 percent across the OECD (OECD, 2001: appendix). Targeted at low income areas, Sure Start includes among the bundle of “core services” to be provided “good quality play, learning and childcare experiences for children” (OECD, 2000, 25). There are also an “Early Excellence Centres” pilot projects that “integrate early years services, high quality early education and childcare for children up to the age of four years, and training for adults, bringing together education, health, adult education and community development” (OECD, 2000, 25).

³⁹ Key national childcare agencies involved include Kids Club Network, National Private Day Nurseries Association and the Preschool Learning Alliance (Beddows-Wilkinson, 1999, 10)

⁴⁰ In Denmark, the first few weeks following birth of a child are reserved for the mother, while in Sweden there is no such reservation. Both countries have provision for paternity leave to coincide with maternity leave around the birth of the child “to provide the mother with support during the first few weeks after birth and to give the father an opportunity to establish an early bond with the child” (Bergqvist et al., 1999: 127).

⁴¹ In the 1990s, fathers took as little as four percent of parental leave in Denmark and between 8 and 11.7 percent in Sweden (Bergqvist et al., 1999: 127, Table 7.3). In Sweden at least, part of the reason that the low share taken by fathers became an issue has to do with the resurgence of feminism in the late 1980s (Mahon, 1999). Bergqvist et al. argue, however, that small but influential men - the “daddy group”- brought this particular issue to the fore in the early 1990s (1999: 145). Note that in Sweden, it was a “bourgeois” coalition government that introduced the daddy leave provision.

⁴² The new Liberal-Conservative government, which has made headlines for its anti-immigrant stance, passed a law extending parental leave to 12 months but eliminating the quota for fathers.

⁴³ In 1994 Denmark introduced a new parental leave option, in addition to the basic and generously funded parental leave scheme. Parents have the right to be off work for care of 0-8 year old children for at least 8



weeks up to a maximum of 13 weeks – but 26 if taken during the child’s first year. During this period they cannot place their children in the municipal childcare system if they are under three (part time services for children over three). The intent was to encourage parents to provide care for children under a year, though older siblings would be affected, hence the provision for part time ECEC for over threes. Local authorities are allowed to provide a flat rate leave allowance, within clearly specified limits. Initially 2/3 of the municipalities did so but that number quickly fell to one-third (European Childcare Network, 1996: 32).

⁴⁴ The children of professionals and white-collar workers were disproportionately represented at childcare centres in the 1980s (Mahon, 1999). As Bergqvist and Nyberg (2002) note, the children of blue-collar workers significantly increased their share as the system expanded.

⁴⁵ At that time, the requirement only applied to children of parents who were working or studying.

⁴⁶ At present 87 percent of the municipalities comply – with the more reluctant induced by the national government’s offer to allow them to raise parental fees from 30 to 33 percent of the costs if they did so.

⁴⁷ In the emphasis on “parents who are working or studying” was interpreted such that the children of unemployed were not given access to childcare in over 40 percent of municipalities (OECD, 2000).

⁴⁸ As part of its official commitment to multiculturalism, Sweden offers special bilingual services for immigrant children and parents are encouraged to help their children develop language skills in their native tongue as well as Swedish. See OECD, 1999a, 25-26 for a discussion of the kind of programmes developed for areas with high concentrations of immigrants.

⁴⁹ As in other countries, their systems were initially divided between day nurseries providing “care” for poor mothers who had to work and “kindergartens” offering preschool education services to middle and upper class families. When they began to design the foundations of the contemporary system, however, the principles of education and care were combined.

⁵⁰ Nearly two-thirds of Swedish children 1-6 are in such preschools and a further 12 percent are in family day care. The curriculum does not apply to the latter but the National Agency for Education is responsible for producing guidelines for this sector (OECD, 1999a: 14).

⁵¹ For the most part, Swedish and Danish childcare is publicly financed (though parent fees cover a certain share, higher in Denmark) and publicly provided. About 15 percent of Swedish preschool children are in centres under non-public auspices, for the most part parent coops. Private, non-profit “*puljeordninger*” (often parent coops) have played an important role. Over the last decade, the government has opened the way for municipalities to contract out to private, including commercial childcare providers. Here too the numbers are small.

⁵² They children spend the day in the countryside, for the most part outdoors exploring nature (European Childcare Network, 1996: 33 and 35).

⁵³ These include development of the principles governing the use of the facility, including educational methodology and the principles governing use of the budgetary framework. They are also make recommendations re staffing to the local authority (OECD, 2000). *Puljingordningen* do not have to establish boards if they are parent cooperatives but if not, they local authorities are to ensure that their contract includes provisions for parent influence.

⁵⁴ Like the other Nordic countries, local authorities have always enjoyed a prominent role in social service provision and enjoy a substantial tax base. France began to decentralise authority under the socialist government in the 1980s (Jenson and Sineau, 2001, 49). In childcare this has meant a much larger role for the local *Caisse d’allocations familiales* (CAFs) (Morgan, 2002). The Dutch too have devolved responsibility for social services to local authorities, but, as in France, have not backed this with a corresponding transfer of fiscal resources (Fargion, 2000). Local “Early Child Partnerships” play an important role in Blair’s new childcare policy but there is sense that they have been granted too little autonomy (OECD, 2000: 35).

⁵⁵ The law also contained a quality provision.



⁵⁶ In 1996, Swedish women worked 84.5 percent of the usual hours worked by men (Plantenga, 1999: 101). The gap would be lower still for Denmark given the lower rate of part time work but a similar tendency to work long part time.

⁵⁷ In the 1980s, the Swedish Social Democratic Women's League was almost the lone voice calling for the introduction of the six-hour day. In the mid-1990s, however, it was joined by the male-dominated Metalworkers' Union (Mahon, 1999: 2001).

⁵⁸ The wage gap is not much larger in France (68 percent) but it is sizeable in countries like Germany and Spain (60 percent). Esping-Andersen et al, 2001, 78). Esping-Andersen argues that gap for this category of workers is an important indicator as differentials between highly educated men and women tend to be much lower.

⁵⁹ Both the blue collar LO and the large white collar TCO support pay equity in principle but the real push for equalisation comes from the large and influential public sector unions within each. See Mahon (1999; 2002) for more detail.

⁶⁰ For instance, 40 percent of the measures proposed in the 1998 social action programme were legally binding directives and regulations. In contrast there were few proposals for legislation in the 1998-2000 social action programme (de la Porte and Pochet, 2001b: 30).

⁶¹ Performance indicators permit comparison with the average of the best performers among the EU, establishing a (dynamic) horizon of action, while policy indicators measure the degrees of effort carried out by individual member states, thus permitting assessment of the extent of the progress made by "laggards". (De la Porte et al, 2001a: 293).

⁶² The Programme was prepared by the Equal Opportunities Unit with DG-V. Established in the first wave of activism for a Social Europe (1976), it was strengthened by the establishment of an Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunity in 1981 (Ross, 2001: 181).

⁶³ In November 1983, the Commission prepared a draft directive on parental leave, which proposed that each parent would get a non-transferable three month leave (Randall, 2000: 355). Nothing was done, however, until after the ratification of Maastricht when the Commission gained new leverage over the "social partners". In December 1995 the social partners reached a framework agreement that the Council of Ministers incorporated into a Directive, making it Community law (Ross, 2001: 198-203). Note while the ETUC secured the non-transferability clause, UNICE won on the issue of no minimum remuneration requirements. "Daddy leave" without a link to income replacement is unlikely to have much significance.

⁶⁴ In addition to creating the Network, the Third Action Programme included New Opportunities for Women (NOW), financed by the European Social Fund. According to Ross, NOW included support for the development of childcare facilities and training in the childcare area (2001:193). In areas receiving structural funds, NOW allowed the Commission to support childcare provision as well as training (costs of training facilities as well as training for particular childcare workers).

⁶⁵ Thus, for instance, it chided governments for the revealing lack of data on childcare, noting that "If something matters to governments, they collect regular information on it, while one of the best ways to ignore a need or problem is to keep it invisible"(cited in Randall, 2000: 349).

⁶⁶ The recommendation focused on four areas: the provision of care for children whose parents are in employment, education or training or seeking such; special leave arrangements for employed parents; promotion of a positive work environment in care services; and promotion of sharing responsibility for care between men and women. See European Commission (nd).

⁶⁷ Source is "Equality Between Men and Women: Childcare" <http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/ch/c10916.htm>.

⁶⁸ Provision of non-parental childcare varies substantially among member states. For the under-threes, the clear leaders are Denmark (48%), Sweden (33%), Belgium (30%), France (23%) and Finland (21%). The laggards here include Portugal (12%), the Netherlands (8%), Italy (6 %), Greece and Austria (3 percent) and the UK, Ireland, Spain, West Germany and Luxembourg (2 percent). Provision for 3-school start is better, with some countries reaching over 90 percent (notably France, Belgium and Italy) and even laggards



like the UK and Portugal moving to catch up. In some – the UK, the Netherlands, and West Germany – however, preschool normally is only provided on a part time basis. See Domsch et al. (1999)

⁶⁹ Randall (2000) also notes a certain tendency to convergence around increased use of demand-based subsidies, though as we have seen, it is only in a few countries like the Netherlands and the UK, where these are not complemented by supply-side measures.

⁷⁰ This includes “mainstreaming”. Thus, for instance, member states are enjoined to consider the gender implications of actions proposed under all four “pillars” (employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability, and equal opportunities) of the employment strategy. This means applying gender impact assessment for each guideline and developing indicators to measure progress toward gender equality for each.

⁷¹ Signed in 1997, the Treaty, which revised the previous treaties, came into effect in 1999.

⁷² That is, a combination of the labour market “flexibility” sought by neo-liberal advisors, with the kind of social security mechanisms that eliminate the “precarious” character of non-standard jobs. For more on this, see Ferrera et al (2000: 49)

⁷³ At Stockholm, the Council set an intermediate target of 57 percent.

⁷⁴ Interestingly enough, the Network tried to position childcare as part of employment policy in the lead up to the Essen Council in 1994 (Ross, 2001) but the latter failed as a result of the absence of a control process. The “open method of coordination” was first applied to the monetary union and then extended to employment and, later, social protection and exclusion. At the same time, gender equality became an area for experimentation with “mainstreaming”.

⁷⁵ Thus in a communication from the Council, it was noted “The European Council of Lisbon invited the Commission and the Member States to further all aspects of equal opportunities, including reducing occupational segregation and helping to reconcile working and family life, in particular by setting a new benchmark for improved childcare provision: (Commission, 2000: 5). Under the rubric of “more and better jobs” a report on the Nice Council suggests, however, that this has yet to be achieved. It called for “a comparative analysis by the Commission, before 2002 on the structural factors likely to encourage participation in the labour market and adjustment to the employment guidelines, in particular when it comes to setting a benchmark on childcare provision” (EU, 2001: 7).

⁷⁶ That report was co-authored by Esping-Andersen, Gallie, Myles and Hemerijck. To judge from a recent intervention, however, Esping-Andersen still leans to the Nordic model (Esping-Andersen and Sarasa, 2002).

⁷⁷ In the absence of financial compensation, or when levels are relatively low, it is very unlikely that men will be induced to take their share of parental leave.

⁷⁸ The report noted that places had expanded in a number of countries, including the Netherlands, Denmark, Austria, and Spain, and that several which had received specific recommendations – Ireland, the UK and Portugal – had responded. The figures reported in Table 11 for Ireland seem particularly impressive – 38 percent of 0-3s and 56 percent of 3-school start. Ireland has also indicated its intention to increase childcare places by an ambitious 30 percent by 2003. (EU, 2001: 110). Belgium, Greece, France, the UK, and Portugal included quantitative targets in their NAPs but several low coverage countries, including the Netherlands, failed to set quantitative targets. Nor is the question of the *form* of childcare provided taken up.



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