

## Comments and Reviews

### Elina Haavio-Mannila et al., *Unfinished Democracy. Women in Nordic Politics.*

Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1985, XIX + 206 pp.

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This rapid process of change makes the Nordic countries particularly interesting for those studying women and politics. How can we explain the increase in representation? And what are the consequences? Have politics changed as a result of a larger number of women politicians?

Now the first comprehensive analysis of women in Nordic politics has appeared. Written by about twenty social scientists – mostly women scientists – ‘Unfinished Democracy’ covers subjects like ‘Women’s organisations’, ‘the mobilisation of women at elections’, ‘women in parliament’, ‘women in the corporate system’ and ‘public equality policies’.

The book presents a comparison of the 5 Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, and it is distinguished by being really comparative. It is very instructive to compare five countries so identical in terms of economic development and political system as the Nordic countries. Important differences are found as to how women organize. In Sweden and Finland we find large separate, well-organized women’s sections within the political parties whereas the women’s sections in Denmark and Iceland have always been small and weak, and at least in Denmark

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they have almost disappeared. This might be one explanation of the variations in the development of The New Women's Liberation Movement in the Nordic Countries. Broadly speaking the new movement in its purest form (a decentralized organizational structure with emphasis on consciousness-raising) prevails in Denmark and Iceland in the 1970s and was least prevalent in Finland, with Norway and Sweden somewhere in between.

The title 'Unfinished Democracy' points to the general theme of the book that although women have gained a more fair share in the political elite, it does not mean that women have got an equal share in political power. The book calls attention to the existence of an 'iron law', i.e. a regularity that indicates that the number of women is inversely proportional to their rank in the power hierarchy. The law is confirmed several times throughout the book: there are fewer women in the corporate bodies than in publicly elected bodies. If we range party-list candidates for election according to their chances we will find an overrepresentation of men among the highly placed members and an overrepresentation of women among those ranked at the bottom. The various parliamentary committees do not have the same prestige or the same power, and very few women are found as members of the really powerful committees.

The authors describe the development in the Nordic countries as a transition from a state of powerlessness with no participation or representation whatsoever to relative lack of power despite participation. And they conclude that the next stage – the road to political power by way of participation and representation – appears to come in some remote future.

Some years ago the feminist movement accused political science of neglecting women and women's political roles. Today the situation has changed – mostly due to women political scientists. As demonstrated by 'Unfinished Democracy' considerable information exists on women's participation and their representation in the political élite. We have also made progress in building better theories to account for women's place in politics. But as far as evaluation of the policies is concerned very little has been achieved. It is easy to tell how much the representation of women has improved in recent years, but it is very difficult to say anything about the effect on policies and on the lives of ordinary women. We need standards to evaluate the levels of equality and to evaluate the benefits to men and women.

Owing to this lack of standards for evaluation of policies it becomes very difficult to arrive at any conclusions based on the development in the Nordic countries. Some observers draw very optimistic conclusions, others formulate rather pessimistic ones. The authors of 'Unfinished Democracy' lean primarily towards the pessimistic side. They wonder if the increase in female representation in parliament and in local politics reflects anything else than the declining importance of the representative bodies. They

wonder whether the increase in representation has been accompanied by an increase in women's political power. And finally they wonder if men have benefited more by the changes and the softening-up process than women: If the extent to which men have increased their part in sharing responsibilities is less than the extent of women's greater share in paid employment, it may mean that the division of labour is even more off its balance than before.

I cannot help feeling that this pessimism is slightly exaggerated. It is, of course, important not to be content with what improvements have already been accomplished for women in the Nordic countries; but on the other hand simply to deny that we are dealing with improvements at all seems to me to be going too far. Are women after all so incapable and inefficient that 100 years of fighting for women's rights or women's liberation have not led to anything but deepening the inequality?

*Lise Togeby, University of Århus*