

Helga Maria Hernes: *Welfare State and Woman Power. Essays in State Feminism*, Norwegian University Press, Oslo 1987, 176 pp.

The book deals with the changes in women's political power in the Nordic countries during the 1970s, with women moving from a situation where they have largely been absent from the central societal institutions and decision-making forums to a position where today they have some power. The essays analyse some of the reasons for this development, what it means for women and the implications it may have for the future development of the Scandinavian welfare states are also discussed. The study of the changes in the lives of women is seen as a fruitful method of analysing the contemporary changes in the Scandinavian welfare states. The purpose of the book is to develop thoughts on the potential possibility for a philogynous or women-friendly polity.

On the theoretical level the book deals with the meaning of gender in political science, but it also touches on fundamental questions related to the nature of the state and the political and to the meaning of power. The book is important and controversial. Helga Hernes' analyses challenge central beliefs within both feminist thought and political science.

The five essays in the book were written over a three-year period and attempt to explain some of the underlying reasons for the changes in women's political power. The main argument running through the essays is that there is a considerable difference between being powerless and having little power, the difference between being outside the forums of decision-making and being part of them. There is still no equality between men and women in the Scandinavian welfare states. The challenging idea is, however, the claim that the Nordic democracies embody a state-form that may open up for a transformation into women-friendly societies and politics. This transformation can, however, only be achieved through a shift in the balance of power between men and women.

The essays touch upon different aspects of the political development of the Scandinavian welfare states focusing on gender relations. Chapter two deals with the study of reproduction going public: *Transition from Private to Public Dependence*. Chapter three analyses the historical development in women's different organizational responses looking at: *Charity women, union women and movement women*. Chapter four looks at *women's power position in the electoral and corporate bodies in the Five Nordic Countries*. And chapters five and six analyse the institutional mix between the public and the private reproductive sphere and the resulting conflict of interests between men and women over central power issues like *time policies and care work*. The last chapter discusses the *welfare state citizenship of Scandinavian women*.

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of study in political science as well as a central political issue. The essays show in many different ways that political development has been gender-specific and cannot be understood with concepts and explanations from main-stream thinking. This becomes especially evident in analyses of the two related themes: 1. The institutional character and meaning of the Scandinavian experiences for women. 2. The study of power relations between men and women.

Helga Hernes describes the Scandinavian state form as a corporate redistribute state. Considering Nordic corporatism from an organizational gender profile it becomes clear that *women have been the recipients and men the participants in the corporate process*. This relates to the fact that the lives of men and women are different and therefore the *process of politicization and mobilization* has been different for men and women. Helga Hernes argues that while men were mobilized and had time to organize before they were politicized, for women it has been the other way around. Women's mobilization can to a great extent be interpreted as a result of politicization. Women have been the objects of public policies and not their creators. In this respect *the corporate profile can be said to be patriarchal*. The power relations between men and women have, however, changed during the 1970s.

One main thesis in the book is that the development from private to public dependence means that women's lives are more dependent on and determined by state policies than men's lives. Therefore women have a different relationship to the state than men. *Women's incorporation into the public sphere has been followed by a political mobilization of women*. Women's political status as clients, and employees and citizens is still lower than that of men, but women have made the decisive transition from being powerless to having little power. The change from private to public dependence has accentuated and made visible the inequalities in terms of power between men and women, and this development has had a mobilizing effect on women.

Contrary to dominant thinking, Helga Hernes argues that *women's political mobilization has been connected to the development of the public sector* and not like that of men, to the market. On the one hand, state policies have contributed to mobilizing women politically. On the other hand she shows, how it is the women's organizations and the new women's movement that has given this mobilization form, scope, political content and direction.

What is new and challenging in Helga Herne's approach compared with most feminist thinking is *the connection of questions of welfare with questions of power*. There is no doubt that Scandinavian welfare states have had a positive effect on women's lives *in terms of welfare*, but there is sharp disagreement among feminist researchers about what they have meant to

women *in terms of power*. Helga Hernes analyses represent an attempt to develop a new framework for studying the power relations between men and women combining power as domination and power as self-determination.

It is a novel approach which means that there are still many open questions in that analysis. One set of questions is connected with the empirical basis for the arguments. The data on which Helga Hernes builds her conclusions about women's political power are primarily data about women's numerical position in the corporate redistributive state. In parliament today women have gained more than 30 percent of the seats in all the Nordic countries, whereas women's position varies in the corporate bodies from 13 percent in Iceland to 30 percent in Norway. I find that the new framework for studying power relations between men and women involves the development of the new methods. We need more empirical research about the qualitative aspects of power relations. In what way do women make a difference in the electoral and corporate bodies and as civil servants? And we need more empirical research about other dimensions of power, e.g. about the power and influence of women in social movements, and about the influence of the women's movement.

The main claim that the Scandinavian states form opens up the possibility for transformation into women-friendly societies and politics rests partly on the potentialities in women's political mobilization and partly on the specific institutional structure of the Scandinavian welfare state. Helga Hernes argues that *the Nordic countries embody a combination of state feminism from above and feminization from below that is the basis for a progressive alliance between women and the state*. We need to know more about what the Nordic political culture, egalitarian values and 'public-private mix' have meant to women. We also need more empirical research of what gender differences mean in terms of political ideas and political activities. It is still an open question whether the 'critical mass' of women in the corporate state will really make a difference or just represent the incorporation of a new elite. I find exciting Helga Hernes's claim that the institutional structure and political culture in Scandinavia give women a unique possibility for participating in the political process of reshaping the societies and political systems and developing something quite new – women-friendly societies. The crucial question is, however, how is it possible to achieve a shift in the balance of power between men and women? How are the political institutions to be related to the civil society and to the economic institutions? We need to develop realistic visions about what these new kinds of communities would look like both in terms of political ideals and in terms of organizational forms.

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