

## Editorial Note

To what extent does the political system satisfy the interests and needs of women and men? What are the individual and structural impediments to women's political participation? How are gender relations in society maintained and reproduced? These questions, and many others, are posed by both women political activists and women scholars.

During the last two decades, the status of women, both in terms of women's representation and women's interests, has become an issue of considerable importance to the political parties in the Scandinavian countries. Gender equality is defined as a specific public policy. Differences between the sexes in terms of political participation have diminished; about one third of the members in elected bodies consist of women. As is shown in the Council of Europe studies of the situation of women in the political process in Europe (1984), a group of four countries 'stand head and shoulders above the rest', namely the Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Norway, and Denmark) and the Netherlands. Besides, women in Scandinavia have an employment participation rate that is almost the same as that of men.

The assumption that women are less likely than men to participate in politics is under reconsideration. Differences between the sexes in terms of political participation have diminished since the end of the 1960s. Young women even tend to be more active than men of the same age in some areas: single-issue politics, trade union activities and participation in elections. In addition, there is now a predominance of women voting Social Democratic, which is the opposite voting behaviour from earlier times, when women preferred conservative parties. We seem to be witnessing the emergence of both a generation and a new gender gap during the 1980s – a new perspective where the gender dimension takes precedence over the traditional left-right dimension.

In this situation of changed social conditions for women, research on women has developed on a broad basis during the last ten years, often with financial support from the government. Gender studies and feminist analysis have become an important subfield within political science in all the Scandinavian countries. There is also an elaborated cooperation between women political scientists from different countries, manifested for example in the work *Unfinished Democracy – Women in Nordic Politics* (1985), the Nordic Association for Research on Women and Politics, and a series of joint seminars on various topics. However, this new research activity has had limited impact on the field as a whole.

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The purpose with this issue is to show the broad availability of women's studies in Scandinavian political science and the value of a gender perspective. This means – in analogy with a class perspective – that there is a conflict between the sexes that has to be problematized and that the conditions of the subjected part are emphasized.

The first article, written by Drude Dahlerup, is entitled 'From a small to a large minority'. She raises the question whether number counts: what happens when women become a large minority in politics, although still a minority? Her article is based on empirical data on women's representation in Scandinavian politics, but has also important theoretical implications. How big is a 'critical mass'?

Anna G Jónasdóttir, asking the question if sex matters to democracy, brings us further into the theoretical aspects of the obvious differences in political power between women and men. How is citizenship, individuality and sexuality connected in a contemporary Western, social context? In what way does individuality, as the basis for liberal citizenship, constitute a hindrance for women? What is the explanatory value of the concept of 'difference'? The final part of the article is devoted to women's views of equality in a future society.

This last discussion is closely related to Beatrice Halsaa's article on 'A Feminist Utopia'. What do women want? What is the feminist vision of a better/good society? Her answer is that a feminist utopia must be centred around reproduction as the core value, which evidently presupposes fundamental structural changes, material as well as cultural. But she underlines that it is a utopia for both men and women.

Diane Sainsbury, finally, examines two properties of the Scandinavian model – universalism and corporatism – and their impact on women's conditions. Her suggestion is that analyses of public policies in the Scandinavian countries should move beyond thinking in terms of one model and rather focus on institutional and country-specific variables.

The writers are critical towards the political reality as well as the political science. The research is more or less explicitly accused of lacking problem-orientation, of not defining key concepts adequately and of leaving out visions and ethics. But the articles are, above all, efforts at defining feminist political science in its presence rather than in its absence. They point to the fact that a gender perspective will not only transform our understanding of women and gender; it will also, eventually, change our understanding of politics and political science.

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