

”These inconsistencies and contradictions should not be taken as indicating simply personal insincerity. They are, rather, symptoms of much deeper, unsettled conflicts of valuations.” Gunnar Myrdal, *American Dilemma*, Harper & Brothers Publishers, New York London 1944 p. 40

The Importance of Gender in the Swedish Labor Movement Or: A Swedish Dilemma

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1927 chairman Per Albin Hansson was asked to write an address to the women in the Social Democratic Party, in their magazine, *Morgonbris*. It was published in the December issue, as a kind of Christmas gift or New Year’s greeting. So what did he say to the socialist women of Sweden? What was their task to be in the building of the People’s Home?

“We have come so far that we are now able to begin to prepare the big home for the people. The task is to create in it comfort and cheer, to make it cozy and warm, bright and gleaming, and free. There is probably no more enticing task for a woman. Perhaps she need only set her eyes upon it to feel the spirit of her calling, to throw herself into it with all her zeal and devotion.”¹

I have often used these words, as they signify so clearly the unproblematic view concerning women in the labor movement in Sweden held by a leading socialist, soon to become the Great Designer of the People’s Home. Of course I know that he did not really put a lot of meaning behind his words, that they are akin to the lighthearted praise one might give ”the little woman” after a good meal. Had he been pressed, the chairman might have uttered other words, more in line with the theoretical ideas on women, emancipation and socialism that he must have read in his youth. The casual character of his words, however, is of interest, as it reveals a more genuine attitude to the gender order, existing and normative, than the attitude he would likely have taken had he been a more orthodox and well-read socialist. What we meet here, in this lighthearted and patriarchal little article, is thus a dilemma within socialism – a dilemma concerning gender, ideas about which positions, places, spheres, responsibilities, etc. belonged to men, and which to women, and the consequences of these ideas. It is this dilemma I want to discuss in this article: how it was dealt with, the importance of the solutions, and, particularly, the dramatic change in the 1960s.²

¹ *Morgonbris* nr 12 1927

² By ”gender contract” I mean the (mostly) unarticulated norms, ideas, traditions and forms of the relation between husband and wife. It could be seen as an ideal-type, distilled from history, and used to easily define the different areas of responsibility, rights and duties thus belonging to man and woman and hence a tool to understand the different gender-rationalities which consequently must follow. For a more detailed understanding in English, see Yvonne Hirdman, *Key Concepts in Feminist Theory*; in Swedish, *Genus. Om det stabilas föränderliga former*, Liber

The Dilemma of Gender = The Women's Question

The dilemma consisted of two incompatible views of *women*, one theoretically correct, albeit full of contradictions, in which women were looked upon as small comrades in the fight against capitalism. The suppression of women would evaporate once capitalism was defeated by turning women into workers.

Let me remind you of Fredrik Engels' once-famous words:

"The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time."³

A deeper analysis also reveals that the theory of the emancipation of women was conditional – and that the participation of women in the labor market was not seen as a prerequisite in the battle against capitalism. Rather, it was the *result* of the successful outcome of that battle. This meant that there was an inherent alibi against taking much action to recruit women, as women's liberation was not *necessary* for the socialist movement – for "us."⁴

These rather loose theoretical ideas had other, very concrete and practical, implications. These were, of course, that many women *do* have children, and that domestic work, which since the days of Marx has been labeled re-productive work, has to be done in spite of its repetitive and, to the course of history, insignificant character – as the theory goes.

Those who seriously adopted a solution within this theoretical framework offered by F. Engels (and to a smaller degree by A. Bebel), had women's waged work as the first point on their list, and women's liberation from child care and domestic work as their second. Actually, what seemed to suppress women, according to socialist theory, was not men in any form, but rather this kind of undignified work – and, implicitly, children. The solution – not very strong or explicit – offered by Marxist socialists was built upon socialist utopian dreams of a collective life, consisting of collective child care, eating, washing, cleaning, etc. Many, however, were not inclined to adopt such a solution, as they found the collective living arrangements, especially the collective upbringing of children, too utopian, too strange, and, of course, too much used in anti-socialist propaganda. In Sweden, the Social Democratic Women *published* ideas in that direction in the early decades of the 20th century, but they did not develop these ideas; they did not build a political program around them.⁵

The liberating kernel, however, in this theoretically correct view was that women were (or could be) regarded as human beings, as "everybody," whatever this meant in reality. Thus young Clara Zetkin baptized her socialist women's magazine "Die Gleichheit" – and gave a fierce speech at the Second International Conference in Paris in 1889, denying that there was a "special women's question"; there was not even a special working women's question, as she saw it.

2001. For a discussion with Klas Åmark and Gro Hagemann, see *Häftan för kritiska studier* 2:2000.

³ "Kvinnans befrielse kommer först att bli möjlig då hon i stor samhällelig skala kan delta i produktionen och det husliga arbetet blott i obetydlig utsträckning tar hennes tid i anspråk."

⁴ As a matter of fact, the ideas of women and socialism reveal the powerful artifact of a male norm, a sort of "We" that turned women into "the Other." For a more detailed analysis, see Hirdman 2001.

⁵ See Yvonne Hirdman, *Utopia in the Home*, an essay, *International Journal of Political Economy, A Journal of Translations*, Summer 1992, Vol 22, No.2. For an overview and analysis of this, see also Yvonne Hirdman, *Women - From Possibility to Problem? Gender Conflict in the Welfare State - The Swedish Model*, Research Report nr 3 1994, Arbetslivscentrum/The Swedish Center for Working Life.

But as she matured, Zetkin used other words. She then tried to develop gender ideas built around the fact of women's childbearing – ideas based on an understanding of distinct gender differences. Thus she came very close to attitudes that were more in harmony with those held (although not necessarily articulated) by most people within the labor movement: ideas of women as mothers and men as providers. I describe these as ideas of an old-fashioned, very consistent gender contract within which the contracting partners have different responsibilities, areas of concern, rights, and power resources, and thus different rationales. According to these later ideas, women were to be liberated *from* the labor market rather than liberated to participate in it. In this view, women's wage-earning labor could be exploited in the propaganda as the most horrible consequence of profit-ridden capitalism – going so far as to use "our" mothers, wives and children.⁶

Masculinity

Mostly, however, the prevailing position – and I am referring to the initial phase of building a socialist movement – was that of total indifference, both to women in theory, and to women as political possibilities, as developed later. What was of interest, however, was the "new man." Choosing gender as an analytical tool, one moves away from "women and socialism," that is, away from the articulated programs, and on to a more subconscious yet very important level within the movement. One sees more clearly that socialism is another word for "masculinity," a new, fighting masculinity, which, of course, shapes both the form and the content of the new movement.

The hero of socialism was a healthy, self-educated, well-behaved man – a man who took his destiny into his own hands, confident that this destiny was connected to the progress of society. A wonderful combination expressed in the early songs, like this one:

"I should be a slave? O never in hell!"⁷

Thus they formed themselves, these "sons of labor," into very articulate combatants against the degenerated *men* of the upper classes, against the fat-stomached capitalists, the unhealthy yellow-faced hypocritical priests, the grayish bourgeois cowards.

What we witness here, in the early decades of the 20th century, is similar to what Catherine Hall and Lenore Davidoff analyzed concerning the battle of manliness in the early period of capitalism: how gender became the crucial weapon in the power struggle between the old and new economic orders in society. The conscientious, hard-working up-and-comers, the new economic men, were pitted against the wild, drinkers, combatants etc. of the gentry.

In the gender battle between different masculinities as Davidoff and Hall analyzed it, the couple became important. A good man must have his family to provide for and take care of. The creation of the different spheres, the male outdoor and the female indoor spheres, was thus fuelled.⁸

⁶ This was a position held by the anarchists. Proudhon, for one, talked loudly of it at the first International, and not a word of protest was heard from Marx and Engels, according to Helga Hernes in *Staten - kvinner ingen adgang?* Universitetsforlaget, Oslo 1982 s 28. See also Hirdman 1992, 2001

⁷ "Jag skulle bli slav? Nej så jälvär anamma!"

⁸ Leonore Davidoff & Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes. Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, Hutchinson, London, 1987

When the proletarian was to become a "man," however, the two sides of masculinity were revealed. To be a man meant to be free and economically able to take care of a family.⁹ To be a man was to have a wife – not an equal, a comrade. But to be a man also meant to be free and independent among comrades fighting like soldiers in the battle against capital. In such a battle there was no place for a woman, unless she was like a brave little man – a little comrade.

Here I can see a fruitful field for new research focused on the varieties of masculinity and how these were connected to ideological differences, and the impact of these ideas of manliness – and womanliness – on both the formation and the content of propaganda and politics. We have long listened to the stories told by the historical actors themselves about the various political and theoretical differences that have split the movement time and again. Gender might add greater depth and insight to this picture.

As the masculine identity became a weapon in the political fight, ideas of women as equals, as comrades, could in contrast be seen as weakening such a fight. Labor – in all its many connotations – became masculine, a reinforcement of masculinity.¹⁰ Thus, again, women in workplaces, trying to liberate themselves as actors in the "real," productive, sphere, became a threat rather than an advantage to the proletarian army. The sources tell us similarly that already segregation in the workplace, in the factories, was being entirely structured as by an invisible hand, which was putting men here, with better jobs and higher wages, and women there, with jobs considered "unmanly" and deserving of lower wages. Behind the hand we can locate the brotherly treaty between labor, that is, trade unionists, and capital.¹¹ In spite of the rare possibilities for an equal development, pointed out by Ulla Wikander,¹² integration of working women in the labor market occurred according to the feminist saying, "Add women, but don't stir."

Women themselves within the labor movement also hesitated when faced with a strategy of equality according to the explicit ideas of Engels, or Bebel. Some of the early socialist women tried to translate the male language of socialist propaganda to the arena of sexuality and to their difficult female role of motherhood. The result was, however, a discouragement. Those who tried were accused of the worst of sins in those days, of being anti-socialists. And when a small socialist female club in Norrköping in 1911 tried to introduce the weapon of blacklisting men who had abandoned women they had made pregnant, as the men had blacklisted scab laborers, indignation knew no limits. What an outrageous comparison, this proposal, this "Mrs Anderson's miscarriage!"¹³

Already, in 1904, when Social Democratic Women started their women's magazine, *Morgonbris*, they chose to put the famous Ellen Key on the front page of the very first issue. She was an icon who stood for old-fashioned gender ideas in a modern frame of love, a fierce speaker for the ideology of differences between the sexes, stressing the importance of motherhood for women and society – ideas that do not fit well with theories of female emancipation through wage-work.

⁹ See Gerda Lerner's discussion on slavery here in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Oxford University Press 1987

¹⁰ Eva Blomberg, *Män i mörker. Arbetsgivare, reformister och syndikalister. praktik och identitet i svensk gruvindustri 1910-1940*, Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm 1995

¹¹ As discussed early by Heidi Hartman in her famous article from 197x, *The Unhappy Marriage* etc. Kerstin Norlander has with great skill and depth shown this marriage in her dissertation, *Människor kring ett företag. Kön, klass och ekonomiska resurser. Liljeholmens stearinfabrik AB 1872 - 1939*, Meddelanden från ekonomisk-historiska institutionen vid Göteborgs universitet 77, Göteborg 2002

¹² Ulla Wikander, *Kvinnoarbete i Europa 1789 - 1950. Genus, makt och arbetsdelning*, Atlas akademi 1999

¹³ See Yvonne Hirdman, *Den socialistiska hemmaföreläsningen och andra kvinnohistorier*, Carlssons förlag 1992

Gender Issues in the Inter-war Period

What we got, then, before "take-off" in modern Swedish history, before the Social Democrats came to power in the inter-war period, were two discourses on gender within the Swedish Labor Movement. There was the theoretically correct theory, which, however, was never debated, was never defended, and which almost disappeared around 1920, or rather, it went underground. And there were the words of Per Albin Hansson, words pointing out the differences between the sexes, and pointing out the "small world" (the home) for women and the "big world" (politics and waged work) for men – words which indeed captured more of the gender ideal held by men and women in the labor movement, and which might easily be seen as underlying the upcoming social and political reforms of the 1930s and 1940s.

But if we look at two political issues of importance to the gender order in society in the inter-war period, both discourses can be found, revealing a more complex and disharmonious reality than the patronizing words of Per Albin Hansson. One might even say that we can see the beginning of an open battle between them.

First there was the issue of whether or not married women should be allowed to work as public servants. It was a question raised as early as 1925 when this field of work was opened to women as one of many important reforms that came with the end of the First World War – among them allowing women to vote. In the midst of those who protested against these new possibilities for women, we find eager socialist men. Their arguments were logical according to the gender-contract ideas of a one-breadwinner family model: married women should not have to serve two masters – they should not be allowed to work two jobs. They should not take the jobs away from men.¹⁴

Second, there was the issue of the decrease in population. It was a question raised to the highs of a crisis by Alva and Gunnar Myrdal in 1934. The well-known message was that people should marry, have at least 3, or, better, 4 children, and if they do, they should be rewarded by social and economic policies that will ease the financial burden and also help parents with the upbringing of the "human material."¹⁵

These two issues - saving jobs for men by removing women from the labour market and encouraging and rewarding women to be nothing but mothers and wives at home - would seem to go quite naturally together.

Instead, these questions brought the dilemma of the gender order in modern society to an articulated level. Women and their place in society were being discussed, and once the topic was on the agenda one could see that it created what might be called a "Swedish dilemma," to borrow the main idea in Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* that discrimination for a *democrat* became a problem because of its logical inconsistencies and immoral suppression of human beings.

It is obvious that it became difficult – although not impossible – to argue that married women should be *forbidden* to work, that a democratic society could be built upon injustices against one half of the population; or to put it more mildly, that it could be built on a complete segregation of the sexes. Thus trade unionist leaders were heard to say, suddenly aware of the

¹⁴ René Frangeur, *Yrkeskvinna eller makens tjänarinna? Striden om yrkesrätten för gifta kvinnor i mellankrigstidens Sverige*, Arkiv 1998

¹⁵ Hirdman 1992, Ann-Katrin Hatje, *Befolkningsfrågan och välfärden*. Allmänna förlaget 1974, Ann-Sofi Kälvevemark, *More Children of Better Quality? Aspects of Swedish Population Policy in the 30s*, Allmqvist & Wiksell 1980

correct theoretical view, that in *this* society, women had to wait for their liberation, that is, for their participation in the labor market, as unemployment was such a hard fact.¹⁶

Young social engineers like the Myrdals, on the other hand, led the argument for more children of better quality as a means for women to enter society, to participate in society as workers *and* mothers *and* politicians. In their blueprint, women's emancipation through paid work was the kernel of a better society, and the old utopian dreams of collective child care, etc. were accordingly seen as means to that end.¹⁷

The outcome, the social and economic policies of the 1930s and 40s, however, was built mainly around a couple consisting of a breadwinner man – a laborer of course, who got assistance from the state if he became sick or unemployed, and a housing loan to ensure a decent living when he married, etc. – and a woman, a proper married one, who would preferably stay at home once the children arrived, living in a nice apartment with running water and central heating, and with access to doctors, social workers and nurses who would offer help and guidance in her area of responsibility, the children. With the introduction of the child allowance following the Second World War, women as mothers were given rights in the same way as men as workers: it was a universal benefit that gave women, explicitly, money in hand. With the child allowances the net of reforms around the old-fashioned, stereotyped gender couple – a couple like the one implied by Per Albin Hansson's words in *Morgonbris* – was indeed completed. The old-fashioned gender discourse thus prevailed, much due to the parliamentary situation, of course, but with considerable help also from Social Democrats.¹⁸

But the difficulties of the married working mother were listened to, and the idea of forbidding her to work was pushed back in 1938. The emancipating discourse on gender certainly did not structure the main social and political reforms of the first era of the People's Home, but it was not silent or silenced. Thirty years later this discourse won the battle.

The Gender Turn – Equality Gender Contract

In 1972 Olof Palme, chairman and prime minister, addressed the women of the party. He painted for them a picture of the future society very different from that of his forerunner, Per Albin Hansson:

”In this society it is only natural for both parents to work. In this society it is self-evident that man and woman should take the same responsibility for the care of the home and the children, and that they both have an equal opportunity to take an active part in both the work and the cultural activities of the community. In this society sharing experience with our children is naturally an important part of life, but the care of these future generations is just as naturally the responsibility of us all.”¹⁹

Four decades lay between the different statements of the two chairmen of the Social Democratic Party. Now, for the first time, in a Social Democratic Congress, the socialist theory of women's emancipation became discussed and, indeed, manifest. The same year a delegation for Equal

¹⁶ Yvonne Hirdman, *Med kluven tunga. LO och genusordningen*. Atlas 2001

¹⁷ Hirdman 1992

¹⁸ Hirdman 2001 (Genus)

¹⁹ *SAP congress minutes 1972* page 759; see also Gunnel Karlsson, *Från broderskap till systemskap. Det socialdemokratiska kvinnoförbundets kamp för inflytande och makt i SAP*, Arkiv 1996, Christina Florin & Bengt Nilsson, ”Något som liknar en oblodig revolution...” *Jämställdhetens politisering under 1960- och 70-talen*, Umeå universitet 2002

Status between Men and Women was institutionalized, thus initiating a new political field that has greatly expanded in the last 30 years. The 1970s also saw a range of very dramatic reforms, aiming to take away the *obstacles* (the word of the day) to women's entry into the labor market, thus making the Myrdals' dream a reality, combining parenthood with a working life. Social and economic reforms were now being arranged around a new couple, consisting of two individuals, the two-breadwinner family. An equality gender contract now structured the many reforms. The most important of the reforms took away the economic dependence between the couple, liberating them from this bondage, this "contract," and treating them as individual beings. This was done by a tax reform, by state subsidies to child care, and by a parental leave insurance, to name the most important measures.²⁰ From now on, "equal status" was to be the main, indisputable norm for every political party.

In this fast and fascinating story of change, the Trade Union (LO) at last played an important part. In the period from 1945 till the 1960s, however, LO had done little to change the unfair conditions for working women, showing an indifference to their problems in spite of their difficult situation and low, "female," wages. The explicit shortage of labor in the 1950s certainly made employers eager to engage women, including married women. They initiated a co-operation with LO in order to get more women to enter the labor market. An institution called AKN (Arbetsmarknades Kvinnonämnd) was thus created in which the trade unionist members, apart from Sigrid Ekendahl, were rather reluctant with respect to the issue and made little effort to use the shortage situation to get rid of the special women's pay rate, in spite of the pressure from their female members. The idea that mothers, married women, should enter the labor market was not a self-evident position taken by most trade union leaders.

At last, in 1960, the special women's wages were being left out of the agreements. And a couple of years later the trade union could be seen as a leading actor in the change of gender contracts. In 1969, a special Family Policy Program was distributed by an institution within the trade union called the Family Council,²¹ in which many of the forthcoming reforms were first proposed, for example, parental leave reform. This corresponds with an awakened interest in a change of "sex-roles," as the issue was labeled, within the Party, an interest that also became visible first in the 1960s.

From the end of 1969 the two actors of the labor movement – the party and the trade union – thus explicitly formulated a new gender contract. Only one discourse was now heard. This was, according to the old socialist theory, the "correct" one, as this important statement from a working group on questions on equality indicates:

"Thus there are strong reasons for making the two-income family the standard in the planning of long-term changes in social insurance."²²

Pieces for Understanding the Gender Turn

Indeed we have an interesting historical problem here: why have gender ideas changed, and changed so fast? What happened to the gender contract ideas that were once so evident? What happened to the proletarian masculinity? Why were there no visible and explicit objections

²⁰ Ibid, Hirdman 2001 (genus)

²¹ In 1967 there was a change from the so-called Kvinnoråd (Women's Council) to Familjeråd (Family Policy Council) as a part of the changing ideas on gender, from difference to equality. For this story see Ylva Waldemarsson, *Kvinnor och klass - en paradoxal skapelseberättelse. LOs kvinnoråd och makten att benämna*. Arbetslivsinstitutet, Stockholm 2000

²² *Jämlikhet- första rapporten från SAP-LO:s arbetsgrupp för jämlikhetsfrågor*, Prisma 1969 p. 102

within the labor movement? What did the loyal women in the Social Democratic Women's League think of all this? How unique was this Swedish gender turn? There are many other questions that could be asked, and I will not be able to answer them all, but by just asking them, one realizes the magnitude of the gender turn and that here we have an interesting field of study.

The main understanding behind this dramatic radicalization of the 1960s and 70s in Sweden when it comes to gender relations has been a simple economic explanation: the country, due to the overheated economy after the Second World War, was in need of labor and women had to do – at least, women were regarded as preferable to immigrants. In order for women to participate in the workforce, the public sector had to expand so that the work/care usually done by women in the homes could still be accomplished.

In my understanding this is a fatal oversimplification of a much more fascinating chain of events and ideas, not least of gender. I will not claim to have a full understanding of this "Swedish Revolution," but here are my "pieces" of understanding:

One has to go back to a macro, or structural, level, pointing to the general changes brought by modernity (to use a simple concept, but one useful for describing the dramatic political, economic, and cultural transformations that took place in Europe and America in the 18th century and onwards). With modernity, *integrating logics* were introduced. The most obvious was the idea from the Enlightenment of "everybody," as in "everybody ought to have the right to happiness," and the strong and appealing thought that "all human beings" have "the same value." Key words, then, are "all," "everybody" and "same." This parcel of ideas was of course not new, but it was strengthened by the revolutions in France and America and by the new kind of *rational* argumentation, which also was a child of the Enlightenment. Actually, this rationality bound together the integrating potential within the democratic idea with the main logics of capitalism. One has to give a reason to answer the question: why not a woman?

Indeed, why not? This integrating logic was thus also dominant within the new economy, called capitalism: why not a woman? At least women's labor was cheaper.²³

Modernity then brought forward two forceful integrating logics that challenged the segregating/separating logic of gender,²⁴ creating a conflict. And it is a conflict of an *expanding* nature: the more women were integrated in society, the more fuss there was about the legitimate places of women (and not men), which in turn gave rise to more discussion, more articulation, and greater propensities for expansion of the idea of "even women" – as in "even women ought to have the vote," "even women can do this," "even women should have the right to," etc. What we witness is a constant *friction* between integration and segregation.

This is what I have labeled the "gender conflict," and I have pointed to its paradoxical nature: that it is a conflict that expands even as it is resolved. What causes it to grow is the tension between the logic of separation inherent in the gender structure and the increasing number of activities drawing women into society. The more women are integrated into society, however, the more friction between integration and segregation emerges and expands and becomes a moving, changing force. For example, it reveals injustices between the sexes – as in wages, promotion, double work, uneven responsibilities for domestic work and children, etc. But it also reveals deeply buried ideas of women having special characteristics that render them unfit for entry to the man's world.

The *outcome, or the solution*, then, is not granted. One example of how this idea of a gender conflict could be used as an analytical tool in a more general way is the development in

²³ For a more thorough discussion of this conflict, see *Genus, or Women - from Possibility to Problem?*

²⁴ Behind this statement a whole theory is implicated: that gender has to be understood as a segregating practice, logic, etc. This is indeed the meaning of gender: that they are two, separate in most ways.

the Weimar Republic, where the integration of women aroused a sort of gender panic, and "back to gender order" became a self-evident and fundamental part of the Nazi ideology.

The growing gender conflict, I would argue, became more acute, *more demanding*, in Sweden, compared to other democratic capitalist countries. My understanding of this rests upon two propensities. The first is, of course, the luck of events, which kept us outside the Second World War. In spite of the myth of war as midwife delivering dramatic changes, this outsider position created an uninterrupted line – a continuum instead of a need to restore order, going back to stereotyped gender positions once peace returned.²⁵ The second propensity is the strong position of the labor movement and its inherent logic of "all," "everybody," and "equal." Here the analysis of a "Swedish Dilemma" is illuminating. The emancipating logic within the socialist ideas of "everybody" became more difficult to avoid at length; it became more difficult to uphold ideas of an emancipating solution "even" for women to come, "then," in the future, as time was reaping time. But fairness alone, appealing as this thought might be, is not enough. It has to be mixed with economic rationality, and that is what happened.

Going back to the historical events, then, we can see how the Social Democrats dealt with the discontent the gender conflict brought forward, especially for those women who had to combine work life with family life without any help from society in the form of day-care centers, fair taxation policies, or even extended store opening hours. And they were a growing number: from 150 000 *married* women in 1945 to 420 000 in 1960. The increasing discontent became articulated within the trade unions by women (mostly), demanding equal pay. We also find the discontent expressed in the 1950s and early 60s by members of the biggest party in opposition, the Liberals. It was the Liberals who started the sex-role debate in the early 1960s, bringing what had been a tacit dilemma to national attention in the media. The issue, however, was quickly "stolen" by the Social Democrats in the late 1960s, who saw its potential and turned it from an issue of fairness between men and women into a question of equality between the classes: a social policy question. It was during this takeover that the trade union became alert. At last, women had become useful in the new, radicalized battle between labor and capital, as reinforcements, as little comrades.

The empirical evidence can be read on a structural level: we see the growth of the public sector, creating equality between the classes. We also see the development of a new labor market, specially designed for women. The importance of the political radicalization, the "red years," as I call them, from 1967 to 1976, played a decisive part in this expansion.²⁶ When demands were being made by the young and wild ones (men) on revolution, or at least on economic democracy, the truly revolutionary reforms, called "family politics," easily slipped through the political system. They were accepted by all the political parties, as they were deemed harmless, tame, "gray," "middle-of-the-road – reformism instead of revolution. Through the statistics on employment of women from 1950 to 1990 we get a picture of the drastic changes in these years – and also a correction of the simplified economic explanation: that it was solely the demand for female labor in the export industries that lay behind the expansion, and that it was this demand that made the public sector grow. Looking at the figures, we see how ridiculous

²⁵ One could of course argue the opposite: since Sweden did not participate in the Second World War, we did not experience, as did the war-waging countries, a dramatic need of women's labor, so that the war became a breakthrough in gender relations. But we did profit from the mentality, although we did not have to "repair" the gender order as was done in the USA, England, Germany, etc. See ongoing research by Johanna Overdrud, History Department of Stockholm University, on the Second World War in Sweden and the gender order.

²⁶ For this story see ongoing research by Kjell Östberg at Södertörns Högskola.

such an explanation is:

Employment of Women (in Thousands)

	1950	1970	1980	1990
Agriculture/Forestry	53	55	54	38
Industry	212	242	237	302
Education/Health/care	282	553	847	1003
Other Services	268	350	462	819
Total (in millions):	0.8	1.2	1.6	2.1

Indeed, women were "used" as a means to radicalize society, to make the level between the classes more even. It was a solution to the gender conflict that created a sort of semi-emancipation for the women of the working classes, as their reality, behind these figures, consisted of part-time work to a large extent, and to segregated work in their own "labor market." As Olof Palme also said, at the 1972 congress:

"If we are going to raise employment for the women, it is altogether certain that a large number of them will get work within the public sector."²⁷

Still, women have become "little comrades" and there is no doubt of the success of the emancipating gender discourse. It is even written into the new Social Democratic Program. One should not underestimate the force of ideas, thus bringing people, actors, onto the stage.

If one looks for actors in this period, one will find an impressive group of people, ready to live for and propagate new gender ideas. Actually, with "the women's question" as an example, we witness how space for action, but action of this radical kind only, was structured in the 1960s and 70s. We also witness how advocates of Per Albin Hansson's old-fashioned solution, portraying women as decorators of the People's Home (whatever that actually meant), was no longer part of the *Zeitgeist*. Leading women of the Social Democratic Women's League who spoke for a mother- and housewife contract, were now rather impolitely pushed aside. Instead, young women, not members of the Women's League but of the Party, like "real" members, became the voice of the new gender discourse: a discourse of sameness, a discourse of equality, a discourse of equal opportunities.

New ideas of gender replaced old-fashioned ideas about the couple. We witness the birth of the androgynous individual (and I speak about the explicit ideal) and the death of the provider and his housewife. We thus witness old ideas popping up, ideas that had been buried for decades – but ideas that very quickly found their advocates and became developed: people, men and women, eager to speak the new tongue of gender.

In 1944 Alva Myrdal wrote a chapter in her book, *Nation and Family*, titled "Women - A Social Problem," obviously well aware of the importance of articulating the problem in order to put it on the political agenda. In the 1940s, however, nobody but radical women cared to listen. In the 1960s and 70s, then, the trick succeeded in making the "women's question" part of a "larger," "common" political issue, a question for "everyone." At that point, the logic of the "Swedish Dilemma" worked as a "can-opener" for women's emancipation: and the argument of equality became imperative. With this instructive example the (self-evident) interaction between

²⁷ *SAP congress minutes* 1972 p. 233 and onward.

"actors" and "structure," between ideas and the surrounding milieu is clearly shown. It also shows that there is no simple "gender model" to imitate. The lesson learned is that "it depends."