

Gender Equity in the Workplace: A Comparison of Canada and Sweden

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This paper argues that New Zealand needs a coherent approach to gender equity and that the experiences of other countries provide some evidence of which policies work and in what circumstances. For this purpose, the Canadian and Swedish approaches to gender equity are compared. Swedish policy is found to be more effective than Canadian policy, but only in narrowing the gender pay gap. Furthermore, it is argued that the ideological incompatibilities of Swedish social democracy and Canadian liberalism would make it difficult for Canadians to emulate even this one dimension of Swedish success. The remainder of the paper examines the common failings of both Canadian and Swedish approaches to gender equity, and, on this basis, makes suggestions for future Canadian reforms which might also prove valuable to New Zealanders in establishing their own approach to gender equity.

As a social policy issue, gender equity has come into and gone out of fashion in New Zealand, all in a decade. For this reason, no definitively New Zealand approach to gender equity has been established, even though there are and have been public policies which affect this issue. In pay determination, for instance, New Zealand women historically benefitted from a centralised collective bargaining system in which wage differentials between higher-paying, male-dominated and lower-paying, female-dominated jobs were compressed. However, the Employment Contracts Act has decentralised and decollectivised the labour market since 1991, so that pay differences, including those between men and women, have widened (Hammond and Harbridge, 1995; Whatman, Armitage, and Dunbar, 1994).

In personnel administration, the public service has attempted to introduce employment equity (equal employment opportunities) under the auspices of the State Sector Act 1988, but the continuing pressures of restructuring and down-sizing in that sector have diverted the attentions and absorbed the energies of unions, managers, and employees so that little progress in gender equity has been achieved (Walsh and Dickson, 1994). Similar reforms to personnel administration in the private-sector were intended with the Labour Government's Employment Equity Act 1990, but that piece of legislation was subsequently repealed by a newly-elected National Government, in the belief that preserving managerial freedom and flexibility were essential to further improvements in private-sector efficiency (Walsh and Dickson, 1994).

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What general approach to gender equity should New Zealand try to adopt in the future? The experiences of other countries could provide some clues concerning the advantages and disadvantages of particular approaches and the preconditions necessary for their success. This paper compares Canadian and Swedish approaches to gender equity. It shows that Swedish policies have proven more successful than Canadian ones, but only with respect to pay. Moreover, even in this aspect of gender inequity, it cautions that ideological incompatibilities between these two countries prevent any easy importation of Swedish pay policies to Canada. The common failings of the two countries' approaches to gender equity are also explored, and from that analysis, new implications for Canadian equity policy are developed.

Introduction

The issue of gender equity in the workplace has received considerable attention from the Canadian public in recent years. Unions and women's groups have lobbied strenuously for laws that provide female workers with the same employment conditions and opportunities as male workers. Legislators have responded by enacting statutes for pay equity, employment equity, and human rights. Yet, women's earnings remain at little more than 65 percent of men's earnings for full-time, year-round work (Weiner and Gunderson, 1990: 131).

Sweden provides a stark contrast to Canada in matters of gender pay equality. In that country, the female-male pay ratio increased dramatically during the 1960s and 1970s, reaching 90 percent in manufacturing (Ginsburg, 1983: 164) and surpassing 80 percent in the economy as a whole (Acker, 1991: 248). Scholars have noted this success and urged other nations like Canada to follow Sweden's example in narrowing the gender pay gap (see, for example, Rubery, 1992). However, the first part of this paper will argue that Sweden's successes are grounded in a social democratic ideology that inhibits their easy transference to a liberal Canadian *milieu*. Special attention is focused on the different roles ideology defines for employer, union, and state to demonstrate the practical incompatibilities of Swedish social democracy and Canadian liberalism that would impede any efforts to copy Sweden's policies in Canada.

An overemphasis on pay provides a second reason for Canada to reject Sweden as a potential model, since gender equity requires more than a fairer share of rewards for women. A more even distribution of organisational power is also necessary, so that women are not as confined by the horizontal and vertical divisions of labour. However, Sweden's progress in desegregating jobs and elevating women to positions of authority has remained as limited as Canada's (Jacobs and Lim, 1992: 465-6, 470-1; Rosenfeld and Kalleberg, 1990: 85-7). In Sweden and Canada, female workers continue to predominate, as clerks, teachers, secretaries, nurses, domestic servants, and shop assistants, in a restricted breadth of mostly lower-level occupations (Hadenius and Lindgren, 1992; Rosenfeld and Kalleberg, 1990: 85-7). On the other hand, male workers in both countries are found in a greater variety of fields, but with heavy concentrations in responsible, challenging, and rewarding positions in management, the professions, and skilled trades (Hadenius and Lindgren, 1992; Rosenfeld and Kalleberg, 1990: 85-7). Furthermore, broad measures of segregation suggest

that, if anything, Swedish women are moving into male-dominated fields even more slowly than their Canadian counterparts (Jacobs and Lim, 1992: 465-6, 470-1). Forty percent of Canadian managers, for example, are now women as against 20 percent in Sweden (Grubel and Walker, 1989: 97-9; Rosenfeld and Kalleberg, 1990: 85-7). The second part of this paper explains this continued subordination and marginalisation of women in both Sweden and Canada in terms of similarities between the two nations. It is argued that both countries have attempted to: socially engineer gender equity changes from above without first establishing a broad base of popular support; integrate and thereby subjugate gender equity policy to the demands of the dominant ideology; and avoid any reconsideration of the gender roles that underlie the present vertical and horizontal divisions of labour. Finally, the third part of this paper discusses the implications of the preceding two parts by rejecting the applicability and suitability of the Swedish approach to gender equity for Canada and by outlining an alternative solution, involving the participation of women at a highly decentralised level of decision-making in human resource management matters.

The role of the employer and union

Sweden

The collectivist orientation of Swedish society places large federations of employers and unions, representing more than 80 percent of the female workforce (Rosenfeld and Kalleberg, 1990: 87), in the vanguard of efforts to bring about workplace gender equality, chiefly through measures to increase women's relative wages. These efforts have, nevertheless, not reflected a major concern for gender, except in the case of the largely peripheral Equal Treatment of Working Life Act 1979 (Weiner and Gunderson, 1990). In fact, union attention to the low wages predominating in women's jobs has always been "part of the more general socialist effort to achieve equality of distribution", rather than "as a separate issue having to do with gender" (Acker, 1991: 249). This focus reflects the reality that "trade unions are dominated by men with whom still lingers the old ideology that women's issues are *bourgeois* and potentially destructive of working-class solidarity" (Acker, 1991: 249). For their part, employers have paradoxically committed themselves to the same levelling of incomes, but in anticipation of higher productivity and efficiency.

The device used to ensure greater equality in pay was the wages solidarity policy, which has since been discarded only to be continued in modified form. The method employed to achieve it was the centralised negotiation of master collective agreements, primarily by the blue-collar Swedish Trade Union Confederation and the private-sector Swedish Employers' Confederation during the years 1956 to 1983 (Ahlen, 1989). The wages solidarity policy provided both *equal pay for equal work* for the same jobs across all industries and *fair and reasonable differentials* for different jobs within each industry hierarchy (Rehn, 1984, 1985). Its application led to the elimination of separate female wage scales by 1965 and to the narrowing of hierarchical pay differences particularly after 1968, thereby satisfying union demands for greater equality in earnings (Fulcher, 1991; Weiner and Gunderson, 1990). *Equal pay for equal work* also induced a narrowing of inter-industry pay differentials, raising labour costs and thus forcing rationalisation and bankruptcy in many smaller, inefficient firms and lowering costs and thus facilitating expansion and investment

in many larger, efficient firms that still dominate the Swedish Employers Confederation and the Swedish economy (Fulcher, 1991; Jangenas, 1985). However, the interests of the Swedish Employers Confederation were not served by the principle of *fair and reasonable differentials*, so the full implementation of this dimension to the wages solidarity policy was limited predominantly to the public-sector wherein the ideological commitment of the social democratic government, as employer, made it possible (Fulcher, 1991). Nonetheless, this episode of rapid advancement in the pay of women was achieved remarkably harmoniously and co-operatively, because it also served the traditional male interests of unions and employers (Fulcher, 1991).

The wages solidarity policy was abandoned after 1983 when higher-paid, predominantly male union members deserted the central negotiations to bargain for larger wage increases at the industry level (Ahlen, 1989; Fulcher, 1991). Employers supported these moves in their bid to raise wages as a means of attracting employees in an extreme labour shortage, particularly in the booming, male-dominated engineering industries (Ahlen, 1989; Fulcher, 1991). For this reason, the female-male wage gap widened after 1983, with average full-time female earnings descending from 81 to 78 percent of average full-time male earnings (Acker, 1991: 249). However, female-dominated unions have since attempted to resurrect limited sectoral versions of the wage solidarity policy in an attempt to reverse the erosion of women's as compared to men's pay, but these measures continue to reflect an overriding social democratic concern for overall income, rather than gender, equality. The female-dominated bank union has, for instance, secured larger than average wage increases for its lowest-paid members, 72 percent of whom are women (Acker, 1991: 251).

Canada

The liberal paradigm casts Canadian employers and unions in very different roles from those performed by their Swedish contemporaries, regarding the issue of gender inequality at work. It establishes the expectation that firms and unions will determine substantive matters such as pay and working conditions at a decentralised level, so as to better reflect the narrow and immediate, economic interests of individual employers and employees, in addition to the supply and demand conditions of local labour markets (Murray and Reshef, 1988). This business unionism philosophy has produced very uneven progress in addressing the substantive concerns of women workers, given priority and bargaining power differences among the workers and their unions. At one extreme, large, female-dominated unions have demonstrated both the inclination and strength necessary to win "collective agreement clauses relating to no-discrimination by sex, retention of seniority for women on maternity leave, adoption leave", and "personal leave and consultation" (Kumar and Acri, 1992: 648). At the other extreme, many unorganised, female workers remain relatively powerless in pressing a programme of gender-based change on their employers. As a result, Canadian women continue to earn 65 percent of what men earn (Weiner and Gunderson, 1990: 131), despite the gains achieved by some high-profile groups of female workers. However, the actual magnitude of this pay disparity is not generally considered problematic in a liberal country like Canada, since comparable wage differentials among male workers are relatively uncontroversial (Rubery, 1992; Whitehouse, 1992).

The important issue, and the subject of debate, is the fairness of procedures for administering recruitment, selection, pay, and advancement, because discrimination in these practices has the effect of undermining the liberal notion of equality of opportunity (Whitehouse, 1992). On one side of the debate, many employers express the view that discrimination is rare and associated primarily with personal prejudices rather than patriarchal rules and customs that exclude and devalue women in unrecognised and unacknowledged ways (Burt, 1986). They believe that the profit motive already provides sufficient incentive for maintaining meritocratic structures, and so procedural reforms such as employment equity are widely regarded as unnecessary and as unfair for furthering "the collective rights of disadvantaged groups at the expense of what often seem to be the individual rights of advantaged groups" (Burt, 1986: 543). Most unions and their feminist allies disagree, arguing that legislated pay and employment equity programmes are necessary to combat institutionalised sexism. The Canadian Auto Workers has, for example, suggested that employment equity legislation is needed "to facilitate bargaining with employers to remove systemic barriers", while retaining the liberal view on substantive matters that "the best employment equity programmes . . . are designed, implemented, monitored and assessed jointly by unions and management" (Kumar and Acri, 1992: 634).

The role of the state

Sweden

In Sweden, the co-operative efforts of unions and employers in compressing wages to the primary benefit of women have been augmented by the state's commitment to full-employment as a means of enabling all adults to financially support themselves (McCrea, 1977). Pursuit of this goal has been critical, because accelerated structural change brought on by the wages solidarity policy has over the years displaced thousands of workers from many traditional industries (Rehn, 1984, 1985). For this reason, Swedish Trade Union Confederation economists Rehn and Meidner originally recommended that the social democratic government, as the political wing of the labour movement, implement an active labour market policy to combat unemployment (Rehn, 1984, 1985).

The active labour market policy consists of three sets of interrelated programmes, which are used to improve the demand for labour, supply of labour, and matching of supply and demand for labour (Swedish Institute, 1993). The public costs of these programmes are usually in the range of two to three percent of gross national product per year (Swedish Institute, 1993). The demand-oriented programmes consist of wage subsidies, recruitment subsidies, and public relief work, which are used to provide more than 60,000 additional jobs per year in occupations, industries, and regions where there are labour surpluses (Swedish Institute, 1993). The supply-oriented programmes incorporate vocational training and mobility assistance, which are used to increase the availability of qualified workers by more than 100,000 people each year in occupations, industries, and regions where there are labour shortages (Swedish Institute, 1993). The matching programmes encompass guidance counselling, job placement, aptitude testing, occupational rehabilitation, and job clubs, which are used to match more than 1,000,000 workers per year with jobs that fit individual

needs and abilities (Swedish Institute, 1993). These programmes are available to all job-seekers, although, in ensuring a universal right to work, they cater predominantly to employment-disadvantaged groups of female, young, or disabled workers (Gonas and Westin, 1993; Swedish Institute, 1993). This targeting reflects the social democratic concern for equality of income, implying special treatment for underprivileged groups, rather than equality of opportunity as in the liberal approach (McCrea, 1977). This Swedish focus on equality is also supported by the feminist Advisory Council on Equality, which has stated that "the worst-off women, the poorest paid, the least educated, and the least influential should be aided first" (McCrea, 1977: 393). As a result, women benefit greatly from the active labour market programmes, not because they are women, but because they are disproportionately concentrated in the low-wage and high-unemployment groups (Gonas and Westin, 1993; McCrea, 1977). For instance, special programmes exist to reintegrate "the middle-aged woman with little education and work experience" back into the workforce (McCrea, 1977: 404). There are also special programmes for training women who enter male-dominated occupations and for subsidising employers who hire them, but these only exist in shortage occupations and for women who are unemployed (Ginsburg, 1983; McCrea, 1977).

The Swedish government supplements its active labour market policy with other programmes designed to facilitate female participation in the economy. For example, it provides both extensive parental leave, which is available to all mothers and fathers with new babies or sick children, and heavily subsidised childcare (Lewis and Alstrom, 1992; Sainsbury, 1993). These programmes again reflect the social democratic desire to use employment as an effective means of self-support for everyone rather than women in particular.

Canada

The Canadian state maintains a relatively passive role, when compared to the Swedish state, in promoting the work status of women. Minimal intervention is predicated on the liberal belief that "the system basically works and is free from discrimination and bias", except in atypical individual circumstances (Warskett, 1991: 180). The nominal roles of rule-maker and enforcer which the Canadian state does embrace are based on the liberal notion that the sovereign state is free of external influence and hence suited to the function of impartial arbiter (Lewis, 1991). The goal pursued remains equality of opportunity for both men and women in the competition for the better jobs and pay, as specified by the 1970 Royal Commission on the Status of Women (Warskett, 1991). Liberal feminists have also accepted this goal, with the idea that "gender bias and discrimination have prevented women from being valued on the basis of merit and achievement, so denying them their proper place in the hierarchy" (Warskett, 1991: 189).

The state's attempts to enforce meritocracy in the workplace began in the 1950s, with statutes requiring employers to provide equal pay for equal work (McDermott, 1991). However, equal pay for equal work failed to have the desired impact on women's relative wages, since men and women are occupationally segregated. Middle-class liberal feminists in management and the professions responded by pressuring the state into legislating various human rights acts (Warskett, 1991). These laws have created complaints-based

procedures for individual women seeking redress from discriminating employers, but their positive effects on the pay and working conditions of women have been limited to a relatively small group of individuals who have been able and willing to make official complaints (Symes, 1990). In this instance, liberals failed to recognise the hostility of the social context, particularly in terms of potential retaliation from employers, in discouraging many female employees from accusing their employers of discrimination (Warskett, 1991). Moreover, the human rights focus on the individual causes of discrimination has proven inadequate for identifying and rectifying those systematic elements of gender inequity that are buried in institutional practices, and are thus not normally apparent in most people's everyday behaviour (Subbarao, 1992).

These inadequacies were highlighted by the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment and led to two new federal initiatives: the Employment Equity Act 1986 and the Federal Contract Compliance Program (Leck and Saunders, 1992; Subbarao, 1992). These programmes have assumed a more proactive role in requiring larger employers within the federal jurisdiction or supplying the federal government to develop employment equity plans, outlining procedures and goals for the hiring and promoting of women among other disadvantaged groups (Leck and Saunders, 1992). In addition, the employment equity legislation has required larger federally regulated employers to submit annual reports, substantiating their progress toward their employment equity goals (Benimadhu and Wright, 1991; Leck and Saunders, 1992). However, this approach has produced only modest gains in the hiring and promoting of women to non-traditional jobs (Benimadhu and Wright, 1991; Fillmore, 1990; Leck and Saunders, 1992; Worklife Report, 1994a), because the programmes provide companies with the discretion to set their own employment equity goals and typically limit the imposition of punitive fines to those companies that have not filed annual reports (Jain, 1989; Subbarao, 1992). The Ontario Employment Equity Act 1994, in following the federal emphasis on goals and plans (Worklife Report 1994b), has also likely had a relatively minor effect on the recruiting, hiring, retaining, and promoting of women. This characteristically liberal focus on procedural change has thus once again failed to produce the large, substantive improvements in the pay and working conditions of women that are needed to achieve gender equity.

A similar scenario has developed with proactive pay equity, which has been implemented in Manitoba (1985), Ontario (1987), Nova Scotia (1988), Prince Edward Island (1988), and New Brunswick (1989) (Worklife Report, 1991). In all cases except Ontario, pay equity has been confined to the public sector, where it is expected to provide a meritocratic model to be voluntarily copied later by efficiency-conscious, private-sector firms (McDermott, 1991). The premise of these pay equity systems is that women's jobs are systematically undervalued relative to men's jobs, and that a meritocracy should be created in which men and women in jobs of comparable worth receive the same pay. Worth is assessed through job evaluation schemes which measure and compare the skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions of predominantly female and predominantly male job families (Worklife Report, 1991). If these results suggest that male and female jobs in the same firm are of comparable worth, pay equity laws compel employers to provide men and women in these jobs with comparable pay (Worklife Report, 1991). Pay equity thus represents a more intrusive form of regulation for employers, but its emphasis on procedural reform rather than substantive outcomes remains the same as in previous liberal approaches. This is particularly problematic for women, because employers retain the freedom to conduct job

evaluations, as they have done for over forty years, with their own gendered weightings for skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions (Acker, 1989; McDermott, 1991; Steinberg, 1992). In Michigan, for instance, the Civil Service Commission has unilaterally adopted a job evaluation plan which maintains market criteria in establishing job worth for public sector workers, with the result that gender pay differentials remain largely unchanged (Figart, 1995). Management's broad decision-making latitude also affords powerful groups such as professionals with the opportunity to influence the job evaluation process so that, as American experience already attests, they receive many of the wage increases that were otherwise originally intended for women (Evans and Nelson, 1989; Orazem and Mattila, 1990; Rhoads, 1993).

Pay equity also has fundamental design flaws. For example, restrictions on coverage to larger employers with more than ten employees in Ontario and to public employers in the other jurisdictions prevents many of the most poorly paid women in consumer services from obtaining any right to any wage adjustment at all (McDermott, 1991; Smith, 1988). Furthermore, the cost economies (see, for example, Weiner and Gunderson, 1990: 149), large number of job titles, and internal male pay comparisons necessary for undertaking a pay equity job evaluation could inhibit its extension to smaller enterprises in the foreseeable future (Smith, 1988). For these reasons, the impact of pay equity on the gender earnings gap is likely to remain small, particularly if employers respond to pay equity-mandated wage increases by laying off their female employees (Rhoads, 1993). In its best case scenario, experience in Canada and the United States suggests that pay equity can provide women, who have relatively accommodating employers in the public-sector, with raises of up to 10 or 15 percent (Gunderson and Riddell, 1992: 88; Sorensen, 1990: 39; Weiner and Gunderson, 1990: 146), but at the cost of some reduced employment growth (Killingsworth, 1990: 51).

Canadian and Swedish similarities

Social engineering

The failure to substantially improve the work status of women in both Canada and Sweden reflects an unwarranted faith in the government's capacity to implement policies which unilaterally transform traditional values and social structures (Martin and Thorsin-Hamm, 1991). Neither the Swedish nor the Canadian approach recognises that "women's oppression is endemic and cannot be rectified through technical tinkering" (Warskett, 1991: 173). As a result, both approaches have been imposed from the top-down without first building mass support across genders, classes, and regions (Martin and Thorsin-Hamm, 1991; Warskett, 1991).

In Canada, the feminist-dominated National Action Committee on the Status of Women has achieved a reorientation in official policy on gender issues through the passage of employment and pay equity laws (Warskett, 1991). However, the efficacy of this legislation is seriously undermined by the failure of these liberal feminists to both defuse business opposition and to organise and then mobilise widespread support among workers and unions (Warskett, 1991). Similarly, in Sweden, social democratic governments and

unions succeeded in narrowing the gender pay gap, prior to 1983, through the centrally negotiated wages solidarity policy (Fulcher, 1991). Nonetheless, the policy eventually collapsed with the exit from the centralised negotiations of disgruntled unions in the male-dominated, metal-working sectors (Fulcher, 1991). The implication in these cases is that, for future success, gender reform efforts should be predicated on a greater depth of popular commitment, extending from all levels and positions in society.

Integration

Consciousness-raising has been mitigated in both Sweden and Canada by efforts to accommodate women through programmes of integration (Martin and Thorsin-Hamm, 1991). These programmes have defused the potential for conflict, while simultaneously preserving the key market institutions which are, in part, responsible for perpetuating women's inferior work status. Concessions are thereby used to renew the commitment of disenfranchised groups to the important social and economic structures which underlie Swedish and Canadian societies. However, the nature of these concessions reflects the reigning ideology in each of the two countries (Martin and Thorsin-Hamm, 1991).

The social democratic philosophy of Sweden emphasises distributive justice in the form of both low income inequality and unemployment (Acker, 1991; Ginsburg, 1983). The wages solidarity and active labour market policies have respectively reflected these priorities, while leaving the main foundations of the capitalist economy intact (Martin and Thorsin-Hamm, 1991). For instance, the wages solidarity policy did compress the pay structure, but did not transform an occupational hierarchy in which women have remained segregated in lower-level jobs with little power (Ginsburg, 1983; Rosenfeld and Kalleberg, 1990). Correspondingly, the active labour market policy has enabled disadvantaged women to obtain employment, but has not elevated them to higher leadership positions within Swedish organisations (Martin and Thorsin-Hamm, 1991).

The liberal philosophy of Canada emphasises procedural justice in the form of meritocratic systems for compensation, recruitment, selection, and promotion (Martin and Thorsin-Hamm, 1991; Warskett, 1991). However, the reforms derived from this philosophy have not altered the locus of power and influence in Canadian work organisations. Pay equity, employment equity, and human rights laws have established bureaucratic constraints on managerial action instead of genuine participation in organisational decision-making (Lewis, 1991). In fact, the technical complexity of procedural constraints has prevented any easy assessment of their impacts, thereby shielding gendered practices from scrutiny (Lewis, 1991). Furthermore, the resulting rationalisation of occupational stratification divides and isolates various gender groups who might otherwise work together in a common cause (Lewis, 1991; Steinberg, 1987).

Gender roles

It has been difficult in both Canada and Sweden to generate popular support for broad-based institutional changes, because the dominant ideologies have displaced gender roles as the focus of reform (Acker, 1991; Martin and Thorsin-Hamm, 1991). For instance, the

problems of Canadian women are debated within a liberal context which stresses equality of opportunity. For this reason, pay equity, employment equity, and human rights laws have established procedures for correcting discrimination against many groups, including natives, the disabled, and minorities, rather than women alone (Warskett, 1991). In Sweden, the problems of Swedish women are debated within a social democratic context which emphasises income equality and full-employment (Acker, 1991; Martin and Thorsin-Hamm, 1991). Wages solidarity and the active labour market policy have therefore been geared toward assisting the least advantaged members of the workforce rather than women in particular (McCrea, 1977). Neither the Swedish nor the Canadian approach has challenged the fundamental assumptions underlying gender roles, especially those associated with men. Neither country has attempted to redefine masculinity and femininity (Chhabra, 1981). Swedish women have been provided with new economic rights which have added to their load, "without as yet removing any substantial part of the traditional chores" (Chhabra, 1981: 39; see, for example, Lundberg, Mardberg, and Frankenhaeser, 1994). Canadian women have been provided with pay equity, which legitimates a "separate but comparable", horizontal gender division of labour, and with employment equity and human rights, which legitimate a "meritocratic", vertical gender division of labour.

New reforms predicated on a reworking of gender roles rather than on a legitimation of present ideologies would prompt a wider debate on gender issues. There would be more questioning of current cultural conceptions of maleness and femaleness in both Sweden and Canada. The transformation of present values and attitudes demands this sort of societal self-effacement.

Implications

Several implications flow from the previous analysis of Swedish and Canadian approaches to gender equity which could prove relevant to policy formation and execution in New Zealand. The foremost of these is that there are fundamental ideological incongruities between Swedish social democracy and Canadian liberalism, as reflected in the differing roles of employees, employers, unions, and governments, which would hamper any effort to replicate Sweden's past policies of gender pay compression in Canada. Furthermore, an examination of the similarities between Swedish and Canadian approaches reveals their shared shortcomings, thereby calling into question the desirability of attempting to emulate Sweden's example. This suggests that additional gender equity reforms in Canada should focus on overcoming the deficiencies of current programmes, as previously described, rather than copying the narrow, uni-dimensional successes of other, ideologically different nations.

The failings of past Swedish and Canadian approaches to gender equity can provide three key lessons for policy-makers and lobbyists to follow in the future. The first is that a socially engineered change is bound to encounter significant resistance from many of the vested interests on whom it is imposed, thereby threatening the political viability of the change. The second lesson is that an attempt to completely integrate a programme within an existing institutional structure risks either stultifying its potential applications, as with employment equity in Canada, or endangering its existence through a close connection with a threatened institution, as with wages solidarity in Sweden. The third lesson is that a focus on prevailing ideological constructs, such as income equality or equality of opportunity,

diverts attention away from the gender roles that are the basis of women's unequal treatment in the workplace. For these reasons, a new approach is needed that is based on broad political support, fundamental institutional changes, and the transformation of gender roles.

Participation in the design and implementation stages provides one way of generating additional backing for new gender equity programmes. Participatory structures offer many potential advantages. For one, they would provide the means to publicly address or accommodate the complaints and concerns of potential gender equity detractors. They would also provide opportunities for building coalitions across diverse groups of supporters. Perhaps most importantly, they would help activate the involvement of previously apathetic or marginalised sympathisers of the gender equity cause. In this regard, American experience already shows that involving trade unionists and feminist bureaucrats in drafting pay equity legislation leads to larger pay increases for women (Acker, 1989; Evans and Nelson, 1989; Figart, 1995). New, legislated institutions for joint decision-making would help establish and maintain any participatory structures at both the enterprise and governmental levels. Moreover, exclusive legal jurisdiction for all human resource matters would help ensure that these new participatory mechanisms were not integrated and thereby subordinated to existing institutions, chief of which is the management hierarchy. Involving women in these decision-making processes would provide them with the power and control they need to secure major improvements in every aspect of their work status. The participation of women in major positions of authority would also provide a first step in the direction of new gender roles, since women have been typically channelled into more subordinate positions in the past.

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