



BOOK REVIEWS

UNFINISHED DEMOCRACY: WOMEN IN NORDIC POLITICS

Edited by Elina Haavio-Mannila et al.
Translated by Christine Badcock.
Oxford: Pergamon Press Ltd., 1985.

Noreen Stuckless

This excellent book left me with ambivalent feelings. The women in the Nordic countries have progressed beyond their North American sisters in numerous aspects, but continue to suffer from much of the same discrimination and oppression. The early Canadian feminists believed gaining the rights to vote and to hold elected office would have far-reaching social benefits for women. Many of their expectations went unfulfilled. Women in the Nordic countries feel disappointment as well. Nonetheless, they have achieved much that we can envy and attempt to emulate. This valuable book is a collaboration by twenty Nordic women scholars studying political problems and issues involving women. It grew out of the "Women in Politics" working group in Berlin, in 1977.

The eight well-researched chapters address such issues as women in organizations, elections, parliament and the corporate systems, as they vary from country to country. In addition they contemplate the questions of equality and the position of women in today's Nordic societies. They reach a sobering conclusion:

Universal suffrage has not provided women with political power on an equal footing with men...the alienation of women from politics and women's lack of power within the political system

have remained fundamental weaknesses of the Nordic democracies...women have had the same rights as men for many decades, but this has not led to the radical changes in predominant ideologies and social structures...necessary...to give substance and cogency to the right of women to participate.

This raises a question. Is the situation for Nordic women as discouraging as this would imply? The authors certainly show there is a great deal left to be accomplished and many injustices to be addressed. Their research and presentations also recount how far they have come — especially from the viewpoint of North Americans. Nevertheless, they are concerned that the position of women in society is not as it should be.

The women of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden live in societies with relatively high living standards, low birth rates, and long life expectancies. Yet they are affected by gender differences that are most marked in Iceland and Norway, and least in Finland. The women are considerably better educated than previously, but other than in Finland, far more men than women earn university degrees. More women than ever are in the workforce, and the percentage of women that work is among the highest in the Western world. However, familiar problems arise. Women usually still bear the double-burden of home and paid work. They are ghettoized by the gender-divided labour market into mainly clerical and service occupations — like their Western sisters. The public sector offers equal pay for equal work and secure employment, but still demonstrates occupational discrimination.

All the Nordic countries accept the principle of equal pay for equal work, yet

there is a considerable difference in the total income of women and men. Women consequently have smaller social benefits, and unpaid housewives have no way of escaping economic dependence. There is growing support for families including financial aid, public support and paid parental leave which can be shared with fathers. Nonetheless, the authors state that the support is "not over-generous," and that few men take more than the opportunity to "get closer" to the child. Women still face the possibility of losing their independence, status and income when they have children.

The authors contend that women's lack of political power is directly linked to these issues. They take a very thorough look at the role of women in politics, and come to some thought-provoking conclusions and suggestions for improvement.

Politics is still a man's world, but not to the extent it was a century ago. The number of men and women that vote is very similar. Women's representation in parliaments and local councils has risen in spite of the barriers thrown up by the "political and ideological structure of society." Although it lags far behind the men's, their representation is the highest, percentage-wise, in the Western world. This is attributed to more involvement outside the home, the gradual erosion of the ideology that politics are for men, and the action of women's organizations to get women into politics. They face many other hurdles, however. Women have difficulty gaining senior party positions even though they constitute a sizable proportion of party members. They also face election difficulties when the male-led parties or councils determine the listing on the ballot. The only way they hope to achieve 50% women's representation, within their lifetimes, is to have a new look at possible quota systems and new

voting systems.

Once elected, women must contend with what the authors call the "vertical and horizontal division of labour in politics." The "vertical" refers to the adage that the higher one moves in the government, the fewer women there are to be found. There have been exceptions in the last decade and a half, and a tradition has been set that the governments must have a certain number of women ministers. The "horizontal" encompasses the grouping of women members in the reproductive sector, and the men in the productive sector. The women then control the large social and education budgets, but are mostly excluded from other sectors of politics.

The authors propose that while in-

creasing women's representation can be an end in itself to eliminate discrimination, there is little consensus as to what other difference it should make. There are those who believe women members should concentrate on "women matters." Others believe they should show no difference in their political conduct from men. Women have brought forth issues that would never otherwise have been raised, but it is equally true that they haven't had the impact that was hoped for by the suffragettes. The authors serve Nordic women well by not only showing them what the situation is, but what it could be.

This book is extremely interesting to non-Nordic women as well. The writers make exceptional use of data, not only

from the Nordic countries, but from countries around the world — including Canada. I found myself both intrigued and envious when reading about the great range of women's organizations, women's political parties, and paid parental leave, that are certainly not part of the Canadian scene. One curious omission, again from a Canadian viewpoint, is the absence of reference to "race" when dealing with the problems that women face. Are the Nordic countries completely homogeneous, or is this an issue that wasn't addressed?

The eminent Elina Haavio-Mannila wrote that the authors hoped to communicate "something of importance" to women working in politics at all levels. They have succeeded.

THE FINNISH BAKER'S DAUGHTERS

Aili Grönlund Schneider. Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986.

WOMEN WHO DARED: THE HISTORY OF FINNISH AMERICAN WOMEN

Edited by Carl Ross and K. Marianne Wargelin Brown. St. Paul, Minnesota: Immigration History Research Centre, 1986.

Marie Tamburro

Aili Grönlund Schneider provides, in *The Finnish Baker's Daughters*, an autobiographical account of her family's settling in Timmins, Ontario, in 1920. She recalls the sadness and apprehension her mother and sisters experienced at the decision made for them by their father, that they were to leave all that was familiar and beloved in Finland to join him in Canada. Their struggle for survival and success is woven into an interesting story.

The presence of a strong Finnish community offered support; the Finnish newspaper, community gatherings and social events helped to keep their Finnish language and culture alive.

This book presents a valuable but rather one-sided picture of Finnish immigrant women. Grönlund mentions women as boardinghouse keepers, as proud house-

keepers, and as was her mother's experience, as helpmates in small, family businesses. With one exception, no reference is made to the Finnish women who earned their living as bootleggers and as prostitutes in the northern towns. Nor has she alluded to the political affiliation of women in the Finnish community. As had been their practise in Finland, many Finns were socialists with a deep commitment to party politics. This political involvement was increased once they settled in Canada.

The Finnish Baker's Daughters is an important book about immigrant experience. In telling her story, Aili Grönlund Schneider supplies the reader with a glimpse of the small, northern, mining town of Timmins and of the support offered by the cohesive Finnish community. Moreover, she provides material for the study of women's history. Most importantly she discusses women's role in the immigration process and clearly portrays the early settling years and the period of assimilation and acculturation.

Another view of Finnish immigrant women is revealed in *Women who Dared: The History of Finnish American Women*, a collection of articles edited by Carl Ross and K. Marianne Wargelin Brown. The book stresses the strength and independence of the single Finnish women who migrated to the United States between 1865 and 1922. The theme in the two books is the role of Finnish women in the work force and the manner in which they asserted themselves and developed a distinctive pattern of women's culture and activity in America. Many single Finnish

women found work as domestic workers. Marsha Penti's article on stories told by Finnish maids provides reasons why so many Finnish women preferred this type of work. Their testimonies reveal the pride they felt in their work and the humour they brought to it.

Carl Ross's article focuses on the role of Finnish women as domestics and depicts daring, independent women who took pride in their work and who exercised control over their lives. He includes their involvement in the Finnish community and in the suffrage movement. Ross stresses the changing attitude of Finnish women as they moved into mainstream America.

K. Marianne Wargelin Brown portrays the independent spirit of Finnish immigrant women and their valiant efforts to survive by working hard, saving their wages and daring, as single women, to find a place for themselves in American society. Their efforts were not limited to work alone. They became involved in cultural and social clubs, church organizations and women's institutions, clamouring for a voice in the American feminist movement.

The contributors to this book have stressed the spirit and determination of Finnish women and the radical elements of their involvement in the women's rights movement. The articles in *Women Who Dared* demonstrate that the history of Finnish American women has only begun to unfold. These women have provided only part of a greater women's history as they worked to survive and to maintain their culture and heritage.