
The perfect politician

From a liberal to a feminist perspective on democracy

BY CARINA LUNDMARK

1. Introduction

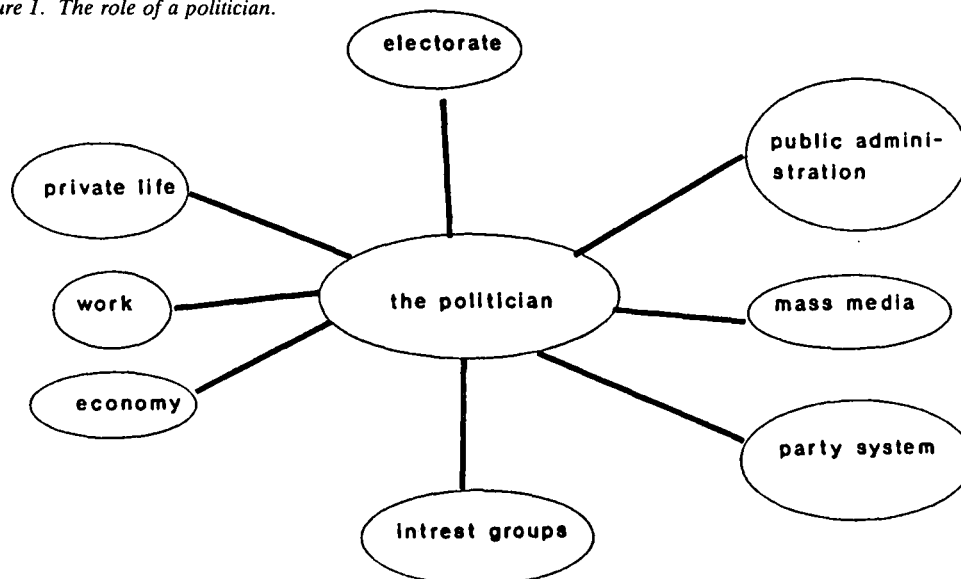
The starting-point for this paper is an assumption that conditions for our elected representatives are changing, in Sweden as well as elsewhere in Europe. There is a continuing debate which is focusing on problems dealing with the role of politicians. Several problems have been mentioned, including people's lack of faith in politicians and that many leave their political positions because of difficulties in combining these responsibilities with regular work and private life.

When studying politicians, it seemed appropriate to start out from liberal democratic theory because of its great influence on the way in which western political systems function. My assumption was that this theory would indicate the tradi-

tional norm for politicians in society but perhaps not reflect changing working conditions, the increasingly diffuse borderline between public and private spheres of life, etc. I suggest that feminist theory could produce an alternative norm in this context.

The main purpose of this paper was to try to extract an *ideal type* of politician from each theory.¹ As a first step it was necessary to decide what characteristics to look for. The framework for the ideal types came from my way of looking at the politician as a decision-maker in relation to different arenas in society.

The initial concept can be explained by the following diagram:



My studies as an undergraduate student were very much influenced by liberal democratic theory, while feminism as a theory was quite unknown to me. Liberal democratic theory came to influence the framework for the ideal types, while lacking any direct incorporation of feminist ideology. Accordingly, the central aspects of the politician's role seemed to be the *electorate*, the *party system*, and the *public administration*. Other factors included in liberal democratic theory, such as trade unions and the mass media, did not appear to be as important as the three central factors listed above.

This framework, however, was inadequate when I tried to extract an ideal type from feminist theory. Democratic theory discussed mankind in general, that is *men* in particular. Women tended to be invisible, no matter which author I studied. Early feminist theory focused mainly on the condition of *women* while later writings also discuss the relationship between women and men, as well as differences within groups of women.² My extraction of a feminist ideal type was also obscured because it focused on different arenas. The electorate was mentioned as well as the party system, but the main attention was focused in an entirely "new" arena – *private life*.

As I soon discovered, feminist theory is not particularly uniform. Many variants exist, one from each major ideology and even different shades of interpretation from every feminist writer. To shed light upon questions concerning democracy, I concentrated on what I have labelled a "reformist" branch of feminist theory, which is striving for changes *within* the present political system. Reformist feminism has a rather optimistic view of the State and its efforts to reach a perceived goal of equal living conditions for both men and women. It is believed that an increase in the number of female politicians will lead to different and better contributions to politics.

Within the so called "State feminism" (e. g. Hernes, 1987), empirical references are made to the Scandinavian welfare state which is held to be an example of the possibility to reform political systems in feminist direction. Other variants of feminist theory, apart from the reformist direction and its Scandinavian counterpart, seemed rather remote from politicians' roles as, for example, the marxist school of feminist thought. According to this view, the State is just another patriarchal power structure, and this makes it extremely difficult for women to work towards a better society within the present political system.

The reformist-marxist dimension is not the only possible way of distinguishing different lines of feminism. On one extreme we find a purely theoretical approach which, for example, could be formed as a critique against society or the research community, and it is often idealistic in its character. On the other hand, there are relatively pure empirical studies of feminism. The latter are mainly concerned with women's actual situation in society, often with a formalistic touch, such as number of women in decision-making bodies. In my view it is time to combine a theoretical frame with empirical references to women's actual situation in society. In this paper an attempt is made to take a modest step in this direction.

2. Liberal democratic theory

Robert A. Dahl and Herbert Tingsten have been chosen as advocates of the liberal democratic tradition. Both Tingsten's and Dahl's theories are normative since they indicate written or unwritten constitutional rules according to which democratic systems *should* operate. These have been based on, and reflect, the theory's empirical point of reference or, in other words, the form of government that has provided a model for the theory. Since these two theories are inherently somewhat different, I will initially describe them in concise terms and then investigate what roles of politicians that can emerge as a consequence.

Tingsten primarily refers to the Scandinavian constitutions in his discussions on political democracy. According to Tingsten (1945) a democratic structure should meet the following prerequisites:

1. The Parliament should be representative. Citizens select a representative group which receives complete authority to govern the nation by means of regular elections in which no major social group should be denied the right to vote. An executive ought to decide on routine matters, prepare proposals, and direct the administration. Democracy is considered to be achieved if such a government's composition is based on representation (parliamentarianism) or is directly chosen by the people. Majority rule is the only acceptable framework for decision-making in these assemblies.

2. Political freedoms are to be respected. Tingsten is most interested in those concerning the formation of public opinion, for instance, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and the right to assembly. Political freedoms are consid-

ered to be means of creating public opinion, which is imperative for democracy.

3. Political parties are essential for a democracy. The parties are able to mobilize opinions within the electorate and transform these into policy. Elections give citizens an opportunity to change the parliament's majority structure and, thereby, the government's composition.

Tingsten provides three *requirements* for a democracy:

Consideration of minority groups.

A certain consensus; at least agreement on a democratic form of decision-making. According to Tingsten the Scandinavian countries are largely characterized by consensus among its citizens.

A balance with respect to citizens' participation in the political process. An excess of political activity can become detrimental to democracy and Tingsten therefore prefers a limitation on civilian participation. Tingsten also considers a realistic observation for this supposition:

How many people in a Swedish community, for example, participate in union meetings, party nominations, elections of local party leadership? Judging by all appearances, very few; democracy does not demand continual activity from the majority of the people (Tingsten, 1948:246; my translation).

Robert A. Dahl establishes two objectives that the political decision-making process should achieve in order to be considered democratic (Dahl, 1956). These objectives are (i) popular sovereignty and (ii) political equality, i. e. central concepts in liberal democratic tradition. Popular sovereignty is achieved if a given alternative preferred by citizens is incorporated into government policy. Political equality is achieved if the preferences of individual citizens are given equivalent weight in the decision-making process. Dahl considers the majority rule as the only principle consistent with democratic decision-making.

How to reach these two idealistic objectives? Dahl has developed eight adequate and necessary conditions for achieving as much democratization as possible – for example, that all citizens vote, that they have identical information of all policy alternatives, and that anyone should be able to insert his preferred alternative(s) among those scheduled for voting (Dahl, 1956:70). If the conditions are met it is considered to be evidence for maximization of the principle of majority rule,

which in turn can be considered as proof of attaining (i) popular sovereignty and (ii) political equality. These conditions are however unrealistic within present democracies. Dahl states that ... "no human organization, certainly none with more than a handful of people, has ever met or is ever likely to meet these eight conditions" (Dahl, 1956:71).

Nevertheless the conditions do meet the purpose for an ideal type definition of democracy: by comparing existing constitutions against the theoretical construction, it can be ascertained how well the two objectives have been fulfilled. A number of states can be accepted as being relatively close to the ideal type. These imperfect although actual systems with democratic rule are referred to as polyarchies (and correspond to Ross's actual type), while the term "democracy" is reserved for the ideal type.

Tingsten's democratic theory diverts from Dahl's on a series of points. One particular feature that should be mentioned is that the theories have different empirical references. Tingsten has predominantly considered Scandinavian democracies while Dahl primarily deals with the American constitution, having its long traditions of power-sharing between decision-making, executive and juridical authorities. Both theories are consequently culturally biased. Despite certain differences, the theories reveal the same ideal type of role for politicians as illustrated by the politician's relationship to the electorate, the party system, and the public administration.

Politicians' Relationships to the Electorate

Both theories have democratic ideals, a sort of "utopia" where the citizens are at the center of attention. According to Dahl's polyarchal theory all citizens should, for example, be able to propose new policy alternatives, and public opinion should guide the political decision-making. However, both Tingsten and Dahl consider a representative assembly as the only viable option on a larger scale. Direct democracy cannot be practically implemented in any nation on account of population size and the enormous time and communication costs involved.

Dahl asserts that ... "the government of a country cannot be highly participatory, and the average citizen cannot have much influence over it" (Dahl, 1982:12). The emphasis therefore shifts to the representation. Citizens elect representatives who are given a mandate to make political

decisions. The political decisions have become more comprehensive and complicated since the middle of the twentieth century and as a consequence, individual voters cannot become involved in all matters.

The average voter must assume that the party bureaucracies (i.e. the political parties; my annotation) are aware of what is of concern, and that the party bureaucracy, through which he voice opinions, will continue to look after his interests. He votes based on trust, not on insight, and for the party, not for the idea. Therefore, harmonious democracy can also be called entrusted democracy (Tingsten, 1966:31; my translation).

The concept "a representative" will be used to describe the liberal ideal role of politicians in relation to the voters. The politician is (and should be) a decision-maker who receives a mandate from the voters on election day. Each voter selects the candidate/party who is believed most able to represent his/her interests. These selected persons are subsequently allowed to rely on their own views and experience for making decisions. At the next election, citizens can hold the party and its leaders accountable. The role as a representative does not only include representation of the electorate but, according to Tingsten's theory, it is clear that the politician functions as a representative of his/her political party as well.

At times when public opinion arises it should guide the decision-making (Tingsten, 1945). It is, however, impossible for politicians to consistently make decisions that are in agreement with public opinion and, consequently, conform with the "will of the people". All political questions do not give rise to strong opinion among the electorate. In addition, representatives can have greater opportunities and motives for obtaining information and knowledge in comparison to a majority of the electorate.

The democratic ideal is, of course, to have a public with such political upbringing and of such political maturity, that the distance between leaders and the masses is small, and that the formers' viewpoints have consequently very limited importance. But we have not arrived at this point (Tingsten, 1945:237; my translation).

Neither Dahl nor Tingsten consider it to be especially troublesome that an elite in Parliament and Cabinet has the decision-making responsibility in a democracy. Our democracies are characterized

by a significant consensus on fundamental norms, and this guarantees that decisions become accepted.

... (I)n this sense the majority (at least of the politically active) nearly always 'rules' in a polyarchal system. For politicians subject to elections must operate within the limits set both by their own values, as indoctrinated members of the society, and by their expectations about what policies they can adopt and still be re-elected (Dahl, 1956:132).

Politicians' Relationships to the Party System

Both Tingsten and Dahl consider political parties to be necessary for the implementation of large-scale elections, and to ensure the existence of democratic regimes. According to Tingsten and Dahl, political parties are constituted by chosen and entrusted individuals who represent party views, or opinion packages, which citizens vote for in elections. Dahl, however, emphasizes the candidates' opinions rather than those of the political party. A probable explanation comes from the point of reference used by Dahl. In the US, the vote based on personality is significantly stronger than in Sweden.

The relationship to the party system can be separated into two parts: the politician's own party and all the others. The politician's own party can serve as a source of power and influence (Dahl, 1982). The state of relations to other parties are predominantly distinguished by conflict and rivalry. These competitions have primarily two purposes: firstly, by means of elections, to demand responsibility of politicians, and secondly, to vitalize democracy, which in the absence of political party competition has a potential to become too harmonious and develop into consensus politics. Politicians should participate in such a vitalization. The conflicts between political parties are most obvious during election campaigns, when politicians promote the ideas from their respective parties in order to obtain complete or partial power, i.e. come into a governing position.

In election contests the ruling party is blamed for everything that can induce discontent... Adversaries are described as incompetent, but their incompetence is depicted as being so remarkable that misguided intentions and deceitfulness are suspected to lie behind this incompetence; this impression is reinforced by constant reminders on what the ruling party has promised but

not fulfilled, along with suggestions that this same party does not intend to pursue current promises, that is, that their platforms cannot be taken seriously (Tingsten, 1966:32; my translation).

It is however an aspect of the politician's profession to compete for central power positions in society and thus, slander of the opponent and stress on their own party is only a natural consequence of competition (Dahl, 1956). The conflicts are nonetheless often superficial and during periods between elections a feature of compromise and co-operation is significantly greater. According to Tingsten, our democracies are characterized by an underlying consensus.

Politicians' Relationships to the Public Administration

Tingsten and Dahl maintain that the tasks of the State have become greater and more complicated. The number of decisions to be made are so comprehensive and complex that a small number of politicians are incapable of dealing with them on their own.

To what agents might representatives in a democratic country properly delegate some of their authority? *The most obvious possibilities are bureaucracies over which representatives would retain unilateral control* (Dahl, 1982:48; my underlining).

As a consequence, a growing public administration with extensive specialization is emerging (Tingsten, 1966). Experts are needed to prepare and administrate political decisions. In contrast to politicians, civil servants within public administration cannot become involved with ideological rivalry and party politics, but rather must guarantee enforcement of the legal rights of citizens.

The underlined segment of the above excerpt deals with a central theme in the relationship between politicians and public administration, specifically management and control. According to my own interpretation, representatives should unilaterally control the different parts of the administration and manipulate its functioning in desired directions by applying certain control measures. Examples of such control measures are not given, but detailed administration and control by follow-up and evaluation are considered to be options that are quite consistent with Tingsten's and Dahl's theories.

Control over the administration is, however, not free from problems, and it can hardly be expected to be one hundred per cent complete (Dahl, 1982). Dahl is certainly aware that administrative functions can be extraordinarily difficult to manage for the representatives and that complete control is not always the most desirable.

Representatives readily yield some of their control, knowing that should they attempt to impose a national policy on complex subsystems they would produce chaos . . . As complexity increases in a centrally controlled system, those in charge of steering need more and more information to avoid disaster, let alone arrive close to their chosen destination (Dahl, 1982:52).

It is important to observe that this deals with a situation of unilateral control. Accordingly, liberal democratic theory as presented here, is inconsistent with civil servants having influence over elected representatives.

Due to the status that liberal democratic traditions have, and have had, in Western democracies, it is an acceptable supposition that the ideal type described above has considerably influenced the standards for the practical role of politicians. A result of this standard role can perhaps be observed in today's elected assemblies? The typical municipal politician, according to Wallins study, is a . . . "publicly-employed middle-aged man with higher-level education and belonging to social group two" (Wallin et al., 1981:175).

Feminist theory has, among other things, become known for its criticism of liberal democratic theory and the above description as a conceivable result of its ideal type politician role. The next chapter concentrates on feminist theory and its implications for a new feminist politician role.

3. Feminist theory on democracy

According to Eduards (1988:209, my translation) "Feminism is a theory of power, of male power and control of women, on the occurrence of a patriarchy". Feminist theory has often been developed out of a criticism of other ideologies (for example liberalism, socialism and marxism) or attempts to adapt them to feminist demands (Hernes, 1982). An essence of feminism that is common to these various approaches can be distinguished. These central aspects of feminist theory are the starting-point for my interpretations of an alternative politician role. Emphasis is however placed on what I have called "reformist fem-

inism" since its advocates, to a large extent, draw attention to democratic issues and criticize liberal democratic theory, which was dealt with in the previous chapter.³ Since feminist theory is less known than liberal theory on democracy, I have provided relatively more space for it in this paper.

Even the actual type, i. e. feminist theory's view of reality, is going to influence the ideal type politician role in this chapter. The reason for this is that advocates of feminist theory present a very *clear differentiation* between *how things are* and *how things ideally should be*. In order to understand feminist theory and its politician role, it is accordingly necessary to illustrate the gap between liberal democratic theory and actual political systems, as well as between a feminist ideal for democracy and the same political systems.

The presumption of a social contract makes up an important aspect of liberal democratic theory. Even if such a contract is not directly noted by Tingsten and Dahl, it can be considered to be an element of the liberal democratic tradition's popular conceptual legacy. A classical example is Rousseau's social contract: an agreement through which free citizens unify to create a political unit and assign government to representatives (Eriksson, 1984). Other examples of contracts are those between employees and employers, as well as between spouses in a marriage. The social contract is not a contract in legal terms, but rather a . . . "contract as a principle of social association and one of the most important means of creating social relationship" . . . (Pateman, 1988:5).

Carole Pateman states that liberal democratic theory forgets, or deliberately overlooks, a fundamental aspect of the original social contract. This original contract, according to Pateman, consists of two parts:

- a social contract, which incorporates the public sphere. Parallels can be drawn to employment contracts, etc.
- a sexual contract, which is also included in the social contract and incorporates both social and biological aspects of sex. Parallels can be drawn to other contracts as, for instance, those concerning marriage.

Liberal democratic theory takes into account the social contract only, which is predominantly directed towards men, since only they are considered to be sufficiently mature to be included in free and mutually advantageous contracts. "Men are born free and equal, women are born into

subjection to men" (Pateman, 1988). Women are accordingly excluded from the community that is regulated by the social contract. Despite the assumed incapacity of women to be included in this contract, it is nevertheless assumed that they can be part of marriage contracts. The marriage contract is taken for granted and the sexual-role contract completely overlooked in liberal democratic theory, despite its fundamentality according to Pateman.

In another context Robert A. Dahl has elucidated the position of different subsystems in society (Dahl, 1984:14). He explains the contracts' status with respect to political and economic systems. Society can be considered as being a large social system with a series of constituent subsystems, of which some are political and others economic. Mixed forms also occur. The two aspects of the social contract are encompassed in this larger social system, referred to as society, and are consequently also included in the subsystems. However, it is notable that Dahl does not discuss the private sphere as a subsystem, and consequently, does not discern Pateman's perception of a sexual contract.

Private and Public Spheres in a Democratic Society

The fact that one of two original aspects of the social contract is discarded by liberal democratic theory is closely connected to their implicit division between public and private spheres. The prevalent conception of politics does not include the private sphere and it is consequently regarded subordinate or irrelevant in democratic discussions.

For the liberal, the two worlds are governed by different rules: the private sphere is the world of particularism, of subjection, inequality, natural emotions, love and partiality, whereas the public sphere is the world of universalism, independence, equality, reason, rationality and impartiality (Siim, 1988:163).

According to feminist theory even the "private" sphere is highly relevant in political analysis. If everyday life is set aside from politics then the position of women is implicitly considered as not changeable by political measures (Rowbotham, 1986). Reformist feminism wishes to make private life more visible in, for example, discussions on democracy. Certain aspects of the private sphere could, as a consequence, be subjected to

political decision-making. That is not to say that the State should automatically increase its regulating power.

Feminism's criticism of liberal democratic theory is, among other things, aimed at the lack of agreement between theory and reality. Feminism which has its roots in liberal ideology usually affiliates itself with democratic principles, including representative political institutions, the application of majority rule, universal voting rights, and other political rights, along with consideration of minorities. The problem, according to feminist theory, is that democracy is not fully implemented in any State known as a democracy. Neither Tingsten nor Dahl considered the democratic ideal to be fulfilled, but in contrast to most feminists, they could still accept the existing political constitutions as being democratic.

Consequently, liberal democracy has serious deficiencies according to feminist theory (Eduards, 1988). Political rights are considered, for example, not to include women in the same way as men. Men and women are equal according to law, but this has not hindered the sexes from being unequal in practice, with significant differences in political power and influence.

For feminists, democracy has never existed; women have never been and still are not admitted as full and equal members and citizens in any country known as a 'democracy'. A telling image that recurs throughout the history of feminism is of liberal society as a series of male clubs . . . that embrace parliament, the courts, political parties, the military and police, universities, workplaces, trade unions, public (private) schools, exclusive Clubs and popular leisure clubs from all of which women are excluded or to which they are mere auxiliaries (Pateman, 1983:204).

An illustrative example is the underrepresentation of women in decision-making bodies, including national, state and local governments. Despite almost 70 years of formally equal political rights, women constitute only a small portion in parliamentary and local council assemblies. Women's representation has, however, increased markedly in the Nordic countries during the past 10 to 15 years and the proportion of women now often reaches 30-40% (Dahlerup, 1988:281). Although this is a very positive development, women continue to be a minority in the political order, albeit a larger minority than previously. "The iron law of power" is a fact that further dar-

kens the situation (Haavio-Mannila et al., 1983:65-66). This "law" states that the greater the power, the fewer the women. This can be applied to a majority of social institutions, in addition to industry and public administration. The Nordic party system can be taken as an example. Political parties are, as a rule, created and led by men.

Pateman states that liberal democratic theory ought to take some of the blame for the present situation, in light of women's underrepresentation, "the iron law of power", etc. The classical liberal view of women from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Mill, Locke, etc.) has influenced the modern outlook towards women and can, to a certain degree, be said to live on in today's political theories. These older democratic theories . . . "are a significant part of the body of ideas which have helped shape Western civilization, and people's conceptions of themselves" (Duncan, 1983:3). There has naturally been a certain relaxation of such strict views; women are gainfully employed to a large degree and are able to reach high positions in society. However, a feminist point of view is that norms in society restrict women from obtaining power and influence (Hernes, 1982). These norms have their roots in, among other sources, liberal democratic theory, and maintain existing power relationships with super- and subordination.

. . . (M)asculine conceptions and actions form the norms and deviant feminine behaviour is punished by subordination and special treatment . . . it requires neither violence nor force to reproduce the prevailing order. Definitions of what is masculine and feminine are deeply rooted in both sexes (Eduards, 1988:210; my translation).

Politics is defined as a masculine activity. And masculine interests and activities as political (Eduards, 1988:211).

Feminist theory also contains a vision of a better and more humane society, free from oppression, war and poverty, as well as new relationships between production and reproduction. This very long-term vision takes this discussion far away from the politicians' role and is therefore not dealt with in the paper.⁴

After presenting feminist theory and its criticism of liberal democratic traditions, a series of questions emerge: What consequences does femi-

nist theory have for the politicians' role? Is there a feminist politician role and, if so, what form does it have? It has become apparent during this research that the division of politicians' relationships that has been pursued so far do not fit a feminist politician role. In conformity with liberal democratic theory only one of two aspects of the social contract has been pointed out, namely the social one. Feminist theory emphasizes the relationship between public and private spheres and, therefore, introduces an additional arena – "private life". This is considered to be fundamental for the politician's relationships to electorate, party system and public administration.

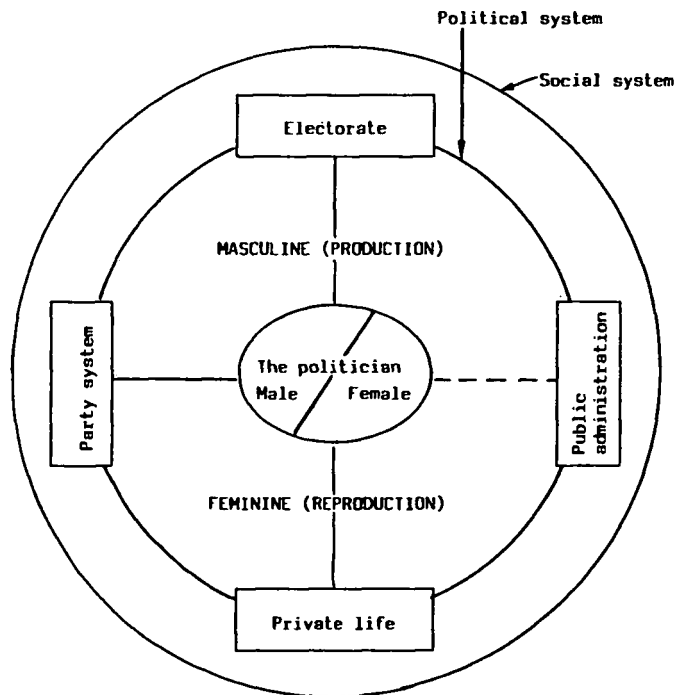
The Importance of Private Life for the Politician's Role

Politicians come into contact with many different actors and arenas as a result of the nature of their given mandate. Three arenas have been chosen for analysis in the first part of this paper: electorate, party system, and public administration. Feminist theory adds a fourth arena which is considered to be fundamental to the rest. In order for a politician to accomplish his/her entrusted mandate it must be consistent with private life, both in

terms of content and available time. This can obviously be said to concern many professions since all people have a private life, but the situation for politicians is more complicated when they commonly have an occupation apart from politics, often along with other additional social commitments. Politicians who resign from their posts frequently give lack of time as a very important reason (Wallin et al., 1981:180 ff).

The figure presented below divides politicians' roles into two equally large divisions, one masculine and one feminine. The upper semicircle is traditionally masculine in character and stresses *production*. Social class is the key unit of analysis, which tend to make women invisible. Political parties, for example, are generally organized according to class affiliation which accentuate production rather than reproduction/private life. The lower semicircle is feminine and stresses biological and social *reproduction*. The key unit of analysis is gender, which makes visible both women and men. According to feminists, the interplay between production and reproduction/class and gender are equally important in the analysis regarding the role of the politician.

Figure 2. The politician's role according to feminist theory.



Why is private life/reproduction considered to be feminine? Here, we are dealing with traditional norms regarding distribution of work. Despite that most women have careers, they still bear the main responsibility for housekeeping and maternal functions. Consequently, if it is difficult for a man to have sufficient time to combine his duties as a politician with private life, then it is commonly even more difficult for a woman. According to feminist theory, marriage/cohabitation is advantageous to men but an obstacle for women due to an unequal division of responsibility and work. The theory is supported by statistics which show that men in high political positions are often married while women in the same positions are often single (Haavio-Mannila et al., 1983).

... (M)arried women workers do two shifts, one in the office or factory, the other at home. A large question arises here why members of enterprises who are already burdened with two jobs should be eager to take on new (political) responsibilities ... (Pateman, 1983:215-216).

My interpretation of feminist theory is that it demands fairly comprehensive changes with respect to constitution as well as the division of labour in society, in order to facilitate female political participation. The type of changes deemed necessary varies between different directions of feminism. The demands for change of reformist feminism are mostly thought to lie within the framework of existing social organization, while marxist feminism advocates more fundamental social changes.

An initial measure according to the reformist viewpoint, based on my own interpretation, is to make the politician's role "more humane". A politician, whether man or woman, should not have to sacrifice either private life or professional work in order to carry out political mandates. Somehow the politician's functions must require less time. Some potential measures could be to increase the number of representatives (both men and women) and to hold meetings during daytime so as not to interfere with private life. An increase of the number of women in politics is also believed to change the content of politics and make it more interesting for women to participate. A more long-term measure in the feminist sense is to alter the work and responsibility burden within the private sphere so that it becomes more equal and gives women the opportunity to participate more actively in the public sphere.

A Feminist Politician's Role in the Traditional Liberal Arenas

In conformity with liberal democratic theory a large part of reformist feminism advocates limited public participation and an *elected representation* that takes care of decision-making between elections. Based on my interpretation, however, feminist theory places other demands on the elected politician apart from being a representative as in Dahl's or Tingsten's analysis. The liberty of action becomes significantly restricted and the politician takes on a role as a chosen *delegate* (Haavio-Mannila et al., 1983). The politician should constantly be informed and aware of citizens opinions and interests. The opinions of citizens should also form the basis for decision-making.

According to feminist theory, feminist politicians should represent those women and men who potentially include reproductive as well as productive functions in the system of political decision-making. To be a woman is indeed no guarantee for sharing feminist values. However, within a short-term perspective, women will probably be more frequent among the supporters of such a "pro-female" society. Perhaps in the long run there will also be large segments of men among its adherents.

Reformist feminism is attentive to a series of problems for the woman politician concerning the relationship to her own *political party*, e.g. that there can be an opposition between the party's interests and the women voters.

Women are not only new (in politics), they are also often in a minority, and subject to considerable pressure to follow the male majority's priorities and valuations. If they try to oppose this and assert special female views, they easily get negative reactions (Haavio-Mannila 1983:70, my translation).

The relation towards other parties is primarily characterized by competition when political parties have different outlooks and need to assert their distinctive character. However, the reformist viewpoint of feminist theory advocates a modified way of looking at opposing parties. Women in politics have much in common, even if they belong to different political parties. Firstly, they have similar experiences from reproductive (maternal and/or social) functions. Secondly, they have experience in being part of a decision-making minority, with the consequent lack of influence (Haavio-Mannila et al., 1983).

Increased co-operation between women in politics, regardless of their party obligations, is in line with feminist theory. The same is true for a women's party, with women members and leadership. The probability of such changes is related to the rigidity of attitudes and norms within specific political parties and systems, i. e. to what extent they accept deviations from the party line on so called sacred issues.

The politicians' relationship towards *public administration* and its civil servants do not take a conspicuous role in the formation of feminist theory. However, over a greater time perspective, comprehensive changes can be imagined in the politicians' relationships to electorate, party system, and public administration. Taken to its extremes, feminism is in opposition to all forms of hierarchy. Decentralization of power is seen to be something beneficial and is, for example, reflected by the feminist movement.

The movement is decentralized, anti-hierarchical and tries to ensure that its members collectively educate themselves and gain independence through consciousness-raising, participatory decision-making and rotation of tasks and offices (Pateman, 1983:214).

If this reasoning is related to the politician's role, a situation can be imagined where representatives devote more time to disseminating information and knowledge to an active electorate. By applying new communication techniques and holding more referenda, a greater number of citizens would be able to participate in political decision-making. Based on a long-term feminist perspective, the working conditions of politicians could be considerably improved by a turnabout in mandate together with a level organizational structure, both within the party system and the public administration.

4. The empirical reality

Two ideal types of politicians' roles have appeared in this paper, one from liberal democratic theory and the other from a reformist branch of feminist theory. Are these ideal types in any way compatible with the empirical reality in modern society? Some interviews I made with politicians in Sweden at the municipal level gave a new angle of approach, especially with respect to the electorate.⁵

According to this paper, two major roles for politicians became visible in relation to the elec-

torate. Firstly, a *representative* role of liberal democratic theory, which is characterized by an individual in charge of decision-making in between elections. The party programme and the politician's own opinions and experiences guides his/her work. Secondly, a *delegate* role was prominent in feminist theory, meaning a very close contact between voters and politicians.

Before the interviews, my hypothesis was that women politicians would consider themselves to be delegates to a greater extent than their male colleagues. Other Swedish studies had come to similar results (Wallin, 1981). However, the interviews showed the opposite! Women generally thought of themselves as *representatives*, while men often considered themselves to be rather ideal mixtures of both roles. Both men and women *wished* to be delegates but women saw greater obstacles in achieving this ideal. The political system in itself seemed to prevent a close communication between citizens and politicians in between elections.

What could be the reasons for such a deviant phenomenon? Perhaps it is more difficult for women to have close contact with the electorate? Such contacts are time consuming, and time is particularly a sacrifice for women. The traditional norm of a politician capable of combining the political mandate with other commitments, work and private life, seems to be precarious. Probably, this balance of time is even more difficult for female politicians, as most women still have the main responsibility for household work and child-care together with a regular employment.

How could this problem of time shortage be solved? One issue often debated is the concept of full-time politicians. In my opinion, feminist theory very likely opposes this concept. A full-time politician may tend to lose contact with an "ordinary" working life, and its function as a contact channel to the electorate. With regard to private life, it is more desirable to have flexible and maybe shorter working hours and an equal distribution of household work within the family. To achieve the latter, feminists emphasize the need of a general change of attitudes in society.

Drude Dahlerup (1988) refers to studies which indicate that women in politics often work to further increase the number of women. A common reformist argument among feminists is that an increased number of women in politics eventually will create a counter-balance to the male political culture. Some Swedish women in politics claim

that this has already happened in a handful of boards and councils (Hedlund-Ruth, 1985). The changes are rather subtle but deemed to be very important. They include for example a less formal atmosphere, flexibility in working hours and support from other women, especially when discussing typically "female" questions, such as child-care.

Feminist theory highlights a gap between democratic ideals and empirical reality. Different directions of feminist theory suggest different strategies for change, both with regard to the public and the private sphere. A radical school of feminist thought speaks for a total change in society and the strategy of "exit", in accordance with Hirschman's terminology (1970), is the only passable way. Reformist feminism speaks for changes within the present political system. For politicians, this will imply a mixture of the strategies of voice and loyalty, i. e. participation according to present norms for political involvement. In line with reformist feminism, women politicians ought to have an important role in such an endeavour.

Notes

- ¹ I use Alf Ross's definition (1963) of this "ideal type" concept as a scientifically pure type to be compared with reality, which he calls "actual type". An ideal type does not have to be positively valued even if this often is the case, especially when we deal with normative schools of thought, such as liberal democratic theory. I wish to emphasize that interpretations of theories are personal to some extent and my version is certainly not the only one possible. I, therefore, try to illustrate the theories with quotations and make it possible for the readers to judge my interpretations.
- ² One example on this later development in feminist theory is found in Helga Maria Hernes' book *Welfare State and Woman Power: Essays in State Feminism* (1987).
- ³ See, for example, Pateman (1988), Haavio-Mannila (1983), Hernes (1982) and Eduards (1988).
- ⁴ One feminist utopia is presented by Beatrice Halsaa in *Kvinnovetenskaplig tidskrift* 1988:4.
- ⁵ This paper is a short version of a paper I wrote within a research project at the Department of Political Science, University of Umeå. The project was led by dr. Kerstin Kolam and was financed by The Swedish Center for Working Life. It focused on management and leadership at the municipal level in Sweden, with the role of the politician as a central theme. Several interviews were made with elected representatives in three cities. These politicians were equally distributed according to sex, political party and type of political mandate.

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