

# **Leave policy**

## **Recent developments in the UK**

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# Current leave policy

## Maternity Leave (1977)

- 52 weeks: 6 weeks @ 90% of earnings, 20 weeks @ £106 [€160]/week; 26 weeks unpaid

## Paternity Leave (2003)

- 2 weeks @ £106/week

## Parental Leave (1999)

- 13 weeks per parent, unpaid
- Until child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday
- Maximum of 4 weeks/year

# Proposed changes

## Maternity Leave

- Extend payment to 9 months (2007) “on the road to 12 months” – flat rate

## Paternity Leave

- Additional PL up to 26 weeks in child’s second 6 months, *if* the mother returns to work
- Some leave could be paid at flat rate, *if* mother returns to work before using her full entitlement to pay

## Parental Leave

- No change...never an option

“Our aim is to enable either the mother or the father to be off work to care for their child in the first year. It is intended that an employed father’s entitlement to [Additional Paternity Leave] and Pay *will be dependent on the mother returning to work* ...Some of this leave could be paid if the mother was entitled to [maternity pay]” (Government response to Work and Families Consultation, October 2004, 4.22)

“Government’s commitment [is] to introduce a new law to enable mothers to transfer a proportion of their maternity leave and pay to fathers” (February 2005)

“We concluded that it would be more appropriate to provide fathers with an additional period of paternity leave, rather than transferred maternity leave. The fundamental objectives of the transferred maternity leave and pay scheme remain” (October 2005)

# Key features of UK leave

- Long period of *maternity* leave
- Long period of *paternity* leave – but dependent on mother's employment and maternity pay
- Minimal *parental* leave entitlement – unchanged since introduction
- Mostly low paid or unpaid
- Little flexibility in leave entitlements...
- ...but parents entitled to request flexible working from employers; employers must consider request

# Explaining UK leave policy

Liberal welfare regime and neo-liberal economy

- Flat-rate benefits as norm
- “Narrow conception of what risks should be considered ‘social’” – reluctance to recognise public responsibility
- Importance attached to deregulated/flexible labour markets – widespread opposition from employers

# Explaining UK leave policy

Gender regime in slow transition from  
'maternalism' to gender neutrality

- Gender regime: the way the state embodies a set of power relations between women and men
- Maternalism: the mother's primary and natural duty is to look after her child, and that as an extension childcare is and should be a "women's issue"...focus on 'mothers' employment'



# Explaining UK leave policy

Path dependency: the significance of specific timing, the large consequences that can flow from contingent events, and the near impossibility of reversing a particular course of action once introduced

- UK late into leave policy
- 1970s decision to go for long maternity leave
- 20 years of policy neglect & public disinterest – UK excludes itself from European developments
- Long maternity leave embedded, taken for granted; little understanding of parental leave