Influence of Europe on French Parental Leave Policies

No direct Influence of the European Directives on the French law concerning parental leaves

What about the paternity leave?

An announcement of the Conférence de la famille on June 15th, 2001

Presented as a major breakthrough by Segolene Royal

A context of strong European pressure

An issue which is not wholly connected in France to the theme of parental leave sharing.

Rather, a will to reassert the authority of the father.


European influences (especially of the Nordic model) only mentioned at the very end of the legislative process.

Report of the Social Affairs Committee of the National Assembly on Social Security Financing Bill (2002):

Scandinavian paternity leave policies mentioned as examples

Before that hardly any references to Scandinavian model

Differences in the approach to paternity leave (France/Nordic countries)

French paternity leave: a policy designed to promote father-child interaction rather than gender equality

Not linked to the issue of sharing parental leave

Along with the paternity leave reform: creation of ‘livret de paternité’, parental recognition ceremony, reform of parental authority..
A gender perspective on the Parental leave allowance reforms in France

*Three questions*:

1. What connexion between family and labour market policies?
2. What are the objectives behind the Parental Leave Allowance reform in 2013?
3. Is there an effect of economic crisis on the restructuring patterns?
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Parental leave allowance reforms and labour market policy

1- To keep out women from the labour market

1984: the first child rearing policy measure (flat-rate allowance paid by social security) – APE
Context: high level of unemployment + development of part-time work

1994: extension of the entitlement to APE to parents with two children (instead of three)
Context: economic recession. New policy incentives for part-time work in labour market policy.

2- To avoid the women's exit from the labour market

Context: drop in economic growth + new objectives for Family Policy: gender equality + reducing child poverty
2013: a reform by the socialist government

What’s new?

From a family policy issue to a women’s right issue:
- Part of the Law on Gender Equality
- … not a family policy reform

At least three aims:

1. To boost women’s employment
2. To forster the sharing of parental responsibilities
3. To expand childcare options
2013 : a reform by the socialist government

What does this reform entail ?

1- Parents with a single child
Until now : parents entitled to 6 months of prenatal leave allowance after the end of maternity leave (or paternity leave).
After the reform: 6 months more for the other parent.

2- Parents with 2 or more children
Until now : the duration of the parental leave allowance is until the last child reaches the age of 3.
After the reform : the duration will be maintained at 3 years only if the second parent takes 6 months. Otherwise the entitlement is reduced to 2,5 years.
A contested reform

From a gender perspective: the question of the duration is fundamental
The impact of the reform on women’s employment seems very limited

The reform targets fathers.
Incentive to fathers to take up part of the parental leave and to share child rearing

« Free choice » for mothers to remain in the workforce and « free choice » for fathers to stay home and care for their children?
What link between the reform and the economic crisis?

1- Effects of the reform on the arguments pushed forwards by pro-family groups
   • Pro family unions support the idea of a long parental leave allowance for three reasons:
     • high value put on family care
     • parental leave allowance mainly used by low-income families
     • a substantial reduction of the length would put pressure on child care services

2 – Effect on the importance assigned to budget-related aspects
   • Savings on benefits
   • Benefit rates are not revised
   • less spending on childcare facilities
Thank you for your attention