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In the article *Dynamics of parental leave in Anglophone countries: the paradox of state expansion in liberal welfare regimes*, authors Marian Baird and Margaret O’Brien analyze the parental leave policies in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States; collectively referred to as the “Anglophone” countries for the purposes of this article. In assessing the policies of these nations, the authors discuss work/family conflict, child well-being, and gender equality. They ultimately argue that shifts in the socio-economic system and processes of globalization lead to seemingly paradoxical ‘form of state “welfare” within neo-liberalism thru the provisions of leave payment by government for parents, although aimed principally at mothers.’ (206)

The authors provide a concise historical background of parental leave policies in Anglophone countries. Rather than focus on comparing or ranking the countries with those from other regimes (conservative/corporatist: continental Europe and Japan, social democratic: Scandinavia regimes), the authors chose to focus their analysis within the liberal welfare regime. This makes their approach novel and allows them to reveal variations within the liberal welfare regime. Baird and O-Brien analyze a range of national governmental department policy sources to examine and compare the leave policies, which are measured in terms of generosity and “gender equality” (200). Table 1, which begins on page 202, includes the name of the policy/policies, the number of weeks for mothers, the number of week for fathers/ same sex partners, payment level for mothers/parents, payment level for fathers only, and maximum parental leave per company (if available) for each of the Anglophone countries.

The second portion of the article focuses on Australia and the United Kingdom, the Anglophile countries which have enacted the most significant policy changes in recent years. Focusing specifically on years 2004-2014, the authors discuss how and why Australia and the UK have adopted more liberal maternity and paternity leave policies. Every Anglophone country (apart from the United States) has seen increased rather than decreased state involvement. The authors claim that Australia’s leave policies reflect a system in which paid parental leave is provided by social services and unpaid leave is “enshrined in labour law”. British policy architecture, the authors argue, is “notably incoherent with twin tracks disconnected developments occurring side by side: within the UK itself and for the UK as a member of the European Union.” Compared with Nordic Europe, leave policies in the United Kingdom are “not highly generous or gender equitable” (211) yet compared with other Anglophone countries, the same policies are rather progressive.

Marian Baird and Margaret O’Brien’s analysis of leave policies in Anglophone countries in the decade 2004-2014 provide meaningful insight into the driving forces which lead neo-liberal/ liberal welfare regime nations to adopt systems of government funded and/or mandated parental leave policies. Since the majority of studies compare the United Kingdom with the European Union or with the United States, an analysis of this kind had not been done. While I certainly believe there is valuable knowledge to be gained from analyzing and comparing leave polices between regimes, I agree with the authors’ stance that within regime variation analysis provides a superior understanding of how and why countries’ who share basic characteristics (similar history, democratic government, language, etc) adopt leave policies at varying rates and how the differences indicate the priorities and concerns of each government (in contrast to that of its people). Ultimately parental leave policies and other social programs will be, I believe, the basis on which we judge industrialized nations. Such issues are being conceptualized and measured as human rights in the globalized first-world society.

Citation

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