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Women's Role in Finnish Democracy Building

The Finnish Experience



Contents

The industrious mistress of the farm: Before industrialisation	3
Industrialisation and urbanisation	6
Building Democracy 1917-1945	9
Reconstruction	12
Finnish society today: still on the road toward equality	17
DEMO FINLAND – Political Parties of Finland for Democracy	20

The industrious mistress of the farm: Before industrialisation

Everyday partnership in agriculture

Finnish democracy is based on a very old Nordic system of democracy. Finland was part of Sweden for almost 700 years before it was annexed to the Russian tsarist empire in 1809, following the war between Sweden and Russia. Finland had an autonomous position as part of Russia, and was allowed to develop its own national Parliament, which had four Estates: the Nobility, the Bourgeoisie, the Clergy (Lutheran Protestant Church), and the Peasantry (Fourth Estate), composed of wealthy farmers who owned their land and paid taxes.

Finland was a very agricultural country. The land was cultivated by independent peasant farmers, or by the tenant farmers ('rented farm workers', called 'torpparit', who lived and worked on large estates). Urban centres were few in number, and relatively small. The largest towns in Finland, Turku and Helsinki had only a few thousand inhabitants each at the beginning of the 1800s.

Peasants lived close to the fields they cultivated: families were isolated and far

from their neighbours. Life then could best be described as hard work under harsh conditions, in a constant battle with an unforgiving climate: everyone on the farm had to work to survive. Large, extended families, which included several generations as well as the hired men who worked outside and the hired girls who worked indoors and in the dairy production, formed a community in which all the members had to get along with each other. They had to work together, and they also had to satisfy the family members' need for a social life.

The work of the farm was divided, for the most part, clearly into 'man's work' and 'woman's work'. Women took care of the daily housework and the domestic animals. The men cultivated the fields and went hunting and fishing. Often, however, it was necessary to be flexible about this division, as the many foreign wars would take the men away to battlegrounds abroad, as happened in the 30 Years War from 1618 – 1648, and the Great Northern War at the beginning of the 1700s.

There has never been a large ruling class in Finland, and what there was, was primarily

composed of people whose ancestors had come from outside of Finland. The civil servants and the priesthood lived modestly, even though they mostly came from the Swedish-speaking 'upper class'. The ordinary folk spoke Finnish. The numerically small upper class was relatively poor, and even the women of this class could not escape working in the household. The Finnish folk were thus very homogenous, and they all struggled together against the harsh conditions of life in Finland.

According to the old Swedish land laws, women were always to be under the guardianship of male relatives. They needed a father, husband, brother, or some other close male relative as guardian. Only as widows could women have any power over themselves and their property, and become the guardians of their children. If she married again, a widow lost her independent position. In the rural areas, a daughter inherited only half of what a son inherited, but in the urban cities children had equal inheritance rights regardless of their gender. Ownership of land was, and remained, however, primarily in the hands of men; males inherited land while females inherited assets such as personal items, cattle and grain.

The common people obtained their minimal education from the Church. Following the Reformation, the Lutheran Church taught and controlled the teaching of the minimal literacy requirements required

by the Church from both parties applying for a marriage license. Both the bride and the groom had to be able to read the Bible before they could get married.

A literate folk

Traditionally the parish churches arranged literacy education for older children and adults, and in remote areas children were also educated at home. Public institutions of education were meant for men who wanted to become priests or civil servants. The daughters of the numerically small upper class were educated in the home or in small, private, schools for girls, which were particularly active in the 1800s. Public schools for girls were introduced to Finland from Russia, where the Empress Catherine II The Great had begun the education of young ladies. The Finnish town of Viipuri was the first in the country to establish a public girls' school, at the end of the 1700s. This was quickly followed by the establishment of similar schools elsewhere in Finland. In the latter half of the 19th century, both public and private schools for girls were established in many Finnish towns.

Elementary schools, separate from the Church, were set up in the 1860s. At the same time, teachers' seminaries were established, where women also had the right to study. The townships were obliged to maintain an elementary school, but sending



PHOTO: MANNERHEIM LEAGUE FOR CHILD WELFARE.

The basis for cooperation between women and men was the division of the daily work in sparsely inhabited rural regions.

children to school was up to the parents to decide.

For studying at university, women needed a special license: beginning in the 1870s,

many women began actively applying for such a license. As the 1900s arrived, over 10% of the student body in universities was composed of women.

Industrialisation and urbanisation

Factory girls and servant maids

Finland began to industrialise and become more urbanised in the 1800s. This meant that the need for people to move from the country to urban centres increased. It also meant that women needed the right to, for example, make work contracts in their own name, without the permission of a (male) guardian.

Outside of agricultural communities, by the early 1900s it was already quite common that unmarried women were active in the labour market, and earned their own living. Almost all of them were working in private families as servants, in factories, or as shop assistants. Women were especially in demand as workers in textile mills and in the tobacco industry.

By the latter half of the 19th century both women and men had freedom of choice as regarded their occupation. Young women from the upper and middle classes began to work in banks and the post office, and to serve as public civil servants, teachers, and nurses. The first women researchers began their careers in science.

In the working class milieu, most women continued to participate in earning money

for their families even after they became wives. They would work as cleaners or take in laundry. The first folk kindergartens were opened, and training of kindergarten teachers began. Schools for domestic science and horticulture were founded, beginning at the end of the 19th century, as occupational schools for the women of the countryside. There were also schools for the care of domestic animals, meant especially for women, and schools to educate women as future farmers' wives.

Women's financial independence improved slowly, step by step. The complete independence of unmarried women was written into law in 1864, but upon marriage women lost this independence. The age at which women could attain independence was lowered in 1898; and in connection with this new law, the possibilities for married women to have more control over their own property improved. Since 1889, married women have had the right of control over the income they personally earned. Married women were still under the guardianship of their husbands, however, and could not make contracts in their own names.

Universal and equal suffrage

The autonomic Grand Duchy of Finland carried out a vast and sweeping Parliamentary reform in 1906. The old Parliament of the Four Estates was done away with, and a single chamber Parliament was created. The right to vote for representatives to Parliament was extended to all Finnish adults, women as well as men, and everyone had only one vote, regardless of their wealth or social position. Women could also stand for election as Members of Parliament.

The reform of Parliament began a new period in Finnish history. Today's political parties began to emerge. In the first Parliamentary Elections for the reformed Parliament, held in 1907, the Social Democrats won, and the upper classes had to learn how to cooperate with Members of Parliament from all classes of society, including the working classes.

This election also brought women into the cooperative decision-making process, since 19 of the new MPs were women. Women did not form a separate 'women's' party of their own, but stood for election side by side with the men of their chosen party. For the most part, women joined those parties in which their fathers, brothers, or husbands were already members. The parties asked women who had become well-known for their work in various organisations to stand for election as their candidates, in order to gain the votes of women.

Election Process

In Finland, elections are organised so that a person gives his or her vote to an individual, who represents a party, so that both the individual and the party get one vote. Several candidates stand for election in each district, and voters vote in the district where they live and are registered. All the votes for a given party are added up, and the party total determines the number of representatives elected from that party. Within the party, the representatives are then chosen on the basis of the number of individual votes each candidate has been given. The party candidate with the most individual votes gets half the votes given to the party, the next most, half of the remaining half, and so on. This means that in practice who wins the seat is not decided on the basis of a list agreed upon beforehand by the party, but that voters themselves have a choice which candidate will be elected.

The Finnish electoral process favours candidates as individuals, and is thus also favourable to women. In countries where the electoral process elects only one representative from each district, it is more difficult for women to get elected. As voters, women are not as active as men in Finland. Women's organisations still try very hard to encourage women to vote, and to vote for women. Each party has its own party organisation especially for women, in which women engage in numerous political



PHOTO NATIONAL BOARD OF ANTIQUITIES

In the first democratic election held in Finland, 19 women were elected to Parliament. They decided to behave and dress as befits a respected Member of Parliament. The photo shows 13 of these first 19 women MPs.

activities, and which helps women with their campaigns when they run for office.

In Parliament, women are behind questions to Parliament relating to social affairs and health, and women's affairs and women's rights. But women in Parliament are also interested in political affairs at the national level, working together with their fellow party members. It took a long time, however, before women were given significant tasks within their party's group in Parliament, or in committees.

From 1906 to 1917, conditions in Mother Russia and her autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland were unsettled. The Tsar, who was

also the Grand Duke of Finland, dissolved the Finnish Parliament fairly often, and elections were frequent. The First World War slowed the progress of passing much needed social legislation. The number of women in Parliament did not increase, but varied between 16 and 25 during the early years of independence. During this period, women still were not given significant posts in Parliament or in the Government: only one woman Member of Parliament was named to serve in the Council of State, Miina Sillanpää, a member of the Social Democratic party. She served as the Minister of Social Affairs and Health during the 1920s.

Building Democracy 1917-1945

Finland became an independent sovereign state on the 6th of December, 1917, and chose republic as its form of government. The President of the Republic was given a significant role similar to that of the Office of the President in France and the United States of America. The President names the Government, which has to enjoy the confidence of Parliament. After Independence, there was a short, brutal, four-month civil war in the country in the spring of 1918. The two sides of the civil war were the 'Whites', led by Marshall Mannerheim, representing the Government, and the rebel 'Reds' fighting against them. The civil war ended with the victory of the Government, but it left deep wounds in the fabric of society, and an immense gulf between the two sides to the conflict.

With the civil war over, Finland began rapidly to pass new social legislation. The most significant reform, which aided in bringing peace to the country, was the 1918 land reform which gave the tenant farmers the possibility to buy the land they were farming for themselves. Finland thus became a country of numerous small farms. In addition, legislation was passed



PHOTO: MANNERHEIM LEAGUE FOR CHILD WELFARE

After the Second World War, all mothers and children had access to the nationwide system of well baby clinics which had grown from NGO activities for infant health in the 1920s.

for inspection of professional qualifications, the safeguarding of orphans and adopted children, and the creation of a national health insurance scheme, as well as an old-age pension programme. In 1937, the general pensions fund law and the child protection law were passed, which gave society the responsibility to look after children and old-age pensioners. Cooperation between the Government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) worked to improve health care so much that infant mortality fell from nearly 200 infants out of every 1000 live births dying before their first birthday in the



PHOTO: FINNISH DEFENCE FORCES PHOTOGRAPHIC CENTRE

During the Winter War of 1939, women and men worked together in defence of their country. Women served in the Lotta Svärd voluntary defence forces.

10

year after the civil war (1919), to only 70 in 1939.

Women Members of Parliament worked tirelessly over the next decade to improve legislation to remove limits on the rights of women. Since 1926, it has been possible to name women to almost any position within the civil services. The exceptions still remaining in the 1920s were certain positions within the police, legal institutions, the armed forces, and the Lutheran Church, which is part of the State in Finland.

Legislation for the universal, compulsory education of all children, girls as well as boys, was passed in the 1920s. Educational institutions leading to university have had as many girls as boys since 1910. Equality

During the Second World War, when the young republic was in danger, the Finnish people closed ranks and pulled together in many respects. Finland fought three separate wars: the so-called 'Winter War' in 1939-1940 against the USSR when it attacked from behind the eastern border; alongside the Germans in 1941-1944 against the USSR, to try to regain the territories lost in the Winter War; and against the Germans in Northern Finland in 1944-1945, a war which was required by the USSR in the peace treaty Finland made with that country in 1944.

Some 90 000 men fell in the three wars, which was almost the same number as the generation of children born in the 1930s in Finland. When peace finally returned, there were 150 000 war invalids, 20 000 war widows, and over 50 000 war orphans with one or both parents dead. Over ten percent of the total land area of the country had been lost to the USSR, and some 300 000 Finns were evacuated from this territory, becoming displaced persons within Finland. In Finnish Lapland, in the north of the country, the retreating Germans had burnt everything to the ground as they left.

in education was also emphasised by the fact that these schools were almost all co-educational. The country was so sparsely populated that it was simply not financially possible to maintain separate schools for girls and boys except in the largest cities. Parents were also quite happy to send siblings to the same school. During the years between the

world wars, almost one-third of the students at university were women. Women's work outside the home increased slowly, with c. 38% of the labour force being made up of women in the 1930s.

During the war, Finnish society collected its strength together and reconciled its internal differences. The 'January Betrothal' is what the labour-market wage agreements made in January of 1940 has been called. After that, the employers and employees agreed on working conditions. The 'language war' between the two language groups in Finland, Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking Finns, was removed from the agenda. The same spirit of reconciliation also appeared in work done to close the gap between men and women.

In the war years, Finnish women stepped into the public eye and took responsibility for the Home Front. The women's voluntary defence force, the Lotta Svärd auxiliaries, had over 200 000 women and young girls in its lines. These "Lottas" fed the troops at railway junction stations and in canteens, took care of uniforms and laundry, and helped out in offices, communications, and field hospitals. The Lotta Organisation also took it upon themselves to organise the military funerals of fallen soldiers. Almost 100 000 women worked directly at the battlefronts, providing aid and comfort to the army, without, however, carrying arms themselves. Other citizens' organisations worked in close cooperation

PHOTO: MANNERHEIM LEAGUE FOR CHILD WELFARE



Women's organisations in the first half of the 1900s devoted most of their time and activities to training women in the basics of domestic science and home economics. The photo shows a childcare course given by the Voikkaa Division of the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare in the 1920s.

with the Government and local public authorities, and formed a sort of extension of public social services, by helping war orphans, the families of war invalids, those who had lost their homes in the bombing or through being evacuated, and others who were in difficulties.

Women's work outside the home also increased because in wartime the entire adult population had a compulsory obligation to work if called upon. While the men were at the fronts, women took over new jobs in industry and in communications. Women came into public life in an entirely new way, and society became used to the sight of women serving in significant posts.

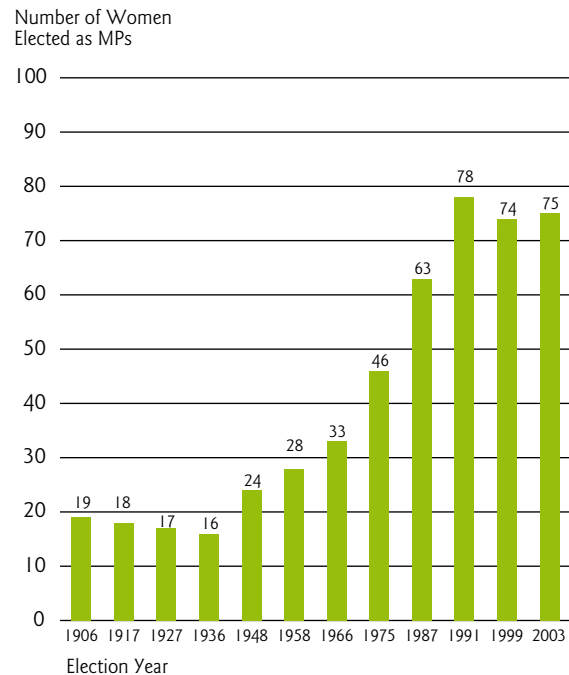
Reconstruction

Women in politics

The wars irrevocably changed the position of women both in the home and in society. The number of women elected to Parliament increased. Many of the women elected were those who had come into public view through their work in the citizens' organisations civil society organisations. There was also a clear connection between the increase in the number of women in Parliament and the increase in the average level of education of women as well as the increase in the numbers of women in the labour force.

Women also began being given positions of trust within their own party's group in Parliament, in committees, and in the Government. Beginning in 1948, it began to be accepted that at least the Minister for Social Affairs and Health would be a woman. Since 1966, not a single Government has sat in which there were no women in the Council of State. Since the 1970s, there have been several women as Ministers in each Government. A woman has at least once held the portfolio of every Minister's post except that of Minister of Finance. For a very long time, the post of Minister for Foreign Affairs

Women in the Finnish Parliament



was also viewed as a strictly male preserve: the first woman to hold that post was appointed only in 1994. She was the woman who today is President of Finland, **Tarja Halonen**, representing the Social Democratic Party.

The first woman to be appointed as Deputy Speaker of Parliament was nominated in the 1970s. In 1994, the first woman named as Speaker was **Riitta Uosukainen**, of the Kokoomuspuolue (National Coalition Party). For a few years in the 1990s, both the Speaker and the two Deputy Speakers were all women. At this same time, the Mayor of Helsinki, the capital of Finland, was a woman: **Eeva-Riitta Siitonen**.

It was typical of all the women in politics who rose to high positions that they were very well-known and well-liked by the people of Finland, and they received very large numbers of votes in elections. They were all also very willing and able to cooperate well with the men of their own party, and across party lines. Their support networks often included many women's interest groups in addition to their own party's women's organisation.

Women's work outside the home increased still further after the end of World War II. There were several factors at work here. During the war years, women had entered many fields of work formerly closed to them. The war had also created a large number of single-parent families headed by women: in addition to the war widows, the increasing divorce rate led to women being granted custody of children and having to raise them alone. In the 1950s and 1960s, Finland underwent unusually rapid urbanisation and industrialisation. There was a huge

PHOTO: MATTI KAINULAINEN / LEHTIKUVA



Recently, women in Finland have also reached the highest places in national government. From the left: President of the Republic of Finland, Tarja Halonen; Speaker of Parliament, Riitta Uosukainen; in the background, Doctor Pertti Arajärvi, PhD, husband of the President.

need for workers to fill jobs in the rapidly expanding public services sector. Many industrialising countries in Europe began hiring large numbers of male workers from the Mediterranean and North Africa during this phase in their industrialisation, but Finland brought her women into the job market.

The entry of women into the job market might have been slowed by the fact that between 1945-1949 more children were born in Finland each year than had ever been the case before or since. When these so-called 'baby-boomers' reached school age in the next decade, many mothers went to work. In the following decades, many women with



In 1991, a record number of women were elected to Parliament. The photo shows the 78 new women MPs immediately after the election, on the steps of the Parliament building.

pre-school aged children also began working outside the home.

Social legislation was developed step by step in the years after the war, so that families as well as individuals were supported. Since the mid-1940s, Finland has had free clinics for expectant mothers, newborns, and children. The health of each mother-to-be is followed throughout her pregnancy, and the health of her children is followed at least until they reach school age, which in Finland is 7 years old. After this, the children are taken into the school health care system. The health care visits are organised in a system of individualised counselling, so that the same health care professional is seen

on a regular basis. Mothers have taken this system gratefully to their hearts. Since 1938, the information campaigns educating women in their own health and that of their children have also included a 'New Mother's Baby Box', which every family receives when a baby is born, and which contains everything needed for the family's newest member during the first few months after the baby's arrival.

At the end of the 1940s, maternity leave was legislated; at first it was only a few months long. It has slowly been extended so that now the mother can care for her child at home for up to almost a year. The right to leave on the birth of a child was extended to include fathers at the end of the 1970s, when fathers were given a paternity leave allowing them to stay home to care for the child for a few weeks after the birth. Today, instead of the mother, the new father can stay at home using parental leave for about 6 months. Either of the parents can also choose to stay at home with the child after the end of parental leave, without losing the right to go back to their jobs, a provision coming under the home-care legislation for children under three.

Since the National Pensions Act of 1956 (347/1956), Finland has had a common citizens' pension fund, which pays a pension to all citizens upon their reaching the age of 65, regardless of whether or not they have worked within the household or outside the home. The pension scheme for employees



PHOTO: MANNERHEIM LEAGUE FOR CHILD WELFARE

Women began professional training at an early stage in Finland's modern history. The women in the photo are students in a school to train kindergarten teachers.

in private businesses has been developed from the early 1960s. The foundations for the national health insurance scheme were laid in the same decade; and in 1972 a new law on national health care, the Primary Health Care Act (66/1972), came into force, which guaranteed the right of all citizens to state organised and funded health care. Particular emphasis in this national health care system is on prevention of disease and health problems, through, for example, vaccination programmes and information campaigns.

In order for women with children to work outside the home, daycare has to be arranged for their children. At first the municipalities maintained the so-called 'folk kindergartens' to meet the needs of lower-income families. Private organisations and individuals, as well as the larger factories and businesses, also arranged daycare. The pressure for nationally organised daycare grew during the end of the 1960s. In 1973, the Children's Daycare Act (36/1973) required municipalities to organise daycare

for all those who needed it. This law did not work as well as expected in practice, however, so it was amended in the mid-1990s to make acceptance of a child into the public daycare system a subjective right of the child. Access could not be denied on financial grounds.

Social welfare and social security were carefully constructed after the end of the Second World War. Social services were improved as fast as the national economy would allow. One social group after another was brought into the sphere of national social security and the national medical and health care. As the result of this systematic progress, by the 1980s the point was reached at which the only further improvements needed in the system were for fine-tuning, primarily to strengthen principles of equality.

From the point of view of women's equality, the most important reforms were made in the 1980s. The family name law gave women the right to keep the family name they were born with even after marriage. In 1986, Finland's own legislation had been brought to the point at which the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women could be ratified. The next year saw the coming into force of a women's equality law which required officials to treat men and women equally in all matters. This requirement led within a few years to, for example, a law which made it possible for a man whose wife

died to receive a widow's pension after her death.

Women's possibilities for participating in the labour market also expanded. The few remaining public posts which were closed to women were opened to them in 1975, with the exception of posts for officers in the armed forces. These were opened to women only in 1995, the same year when women were also given the possibility to participate voluntarily in the national military service which is compulsory for men. Today, compulsory military service, which has been a part of Finnish men's lives since Independence, lasts from 6-12 months. The Lutheran Church, which is the Finnish State Church, has been ordaining women as priests since 1986.

When it was felt that these gender equality laws were not doing the job fast enough, in 1995 a law was passed which required naming representatives from the gender in the minority to at least 40% of the posts in public working groups, committees and boards. After this law came into force, women were named to posts which had been traditionally considered suitable only for men, in such places as technical and engineering committees and boards; and men were named to posts in traditionally female-dominated fields such as child welfare and other social services.

Finnish society today: still on the road toward equality

Conscious and determined efforts to develop democracy and gender equality in Finland have been underway for some 150 years. A great deal has been achieved. The number of women in Parliament has risen to nearly 40% of all MPs, and in national politics all the posts are also open to women. Around 48% of the work force is female. Almost 80% of all adult Finnish women are working outside the home. Women holding jobs have the right to maternity leave, and can expect support from the child's father in housework and childcare. Public daycare and a comprehensive school system also provide mothers with practical possibilities for reconciling work and family life.

In regard to level of education, women have overtaken men in Finland. Every year now, more women (59%) than men graduate from secondary schools leading to university. Similarly, more women (62%) than men receive degrees from universities. Men are in the majority however in receiving technical degrees (77%), and in business degrees (62%). Women have taken over fields in education and the humanities (84% and 76%, respectively). Joint efforts are being made to try to interest more young women



PHOTO: TOMMY OLOFSSON / CORILLA

Even today the job market is still divided into 'women's work' and 'men's work'. Women often work in the social affairs and health sector.

in technology and mathematics; and more young men in education, humanities, and social sciences. Nearly half of all doctoral degrees awarded by Finnish universities are held by women, but the number of Chairs and posts of Head of Department held by women in universities is only now beginning



Women are being encouraged to choose jobs that are not typical for women.

to approach 25% of the total. It must be remembered, however, that relatively speaking this is a very high percentage compared with other member states in the European Union.

One remaining defect, evident even today, seems to be that the labour market is still divided into jobs that are perceived as 'women's work' and 'men's work': women work in jobs that involve caregiving or provide services, and men work in industrial and technical jobs. This has also led to the division of labour so that women still earn on average only 80% of what men earn, since jobs in 'women's work' have lower salaries than those in 'men's work'. The difference in earnings can thus be almost totally explained by the gender division just mentioned. Another gender related problem is that only in the last decade or so has violence by husbands against wives been seriously looked into: rape within marriage was made a crime in 1994, and family violence became a matter for the public prosecutor.

Another challenge has been how to divide work within the family household on a more equal basis among the members of the family. Even now, in 2006, women do more than two-thirds of the housework and childcare. This cannot but have an effect on how women can progress in their careers, and on how the labour market treats them. At the moment, women's biggest problem is that it is much more difficult for them than for men to get permanent, full-time work: women's careers are made up of many short-term jobs. Recently, demands have begun to be made that the expenses of family related leaves should be divided among all employers, not

just the employers of those taking family leave. This would mean that not only fields in which women are the majority of the workers would have to bear this burden. The current system works to maintain discrimination against women in the labour market.

Well-balanced and equal Finns

Equality among all groups in society and between genders brings a great deal of good to society. Living conditions reflecting human values that are favourable to everyone are maintained through Finnish social legislation. The educational system provides the possibility for all of our children's talents to be used for the good of society. In practice, this means that gifted young people living in remote parts of the country, too, can be brought in to help develop society, and that the know-how of both men and women can be used for the common good. Since women no longer need to choose between financial independence and having a family, the birth rate in Finland has remained at a relatively high level compared to other European Union member states. Education gives citizens the possibility to understand national affairs sufficiently for them to make informed political choices. It gives them information which helps them live healthy lives, and teaches them how to take care of themselves. In a democratic society, all citizens have the possibility to make choices based on

PHOTO: TOMMY OLOFSSON / CORILIA



Public daycare helps women to reconcile family life with earning a living. Men are being encouraged to enter a field that is not typical for them, and to provide children with good role-models of what it is to be a man.

information and free will, to create a safe, secure and good life. Work toward gender equality has improved living conditions for men as well as women. In today's modern families, men have by their sides equal partners; wives who can share the responsibilities of providing for the family, as well as decision-making. Particularly among younger people, fathers today participate much more in their children's lives than fathers in earlier generations did.



Demo Finland functions as a co-operative organisation for Finnish parliamentary parties. It seeks to enhance democracy through supporting and implementing collaborative projects carried out between Finnish political parties and political movements in developing countries.

Demo Finland's work is based on the Finnish Government's White Paper of 2004, according to which: "Respect for human rights, equality in society and between the sexes, as well as the advancement of democracy, are the prerequisites for development." The 2004 White Paper goes on to say that: "Facilitating encouraging conditions for the functioning of a multiparty system and parliament creates a favourable basis for the development and establishment of democracy.

Support for democracy and mutual learning

Central to the work of Demo Finland are joint and bilateral dialogue and training projects carried out in cooperation with political movements in developing countries. The purpose of these collaborative projects is to promote dialogue and mutual learning from each other about different forms of democracy, and the problems and benefits of various approaches.

When working with its partner organisations in the South, Demo Finland particularly emphasises:

- Empowerment and participation of women, youth, and marginalised groups in democracy building
- Improved openness and transparency of the political system
- Development of regional and local activities
- Democratic monitoring of national budget formulation, allocation and spending



Through dialogue and training projects, participating Finnish party activists gain a better understanding of the state of democracy in the developing countries, as well as obtain a new perspective on

the way democracy functions in Finland. Parties contribute their own expertise and experience of good practices, thus providing support to the multi-party system of the partner countries.



FINLAND IN BRIEF

- A constitutional republic, independent since 1917
- 5.2 million inhabitants, a total area of 338,000 square kilometres and a population density of 16 persons per square kilometre
- Life expectancy at birth of 73.7 years for males and 81.0 years for females
- GNP per capita EUR 30 005 (2005)
- Member of the European Union since 1995

Finland is an advanced industrial economy with a high standard of living and a functioning social welfare system.

One of the priorities on the political agenda has been to ensure that women enjoy equal rights and opportunities. The majority of Finnish women (85%) work outside the home and are active in political life. Of the 200 members of the present Parliament, 74 are women. The President of the Republic is Ms. Tarja Halonen, the first woman to hold the office in Finland.

All children receive compulsory basic education between the ages of 7 and 16. More than half of the population have completed post-primary education and 13% have a university degree or an equivalent qualification.



In 2006 Finland celebrates the Centenary of the granting of Universal Suffrage to all of the citizens of Finland. Through the granting of full political rights to women, Finland has since been able to achieve a society in which women have an equal place, guaranteed by law, alongside men. An equal society allows all citizens the possibility to make free choices, and to realise their hopes and dreams, regardless of their gender. The participation of women in providing for the family, and in making family decisions, allows them to share family responsibilities, and thus also benefits men.

Education is an important factor in enabling citizens to have an effect on politics and on society: Finland's first school for girls was established in the late 1700s. In the more than 200 years since then, we have come to the point at which women form the majority of students in secondary and university education. Women now

participate more than ever in the labour market, which they entered in large numbers after the end of WWII. During the war years they had to take over the Home Front, and to do jobs that it had traditionally been thought that only men could do.

The modern Finnish welfare system supports parents who wish to stay at home to take care of their small children. As the children grow, the national daycare system and a comprehensive school system provide parents with the possibility of combining working outside the home with family life. This gives women, too, better chances for participating in political activities and in taking responsibility for positions of trust, such as elected political office, in society. Women's participation in politics is important to maintain equality and to ensure that women's point of view on national affairs is seen in Government policies.

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