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Gender and Citizenship under New Labour

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Abstract

To what extent has citizenship been transformed under the New Labour government to include women as equal citizens? This chapter will examine New Labour's record in terms of alternative conceptions of citizenship: a model based on equal obligations to paid work, a model based on recognising care and gender difference, and a model of universal citizenship, underpinning equal expectations of care work and paid work with rights to the resources needed for individuals to combine both. It will argue that, while New Labour has signed up to the EU resolution on work-life balance, which includes commitment to a 'new social contract on gender', and has significantly increased resources for care, obligations to work are at the heart of New Labour ideas of citizenship, with work conceived as paid employment: policies in practice have done more to bring women into employment than men into care. Women's citizenship is still undermined – though less than under earlier governments - by these unequal obligations and their consequences in social rights.

Introduction

To what extent has citizenship been transformed under the New Labour government to include women as equal citizens? In the post-war welfare state under the Labour government, women were defined primarily as mothers, with their position in social security defined by their status in marriage; minimal state commitments to nursery or pre-school care; and the male-breadwinner/female carer model underpinning welfare structures, even as women themselves took to education and the labour market. Citizenship was clearly gendered, with women's obligations conceived as unpaid care, and men's as paid employment. Civil, political and – particularly - social rights were gendered too and left women more exposed than men to poverty and dependence. This 'male breadwinner model' survived in many respects through the Thatcher era, entrenched in government resistance to providing or supporting childcare outside the home, while mothers' labour market participation fitted around their children's needs. By 1992, in her comparative account of welfare regimes, Jane Lewis described the UK as still a male breadwinner model in comparison with France, where these assumptions were more modified by support for motherhood, and Sweden, where policies for dual earner households had weakened them further (Lewis 1992). Among New Labour governments' many initiatives are a Women's Unit, Childcare Strategy, Sure Start, Child Tax Credits, Working Tax Credits, New Deals, Guaranteed Minimum Wage, Work-life Balance Strategy, many of these designed to bring more women into the labour market, putting an end to the post-war gender contract. The chapter will examine New Labour's record in making more equal citizens through changing obligations in paid employment and unpaid care and changing entitlements in social rights.

Citizenship and Gender

T.H. Marshall's conceptualisation of citizenship was rooted in an earlier period of Labour government. It based citizenship on the development of civil, political and social rights, as 'a design for community living'. His essay about citizenship and social class asked about the relationship between citizenship as a principle of equality and class as a principle of difference (Marshall 1949). But the difference of gender escaped Marshall's analysis (Pascall 1986, 1993). Now Ruth Lister's publications in particular enable us to understand the relationship between gender and citizenship (Lister 1995, 2002, 2003a and b). If the post-war labour government established a welfare state with different citizenship status for women and men it was a citizenship

of rights. New Labour's change of emphasis from rights to responsibilities, and the Third Way concept of no rights without responsibilities (Giddens 1998) now make it difficult to discuss rights without responsibilities: these tightening connections now have clear implications for citizenship entitlements. But to what extent are care responsibilities under New Labour recognised as well as labour market responsibilities, and to what extent are citizenship rights still affected by gender differences in work and care?

The adult worker model is one idea of gender equality in citizenship, in which women gain equality with men through equal participation in the labour market. The linking of citizenship and paid work was central to ideas of citizenship in the second half of twentieth century Britain. Paid employment underpinned men's citizenship status under the post-war settlement: because women were not seen as workers, the male breadwinner model with its family wage made women second class citizens. Joining the labour market to achieve equality with men has been an important part of women's own actions as individuals and citizens, in search of economic independence and autonomy. Influential North American New Right discourse, EU concepts of social exclusion and inclusion, a 'new contractualism' which has tied rights more tightly to reciprocal obligations: all these contribute to a tightening knot between paid work and citizenship. Increasingly, paid work has been seen as the key moral obligation for citizens, without which there should be no citizenship rights (discussed in Jordan 1998, Lister 2002).

A citizenship based on difference – accepting gender difference and arguing that women's distinctive contribution should be acknowledged and rewarded - is an alternative destination. If paid work is an important moral duty of citizenship, what of unpaid? Feminists have long argued that care, raising children or caring for older people, is important in itself, and should be recognised as work, differing from paid work only in so far as it is unpaid and socially unregarded (Ungerson 1987, Daly 2002, Daly and Rake 2003). Not only is care seen as work, but as work which has a particular value in developing sensitivity to others' needs, and the qualities required of citizens in a democracy. Thus Sevenhuijsen (1998) links care with citizenship, arguing that the crucial sociological message of feminist theories of care is 'that care is a social activity in itself and that caring activities and caring moral orientations are crucial for the provision of basic needs' Sevenhuijsen (2000: 14). This brings the claim for care as an obligation that should be recognised in itself, and for rights for carers. This may be linked to ideas of difference in feminist claims, which grow partly because of the limitations of the claims to citizenship based on women trying to act as if they were men, while continuing to bear the main responsibility for care.

A third ideal might be called universal citizenship. Structures of work, taxation, benefits and services would assume all adults – men and women - as responsible for care and for paid work and would support them in doing both. Care would be recognised as a moral responsibility, bringing respect and rights, allowing responsibilities and resources for care to be shared within households as well as beyond them. Such a model could be supported through policies for regulating working time, as in France, tax (and tax credit) regimes bringing incentives to enable women's more continuous labour market participation, as in Sweden, and through more universal rights to childcare, work flexibility and paid parental leave. It would aim to replace the current UK pattern of one-and-a-half earner households with a two

x three-quarter model for couples, while lone parents would also be supported in combining employment with childcare.

In so far as the UK developed policies for gender equality under previous administrations, they tended to be based on individual rights. Policies for changing gender relations in households, bringing men into care, offer a second layer of possibilities. The Netherlands' 'Combination Scenario' offers an example of this in some respects, with its ideals of equal value for care work and paid work (Knijn 2001, Knijn & Selten 2002, Plantenga 1999 et al, Plantenga 2002). A third potential layer lies in developing institutions in civil society, to enable the sharing of responsibilities beyond households building a 'universal caregiver' approach in which all employees would be assumed to have care responsibilities (Fraser 1997). For example, in some new CEE member states the EU has stimulated legislation to speed the development of civil society, through a percentage of taxes paid to voluntary organisations (Pascall and Kwak 2005). All these have their place as strategies for gender equality, but a 'universal citizenship' model adds a level of social responsibility for enabling gender equality in work and care, in public and in households (Pascall and Lewis 2004).

What justifies this model of 'universal citizenship'? First, the alternatives are inadequate for bringing real gender equality. Women's efforts to achieve autonomy and independence through paid employment have brought modest success: in the UK, labour market participation is very high at 70% of women of working age, but mothers fit employment around their children's needs and women earn around half the lifetime earnings of men, with poorly qualified women particularly likely to have interrupted working lives and part-time work (Rake 2000, Bellamy and Rake 2005). This model, attempting to bring women into the labour market activity on the same basis as men, brings problems reconciling work and family, even where it has been well supported: in Sweden, high proportions of both men and women report a conflict between work and family life, compared with the UK and the Netherlands (Cousins & Tang 2004). An alternative model of citizenship based on gender difference entrenches the public-private divide, and weakens the recognition of care in the public realm: this Beveridgean model has brought more gender difference and less equality to UK women in income or security compared with Scandinavian countries which have brought women into the labour market on more equal terms with men. Widespread agreement at an ideological level that childcare should be shared (Fahey and Spéder 2004), joins evidence that merging and converging of working and caring lives is already under way (Gershuny 2000). It can no longer be argued that fathers are not seriously engaged in care, while they are – in dual earner households – undertaking three-quarters of mothers' care time (O'Brien 2005). Children should be seen as a social good, not only a private one, requiring a social commitment beyond households (Gornick and Meyers 2003). Finally, the 'no rights without responsibilities' argument can and should be turned on its head to make an argument for 'no responsibilities without rights'. It is difficult to see how parents can undertake responsibility for children unless they have the resources of time and income to do so (Doyal and Gough 1991). The universal citizenship model recognises the limits of individuals, households and civil society in achieving gender equality, especially amid growing socio-economic inequalities and insecurities and risks of relationship breakdown. It assumes responsibilities for paid and unpaid work, and social rights to time, income and care in support of these.

The male breadwinner model in the post-war welfare state

Health and education systems were developed in the post-war period according to a social democratic model, bringing rights on the basis of citizenship. The connection between rights and responsibilities in the NHS and education systems served women well, with rights to services linked only loosely to the broader responsibility to pay taxes. But National Insurance brought a much closer connection between contributions and benefits. The post-war settlement entrenched the male breadwinner model – and gender difference – at the heart of the welfare state. Beveridge, in the Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services, argued carefully for the duties of married women as wives and mothers, to perpetuate the British race and ideals through motherhood, and of marriage as a partnership of different roles and obligations (Beveridge 1942). The National Insurance system was constructed around men's working lives, and their contributions on behalf of their wives, and it built in women's position as wives and mothers, allowing the married women's option of depending on men's contributions. The Women's Freedom League attacked this notion of women's citizenship in 'The Woman Citizen and Social Security': 'The error – an error which lies in the moral rather than the economic sphere – lies in denying to the married woman, rich or poor, housewife or paid worker, an independent personal status. From this error springs a crop of injustices, complications and difficulties, personal, marital and administrative' (Abbot and Bompas 1943). Of course, these complications and injustices have led to a feminist politics and to numerous detailed changes: women now contribute to social insurance in their own right rather than through their husbands. But the way that gender difference was built into this aspect of citizenship has continuing consequences in terms of women's ability to earn rights to insurance benefits – particularly pensions – and their vulnerability to poverty, an issue to which the chapter returns below. Childcare – or its lack – is the other remnant of the post-war settlement: mothers were discouraged from entering the labour market, assumed to be available full-time as mothers, state nurseries and nursery schools were closed. By the end of the Conservative era in 1997, UK childcare provision was recognized as the worst in Europe. Mothers had joined the labour market, either paying for the rapidly developing private sector care, or as very part-time workers who fitted their labour market participation around children's needs. This opened divisions between women: lone mothers were particularly likely to live on Income Support, the means-tested benefit, and particularly likely to be poor. Women's participation in employment is high. But significant residues of the male breadwinner model in the UK remain: a high gender pay gap and exceptional level of women's part-time employment, contributing 44% of total employment. While women on average earn 78% of men's hourly pay, part-time women workers earn around 60% of men's hourly earnings (see below). Over a lifetime, women's earnings average half men's': a one-and-a-half breadwinner system, which does not allow women to earn an independent income or pension rights (Lewis 2000, 2001). And while mothers' part-time hours are often too short to bring an independent income, fathers' average weekly working hours are 47 (O'Brien 2005).

Work and citizenship under New Labour

The recasting of citizenship in terms of the responsibility to work is a trademark of New Labour, with citizenship rights seen as conditional on work, and the security of welfare only for those who cannot work. Work has been defined as paid employment,

rather than unpaid care, bringing major debates about lone parent families and the policies to bring lone mothers into the labour market such as the New Deal for Lone Parents (Gray 2001, Millar and Rowlingson 2001). Policies to 'make work pay' have also brought a Guaranteed Minimum Wage, Working Tax Credits and Child Tax Credits to support work, children and childcare, and – more controversially – low levels of benefits to those not in the labour market. Encouraging the employment participation of women is among these objectives, according to the 2005 Labour Party Manifesto: 'Work is the best anti-poverty strategy. Tailored help, especially for lone parents, is key but we are also committed to making work pay – with a guaranteed income of at least £258 per week for those with children and in full time work' (Labour 2005: 75).

Some critics argue that the government's ambition for a dual earner model is misplaced, and that its strategies offer too simple a model of decision-making, in which individuals choose on the basis of individual benefit, rather than making moral decisions on the basis of their commitment to children and others: 'Mothers make morally and socially based decisions about what behaviour is right and proper, and these decisions can vary between different social groups in different places' (Duncan et al 2003: 327). Alternatively, the strand in feminist thinking prioritising women's independence through paid employment has been an important part of feminist aspirations for citizenship, even while criticising a fetishism of the work ethic that recognises only paid employment as a citizen's contribution (Lister 2002). Women's own actions in reducing gender differences through education show employment as important to women (Grimshaw and Rubery 2001: 49). From this perspective, the question may be whether governments have done enough to support women's labour market participation, rather than whether they have done too much, especially if quality, continuity and pay are added to the equation as well as sheer quantity.

The flagship strategies for encouraging labour market participation – the various New Deals for Young People (NDYP), for the Long Term Unemployed (NDLTU) – have been compared with those targeting women - the New Deals for Lone Parents (NDLP) and for the Partners of the Unemployed (NDPU) in a gender analysis of New Labour's Social Policies. Rake (2001) concludes that those New Deals which serve the claimant population (in which men predominate) have been much more generously funded – to a tune of around twice the investment per person - than those funding lone parents and partners of the unemployed (in which women predominate). Meanwhile, the development of the Tax Credit system, intended to 'make work pay', has had contradictory – and rather complicated - impacts for women. It has become a key system of income support, and will be discussed below. From the point of view of accessing work it appears to offer work incentives to lone mothers, helping to pay for childcare through the Working Tax Credit, while offering some disincentive to women living with partners because of its means-testing system based on household income (Bennett 2002, Bennett 2005, Lister 2002, Grover 2004).

The very strong emphasis on paid employment as a citizenship obligation is apparent in New Labour policies, and only occasionally challenged – as in the Tax Credit system example above – by alternative ambitions. But what has been the impact of policies? Women's labour market participation has indeed grown under New Labour. At the beginning of the New Labour era in 1997 it was 63.1% and by 2003 had climbed to 65.3%, well above the EU 25 average of 55.1%. But the growth of

women's labour market participation precedes New Labour, with a similar increase from 60.8% in the period preceding the Labour government (Eurostat New Cronos website 2005, Aston et al 2004).

[INSERT TABLE 1 around here]

The policies may have helped to keep this trend going, but they have not done very much more. The picture of the UK in Europe is well above average, and much further above the traditionally male breadwinner countries of Ireland and Malta, if still well behind Sweden. But this seems to have been achieved well before there were government policies to encourage women to join the labour market at all, with a 60.8% employment rate already in 1992.

Employment participation is clearly important to UK women, and to their ability to support themselves and their families. But participation is not all. There are crucial limits to women's ability to earn, with serious problems of low pay. The gender pay gap is 22%, well above the EU average, and the highest among EU 15 countries apart from Germany (Eurostat New Cronos website 2005).

[INSERT TABLE 2 around here]

The Guaranteed Minimum Wage has lifted women's wages a little, with over 1 million women affected, and contributing to a small reduction in the gender pay gap, but the minimum wage's low level and lack of automatic upgrading have both been criticized, and have left many women on low pay (Toynbee and Walker 2005: 70-71).

The contribution of women's part-time work to UK employment is exceptional. European comparisons show women's part-time employment constituting nearly 44% of total employment, well above the EU 25 average of 30%. As in the rest of Europe, men's part-time work contributes around a fifth of this. In these respects, Britain is much more like the traditional male breadwinner countries of Ireland and Malta than France or Sweden (European Commission 2004). Short part-time hours are also a feature for UK women, while their preferences are for working longer (Fagan and Warren 2001). So while women's labour market participation is high by EU standards, their labour market position is marginalized.

[INSERT TABLE 3 around here]

The pay gap for full time work in 2003 was 18%. But the gap between women's part-time earnings and men's full time was a full 40%. Each year of part-time work lowers earnings by 1%, as well as losing the 3% increase which full time workers would earn. For every year of interruptions to employment for childcare and family care work, hourly wages decrease by 1%, while doing 'women's work' is another recipe for low earnings (Olesen and Walby 2004). Discrimination is a component in the range of explanations for women's lower earnings, with part-time segregated work associated with motherhood, but also offering a low pay trap for women who need flexible or reduced working time. The National Minimum Wage may have had a small impact on the gender pay gap, as low wages are a feature of women's work, though the low rate paid means many women still earn poverty wages (Warren et al 2001, Bradshaw et al 2003: 14).

Motherhood is an important part of the story of women's earnings in the UK, where mothers are particularly likely to have interrupted working lives, and to work short part-time hours after childbirth. While the tendency of mothers to return to employment has increased, from 57 per cent in 1992 to 64 per cent in 2002, the gap between mothers and other women aged 25-54 is bigger than in other OECD countries. The gap between mothers and non-mothers is especially high at 18 per cent for those with two or more children (HM Treasury and DTI 2004: 76, Chart B5). The age of the youngest child is an important factor, with mothers' employment 20 percentage points higher when their youngest child is between 11 and 15, compared with mothers whose youngest child is under 5 years (HM Treasury and DTI 2004: 77, Chart B7). Comparatively, UK mothers are near the top of the part-time league, 47 per cent of mothers with one child and 63 per cent of working mothers with two or more (HM Treasury and DTI 2004: 78 Chart B8).

Lone mothers' labour market participation has been a particular target of New Labour, partly because of the poverty of lone mothers and their children under previous administrations and their reliance on benefits. There is a new expectation of work, with the New Deal for Lone Parents and Working Tax credits, which provide incentives, but not yet a compulsion to join the labour market. The participation rate has climbed from 44 per cent to more than 54 per cent over the past decade (HM Treasury and DTI 2004: 11).

One calculation of the impact of women's ability to earn an independent living is in terms of the difference in lifetime earnings between men and women in Britain, with women earning half of men's earnings over a lifetime (Rake 2000). It is clear that – while some women in Britain now have careers and earnings comparable to men – they have not on average experienced gender equality in dual earner households. In practice, women's earnings are compromised by discrimination and by care. The next section asks about New Labour's approach to care, particularly childcare, and whether it may be laying the groundwork for more gender equality in the labour market and at home.

Care and citizenship under New Labour

Some aspects of New Labour as ideology are favourable to women's labour market participation and the public support for childcare that would be needed if women were to be full citizens through paid work. The social investment state sees children as the future (Lister 2003), while the fuller use of women's labour can be seen as improving productivity. Previous administrations had assumed that motherhood came first, and that women could make their own arrangements for childcare if they needed it: childcare was a private responsibility, and maternal care best for children (Riley, 1983, Randall 2000, Lewis 2003, Fawcett et al 2005). New Labour has brought very different assumptions about working motherhood, from the first discussion papers about the family, *Supporting Families* (Home Office 1998) and the National Childcare Strategy in *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (Department for Education and Employment/Department of Social Security 1998, Brannen & Moss 2003, Fawcett et al 2005). More recently, in *Balancing work and family life* (HM Treasury and DTI 2003), the current ten-year strategy for childcare, *Choice for parents, the best start for children* (HM Treasury and DTI 2004) and the recent election manifesto (Labour 2005), with its long-term aim of 80% employment, Labour has assumed women as part of the labour market. Rather more slowly, policies for work-life

balance and childcare have followed the recognition of women's labour market participation, with support justified in terms of investment in children and social inclusion of parents (implicitly mothers): 'enabling parents to balance work and family responsibilities can make the difference between their participation in the labour market or their exclusion' (Gordon Brown and Patricia Hewitt forward to *Balancing work and family life* (HM Treasury and DTI 2003).

A range of policies developed for children and parents began with Sure Start, which describes itself as 'the Government's programme to deliver the best start in life for every child by bringing together: early education, childcare, health and family support' (surestart.gov.uk). Current aims are to provide integrated services through children's centres in the most disadvantaged areas, including childcare, but going beyond to a range of supports for parents and children. The Child Tax Credit is now the key mechanism for lifting children out of poverty, while its childcare component assists parents with payments, currently including families earning up to £59,000 per year, paying a maximum of £300 per week (£175 for one child), and covering up to 70 per cent of costs. In 2004, Gordon Brown argued that 'the early part of the twenty first century should be marked by the introduction of pre-school provision for the under fives and childcare available to all' (Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Comprehensive Spending Review). Such is the commitment to childcare as social investment, the 2005 election Manifesto breaks a long-established rule, proposing 'universal' childcare (Labour 2005: 76). All of these amount to important changes of principle since the Thatcher/Major years.

These shifts of rhetoric towards a more comprehensive and universal childcare service for pre-school children have been followed by real changes in practice (Dench et al 2002). The government has made serious changes of policy in assuming the value of childcare for children and parents, and serious investments in new services. The promise of kindergarten places for pre-school children has now been met, with publicly funded places for all 3- and 4-year olds. Labour hit its target of 1.6million new childcare places and had developed 300 new children's centres by 2005 and made plans for 2,200 more to be in place by 2008 (Toynbee and Walker 2005: 71, 312).

But are there limits to what New Labour can achieve in childcare through 'Market Means and Welfare Ends' (Taylor-Gooby 2004a)? New Labour's childcare development has been a case study of this approach, using means-tested tax credits to stimulate demand, and a mixture of public and private providers to supply. The recent ten-year strategy for childcare explains government policy for childcare as 'progressive universalism, with some support for all and most support for those who need it most' (HM Treasury and DTI 2004: 4). Provision so far is piecemeal, with a mixture of public and private providers making a complex pattern, with a mixture of funding streams, and many poor children living outside the catchment areas of the sure start and children's centres (Land 2002). Despite help through tax credits, parents in the UK pay around 75 per cent of the cost of childcare (Daycare Trust 2004: 10). Now just over half of lone mothers are in paid employment and nearly a quarter of lone mothers receive CCTC, which will pay a proportion of their childcare costs, stimulating the demand for childcare places (Women's Budget Group 2005: 3.9). But the mixed economy makes access and quality uncertain (Lewis 2003). By 2004 Peter

Moss described the early years childcare system as ‘an incoherent and exclusionary jumble of services’ (Moss 2004: 24).

The new ten-year strategy for childcare *Choice for parents, the best start for children* certainly plans improvements for parents and children: increasing the scope of pre-school places from the current 2.5-hour day to a 3-hour day by 2010, giving a 15-hour week in term-time (with a long-term prospect of a 20-hour week), and an obligation on local authorities by 2008 to ‘secure sufficient supply’ for families’ needs. There are also plans for developing a skilled workforce, and reducing the proportion of childcare costs paid by parents (HM Treasury and DTI 2004). The ten-year strategy does not address the provision of childcare for one- and two-year olds. It also continues the policy of focussing on disadvantaged areas, thus missing the many poor children who live outside them (Land 2002).

Childcare campaigners have been arguing for a more thoroughgoing universal system, with a shift from a demand-side approach to a supply-side approach. They argue the need for a guaranteed supply of childcare places, a strategy for 1- and 2-year olds, higher public spending, and reducing parents’ share of the costs, comparing the UK budget for childcare –0.8% GDP – with the 2 –2.5% spent in Sweden and Denmark (Women’s Budget Group 2005: 6.11, see also daycaretrust.org.uk 2004).

There has been real increase in spending and commitment to Early Education and Childcare. And there are plans and promises for more, including – by the end of the next Parliament – out of school childcare places for 3-14 year olds between 8am and 6pm on weekdays (HM Treasury and DTI 2004: 1). But these debates show how far the UK is from a universal system of childcare. Despite unprecedented concern with women’s labour market participation, work-life balance for parents, investment in children through quality services, social inclusion of parents and children, we still have a 2.5 hour day for pre-school children, forcing parents (usually mothers) to patchwork care arrangements if they are to use the time for jobs. And despite unprecedented commitment from HM Treasury to children and childcare, the system relies on the unreliable: private providers who do not necessarily respond to government incentives (Taylor-Gooby 2004b) and 17.7 per cent of whom went out of business in the year to 2004 (HM Treasury and DTI 2004: 15).

Parental leaves/work-life balance/working time

Under earlier administrations, managing work and childcare had been seen – broadly - as maternal work. Some increases in rights under previous Labour governments meant that women had rights to equal pay, and access to jobs, became contributors to National Insurance, and had rights to maternity leave, and to return to their jobs after childbirth. But the interrupted and part-time careers described above were women’s response to a social policy context which offered little positive support to reconciliation between paid work and motherhood. Broadly, women could have equality if they behaved like men, but there was little to support those who had responsibility for children or others.

Among other countries in Europe, Britain has signed up to the agenda on work-life balance in the EU, agreeing in principle with a resolution to work towards a ‘new gender contract’ in which issues of working time, flexibility, managing work and

childcare would be on our social policy agenda (Council of the European Union 2000). It has also developed its own policy: *Balancing work and family life: enhancing choice and support for parents* (HM Treasury and DTI 2003). There is a string of Treasury commitments and government documents about improving parents' relationship with the labour market, including *Working Parents: competitiveness and choice, Working Time – Widening the Debate* and *Work and Families: Choice and Flexibility* (DTI 2000, 2004, 2005) and now a *Work and Families Bill*. These all document the limits imposed on women's labour market position by motherhood, while recognizing the value of their contribution to business and employment. They also admit that the UK's provision has been weak in comparison with OECD countries, and argue the need for government to provide a framework to tap the 'public benefits' from improving the fit between families and work, seen as 'expanding opportunities within and across generations, tackling disadvantage and increasing the productive capacity of the nation' (DTI 2005: 14). From April 2003, parents have a new 'right to apply to work flexibly ... employers will have a statutory duty to consider requests seriously' (HM Treasury and DTI 2003: 24). In its first year of operation around a quarter of parents of children under six asked for more flexible working arrangements and around 800,000 families secured them. There are cautious plans to extend these rights to parents of older children and to carers, once business has been persuaded that flexibility brings savings in recruitment and minimal costs (DTI 2005: 53).

Debates about extending parental leaves have brought significant changes under New Labour, as well as promises of more. Currently, Statutory Maternity Pay lasts 6 months, which the government claims is now the longest in Europe and plans to lengthen to 12 months by the next election; but at £106 per week it is rather low. Currently mothers can take an extra 6 months unpaid. New Labour resisted pressure for paternity leave, showing great reluctance to make any such gesture to new fatherhood. But April 2003 saw the first leave for fathers: two weeks Statutory Paternity Pay, at the same standard rate as Statutory Maternity Pay. Paternity provisions announce a break with a policy past in which men's responsibility for care has scarcely been considered. But we have to wait until the end of the next Parliament for stronger provisions for sharing parental care rather than extending maternity leave (HM Treasury and DTI 2003, 2004). And what is being proposed is a right for mothers to transfer maternity leave to fathers, rather than a right of fathers to 'Daddy leave' in their own right. This seems to entrench mothers' responsibility for care rather than fathers'. The priorities in the DTI *Work and Families* consultation begin with children, and move on to parental choice, response to fathers' demands and changing families, drawing to a close with gender equality: 'This law will help give children the best start in life and provide parents with more choice by allowing the mother the option of returning to work earlier if she wants to and responding to the growing demand from fathers to stay at home and care for their child. This reflects changing family patterns, the different choices families are increasingly facing, and helps support greater equality at home and at work for men and women' (DTI 2005: 39). This 'responding to the growing demand from fathers' makes an interesting contrast to countries such as Norway and Sweden, whose governments have been using 'Daddy Leave' to encourage fathers to care (Hobson 2002, Deven and Moss 2002). Higher levels of income replacement and the 'use it or lose it' principle applied in Norway, are needed if men are to use the leaves and become more involved in caring for their children (Women's Budget Group 2005: 1). The reference to gender

equality in the DTI paper is rare: the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, author of a book about time and family life (Hewitt 1993), has pursued this 'women's agenda' energetically, but always within a set of New Labour priorities about business, individual choice and market means.

Another interesting contrast with other European countries appears in Britain's working time policy. France has reduced working hours mainly for the sake of sharing work between households rather than sharing within them, but its 35-hour week has nevertheless enabled families to manage childcare (Fagnani and Letablier 2004). Meanwhile, Britain negotiated an opt-out to the EU Working Time Directive, which allowed, and still allows people to work longer than a 48-hour week if they choose to do so. In a consultation paper on *Working Time – Widening the Debate* the DTI argued the significance of the individual's right to work more than 48-hours, for two reasons: 'preserving labour market flexibility' and 'individual choice' (DTI 2004: 11). The Working Time Directive could be a key instrument for promoting work-life balance. The government's focus on the business case misses the benefits to the wider economy and society from women's fuller participation in the workplace. The argument for individual choice ignores joint responsibilities and reduces choice for those who take responsibility for care (Women's Budget Group 2004: 4). But while the DTI has been consulting on this issue, and some EU Labour MPs have voted in Europe to end the opt-out, it seems unlikely that the government in Westminster will change a policy that is so in accord with the priority given to business interests and individual choice.

Gender and citizenship rights under New Labour

To what extent has the New Labour agenda brought equal rights to women and men? Of course this is a huge topic, and can only be touched on. In particular, we should note those areas in which New Labour has at last come down on the side of old in supporting public services according to social democratic principles with public investment in education and the NHS, even if this is combined with Private Finance Initiatives. This section asks about the changes in entitlements to income under New Labour, and to what extent the gender differences have changed from the male breadwinner model which tended to put incomes and benefits in men's hands as well as jobs. First, an overview of the poverty data shows that poverty is still gendered. The Family Resources Survey, shows that 25 percent of the female population compared with 22 per cent of the male population were living in households with incomes less than 60 per cent of the median. The Social Exclusion Survey shows that women are more likely to be lacking two or more socially perceived necessities and are more likely to feel poor, to be dependent on Income support and to be poor on all four dimensions of poverty. Research consistently shows that women have much less individual income than men, and less access to household income, and that official figures – which tend to be based on joint household income - underestimate women's poverty (Bradshaw et al 2003, Bellamy and Rake 2005). Table 4 shows how far social welfare transfers in the UK reduce women's poverty in comparison with men's and in comparison with other EU welfare states.

[Insert Table 4 around here]

While women in Ireland (32%), Sweden (31%), the UK (28%) and France (25%), all have risks of poverty before transfers at or above the EU 15 or EU 25 average (both 25%), welfare states demonstrate very different abilities to reduce these. While

Sweden and France both cut women's risk of poverty to 12% and 13% respectively, below the EU 15 or EU 25 average (both 17%), the UK leaves 19% of women at risk of poverty, even after transfers. These data point to a male breadwinner model in the UK, still important in the welfare state's capacity to respond to women's risk of poverty.

There are plenty of reasons for pensions to be on the social policy agenda: the ageing population, inadequacies in savings, whether through personal pensions (dating from the Thatcher years), company pensions, stakeholder pensions. While the question of how to produce enough savings to keep pensioners out of poverty is on the agenda, the gender dimensions have been too little debated (Barr 2001, Ginn et al 2001, Bellamy and Rake 2005). Whether National Insurance pensions, occupational pensions, personal pensions or savings, men's contributions earn them more entitlements than women. As cohabiting partners and wives, women may be included in any of these arrangements, and the allocation of pension rights on divorce is now more likely to acknowledge unpaid work in women's contribution to marriage. But gender differences in working lives bring gender differences in entitlements to pensions, putting women at much greater risk of poverty.

The core National Insurance pension entitlement in the UK is the Basic State Pension. But whereas 92 per cent of men retire with the full state pension in their own right, a minority of women do so (Hansard House of Commons Written Answers 7 Feb 2002, Bradshaw et al 2003: 34, Hollis 2005). Older women may have taken the Married Woman's Option to opt out of National Insurance, on the grounds that they would be covered through their husbands, as indeed, some are: a wife may receive a pension at 60% of her husband's rate and be entitled to inherit his pension rights. Others may lack entitlement because of low pay, below the lower earnings limit for contributions, and/or because care responsibilities as parents, or to their own parents, have limited their labour market attachment and reduced entitlements. For all these reasons the full Basic State Pension was received by only 23% of women reaching 60 in September 2004, while on average those reaching 60 in 2005/6 have 70% of a full Basic Pension (DWP 2005: 73). The DWP argues that the figures are changing rapidly because of women's increasing labour market participation, and the effects of Home Responsibilities Protection, introduced in 1978 to protect the Basic Pension rights of those caring for a child under 17 by reducing the number of years needed to qualify. The DWP seems to be building an argument for defending the current contributory system, on the grounds that women in their early 40's or younger are accruing pension rights equivalent to men and by 2025 over 80% of women reaching pension age will be entitled to a full basic state pension (DWP 2005: 66-82). But this solution will not meet the needs of those retiring before 2025. There are problems at the heart of the National Insurance Scheme, designed in the post-war era around men's working lives and secure families. Most women's working lives have been interrupted and low paid. Falling marriage rates and higher divorce rates, with now half of all marriages ending in divorce, mean that the Beveridgean model, which built women's dependency on men into the welfare state, is not a secure framework for women's pensions. New Labour's response to pensioner poverty is to means test, to focus pension guarantees on the poorest pensioners. There is now a Pension Credit, paying around £40 per week to around 3.2 million households, with an income guarantee, currently £109 per week. In many ways this benefits women, whose life expectancy is greater than men's and who have a high risk of poverty in old age: they have been

two-thirds of the recipients of Minimum Income Guarantees. But there are problems with this solution: the Department for Work and Pensions estimates that between 22 per cent and 36 per cent of entitled pensioners do not claim. One solution would be to have care better recognised in the National Insurance System, on the grounds that this would value care and give more long term protection to women's contributions (Women's Budget Group 2005: 3). The Equal Opportunities Commission prefer a universal citizens' pension, on the grounds that National Insurance is too much designed around men's lives and will never give a secure, guaranteed pension for women (Equal Opportunities Commission 2005: eoc.org.ac.uk). This seems the stronger argument, on the evidence that the cutting and pasting of the insurance system to fit the changing reality so far leaves 77% of women reaching 60 unable to claim a full Basic State Pension. Now it seems that New Labour may be making a similar mistake on pensions to the post-war Labour government, both reviewing pensions through a male lens: in this case, and characteristically for New Labour, with the forthcoming Turner report, it is a business lens.

If the means test – a classic liberal welfare state response to poverty – is the current solution for pensions, the same strategy has brought tax credits administered by the Inland Revenue rather than the benefits system, as a core strategy for encouraging work and reducing poverty. New Labour's emphasis on work incentives was reflected in a decision to pay the Working Family Tax Credit through the wage packet, rather than to the carer, thus bringing a potential £900 million transfer from carers (mainly women) to earners (mainly men) (Steve Webb MP, House of Commons debates 1999, col 169). At this point, the policy priority was clearly for work rather than against poverty. However, the government changed under pressure, and gave couples the choice about whether the earning partner should receive it in the wage packet, or the caring partner as a benefit. Since April 2003, the tax credit system has been significantly developed, with Child Tax Credits, paid to 90% of families, and Working Tax Credits, aimed at rather fewer. The new system appears to split the payment between carer and worker: now the Child Tax Credit addresses child poverty, while the Working Tax Credit offers the incentive to work. While the Institute for Fiscal Studies reports 'there is nothing that requires the child tax credit to be paid to the woman or the main carer in a couple' (Brewer 2003: 4), it does appear more widely to be seen as giving the Child Tax Credit to the main carer (Bennett 2005). The Child Tax Credits are now a major part of the government's anti-poverty strategy, and 'the biggest ever state boost to mothers' incomes' (Toynbee and Walker 2005: 71). The universal system of child benefit, paid on behalf of all children, remains. Hilary Land comments that we now have the closest thing to the Inland Revenue's claim 'single seamless system' of support for families with children that Britain has ever experienced (Land 2004: 4).

The Working Tax Credit brings support to single people and couples who work at least 16 hours a week if they have children, or 30 hours if they do not and has a childcare element. For lone mothers, this brings a significant work incentive, and the proportion in employment has now reached 54 percent, an increase from 46 percent since 1997, while the government aims for 70 percent by 2010 (HM Treasury and DTI 2004: 90). For lone mothers, this employment strategy brings a better prospect of a long-term income than being full-time carers. They may sometimes under the New Deal have been encouraged to do low paid jobs, when a strategy of developing skills would bring better incomes and security in the long-term (Gray 2001). There also

remain serious problems in accessing childcare. But the Working Tax Credit, incorporating an element for childcare, and the Child Tax Credit, which they receive whether employed or not, bring a range of choices for lone mothers. The working hours rules for Working Tax Credit appear to give lone mothers a real choice about balancing work and care: they can receive support if they work 16 hours, or more support if they work 30. Either way, this system allows a shorter working week to be supplemented through tax credits, and may enable lone parents, who are mostly mothers, to lift themselves and their children out of poverty, and keep a foot in the labour market, while keeping time for care.

For mothers who are part of couples, the Tax Credit system has more mixed implications. The Child Tax Credit brings more material support for children and childcare. But there are concerns about joint taxation (Bennett 2002, Bennett 2005, Brewer 2003). Whereas the Inland Revenue had moved to individually based taxation, the Tax Credit system is built on a household means test. This risks bringing disincentives to labour market participation for mothers of young children, who will face high rates of marginal taxation/tax credit loss. Mothers in couples are also more likely to pay the costs of childcare. The maximum proportion of the costs covered by tax credits is 70%. It is also targeted on smaller families, making childcare costs a significant barrier to work for mothers in larger families (Land 2004).

Equal citizenship under New Labour?

If we go back to the three concepts of gender equality in citizenship outlined at the beginning, we can ask to what extent New Labour ideology and policy have moved towards gender equality in each of the concepts.

The adult worker model of gender equality, in which women join the labour market on the same terms as men, has been strongly developed under New Labour. The underpinning assumptions have changed radically from the male breadwinner model, to the point where the assumptions about women as workers have overtaken the real ability of women to earn independence for themselves (Lewis 2001). Core New Labour ideas – equality of opportunity, no rights without responsibilities, market means/welfare ends – these have favoured women's labour market participation, and a range of measures to improve their incentives to work and their ability to do so. These have included a commitment to 'universal' childcare, while the extent to which they can achieve this through market means may be limited (Lewis 2005).

The gender difference model – represented in the UK by the male breadwinner model, instituted under the post-war Labour government – has proved unable to produce gender equality, as care was unpaid, and therefore undervalued. It has also proved vulnerable to one of the new risks: marriage and relationship insecurity bring income insecurity to women under a system which attached benefits to a male 'family wage'. However, the literature about care has raised real issues about its importance and relationship with citizenship. Care and carers are a little higher up the political agenda, with child tax credits paid to the main carer, and longer maternity pay (Bellamy and Rake 2005: 15). The negative in these developments is that care issues are on New Labour's agenda in so far as they mesh with labour market issues and little further. As Rake argues: 'New Labour runs the risk of pursuing the citizen worker agenda at the expense of any richer and more just understanding of what constitutes citizenship' (Rake 2001: 227).

And what of a third model of gender equality in citizenship, which would support citizenship obligations as both work and care, bringing men into care as women have been brought into work, and move towards replacing the one-and-half earner with a two x three-quarter model? The UK population is moving in this direction, in terms of childcare ideals (Fahey and Spéder 2004) as well as practices. The position is not one of equity between men and women, but of convergence in the time given to childcare, with men in dual full-time earner couples in 2000-1 spending 75% of the time given by women (O'Brien 2005: 4). New Labour seems old-fashioned: happy to support changed gender roles for mothers, including a combined model of work and care for lone mothers, it has been extremely reluctant to promote changes in fatherhood, containing working hours, or enabling fathers to care. While government documents are littered with references to responsibility to work, it is difficult to find any official reference to any moral responsibility of fathers to care. Where there is support for fathers as carers, as in the new paternity leave, it is offered in terms of consumer choice rather than moral responsibility. New Labour's support of individual choice in relation to working hours and the 48-hour opt-out, and its hesitant succumbing to pressure over paternity leave, proposals for mothers to control fathers' access to leave: these suggest a traditional model of gender roles in the family. This traditional model under-uses and under-develops women's capacities at work and men's capacities in care, and will not bring gender equality in family or public life.

Table 1: Female and male employment rates, as percentage of women and men aged 15 to 64, and difference between male and female, 2005¹

	Employment rate: female	Employment rate: male	Employment rate Male – female
Sweden	70.4	74.4	4.0
Denmark	71.9	79.8	7.9
Slovenia	61.3	70.4	9.1
Hungary	51.0	63.1	12.1
France	57.6	68.8	11.2
Germany	59.6	71.2	11.6
UK	65.9	77.6	11.7
Ireland	58.3	76.9	18.6
Malta	33.7	73.8	40.1
EU 27	56.0	70.8	14.8

Source: Eurostat structural indicators Europa NewCronos website 2006 and author's calculations

¹ The employment rates are calculated by dividing the number of women aged 15 to 64 in employment by the total female population of the same age group. The indicator is based on the EU Labour Force Survey. The survey covers the entire population living in private households and excludes those in collective households such as boarding houses, halls of residence and hospitals. Employed population consists of those persons who during the reference week did any work for pay or profit for at least one hour, or were not working but had jobs from which they were temporarily absent.

Table 2: Part-time workers as percentage of total employment, 2005

	Part-time rate: female	Part-time rate: male	Part-time rate female: male
Sweden	39.6	11.5	3.4: 1
Denmark	43.8	7.8	5.6: 1
Slovenia	11.1	7.2	1.5: 1
Hungary	5.8	2.7	2.1: 1
Poland	14.3	8.0	1.8: 1
Netherlands	75.1	22.6	3.3: 1
France	30.7	5.7	5.4: 1
Germany	43.8	7.8	5.6 :1
UK	42.7	10.4	4.1: 1
Ireland (2002)	30.4	6.5	4.7: 1
Malta	21.1	4.5	4.7: 1
Euro area	34.8	6.9	5.0: 1
EU 25	32.4	7.4	4.4: 1

Source: European Commission/Eurostat 2007 *Living conditions in Europe* (Table 3.2: 46) and author's calculations.

Table 3: Women in decision-making

	Percentage of women Senior Ministers in national government	Percentage of women members of single/lower house Parliaments	Percentage of women at one level below the minister	Percentage of women at two below minister
Sweden	52	45	40	45
Slovenia	7	15	41	67
Hungary	12	9	3	23
Poland	6	22	29	31
France	18	13	0	18
Germany	33	33	11	9
UK	27	18	21	18
Ireland	14	13	11	11
Malta	15	9	7	12
Average EU 25	23	23	16	24

Source: European Commission Database on Women and Men in Decision-making 2005

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