

## **Feminism: a social issue. Fighting economic inequalities between women and men.**

Income inequality between men and women in France today stands at 42%. Women's material dependence is the main factor in their domination. Deeply linked to their confinement in the roles of mother and wife, to the sacralization of maternal devotion and sexual availability, the condition of women has nevertheless progressed in recent decades.

After the 19th century consecrated "the invention of the housewife" and organized the return of women to the home to ensure the reproduction of the labor force and the maintenance of the home of men who had to spend their lives in the factory, the 20th century saw women return to the labor market, under the double influence of the feminist movements of the 2nd wave and the Glorious Thirty. But this return was accompanied by the phenomenon of "double days" (salaried work and free work at home), while wage and wealth gaps remain high.

Women are more often part-time, have little access to positions of responsibility and work in less valued occupations, resulting in significant retirement gaps. The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted their over-representation in overexposed and under-valued professions: they represent 90% of the nurses, medical-social assistants and cashiers on the front line during the Covid crisis. These figures should raise questions about the gender stereotypes that contribute to orienting women firstly towards the *care* professions and then affect their careers, which are more often interrupted at the time of births in particular, with the resulting drop in income.

Our institutions play a decisive role: until the introduction of the 35-hour week, part-time work was less expensive for employers, encouraging less work for women (Hélène Périvier). Similarly, the opening of parental leave as of the second child in the 1990s has had a significant effect on women's working hours. Today, the demand for a properly paid and sufficiently long 2nd parent leave is likely to prevent the deepening of career inequalities by better distributing parental tasks, and thus to fight against women's economic dependence.

These income inequalities are prolonged by wealth inequalities: for example, the gap between the capital held by men and women has increased from 9% in 1998 to 16% in 2015. While women work for free in the home, men accumulate capital. And during separations or inheritances, many biases still favor men: structural assets are systematically passed on to them. The family business should not be threatened in the event of separation by a fair division of shares, so that women are often at a disadvantage. And when there is little or nothing to share, the compensatory benefits do not reduce the husband's low income, so that the wife, who often assumes the responsibility for the children, will have to make do with a small benefit and take care of the applications for social assistance. Some institutional absurdities also remain: for example, alimony payments are deductible from the

taxes for the debtor, but taxable for the beneficiary. Men manage wealth while women manage misery.

Let us not forget that fighting for economic equality F/W means defending half of humanity, making concrete the republican promise of equality, but it also means strengthening social cohesion by preventing many of our fellow citizens and their children from falling into poverty.

### **1. For a real second parent leave**

We affirm the need for both parents to be able to welcome their child(ren) together and thus call for the implementation of a real second parent leave, mandatory, guaranteed in remuneration, extended over 16 weeks - 8 of which are mandatory - and taken at the same time as maternity leave.

French society is changing: 64% of women and men under 35 are in favor of extending paternity leave. France is far behind some of its neighbors: 8 weeks from 2019 and 12 weeks in 2020 in Spain, 6.5 months in Finland from 2021.

The paternity leave existing since 2002, and modified in 2012, gives 3 compulsory birth days and up to 11 working days of paternity leave. Only 67% of fathers take them.

The "first 1000 days" commission recommended rethinking paternity leave, in particular by extending its duration and making it more flexible, so that it can be taken, for example, at the time of birth, but also at the end of maternity leave. The committee's report stresses that a longer leave than the current duration promotes interaction and the formation of a bond of attachment with the second parent, but also co-parenting and an equitable sharing of work and family life between parents.

The Macron government is now proposing 28 days of paternity leave, including 7 days of mandatory leave. This subject deserves greater ambition.

- **More equality between women and men**

The obligation for all men and women to be absent from the workplace on the occasion of the birth of a child is the only way to guarantee equality between all parents, which changes mentalities and professional practices.

45% of women aged 25 to 49 with family responsibilities report that being a parent has an impact on their work situation, almost twice as many as men. These inequalities are reflected in a more frequent reduction in working time when a child arrives, but also in a lesser progression in women's professional careers.

During the child's first few months, the automatisms that define parental functioning are created. Making women take on care and domestic tasks alone during this period maintains the status quo: women still do 71% of domestic work and spend an average of 95 minutes a day on daily parental tasks compared to 21 minutes for men.

Finally, the COVID-19 crisis has shown us the extent to which certain professions are exposed to financial risk in the event of a decline in activity: this right to second parent leave should be open to all, whether employees or self-employed.

- **A second parent leave for a public health issue**

10 to 13% of women experience postpartum depression. The extension of paternity leave is thus a public health measure: the parent who does not give birth must be able to support the woman who has given birth.

However, it should not be thought that the presence of the second parent is always synonymous with help for the mother. During the confinement, 58% of women in couples felt that they performed the majority of household and educational tasks, while 34% of men were teleworking at home (compared to 28% of women) and 23% were partially unemployed (same share as women). Despite a greater presence of men in the home, 28% of women continued to devote between 2 and 3 hours of their time to domestic work, compared to 18% of men.

We must therefore continue to fight against ordinary sexism and deconstruct the gender stereotypes that make it more difficult to achieve de facto equality between men and women. Bourdieu stressed that, if the battle of the law is won, the battle of minds is still to be fought to challenge male domination, especially in schools.

## **2. Empowering the school to stop being a place where virilism is learned.**

The founding texts on the school's involvement in the fight against sexism are old.

The 1982 circular "Educational action against sexist prejudices", written at the instigation of Yvette Roudy, Minister Delegate for Women's Rights, the interministerial convention for equality between girls and boys, women and men in the education system, initiated in 2000, under the Jospin government.

After almost 40 years, we can see that these texts are applied only very partially and often thanks to the conviction and involvement of a few members of the educational staff. The latest reform of the general high school reinforces the sexist bias of orientation, which remains very gendered in the professional streams according to the roles implicit in society. The initial compulsory training of educational staff on this topic is weak and continuing education almost non-existent.

- The fight against gender-based violence must become a priority:
- Educating girls and boys to consent
- Working with class groups on the rejection of gender-based violence

- Support for educational personnel when young people or their parents react in transgression with the fundamentals of equality.
- In all schools, a protocol is in place to allow students who are victims to violence to talk to trained adults in confidence

The school has a fundamental role to play in deconstructing gender stereotypes that inscribe inequalities in the bodies themselves and reproduce the social patterns of economic dependence of women, who, moreover, are still victims of gender discrimination. It is necessary to :

- Fight against gender stereotypes that influence real equality between girls and boys (guidance, political or professional careers)
- To fight against the learning of virilism in boys and against sexist and sexual aggression in secondary schools.
- Supporting young girls and boys who choose paths in which they and they will be in the minority
- Carry out mandatory initial and ongoing training so that all educational personnel are aware of the mechanisms related to stereotypes and virilism and the importance of combating them.
- Re-launch equality ABCDs designed for a progressive journey of equality awareness among students.

### **3. . Towards true gender pay equality?**

In France, while the average wage gap between women and men narrowed encouragingly between 1973 and 1995, the catch-up has slowed considerably since then. Today it is 25% over the entire career and 9% at equal work, in equal positions (effect of discrimination).

This gap increases as qualification levels increase: for employees with three years of higher education, the average annual net salary in full-time equivalent is 50,851 euros for men and only 35,896 euros for women. Only 6% of companies pay equal pay for equal work, according to a study of 40,000 companies with more than 25 employees (INSEE study of June 18, 2020).

Strict equality would make it possible to put an end to many other forms of discrimination (housing, health, transportation, etc.) and to contribute to balancing the accounts of the social security system, particularly those of the "pension insurance" branch. From a societal point of view, it would finally legitimize, on this subject, the republican promise of equality for half of the French people.

It will thus be necessary to act on both gender discrimination and inequalities in employment and careers:

- on the gendered structuring of the job market (sectors, part-time, distribution of fixed-term/fixed-term contracts, low-skilled jobs, etc.).

- an accelerated catch-up in the distribution of positions of responsibility, and equal pay, to reach between 2025 and 2030 a 40% share for women, as in Iceland, through the introduction of quotas as already planned in France, for example, for boards of directors or public authorities.
- on the lack of transparency of companies to fight against discrimination.

#### **4. . The structure of taxation is also important and may discourage women taking up paid employment.**

First of all, while some countries individualize taxation, ours remains patriarchal, organized around the "household" - the man's taxation increases if the woman works while social benefits are not individualized and therefore shared. The general principle of the marital quotient - the common taxation of the members of a couple and the application of the progressive scale to the average of their incomes - increases the marginal tax rate of the "second" income (usually the woman) and discourages her participation in the labor market. Second, tax credits and reductions can play a role: tax reductions related to child care costs can help women enter the labour market.

**The progressiveness of taxation is also a determining point: the more progressive the taxation system is and on wealth, the more favorable it will be for women, with lower incomes and wealth. Moreover,** since the share of income spent on the purchase of products for the family (basic necessities, baby products, etc.) is higher for women than for men, the Socialists must support the reduction of VAT on basic necessities, particularly on feminine hygiene products at the European level.

#### **5. . Getting to know each other better to better fight against economic violence**

Women's economic dependence and violence against women are linked. Differences in income and assets can make it very difficult for women to leave the marital home, even in cases of domestic violence. And when the departure is hasty, it also sometimes means leaving the husband in control of the family patrimony.

Economic violence now refers to a separate notion, that of acts of control over a woman's behavior by depriving her of economic resources, preventing her from having a job and personal financial income or using them according to her will, which for a long time was legal: French women had to ask their husbands' permission to open a bank account until 1956 and until 1965 to be able to work.

In 2014, France ratified the Istanbul Convention, which includes economic violence in the definition of domestic (marital) violence. In 2018, the HCE deplores the lack of "*available funds and means to conduct such a study, especially if it concerns the field of housing*". Finally, in November 2019, GREVIO points out the need for measures to "*establish legal mechanisms to protect women from economic violence*."

Feminism is not a societal issue, but an eminently social one.

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