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The family, flexible work and social cohesion at risk

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Analysing changes in working life at any time in history requires an understanding of women's and men's relationships to social institutions outside the workplace, particularly the family and the community. Today, this is even more true than in the past because of women's massive return to wage work at a time of profound change in the workplace, in families and in communities. This article focuses on the family in a globalizing economy, on what these changes may mean for the way in which women and men in postindustrial society confront the information age, and how social policy needs to change to be relevant in the new environment.

Forces for change in the family and workplace

Globalization and the intensified economic competition it engenders are profoundly altering the way we live and relate to each other. For a start, work is undergoing such transformation that in future the notion of a "job" may change its meaning entirely. More intense competition on a worldwide scale makes firms acutely aware of costs and productivity. The solution many employers have reached is to reorganize work around decentralized management, customized products, and work differentiation, such that work tasks become individualized and workers differentiated. This makes it much easier to subcontract tasks, employ part-time workers and hire temporary labour for some specific tasks, while other "core" work is multi-tasked and carried out in teams. Workers are being defined less in terms of the particular long-term jobs they hold than in terms of the knowledge they have acquired through studying and working. The acquisition of a "knowledge portfolio" enables them to move between firms and even between types of work, as jobs are redefined and demand shifts.

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The effect of individualization and differentiation is to separate more workers from the kind of permanent, full-time job in stable businesses that characterized post-Second World War development in Europe, Japan, the United States and other industrialized countries. An earlier factory revolution drove a wedge between workers and the products they made (in a Taylorist model); the new transformation is dissolving the identity that workers developed in relation to industrial institutions, especially the corporation and the trade union. Workers are being separated both from their traditional identities built up over more than a century and from the social networks that enabled them to find economic security. The job and everything organized around the job — the friends at work, the after-work meeting places, the trade union, even group transport — lose their social function. They are becoming as "permanently temporary" as the work itself.

The traditional social integrators, apart from the workplace and job-centred social networks, are the family and the community. In times of transition, whether from agricultural society to industrial, industrial to postindustrial, or (as now) local or national to global, families and communities are called upon to bear the greatest responsibility for preserving social cohesion. Families also transmit much of the skills and knowledge needed by children to succeed in the adult work world. So it is not surprising that, whenever these workplace transitions occur, families and the communities that form around work organizations are strained.

Families have changed profoundly over the past hundred years. Women have gradually rejected bearing the sole responsibility for social cohesion and for educating the next generation. They began in the late nineteenth century, by reducing family size through sexual abstinence. Smaller families made social cohesion easier, gave more time for community-building, and allowed women to create a social life for themselves outside the family, even, and increasingly, at the workplace. But the last round of women's revolt, which started in the late 1960s in a number of countries, struck at the gender relations underlying both family and work. Women rejected the homemaker identity assigned them by industrial society. Masses of married women entered the labour market, first on a part-time and then on a full-time basis. Many of them ended heading families without men. All this happened both *before* and *independently* of globalization and the arrival of new information technology.

So, when workplace restructuring came along only a short decade later, employers were inevitably influenced by women's new willingness to work, and hired them in great numbers as a new source of relatively highly educated labour. In the meantime, the nuclear family with a full-time mother managing the home — the family that sustained and nurtured the Industrial Revolution — has been transformed. The new style of work organization that is successfully responding to the competitive pressures of a globalized economy has come to depend on the relatively cheap, highly productive and highly flexible labour increasingly supplied by these wives and mothers. And this has occurred just as there is the greatest need for a strong, cohesive family with time and energy to invest in the education and well-being of both adults and children during the difficult transition towards new forms of work and personal life.

Furthermore, communities that developed during the Industrial Revolution, such as the factory towns and the industrial cities with their ethnic and other highly organized suburban enclaves, have fragmented as a result of the post-industrial flight to new urban formations or "metapols" (Ascher, 1998). A wave of accelerated urban-suburban sprawl has largely destroyed the material base of neighbourhood sociability. Globalization produces work arrangements that are less secure and more geographically dispersed than did earlier styles of production organization. Families with two working adults are now the norm, and parents and children tend to build up networks within the various institutions where they spend their time, rather than by socializing in a common community of proximity. This renders these already semi-transitory communities even less relevant to integrating the disaggregated workers of the globalized age.

Unravelling the meaning of this combined process of family and work restructuring for the daily lives of the 800 million men and women in the postindustrial countries is not easy, for many changes are concurrent:

- The family is undergoing profound change. All over the world, women are demanding and winning new rights, such as equal access to wage work (and sometimes equal wages), which transforms traditional relations within the family. In all the developed countries, women are proving much less willing to devote their lives to raising children than they were just a generation ago. Of course, family changes do vary greatly among the industrialized countries. Southern Europe and Japan have much lower divorce rates and lower women's labour force participation rates than northern Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In southern Europe and Japan, fewer married women with children work, and traditional family structures are more persistent. Are these differences lasting or temporary cultural differences? Is a relentless process of change in gender relations now under way, whatever its current differences, that will reach into all developed societies and transform the family?
- Labour markets are also being transformed, though these changes also vary from one country to another, seemingly in relation to change (or lack of it) in the family. Are changes in the family being spread and hastened by the new transformation of the workplace? Are current attempts by business to make labour markets more flexible linked to, even dependent on, the existence of different and much more "flexible" families?
- The transformation of labour markets places great demands on families. To do well in flexible labour markets, workers need to have extensive information networks. Workers with more and better education enjoy greater access to information, have larger networks and more choices, and can more easily adjust to change. Labour markets favour highly educated parents and encourage their children's education. The networks needed for parents to be effective in flexible labour markets require more sophisticated decision-making and organization than in the past. Families lacking the capacity to make informed decisions or the resources to act on

them are still forced to be flexible but are much less sustainable. Some countries have publicly subsidized systems of support for working parents that make it easier simultaneously to work and to rear a healthy family. Other countries rely heavily on the rapidly changing private family to rear children, with all the strain that entails as working hours remain long. Does the family need new forms of support? Can workplaces take on new functions to support the family? Without new arrangements to help families acquire the necessary skills, can families be successful in the new environment?

With the sea change under way in work and the family, postindustrial society faces a dilemma. Today's workplace demands well-informed, highly organized, stable families that can support all their members as they try to operate in a flexible work environment. But the new work environment is marked by greater job instability, causing family members to change their work situations more often, and new jobs may well entail having to acquire new skills, hence more education. Since there is no end to this trend in sight, the existing pressures on adults to acquire more education for their own work will be compounded in the case of their children. Thus, family involvement in children's education is both more important and more complicated than in the past.

All this places an enormous strain on the family. Anticipating these stresses, many young people hesitate to form a family, and ties formed tend to be more unstable. This results in a serious social contradiction: the new workplace requires even greater investment in knowledge than in the past and families are crucial to such knowledge formation, for adults as well as children. But the new workplace destabilizes the child-centred nuclear family, degrading the very institution crucial to further economic development.

One solution to this dilemma might be to maintain more traditional, industrial-era labour markets, in which men earn a family wage, and labour markets are relatively rigid — organized to protect the employed. But the evidence from countries such as Spain and Italy, where formal labour markets are still quite rigid, suggests that this solution does not work well. Not only is market rigidity difficult to maintain in the face of global competition: it is organized around male workers and takes little account of the struggle women have waged for a new identity. And although labour market rigidity is only one of many reasons that unemployment is now high in continental Europe, it also has unintended and highly undesirable consequences: it contributes to higher youth unemployment and therefore delayed marriage and even lower fertility rates (see below). Rigidity also contributes to lower fertility rates because in rigid, male-run markets, maternity tends to increase working women's risk of permanent job loss. So though labour market rigidity may make life more peaceful at home by easing pressure on family time, in the context of women's redefined roles and global competition, it tends to reduce family formation and to increase tension as women are forced to maintain unsatisfactory, traditional roles.

Changes in the way women define their identity and the increased demands placed on the family by flexible production also may pose serious eco-

nomic problems. As labour markets inevitably become more flexible, incorporating more married women into wage jobs and expecting men to be more flexible in their schedules and yet dedicated to their work, labour productivity and political stability will be conditioned by the manner in which private and family structures and government support for families adjust. Ironically, the societies with the least flexible labour markets today may be those best positioned to move to greater flexibility if they are able to maintain the private and public family support structures presently in place. And the societies with the most flexible markets today may prove the least well positioned to sustain flexibility unless they make drastic changes in family support systems.

In a flexible work system the family is at the hub of productive and reproductive activity. Because of the new demands placed on the traditional family by flexible labour markets, and because the traditional family as a social form is disappearing so quickly in developed countries, the family may have to be redefined, with the help of the community and the State, if it is to survive at all. But before addressing the kind of help that may be needed, a clearer picture is needed of how families are actually changing in the industrialized countries.

A stylized history of the family

A helpful analysis of the family is provided by Young and Willmott (1973), who characterize its history as occurring in three stages:

Stage 1 was the "family as production unit",[1] with all members working in the home, on the farm or in small-scale home factory production, doing domestic work, child-rearing and market work all at the same place. Men and women were totally dependent on one another and the home was the centre of all activity, including income generation.

In stage 2, this home-centred family broke down, with disastrous consequences for women. Both men and women (as well as children) were employed outside the home, but if there were young children in the home, women could not work; and men controlled income. There was little incentive for men to limit the number of children because they could still hold back income, and children could go to work at a young age. Women suffered most, followed by children.

Towards the end of this stage there occurred an important, and little-discussed, phase in women's struggle to gain control over their bodies and the allocation of their time. At the end of the nineteenth century, middle-class women learnt to understand their fertility cycles and simply refused to have sexual relations during periods of greatest fertility. Though it spread slowly, this practice, together with new forms of contraception, child labour laws, and

[1] I characterize early family production as inseparable from reproduction, and Young and Willmott (1973) characterize the family as totally devoted to production. The two characterizations show the difficulty of separating production from reproduction in subsistence culture. But at some point, family subsistence production becomes a source of accumulation, with the product of family work much greater than what is needed just to meet the family's basic needs. This makes the family a production unit.

the introduction of compulsory schooling (which made it increasingly costly to have children), reduced family size even before the First World War. There was a trend towards smaller families, in emulation of the increasingly affluent middle class. Women's liberation movements at the end of the nineteenth century also succeeded in improving women's rights to leave abusive men.

Once families became smaller in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, married women gradually started returning to work after the roughly 20 years it took to raise all their children up to age 14, when they would leave school and go to work. Although the percentage of married women active in the wage labour market was still small in the 1920s, it rose until the Great Depression of the 1930s. The other factor that changed the family was the development of household aids and appliances such as electric refrigerators, stoves, washing machines, and home tools that revolutionized housework and made it more interesting for men to come home and engage in house maintenance. Fewer children and higher wages made the home environment more pleasant. Families actually had disposable income to spend on goods beyond what they needed just to sustain themselves. The family increasingly became a centre of activity for men as well as women, with men and women forming a consumption partnership focused on the home and the family. Young and Willmott (1973) see the family as crucial to the expansion of the domestic economy in the industrial stage of development, and increased consumption of consumer durables as its main new economic function. So rather than just reproducing cheap labour for industrial expansion (stage 2) — mainly at the expense of women who were responsible for that reproduction while men led essentially separate lives — by stage 3, which developed after the Second World War, men and women became partners in consumption. Many thought that, once freed from the need to work collectively, the family unit would be able to focus on more spiritual, non-economic needs and concerns, and would become more of a democratic union of life companions (Calhoun (1919) cited in Ehrenreich (1983)). Stage 3 reached its highest point in the 1950s and 1960s, and provided the model for the "traditional family" still extolled by neo-conservatives in almost every industrialized country.

Yet Young and Willmott miss two important points about the stage 3 family. First, it was not only a consumption family but also an investment family, investing in its children so that they would be able to earn more than their parents and move up the consumption ladder. This investment role became increasingly important after the Second World War, spreading from upper-middle-class families through to working-class families. And although the original aim of introducing welfare state support for families in the 1930s was to maintain consumption, from the 1950s this aim became subordinate to the maintenance and enhancement of the family's investment role in providing potentially more productive labour for the increasingly flexible, competitive economy.

By the 1980s, with the emergence of flexible production and the increasing importance of education in determining access to high-paying jobs, the investment role of the family had become even more important. As both par-

ents worked more even when the children were young, parents increasingly consumed all kinds of services previously available only to higher-income families; in the best of cases, such services had large investment components, enhancing the health and learning of children. In Europe and Japan, the State provides or subsidizes childcare, pre-schooling and, especially, health care precisely because of its concern about the family's investment role. Families themselves — particularly mothers — want more publicly provided services both because they need some freedom from child-rearing and because they believe that such collective environments enhance learning.

The second point that Young and Willmott could not foresee in the early 1970s was that, even as stage 3 reached its apex, the family was already undergoing transformation. The consumption partnership, formed in part because of smaller families and higher incomes, was already dissolving as they wrote. Women wanted broader options, including participation in the social world defined by work and greater decision-making power over the larger issues in family life, including the division of family labour. Women's rising access to remunerative work increased their chances of gaining some economic independence from men. As divorce rates rose, women were even more compelled to seek employment in order to protect themselves financially against potential family break-up and income loss.

The transformation of the family

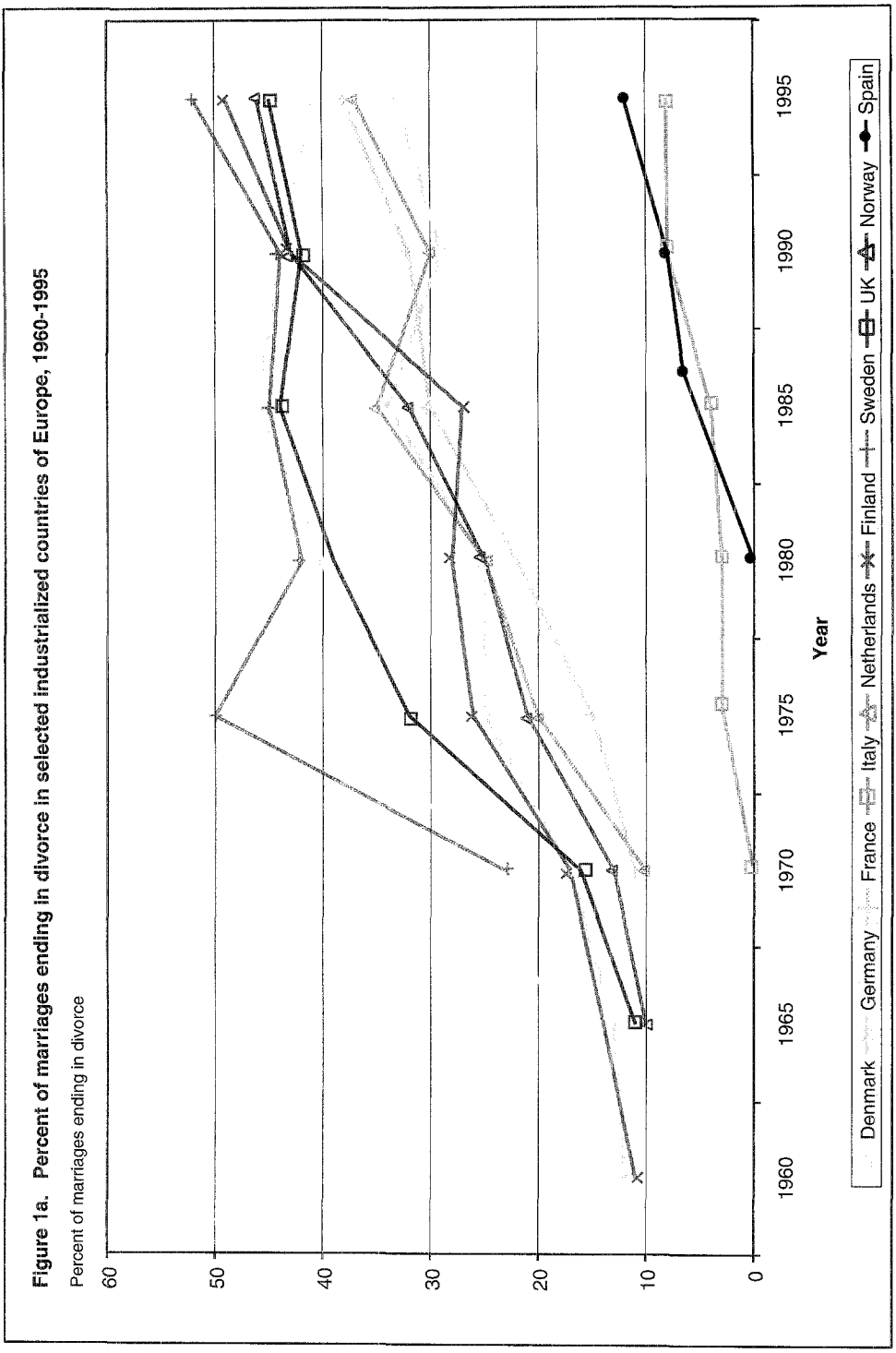
The continuous increase in the number of women entering the labour force in most industrialized countries and the formation of families with two wage-earners have had a tremendous impact on families. So have the increased ability and willingness of men and women to undo marriages (Cherlin, 1981). The family has lost the stability provided when one parent — usually the mother — centres her activities on the home, accepting a single source of income. Two separate individual projects and two separate working schedules make the compatibility of the individual work projects and the family project more difficult to sustain. Women's rising wage contribution to family income increases their bargaining power in the family, and undermines the structure of the traditional, patriarchal family.

It is no surprise, then, that the interaction of social forces producing these changes is having a measurable impact on the family in industrialized countries. Moreover, there are significant psychological and social effects beyond measure. There is a process of change moving across countries.

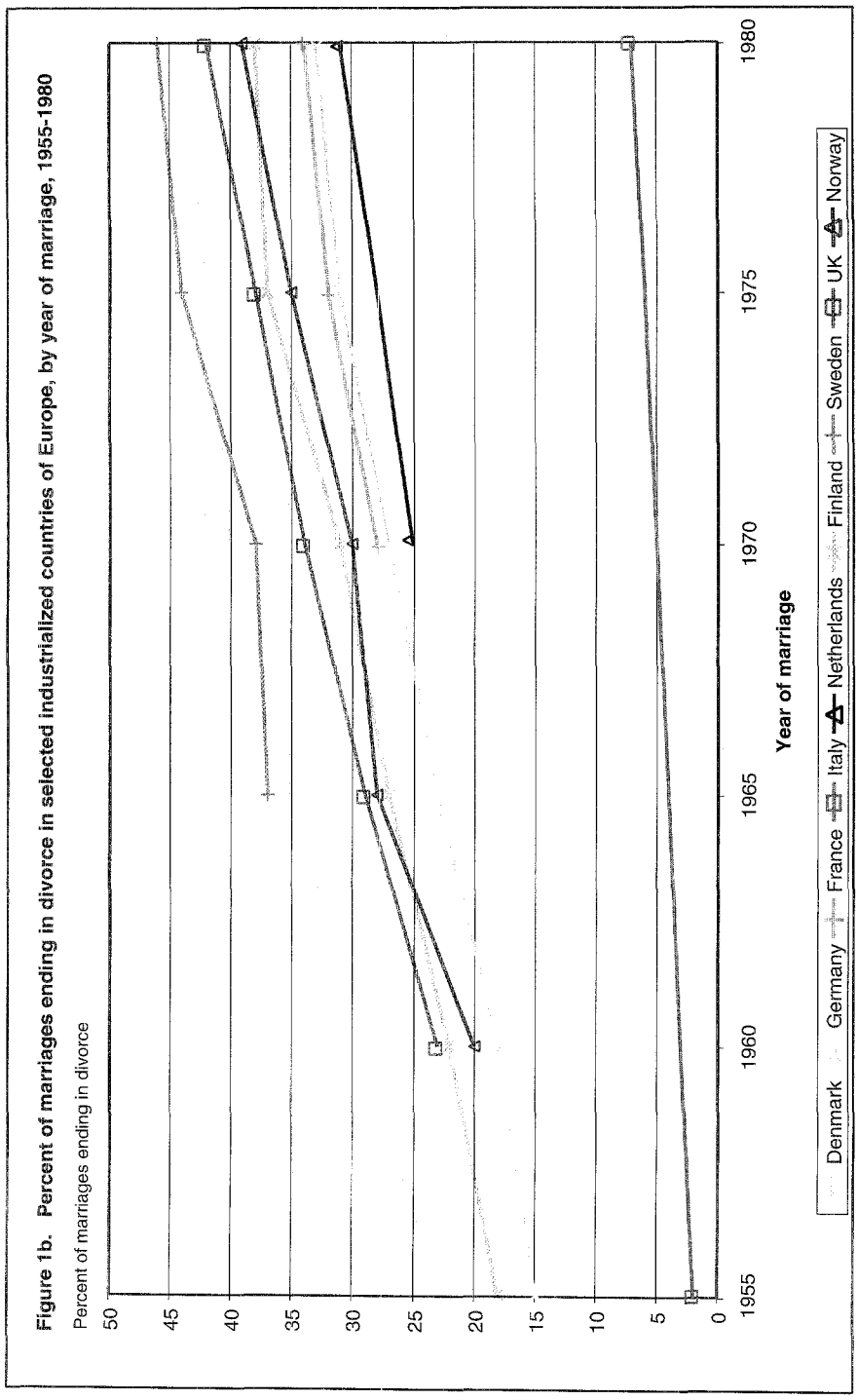
Data for the industrialized countries of OECD show three significant changes:

- The chances of a marriage dissolving are much greater in the 1990s than they were in the 1960s. (See figures 1a and 1b.) Admittedly, divorced people often remarry (and re-divorce). But the fact that marriage is more likely to be a temporary arrangement and that more marriages are recombinations of previously married people itself redefines the notion of

Figure 1a. Percent of marriages ending in divorce in selected industrialized countries of Europe, 1960-1995



Source: Eurostat, 1999, Table F-20



Source: Eurostat, 1999, Table F-22

Table 1. Fertility rates in selected industrialized countries, 1970-96 (children per woman 15-44 years of age)

Country	1970	1980	1990	1996
Denmark	2.0	1.6	1.7	1.8
France	2.5	2.0	1.8	1.7
Germany	2.0	1.6	1.5	1.3
Italy	2.4	1.6	1.3	1.2
Japan	...	1.8	1.5	1.4
Netherlands	2.6	1.6	1.6	1.5
Spain	2.9	2.2	1.3	1.2
Sweden	1.9	1.7	2.1	1.6
United Kingdom	2.4	1.9	1.8	1.7
United States	2.5	1.8	2.1	2.1

Source: Eurostat, 1997.

the family. In the late 1960s, crude divorce rates (the number of divorces per hundred marriages) began rising first in the United States, then in Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, and Germany, reaching the highest European levels in Denmark and Sweden. By the mid-1980s, more than one in every two marriages in the United States ended in divorce and, in Denmark and Sweden, almost one in every two. But rates in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, also rose very rapidly, reaching Scandinavian levels in 1985 from a much lower starting-point. Divorce rates in France and Germany rose to over 30 per cent of marriages. However this pattern is not universal. Despite the liberalization of divorce laws, divorce rates in countries such as Italy and Spain rose slowly and are still relatively low in the 1990s.

- The increased difficulty of making marriage work, the greater participation of women in working life, the apparently decreased willingness of men to enter into marriage (Ehrenreich, 1983), and now, in the 1990s, the greater insecurity surrounding work have all delayed the ages of marriage and child-rearing, increased partnerships without marriage, and greatly reduced women's fertility rates (see table 1). Birth rates have fallen below population reproduction levels in most of Europe as well as Japan. The higher first-marriage age in lower-income industrialized countries in 1960 was partly the result of the economic situation: married couples generally prefer to live apart from their parents, but affording a separate place to live is more difficult in lower-income countries, so couples wait longer to marry. But the recent rise in marriage age in most industrialized countries is more closely related to women's new role in the labour market and, in Europe, to the difficulty for young people to obtain any job at all. By the late 1970s, many more women were entering work careers that caused them to delay having children and to delay marriage. In the United States, the fastest-growing group among women consists of those who have their

first child between the ages of 30 and 35. Most women still marry before age 25 and have their first child in their early twenties, but this group is declining proportionately, while the proportion of women bearing their first child after age 25 is growing.

- Fewer and later marriages and less child-rearing, plus more divorce, single parenting, and an aging population, have meant that by 1990 a smaller percentage of the population lived in a household consisting of a married couple or a nuclear family than did in 1960. Moreover, fewer and later first marriages and fewer children per family mean that men and women are far less occupied with child-rearing in the prime of their lives than in the past. Even if women do not go out to work while their children are growing up, the average time they now spend caring for young and preteen children is 14 years. For men, in turn, even when they are the sole source of family income and stay married for life, their families are less costly than in the past, and divert them less from other activities. Family life involving children is thus far less central to adults' lives today than it was 30 years ago. There may be as much thought and talk about the ideal of family life — husband, wife, and children living together, with the focus on child-rearing — as in the past, but the reality is quite different. Child-raising is being relegated to a secondary role in people's lives.

Just as interesting as these trends is the way in which they vary from one country to another. At one end of the spectrum evident in the major industrialized countries, Italian and Spanish families are much more likely to conform to the traditional pattern of a nuclear family, although they now include very few children. At the other end of the spectrum, American and Scandinavian families have experienced the greatest structural change, with high divorce rates and proportionately far fewer nuclear families. But birth rates in the 1980s and 1990s were much higher in the United States and Scandinavia than in Italy and Spain. The Swedish rate dropped in the mid-1990s but still remains above the low levels found in southern Europe. Other countries lie in between, with the United Kingdom nearer the United States and Scandinavian end of the spectrum, France, Germany, and particularly Japan nearer Italy and Spain. Though the traditional family is in decline in all these countries, significant differences remain, relating to culture, labour markets and public policies concerning family support. These differences also affect labour markets. The persistence of more traditional families in Spain and Italy, for instance, allows high rates of youth unemployment to be supported by families willing to keep their adult children at home. And, in turn, the persistence of traditional, relatively rigid labour markets supported by traditional family structures has unintended effects on the formation of future families.

There is also diversity within countries. For example, in the United States immigrants from Mexico and Asia tend to be more traditional: they have more children, lower divorce rates, and are more likely to live in extended families. In Europe, immigrants, mainly from North Africa, also live in more traditional family structures than do people of European origin.

Even so, younger women from immigrant groups or in the countries at the Italian and Spanish end of the spectrum react to family life in ways similar to non-immigrant women in the United States. They delay marriage, avoid having children, prefer to work rather than stay at home and, if they can get a job, arrange for day care (often with their parents) rather than taking care of their children themselves on a full-time basis. The sharp drop in fertility to extraordinarily low levels in Italy and Spain is another sign that traditional family life is changing radically there and that women's (and to some extent men's) conception of family life is being transformed everywhere in the developed world. This implies that many of the quantitative differences between industrialized countries may reflect the behaviour of older women who, unlike non-immigrant older women in the United States, tend not to divorce even when they are unhappily married. The differences may also reflect economic factors, such as the fact that, because of the difficulty of finding work, children in Europe live at home till a much later age than their counterparts in the United States. Nuclear families form a larger proportion of families in such situations partly because high youth unemployment prevents young people from moving out and living alone.

However, the greater fertility rates of less-educated, lower-income families affects societies, especially in the current global environment. It could mean that most children today are growing up in families that cannot prepare them adequately for the ever-higher educational requirements needed to succeed in labour markets. This is not to say that higher-educated men and women make better parents than those with less education. But being a parent in the global economy requires much more information than in the past, and the stakes in children's educational success are much higher. On average, less-educated parents are increasingly at a disadvantage in supplying what is required to prepare young children to do well at school.

Flexible workplaces and the new family

Far from losing its fundamental importance to work, the family will be even more crucial in this respect as the economy shifts to flexible, knowledge-based production. Not only is an ever-increasing proportion of jobs in the industrialized world organized around knowledge rather than around physical skills; today's younger workers are also likely to need to acquire new kinds of knowledge at various points in their careers as they move through different kinds of work.

In a flexible work system the family is at the hub of productive and reproductive activity. When it is potentially strong (with two highly educated adults at its core), it serves as a risk hedge against periods of unemployment and as a source of child development for its offspring, of investment capital for adults' and children's education and training, of networking for job search and upward mobility, and of personal security and growth. If linked into larger information and communication networks, it can also become a production unit.

Yet, low birth rates can threaten population reproduction and future economic growth. Even in more traditional societies, divorce rates will almost certainly increase and then stay high, perhaps at levels comparable to those of the United States and Scandinavia. Even with traditional forms of support, as men and women try both to rear children and to satisfy their own needs for status and social interaction as wage-earners in remunerated work, the increased stress on their families could have a serious negative effect on adult productivity and on children's well-being. The combined effect of flexible production with its demands for individualized, work-focused activities, of women's fight for greater equality in the family and in the labour market, and of the increased importance of the family as an investment unit is now shaping the next, emerging stage of family life. The family could and should be the social institution tempering the stress induced by the processes of disaggregation of labour and of individualization of social and economic life. But for the family to be able to play its fundamental role of sustaining work, it has to be redefined and strengthened under the new cultural and technological conditions now obtaining in industrialized countries.

Models for the new family?

The United States model is appealing to employers and to many politicians in Europe because its job creation potential and low rate of unemployment stand in stark contrast to Europe's frustrated struggle to create jobs and reduce unemployment. But flexible American-style markets have a down side that understandably reduces their appeal to the average European and Japanese: flexibility expands job growth, but in the United States' highly deregulated economy it is characterized by stagnant or falling wages for a significant percentage of workers. Most workers have to pay much more attention to keeping their jobs simply because of the threat of losing them. Flexibility also tends to increase the number of hours families work. In less skilled jobs, American-style flexible markets promote people to work more in order to earn more, rather than letting them earn more for the hours they do work. In highly skilled jobs, high pay is the norm but only for those who are willing to commit themselves to a supercharged work schedule, meeting crucial deadlines at all costs, and out-competing other workers in the do-or-die global economy. In some of these occupations, the financial incentives are great: workers who make the right moves may earn a great deal in a few years. So the long hours have a potentially high payoff. All this promotes higher profits, economic growth, and higher average family income, but at the cost of job security, more intensified family and work schedules, and increased individual stress and isolation.

Europeans and Japanese may admire the vitality of the current United States "job machine", but consider its system of work and family relations to be too costly in social terms. They read about high levels of open poverty in the United States, deteriorating living conditions, lack of childcare, stressful dual workdays, long commuting hours, downgraded schools, violence, and a significant percentage of the young male black and Latino populations in prison.

Americans tend to live either in cities that are no longer very safe for children and adolescents, or in suburbs which hold risks too for young people, as evidenced by shocking and increasingly frequent killings in suburban schools. According to a national survey conducted in 1994, the decline in the quality of childcare in the United States had reached crisis proportions, and children's development was at risk (Government Accounting Office, 1994). In the United States, all political parties and leaders invoke a strengthened family as a solution to the nation's social ills. But its social legislation in support of the family lags behind that of all other industrialized countries. Not only do most children in the United States live in families broken by divorce (Chira, 1995); more than a third also live in or close to poverty. In some ethnic minorities the crisis of the family is very deep, playing a major role in perpetuating the underclass status of a significant segment of the minority population (Wilson, 1987). About half of all African-American children are conceived out of wedlock, and many do not know their fathers (Jaynes and Williams, 1990). Not only do less-educated mothers in the United States have more children than higher-educated mothers (just as in other industrialized countries); they are also likely to raise their children in relatively worse economic conditions, with less access to child centres and early educational services than in most of the rest of the industrialized world.

Another issue for Europeans concerned about the American model of flexible work is that it puts an ever-increasing emphasis on work and earnings as the purpose of human existence. This is not a completely new phenomenon in the United States. Yet, with increased competition in the globalized economy and the rapidly rising capacity to operate in global time to enhance productivity, the ideal worker is one who never sleeps, never consumes, never has children, and never spends time socializing outside the workplace. As Hochschild (1997) argues, it is in the employer's interest to make the workplace more socially congenial for workers because they will then be willing to spend more time there. However, it is also in the employer's interest to make workers believe that if they do not spend more time there, the employer will find someone else who will.

Of course, the socially congenial work organization is hardly alien to the Japanese or to many Europeans. Japanese workers are renowned for placing company loyalty above almost all else, and Japanese companies for demanding such loyalty in return for guaranteed employment. Indeed, many of the methods used by American and European companies to build company spirit and dedication were imported from Japan. Company loyalty means long hours of work in Japan. In 1979, the average employed Japanese worked about 200 hours more per year than the average United States worker; even today, after several years of recession, the Japanese employee works only slightly fewer hours than a United States worker — who works longer hours than anywhere else in the industrialized countries. But in Japan these long hours affect mostly male workers; married women with children are likely either not to work or to work part time. The relative intactness of traditional family relations in Japan still preserves male company loyalty and female family loyalty.

Fewer Japanese families may have children today than a generation ago, but those who do still tend to divide their work and family responsibilities along traditional gender lines.

Europeans may not have Japanese-style company loyalty, but a high proportion of European men have similar work guarantees to those given the Japanese. Furthermore, Europeans work many fewer hours. Although OECD data on hours worked are not strictly comparable, they do show that employed French, German, Italian and British workers all worked far fewer hours than United States workers even in the mid-1980s before today's employment problems. A recent ILO publication confirms this (ILO, 1999).

So, despite their promise of more, badly needed employment, most Europeans and Japanese are not anxious to work in American-style flexible labour markets — even though to some extent they are already doing so. In most of Europe, this is not because of fear that more women will enter the labour market, or because relations between men and women will change. A high proportion of women are already in paid employment, and relations between the sexes have changed in most countries without the introduction of American-style flexibility in hiring and firing.[2] Nor is there serious resistance to the possible introduction of more part-time and temporary work. In the late 1970s, Scandinavian and several other countries, including the United Kingdom and Japan, displayed rates of part-time work that were as high or higher than those of the United States. Nor, in Japan, is it a problem of being wedded more to work: Japanese *men* are heavily committed to their jobs, yet seem to want to keep their wives at home. In Europe, however, increasing the number of hours required by full employment could pose serious political problems.

None of these reasons is grounds for major resistance to American-style flexible markets. The common ground is rather that the Europeans and Japanese see United States flexibility as a combined assault on their rising wage rates, on social incorporation through the social benefits of work, and on the relationship that they have established between family, work and leisure — a relationship that in Europe sets constraints on employers' ability to demand intensive, year-long work schedules, and that in Japan hinders married women from being drawn into full-time career work.

However, resistance to American-style flexibility does not mean that Japanese and European work organization continues unchanged. Nor does it mean that Japanese and European workers will be able to preserve existing work and family relations: they are already in flux to some extent. Nor does it mean that the present United States work system is socially desirable or even sustainable. That leaves open the end state of Europe, Japan and the United States in the new global economy.

[2] In Japan, however, work for married women is more of an issue.

Some policy implications

Arguably, a desirable end state would reflect a shift to a larger knowledge-intensive component in work generally. Industrialized countries are rapidly becoming knowledge societies in which communicative, cooperative and cognitive skills form the basis for the production of wealth rather than raw materials, human strength or machines. Because knowledge is now much more important in work, and also because women's identity is now more closely associated with income-earning capacity, family formation is increasingly determined by the pattern of knowledge acquisition (e.g. the length of professional development and career formation). Hence, the quality of family life will increasingly be gauged by the availability of learning opportunities for adults and by the capacity of the adults in the family to provide learning opportunities for their children. An intense emphasis on learning as a factor in life decisions has already emerged in the upper middle-income groups across the industrialized countries, where women are choosing to establish careers before having children. The availability in Europe and Japan of subsidized childcare centres for youngsters of all ages and the lack of such centres in the United States influence the sustainability of marriages and the number and timing of children, especially for professional couples. Such learning-driven behaviour as a dominant shaper of family formation, now limited to higher-educated young people, will influence the rest of the population, just as middle-class fertility reduction influenced the working class at the beginning of the twentieth century.

With knowledge and information potentially playing such important roles in flexible work, family formation and family relations, support systems consistent with improving both individual productivity and family life should increasingly be organized around enhancing access by both children and adults to high-quality learning opportunities. Households' integration into learning networks is the linchpin of a flexible, knowledge-based work system. Government family policies are fundamental to this integration, since the State is the only institution that has both the material resources to support the household's investments in its members and the political accountability to do so. Such policies need to enhance the family's capacity to invest in learning without interfering in the privacy of its decisions. The State can do this by helping families acquire education for their children even as parents are on flexible work schedules; giving parents new possibilities to take up further education and training themselves; guaranteeing family health care provision even when adult family members are unemployed or studying; providing widely available training to young people, prospective parents and parents on childcare and child development; using fiscal policies to reward families who invest in education; and strictly enforcing laws ensuring that parents, whether they are married, living together or divorced, contribute financially to the support of their children.

Knowledge acquisition depends heavily on early childhood development, and early childhood is generally lived out in families. Not only are most parents uneducated about child development but, in the free-market Anglo-

American model, collective society pays little attention to the crucial early years of a child's development. Again, this is a remnant of pre-industrial and industrial society, when the knowledge children acquired at school was far less important to their subsequent work lives.

Those industrialized countries that have been especially conscious of the need to ensure children's welfare when both parents or a single parent work, or even to provide respite for women who do not work, organize all-day, high-quality subsidized day care. In Scandinavia and France, day care is the centrepiece of family policy. More recently, Japan has begun well-staffed day-care centres for working mothers (Kristof, 1995; Hewlett, 1991). In all these countries, state-run day care employs well-trained, certified teachers who are specialized in early childhood development.

In addition to supporting early childhood development, governments need to ensure that schools are also community learning centres, where parents can leave their children in a learning environment while they themselves are at work or studying and during that part of the school holidays when parents are not on leave. The community learning centres should also be places where parents and seniors can engage in forms of learning — some related to their children's education and some to adult activities, including community-run business courses for the self-employed. Existing local educational institutions — from primary and secondary schools to community colleges and universities — are the logical sites around which the State can build all-day, all-year, lifetime learning networks for households to link to, whether parents are employed, unemployed or self-employed. Yet, these institutions have to evolve to meet different needs in the various communities. In low-income communities, for example, demand both for full-day children's education and even for adult education may be far greater than in high-income communities. Government allocation of resources for education should seek to meet such needs as an integral part of policy on equal opportunities and social protection, particularly in light of the fact that less-educated families have more children but a lesser capacity for providing them with the information and networks they need to become productive in a flexible, knowledge-intensive economy.

Which model is more likely to be able to respond to this integrative challenge? The United States version has the distinct advantage of a highly flexible educational system that allows young people and adults to leave and re-enter college, change their main subject of study, and retrain for new careers at any age. In the United States, women especially have availed themselves of this flexibility to shape their re-entry into the labour force after rearing young children or divorcing. The greatest growth in college enrolment in the 1970s and 1980s occurred among women aged 30 or over returning to college to train for a different job. Flexibility also allows for modular supplements to basic public education, such as private after-school tutorial programmes.

But the United States model has major drawbacks in meeting knowledge needs for a flexible economy. Americans and their political leaders seem unwilling to confront the public crisis of the family and related child poverty. One way to deal with this crisis is to invest heavily in early, high-quality, pub-

licly funded education for low-income children. Child development centres, so central to Europe's public approach to family poverty, are virtually non-existent in the United States. Beyond providing early childhood education, the schools of the future will probably have to serve as community knowledge centres open from dawn to late evening.

Europe and Japan have much more rigid educational systems than does the United States. Adult education is not readily available in France, Italy or Germany, and it is unusual for young people to leave the educational system and re-enter it later. It is also difficult for university students to change their main subject of study. Women seeking to redefine themselves are not well served by an educational system that is youth centred and highly linear. This makes education-based responses to the crisis in the traditional family more difficult to organize.

However, despite growing disillusion with the State on many levels, continental Europeans (and the educationally more flexible Scandinavians) are much more willing than Americans (or the British or Australians) to acknowledge the role of the public sector in equalizing opportunity and providing important services. Japan relies less on government agencies than on corporate organizations for lifelong support systems but, like the continental Europeans and Scandinavians, the Japanese have a relatively homogeneous society and a sense of collective responsibility.

Can this sense of collective responsibility and willingness to organize and spend substantial public funds on early childhood education be extended to developing lifelong, flexible knowledge provision systems in response to changing family needs? Or will citizens or political leaders extend their current advantage in flexible education by taking responsibility for high-quality, publicly funded early education and other forms of family education and network-support systems?

The collective and public approach to education will be a fundamental issue for the viability of these societies in the high-speed future ahead. Obviously, the capacity of an economic system to innovate and organize the production of goods and services is crucial in a competitive global system. But social cohesion is also crucial, and the family — the main institution for ensuring social cohesion — needs help in an age of flexible production and changed gender roles. The capacity and willingness of a society to provide this help, especially through support for learning and learning networks for families with a low capacity to provide them privately, will be major elements in sustaining innovation and work systems over the long haul.

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