

ADDRESS BY MRS SIMONE VEIL, PRESIDENT OF
THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, TO THE WOMEN'S
POLITICAL ASSOCIATION

- DUBLIN, 28 NOVEMBER 1981 -

FIRST I WANT TO THANK YOU, THE PRESIDENT OF YOUR ASSOCIATION WHO INVITED ME AND GAVE ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE HERE TODAY AND BE AT THIS MEETING WITH YOU.

SECONDLY I HAVE TO APOLOGIZE FOR MY TERRIBLE ACCENT IN YOUR LANGUAGE.

IN 1869, JOHN STUART MILL, BETTER KNOWN FOR HIS ECONOMIC THEORIES, PUT FORWARD THE FOLLOWING THESIS : "THAT THE PRINCIPLE WHICH REGULATES THE EXISTING SOCIAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO SEXES - THE LEGAL SUBORDINATION OF ONE SEX TO THE OTHER - IS WRONG IN ITSELF, AND NOW ONE OF THE CHIEF HINDRANCES TO HUMAN IMPROVEMENT; AND THAT IT OUGHT TO BE REPLACED BY A PRINCIPLE OF PERFECT EQUALITY, ADMITTING NO POWER OR PRIVILEGE ON THE ONE SIDE, NOR DISABILITY ON THE OTHER". MILL WAS VARIOUSLY DENOUNCED AS MAD AND IMMORAL AND HIS BOOK INDECENT, AS COULD ONLY BE EXPECTED AT THE TIME.

TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT HIS REMARKS MUST HAVE HAD, ONE MUST PLACE THEM IN THE CONTEXT OF THAT TIME. A PROFOUND CHANGE IN THE NATURE OF WOMEN'S WORK HAD COME ABOUT. WOMEN HAD, OF COURSE, ALWAYS WORKED, BUT TRADITIONALLY THEY WORKED

ON THE FARMS, IN SMALL FAMILY BUSINESSES AND IN DOMESTIC SERVICE. THE ADVENT OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION LED TO A DRIFT INTO THE FACTORIES AND AWAY FROM AGRICULTURE. INCREASED URBANISATION MEANT THAT, MORE AND MORE, WOMEN WHO HAD TO WORK FOR ECONOMIC REASONS WERE OBLIGED TO LEAVE THE HOME. FOR MANY, THIS MEANT A DUAL WORKING DAY, IN THE FACTORY AND IN THE HOME. CONDITIONS WERE APPALLING AND INQUIRIES SET UP LED THE WAY TO REFORMS IN WORKING CONDITIONS. HOWEVER, WE MUST NOT DELUDE OURSELVES THAT CONCERN SHOWN FOR IMPROVING THE CONDITIONS IN WHICH WOMEN WORKED STEMMED FROM ANYTHING OTHER THAN A DESIRE TO ULTIMATELY BRING THE WOMAN BACK TO HER "RIGHTFUL PLACE" - THE HOME. SOME SUCCESS IN THIS RESPECT WAS ACHIEVED, BUT ON THE OTHER HAND, OUT OF ALL THIS HARDSHIP AND EXPLOITATION WOMEN GRADUALLY BEGAN TO ACHIEVE SOME SORT OF INDEPENDENCE, ECONOMIC TO START WITH AND THEN GRADUALLY LEGAL. NEXT CAME ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TO THE PROFESSIONS AND THE RIGHT TO VOTE.

AT THAT TIME, EVEN MORE THAN TODAY, THERE WERE VAST DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE COUNTRIES OF EUROPE. AS REGARDS THE RIGHT TO VOTE, WOMEN BECAME ENFRANCHISED IN GREECE AS RECENTLY AS 1952 WHILE DENMARK LED THE WAY IN 1915.

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT HAS COME A LONG WAY SINCE THOSE DAYS AND FOR MANY THE DISCUSSION IS NOW CLOSED. LEGISLATION AIMED AT REMOVING DISCRIMINATION IN ITS VARIOUS FORMS HAS BEEN ENACTED AND, IN THEORY AT LEAST, EQUALITY IS A FAIT ACCOMPLI. WOMEN AND MEN ARE INDEED NOW EQUAL IN TERMS OF PRIVATE LAW, BOTH AS FAR AS RELATIONS BETWEEN HUSBANDS AND WIVES AND PARENTS AND CHILDREN ARE CONCERNED. THERE ARE USUALLY JUST AS MANY GIRLS AS BOYS STUDYING AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL WITH A BROADLY SIMILAR SUCCESS RATE. AND YET EVEN IN THIS AREA ONE CAN SEE DIFFERENCES : THE ADVANCED, TECHNICAL TRAINING WHICH YOUNG MEN RECEIVE IS OFTEN MORE CAREER ORIENTATED THAN THAT GIVEN TO YOUNG WOMEN. THE WHOLE COURSE OF THEIR WORKING LIVES IS AFFECTED AS A RESULT: SHORTER TRAINING PERIODS QUALIFY THEM FOR OCCUPATIONS WHICH ARE STRICTLY FOR WOMEN AND OFTEN ON THE POINT OF DISAPPEARING, STUDIES WHICH PROVIDE A TRAINING FOR LIFE BUT DO NOT LEAD TO A SPECIFIC JOB - THESE ARE TOO OFTEN THE HALLMARKS OF THE COURSES STUDIED BY GIRLS.

OF COURSE ONE CAN THINK OF A NUMBER OF WOMEN HOLDING RESPONSIBLE POSTS IN THE UPPER ECHELONS OF BUSINESS AND POLITICS AND IT IS POSSIBLE THEREFORE TO SAY THAT OPPORTUNITIES EXIST FOR WOMEN WHO WANT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEM. BUT IT

WOULD SEEM TO ME THAT THINGS ARE NOT QUITE SO SIMPLE AND THAT IT WOULD BE PREMATURE AND EVEN DANGEROUS TO REGARD THIS PROBLEM AS HAVING BEEN SOLVED.

IT IS NOT BECAUSE THERE ARE NOW SEVERAL WOMEN HEADS OF STATE OR OF GOVERNMENT IN THE WORLD THAT WE CAN IGNORE THE LOW PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND IT IS NOT BECAUSE WE HAVE A NUMBER OF WOMEN ON BOARDS OF DIRECTORS THAT WE CAN CLAIM THAT THE SITUATION OF WOMEN ON THE SHOP FLOOR HAS IMPROVED GREATLY.

WE CANNOT OVERLOOK THE FACT THAT IN ALL THE COUNTRIES OF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY THE RATE OF FEMALE UNEMPLOYMENT IS MUCH HIGHER THAN THAT OF MALE UNEMPLOYMENT, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME WORK IS A VITAL NECESSITY FOR MANY UNEMPLOYED WOMEN AND NOT, AS IS OFTEN MAINTAINED, A SECOND SOURCE OF INCOME FOR THE FAMILY. NOR CAN ONE OVERLOOK THE RESPECTIVE PROPORTIONS OF MEN AND WOMEN IN THE LEAST SKILLED AND HENCE LEAST WELL PAID JOBS.

AWARE OF THIS SITUATION, THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, SHORTLY AFTER DIRECT ELECTIONS THEREFORE SET UP AN AD HOC COMMITTEE ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS. OUR PARLIAMENT, WITH 69 WOMEN MEMBERS,

HAS THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL OUR NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS EXCEPT DENMARK. THIS SITUATION IS ALL THE MORE REMARKABLE WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THAT ON THE EVE OF DIRECT ELECTIONS, THE FORMER PARLIAMENT HAD ONLY 11 WOMEN OUT OF 198 MEMBERS. IT IS CLEAR THAT THIS INCREASED REPRESENTATION IS DUE TO UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE AND, IN PARTICULAR, TO THE SYSTEM OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION WHICH WAS ADOPTED IN MOST COUNTRIES.

ON THE OTHER HAND, THE SITUATION HAS HARDLY IMPROVED IN THE OTHER INSTITUTIONS OF THE COMMUNITY. ALTHOUGH MRS THATCHER IS CURRENTLY PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND MRS FLESC HAS BEEN PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS THEY ARE THE ONLY WOMEN TO HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THESE BODIES AND DESPITE THE WISHES EXPRESSED ON THE OCCASION OF THE RENEWAL OF THE COMMISSION, NOT ONE WOMAN WAS NOMINATED COMMISSIONER.

THE SITUATION IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, DESPITE THE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF WOMEN MEMBERS, IS FAR FROM IDEAL. OUT OF 15 PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES, ONLY ONE IS CHAIRED BY A WOMAN. SOME WOULD BE ONLY TOO WILLING TO SAY THAT HAVING A WOMAN PRESIDENT COMPENSATES FOR THIS SITUATION BUT THIS IS MERELY A WAY OF AVOIDING THE ISSUE.

THE SITUATION IS EXACTLY THE SAME AMONG THE STAFF OF THE INSTITUTIONS. THE GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE PARLIAMENT IS INCREASING DAILY AND OUT OF APPROXIMATELY THREE THOUSAND STAFF THERE ARE HARDLY ANY WOMEN IN POSTS OF RESPONSIBILITY. EVEN IF ONE WANTED TO MAKE AN EFFORT AND TO PROMOTE SOME WOMEN TO THESE POSTS, IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE AS NONE OF THEM FULFIL THE NECESSARY CONDITIONS FOR SUCH A PROMOTION. THE SAME SITUATION EXISTS IN THE COMMISSION IN BRUSSELS WHERE THERE IS ONLY ONE WOMAN DIRECTOR-GENERAL AND TWO WOMEN DIRECTORS OUT OF A STAFF OF 8000.

IT WAS QUITE NATURAL FOR OUR PARLIAMENT THEN TO TURN ITS ATTENTION TO THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY AND, IN THIS WAY, TO FULFIL ONE OF ITS ROLES WHICH IS TO EXAMINE THOSE PROBLEMS OF SOCIETY TO WHICH A MORE RAPID SOLUTION COULD BE FOUND WHEN ACTION IS TAKEN ON A EUROPEAN LEVEL RATHER THAN IN A STRICTLY NATIONAL CONTEXT. WE HAVE FOUND THAT MORE AND MORE WOMEN, CONSIDERING THE ACTION UNDERTAKEN AT NATIONAL LEVEL INADEQUATE, ARE TURNING TO THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS.

WHEN OUR AD HOC COMMITTEE WAS FORMED SOME ACTION HAD ALREADY BEEN TAKEN BY THE COMMUNITY IN THIS FIELD. DIRECTIVES HAD BEEN ADOPTED ON EQUAL PAY, ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL SECURITY. OTHER DIRECTIVES, LESS

SPECIFICALLY AIMED AT WOMEN, HAD ALSO HELPED TO IMPROVE THEIR SITUATION. I AM THINKING HERE OF THE DIRECTIVES ON FREEDOM OF ESTABLISHMENT. PREVIOUSLY, A WIFE WITH SPECIFIC QUALIFICATIONS WAS UNABLE TO EXERCISE HER PROFESSION IF SHE WAS OBLIGED TO MOVE FROM ONE COUNTRY TO ANOTHER BECAUSE OF HER HUSBAND'S POSTING. WE HAVE MANY CASES, FOR EXAMPLE, OF WIVES OF EUROPEAN CIVIL SERVANTS WHO ARE DOCTORS OR LAWYERS AND WHO CAN NOW PRACTISE FREELY IN ANY MEMBER STATE.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK, ALTHOUGH RATHER SKETCHY, DOES EXIST BUT TO THE MEMBERS OF OUR AD HOC COMMITTEE IT SEEMED THAT, ALTHOUGH LEGISLATION WAS NECESSARY, IT WAS NOT SUFFICIENT AND IF ONE REALLY WAS TO ACT AND TO CHANGE TRADITIONS AND ATTITUDES, WHAT WAS NEEDED WAS A PERIOD OF REFLECTION LEADING TO A FAR MORE BROADLY-BASED ACTION. THE COMMITTEE'S MANDATE WAS, THEN, TO EXAMINE THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN THE COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE AND TO DRAW UP PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE ACTION AT COMMUNITY LEVEL.

WE DISCUSSED THESE MATTERS NOT SIMPLY FOR THE BENEFIT OF WOMEN THEMSELVES BUT BECAUSE WE WERE AWARE OF WHAT WAS AT STAKE AND OF THE IMPORTANCE TO THE STABILITY OF ANY SOCIETY, THE HUSBAND-WIFE RELATIONSHIP AND THE EDUCATION

OF THE CHILDREN, OF A SITUATION WHERE WOMEN ARE NOT FRUSTRATED AND CAN FIND FULFILMENT IN SOCIETY.

CONSEQUENTLY, THE REPORT DRAWN UP BY THE "AD HOC COMMITTEE" COVERED EVERY POSSIBLE AREA OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS. DIFFERENCES OF OPINION EMERGED DURING THE DEBATE HELD LAST FEBRUARY AS SOME MEMBERS FELT THAT PARLIAMENT SHOULD CONFINE ITSELF TO MAKING PROPOSALS ON THE ECONOMIC AND OCCUPATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE SITUATION OF WOMEN AND THAT IT WAS NOT COMPETENT TO DEAL WITH MATTERS RELATING TO WOMEN'S PRIVATE LIVES AS THESE WERE NOT COVERED BY THE TREATIES.

A RESOLUTION WAS FINALLY ADOPTED BY 174 VOTES TO 101 VOTES WITH 24 ABSTENTIONS, AS A NUMBER OF MEMBERS WHO HAD RESERVATIONS ALONG THE LINES I HAVE INDICATED FELT THEY COULD NOT SUPPORT THE RESOLUTION IN ITS ENTIRETY.

THE RESOLUTION AS IT STANDS IS OF COURSE FAR FROM PERFECT BUT ONE MUST REALIZE THAT THIS TEXT IS THE RESULT OF A COMPROMISE AND IT IS A REFLECTION OF DIFFERING OPINIONS AND TRADITIONS WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY. IT IS NOT A DIRECTLY APPLICABLE LEGAL TEXT NOR IS IT A PURELY INTELLECTUAL WORK, RATHER IT IS A GLOBAL PROGRAMME WHICH LAYS DOWN GUIDELINES FOR FUTURE ACTION ON THE PART OF COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS.

THE PROGRAMME HAS TWO SEPARATE OBJECTIVES. ON THE ONE HAND IT PROPOSES MEASURES THAT COULD BE TAKEN TO IMPROVE THE EXISTING LEGAL SITUATION IN THE COMMUNITY BY ADDING TO AND AMPLIFYING THE SCOPE OF THOSE DIRECTIVES ALREADY ADOPTED. ON THE OTHER HAND IT ATTEMPTS TO OUTLINE IN BROADER TERMS A POLICY FOR, IN PARTICULAR:

- . WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LIFE
- . EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING
- . HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELFARE
- . SPECIFIC CATEGORIES AND REGIONS
- . DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

IN EACH OF THESE AREAS PARLIAMENT TRIED TO DRAW UP SPECIFIC PROPOSALS. IT IS CLEAR HOWEVER THAT THIS IS ONLY AN OUTLINE PROGRAMME AND MUCH OF ITS EFFECT WILL DEPEND LARGELY ON THE FOLLOW-UP GIVEN TO IT AT COMMUNITY LEVEL AND IN EACH OF THE MEMBER STATES.

THIS IS WHY PARLIAMENT HAS NOW CREATED A COMMITTEE OF ENQUIRY WHOSE TASK WILL BE TO MONITOR THE RESPONSE TO OUR RESOLUTION AND TO SPUR THE OTHER COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS INTO ACTION.

IT MUST BE STRESSED THAT THIS COMMITTEE IS NOT A COMMITTEE OF ENQUIRY OF THE KIND SET UP BY NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS. IN OUR PARLIAMENT THIS COMMITTEE HAS EXACTLY THE SAME POWERS AS ANY OTHER PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE.

THE ACTIVITY OF THE AD HOC COMMITTEE, WHICH WORKED FOR A PERIOD OF 14 MONTHS HAS, WITHOUT ANY DOUBT, STIMULATED COMMUNITY ACTION. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION WHICH WORKED IN CLOSE CONTACT WITH THE AD HOC COMMITTEE. THE COMMISSIONER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS, MR RICHARD, GAVE AN UNDERTAKING THAT THE COMMISSION WOULD PRESENT A MAJOR ACTION PROGRAMME ON EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY FOR THE PERIOD 1982-1984. A EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES HAS BEEN SET UP WITH THIS IN PROSPECT. THE COMMISSION IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON THIS PROGRAMME AND SHOULD FORWARD IT TO THE COUNCIL AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT BEFORE THE END OF THIS YEAR.

THE COMMISSION IS SEEKING A PRECISE MANDATE FROM THE COUNCIL TO MAKE PROPOSALS FOR SPECIFIC ACTION IN A NUMBER OF FIELDS, NOTABLY IN EMPLOYMENT AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING, IN ORDER TO REMEDY THE PARTICULAR PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN.

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THE WORK OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT HAS ALSO HAD REPERCUSSIONS AT THE LEVEL OF THE COUNCIL. DURING ITS MEETING OF 10 JUNE 1981 THE COUNCIL EXAMINED A REPORT PRESENTED BY THE COMMISSION ON THE STATE OF APPLICATION OF THE DIRECTIVES CONCERNING EQUAL PAY FOR MEN AND WOMEN, AND THE COUNCIL REFERRED SPECIFICALLY TO THE PROPOSALS MADE SOME TIME PREVIOUSLY BY PARLIAMENT.

SO, EVEN THOUGH OUR DEBATE AND RESOLUTION OF 11 FEBRUARY STILL HAVE NOT PRODUCED TANGIBLE RESULTS, A DYNAMIC PROCESS HAS BEEN SET IN MOTION. THIS WAS A SUCCESS FOR PARLIAMENT WHICH SHOWED ITS CAPACITY TO GENERATE COMMUNITY ACTION. IT WILL ALSO BE A SUCCESS FOR THE WOMEN OF EUROPE IF WE CAN CONSOLIDATE THE ACTION UNDERTAKEN.

UNLESS SOCIETY AS WE KNOW IT IS RADICALLY CHANGED - SOMETHING WHICH IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE AT PRESENT - THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS EQUALITY AND THE AFFIRMATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IS IRREVERSIBLE, EVEN THOUGH THE SITUATION IS STILL VERY DIFFERENT FROM ONE COMMUNITY COUNTRY TO ANOTHER. AND YET, IF YOU ASK ME IF, TODAY, WE SHOULD BE OPTIMISTIC OR PESSIMISTIC AS REGARDS THE REAL SITUATION OF WOMEN, I MUST BE QUITE FRANK WITH YOU AND REPLY THAT IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO SAY ONE WAY OR THE OTHER.

IT IS DIFFICULT BECAUSE, IN SOME RESPECTS MANY OF THE DEMANDS OF WOMEN HAVE BEEN SATISFIED. ON THE PURELY LEGAL SIDE, LITTLE REMAINS TO BE DONE, AND THERE ARE HARDLY ANY DISCRIMINATIONS IN THE STATUTE BOOKS. ALL THIS HAS HAPPENED WITHIN A RELATIVELY SHORT PERIOD OF TIME AND THE YOUNGER GENERATION WOULD BE ASTONISHED AT HOW RECENTLY SOME OF THE MAJOR CHANGES HAVE TAKEN PLACE.

IT HAS ALREADY BEEN FORGOTTEN THAT NOT SO LONG AGO - AT LEAST IN CERTAIN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES - WOMEN, EVEN THOSE OF MY GENERATION, HAD TO OBEY THEIR HUSBANDS AND NEEDED THE AUTHORISATION OF THEIR HUSBANDS TO MANAGE THEIR OWN AFFAIRS, TO ENGAGE IN EMPLOYMENT, AND EVEN - BEFORE THE SECOND WORLD WAR - TO OBTAIN A PASSPORT.

ALTHOUGH MANY WOMEN WERE MARRIED WHILE THESE LAWS WERE STILL IN FORCE IT IS SCARCELY CREDIBLE TO US TODAY THAT THEY COULD NOT, SAY, HAVE THEIR OWN BANK ACCOUNT.

ON THE OTHER HAND WE FIND THAT THE REAL SITUATION OF WOMEN HAS NOT PROGRESSED AS RAPIDLY AS THE LAW. THE YOUNG WOMEN OF TODAY OFTEN FACE THE SAME DIFFICULTIES AS PREVIOUS

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GENERATIONS BUT THEY ARE LESS PREPARED AND LESS WILLING TO ACCEPT THEM. IT IS DIFFICULT IN PRACTICE TO RECONCILE WORKING LIFE WITH FAMILY LIFE AS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURES, EVEN WHERE THEY ARE ADEQUATELY PROVIDED FOR, DO NOT RELIEVE WOMEN TOTALLY OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES.

MOREOVER, ALL KINDS OF OBSTACLES - PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS, TRADITIONS AND PREJUDICES, A LACK OF AMBITION ON THE PART OF WOMEN TORN BETWEEN DIFFICULT OPTIONS - HAVE ENSURED THAT FEW WOMEN HAVE SO FAR OBTAINED POSTS OF RESPONSIBILITY.

IT IS THIRTY YEARS SINCE THE FIRST WOMAN GRADUATED FROM THE ECOLE NATIONALE D'ADMINISTRATION IN FRANCE, AN INSTITUTION WHICH PREPARES ITS STUDENTS FOR RESPONSIBLE JOBS, AND YET FEW FRENCH WOMEN ARE IN TOP MANAGEMENT POSTS IN THE CIVIL SERVICE, TWO OR THREE NO DOUBT.

IN SWEDEN, THE STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR 50 YEARS, AND YET THE HOPES OF WOMEN HAVE NOT REALLY BEEN SATISFIED. TO TRY TO REMEDY THIS SITUATION A POST OF OMBUDSMAN HAS BEEN CREATED WHOSE ROLE IT IS TO ENSURE THE APPLICATION OF THE LAW ON NON-DISCRIMINATION. NO MATTER WHAT COUNTRY ONE LOOKS AT, BE IT THE USA OR THE SOVIET UNION, THE SITUATION IS THE SAME: THE PROPORTION OF WOMEN IN POSTS CARRYING REAL ECONOMIC OR POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY IS MINUTE. ALTHOUGH THE LEGAL AND EVEN THE ECONOMIC SITUATION OF WOMEN HAS IMPROVED, IN EVERYDAY LIFE, THE PROBLEMS HAVE NOT BEEN

SOLVED, NOTABLY AS A RESULT OF DEEP-ROOTED PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS.

OUR SOCIETY IS CHANGING RAPIDLY AND IT IS PERHAPS TIME FOR US TO SIT BACK THEREFORE AND TAKE STOCK OF THE SITUATION AND EXAMINE THE PROBLEMS FROM NEW ANGLES. SHOULD WOMEN ADAPT THEMSELVES TO A SOCIETY WHICH HAS ESSENTIALLY BEEN ORGANISED ACCORDING TO CRITERIA AND OPTIONS DECIDED BY MEN AND IN WHICH COMPETITIVENESS AND AMBITION DOMINATE WITH THE RESULT THAT THOSE WHO HAVE TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITIES OFTEN HAVE NO TIME TO LIVE THEIR OWN LIVES?

LET US START OUR STOCKTAKING BY EXAMINING WHY SO MANY WOMEN, WHO SHOULD BE IN TOP JOBS HAVE BEEN LEFT BY THE WAYSIDE. LET US SEEK OUT THE EARLY WOMEN GRADUATES AND TRY TO FIND OUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THEM AND WHY SO FEW HAVE FOLLOWED THE CAREER PATTERN OF THEIR MALE PEERS.

PERHAPS THERE ARE OTHER WAYS OF HELPING WOMEN. ISSUES DO NOT HAVE TO BE CONSIDERED SOLELY IN TERMS OF EQUALITY: PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT, WORK AT HOME ARE SYSTEMATICALLY SPURNED BY THE FEMINIST MOVEMENTS AND THE TRADE UNIONS. SURELY THESE QUESTIONS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED IN A FRESH LIGHT? PART-TIME WORKING IS

INCREASINGLY EMERGING AS A POSSIBLE WAY OF ALLOCATING WORK MORE EFFECTIVELY. WHY REJECT IT OUT OF HAND IF IT IS OPEN TO ALL SIMPLY BECAUSE IT CONCERNS WOMEN MORE SPECIFICALLY? THE POSSIBILITY OF WORKING AT HOME WILL UNDOUBTEDLY ARISE IN CONNECTION WITH THE NEW TECHNOLOGIES: MUST THIS FORM OF WORK BE CONSISTENTLY ATTACKED BECAUSE IT OFFERS LITTLE IN THE WAY OF SOCIAL SECURITY AND, GIVEN THAT IT CAN BE BETTER ADAPTED TO SOME WOMEN'S SITUATION, SHOULD WE NOT ACCEPT IT - WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ENSURING THAT AN EFFECTIVE SYSTEM OF PROTECTION OF THESE WORKERS' RIGHTS BE SET UP.

MANY SUCH QUESTIONS SPRING TO MIND WHICH MUST BE CONSIDERED WITHOUT PREJUDICE AND WITH THE SOLE PURPOSE OF ALLOWING WOMEN A REAL OPPORTUNITY TO SATISFY INSTINCTS AND ASPIRATIONS WHICH SOMETIMES CONFLICT. PERHAPS THE STRUGGLE AGAINST DISCRIMINATION IS INSUFFICIENT, AND PERHAPS WE SHOULD NOW RETURN TO AN IDEA OFTEN SPURNED IN THE PAST, NAMELY THE SYSTEM OF "QUOTAS". I THINK THAT IT COULD BE MORE EFFICIENT TO ACCEPT A SPECIFIC MEASURE SUCH AS THE RESERVATION OF A CERTAIN NUMBER OF JOBS FOR WOMEN, DESPITE FEARS THAT SUCH A SYSTEM WOULD PROVOKE CERTAIN REACTIONS AND THE ACCUSATION OF ACCEPTING THE PRINCIPLE OF DISCRIMINATION.

WE MUST TRY NOT TO ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE HEMMED IN BY TRADITIONAL WAYS OF THINKING. IF, EVEN IN THOSE COUNTRIES WHERE CONSIDERABLE EFFORTS HAVE BEEN MADE TO ENSURE GREATER EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY WE COME UP AGAINST THE SAME BARRIERS, THEN IT IS CLEAR THAT A NEW APPROACH IS NEEDED. WE MUST BE BOLDER IN OUR SOLUTIONS, EVEN IF THIS MEANS RETHINKING TOTALLY THE APPROACH THAT HAS BEEN ADOPTED UP TO NOW. THE SEARCH FOR EQUALITY AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE MALE EXAMPLE ARE PERHAPS NOT THE BEST WAY OF GIVING WOMEN THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SELF-FULFILMENT WHICH MOST OF THEM NOW WISH, THAT IS A BALANCED LIFE IN WHICH THEY CAN RECONCILE A CONTENTED FAMILY LIFE WITH GENUINE PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY.

THE EFFORTS WHICH WE ARE MAKING IN EUROPE TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION OF WOMEN ARE IN THE FIRST ANALYSIS DEPENDENT ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF EACH COUNTRY AND THE DETERMINATION OF THE WOMEN CONCERNED. WE MUST BE CAREFUL NOT TO SACRIFICE PERSONAL HAPPINESS AND THE BALANCE OF OUR SOCIETIES FOR THE SAKE OF THEORETICAL AND SECTARIAN APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IS ONLY MEANINGFUL IF IT IS PERCEIVED AS A STEP FORWARD NOT A WEB OF EVEN MORE ONEROUS CONTRADICTIONS AND CONSTRAINTS.

I HAVE NOT COME HERE TODAY TO OFFER YOU SOLUTIONS
BUT RATHER TO ENCOURAGE YOU TO RE-OPEN THE DEBATE AND
PONDER WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS IN STORE FOR WOMEN.

AS I SAID NO COUNTRY CAN SOLVE THE WHOLE PROBLEM
ALONE. WE, THE WOMEN OF EUROPE MUST SEEK THE SOLUTIONS
TOGETHER.