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Helen Glew, *Gender, Rhetoric and Regulation: Women's Work in the Civil Service and the London County Council, 1900-1955*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016, pp. xvi + 265, h/b, £70, ISBN 9780719090271

'Refuse, resist and in the last resort, defy' wrote Winston Churchill of the campaign for equal pay in the Civil Service when Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1925. The history was a little different: refusal, resistance but in the last resort, acceptance. The segregation of clerical grade posts in 'women's grades' was largely abolished in the 1930s, the marriage bar was abolished in 1946, and equal pay conceded in R.A. Butler's budget of 1954.

By far the largest Civil Service employer of women throughout the period covered by this book was the General Post Office. It had begun to employ women in the 1870s and by 1914 it employed about 3,000 female clerks and almost 60,000 women in the so-called 'manipulative' grades working as telegraphists, telephonists and as counter staff in post offices. The London County Council employed a far smaller number of clerks and many of its female employees were nurses and teachers. However, Glew, apparently on the ground that the history of women in health and education has been well-studied already, ignores these two groups. Also ignored are charwomen and other domestic staff, possibly because their work was almost completely segregated and thus arguments for 'equal pay' for them had no traction in this period. Although Glew gives little discussion of this point, none of the associations and trade unions these workers joined were powerful; there were, it would seem, no strikes even before the 1927 Trade Disputes Act rendered strikes by civil servants illegal. Thus industrial conflict was limited to a war of words and it is for this reason that Glew emphasizes the rhetoric of the struggle.

By 'rhetoric' she means the arguments deployed to defend and contest gender inequality. In the early years the segregation of women's work was supported by the argument that only in this way could it be ensured that women were supervised by other women but that no man would have to take orders from a woman. That women were usually offered only routine work was justified on the grounds that this was what women were good at (and, it was implied, was all that women were good at). 'Protective' arguments were also deployed, for example that women (or 'ladies') should not undertake work at night or jobs which might bring them into contact with working-class men, an argument that indicates the importance of class as well as gender identity. The justice of equal pay was denied on the grounds that women's work was of less value than that of men's. Ideas based on the assumption of a male breadwinner in every household were also in evidence. The rhetoric supporting the marriage bar was at first remarkably incoherent. Eventually male rhetoric seems to have settled on the idea that women could not adequately and simultaneously serve the state and their children and that their children should come first.

Glew, in one of the many original aspects of the book argues, correctly I think, that the First World War had little impact on the struggle for gender equality in the Service; not only were pre-war conditions largely re-established but so, too, was pre-war rhetoric. Government austerity in the 1920s and then mass unemployment in the early 1930s brought economic arguments to the fore however. Women now made excellent workers (at least on routine work) but, regrettably, the Treasury was unable to find the money to finance equal pay for them in these difficult times. When jobs were so scarce, it was only right that married women should give up theirs so that a man could be employed. Male trade unionists became more fearful of the

ability of low paid women to undercut their own position in the labour market and promoted equal pay out of prudence rather than principle.

Glew does not really explain why the rhetoric changed in the 1930s and later but shows that it did. Arguments about the necessity of segregating women workers, the necessity of 'protecting' women from the world, the inferior value of women's work, their 'natural' inability to perform any work but the routine, fell away, leaving only one refuge for the Treasury: the expense of equal pay and the impecuniousness of government. By the early 1950s even this had become a veil of perfect transparency. A sense of the inevitability of change emerged.

Glew presents little discussion of the world outside Whitehall, Parliament and County Hall. This weakens the argument. If rhetoric is the only resource then much depends on the power of rhetoric to change attitudes or the ability to take advantage of changes in attitudes brought about by developments elsewhere. Glew, by keeping her eyes firmly fixed on the clerical woman's world, can only conclude that factors internal to that world caused the changes that happened. The possibility that changes elsewhere were responsible is not discussed. The difficulty is illustrated by Glew's comment that a woman, Margaret Bondfield, became a cabinet minister (in 1929) before a female civil servant was allowed to manage any other than women's labour exchanges. Such disparities suggest that the clerical and official world was dragged along by external developments, rather than by the internal campaigning upon which Glew focuses.

Nevertheless this book is highly valuable especially because work on this topic is long overdue. The GPO was the employer of one of the largest female workforces to be gathered together anywhere in the UK before the second world war and to see how it grappled with and discussed contemporary issues of gender

equality is fascinating. The rhetorical approach is vindicated. The research is meticulous, the book is well-written and it will stand as the standard work on an important topic for a long time. I hope this absorbing book will stimulate further work in this thought-provoking and under-explored field.

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