

### State Policies and Position of the Women Workers in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. (1967 - 1977)<sup>(1)</sup>

This book is based mainly on personal interviews conducted by the author during a research visit to Democratic Yemen at the end of 1977. Part of the information on women factory workers was obtained through an officially approved questionnaire supplemented with interviews with officials, factory managers and people from different walks of life.

The introduction surveys the constitutional and legal reforms carried out by the new Socialist regime since 1967. The rest of the book deals with the following topics regarding women: political involvement, education, employment and women factory workers.

The last chapter includes a note on methodology, a review of the main attitudinal changes since 1967 and a conclusion.

According to the author, Democratic Yemen constitutes a valuable case study for two reasons. First, newly-implemented reforms mark its government's policy towards women as being one of the most radical in the region. Second, it is a Muslim country which has been influenced by Socialist doctrine.

The 1970 constitution recognizes women as part of the «working people» and calls on women not yet involved, to take part in «productive work». Article 34, states that «all citizens are equal in their rights and obligations (and) all are equal in the eye of the law».

As a result, the following legal reforms were introduced:

1. Marriages were to come under greater state control, and to be registered by the state.
2. Arranged marriages were to be made illegal.
3. The minimum legal age for marriage was fixed at 16 for women and 18 for men.
4. Polygamy was forbidden except in certain exceptional circumstances.
5. The amount of the brideprice or «mahr» was limited to 100 dinars.



6. Both spouses shall participate in bearing the expenses of marriage and establishing the conjugal home.
7. «All divorces have to be processed through the courts,» and unilateral divorce was abolished.
8. Mothers acquired the right of custody over their children for a more extended period of time than is usual (until the age of 10 for a boy and 15 for a girl).

The new laws have refrained from attacking «veiling» in its various forms and clitoridectomy or female excision (Khitān). They are tolerated by women leaders on the ground that they are anachronisms which in the long run will not fail to disappear.

#### Attitudinal Changes

During the past 25 years, female industrial workers seem to have undergone the following attitudinal changes:

1. They prefer smaller families.
2. They often postpone marriage until their early twenties.
3. They often postpone childbearing to their early or mid-twenties.
4. They express the desire to continue working after marriage.
5. They sometimes obtain domestic help from their husbands.
6. They are encouraged to join political organizations. A fairly high percentage of them are members of the General Union of Yemeni Women, of **Youth Organizations** and many of these members are politically involved.

#### Veiling

There is a general optimism among members of the Women's Union that veiling will gradually disappear. On the streets of Aden, few women are completely veiled; most wear the sheidor (or chador) as a cloak draped loosely around their shoulders, and relatively few wear face veils.

#### Limiting Factors:

1. Domestic pressures:
  - a. Child-care remains a problem for working

women, since the provision of kindergartens is very limited. Working women are still under considerable pressure to leave work as a result of domestic responsibilities.

2. Work restrictions:
  - a. The work allocated to women is often the most tedious and repetitive.
  - b. Promotion prospects are rare.
  - c. The level of remuneration is low.
  - d. The lack of a firm career or employment orientation among women is a significant factor in causing them to leave their jobs.

#### Conclusions

State intervention and the implementation of radical reforms have done much to improve the position of women in Democratic Yemen. Yet legal changes and Party proclamations will not, in themselves, enable women to attain equality with men. Domestic responsibilities and work restrictions already referred to contribute to the high dropout rate among women. The kin-based female support structures which assist working women are not a solution. Hence the following changes are recommended:

Child-care facilities for pre-school children should be made available, especially for working mothers.

Prolonged maternity leaves and other privileges should be given to working mothers, encouraging their return to work.

Opportunities for further training and promotion are necessary to ensure women's interest and persistence in working.

Equally important is the elimination of sexual division of labor.

**R.G.**

(1) By Maxine Molyneux, International Labour Office Geneva, 1982. (**Women Work and Development 3**). See **Al-Raida**, May 1, 1981, Vol. IV, no. 16, p.10. «Women in South Yemen» by Maxine Molyneux.

(2) For more detailed information about this subject read the article by Maxine Molyneux entitled: «**Legal Reform and Socialist Revolution in Democratic Yemen: Women and the Family**» in the **International Journal of the Sociology of Law**, May 1985 issue.