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The Dissolution of Core Values: Development of Crime and Society in Postwar Scandinavia with an Emphasis on Norwegian Circumstances

*Justice Georg Fr. Rieber-Mohn**

I would first like to thank my friend, Erlend D. Peterson, for giving me this opportunity to come to Utah to speak to you. As a citizen of a small nation situated far to the northeast and bordering mighty Russia, it is a pleasure as well as a privilege to be asked to describe to an American audience the trend of development in this area. I humbly approach the task. I am not a sociologist, nor a social anthropologist. My remarks are based on several decades of experience in various positions in criminal law in my home country, from collaboration with Scandinavian colleagues, and from participation in Nordic debate on criminal law issues. I also have a strong personal interest in the general cultural development in our little corner of the world.

Perhaps my reflections will give you a few surprises depending on your previous perceptions of Scandinavia. Perhaps you will recognize trends of social development in Norway which are also the subject of current American debate. Such a discovery is not without interest, at least for Scandinavians. In Norway, we often say that the best and the worst influence we receive from the outside comes from the United States via "big brother" Sweden. Sweden provides, at least, some precedent and allows us to more easily foresee what might happen in Norway. However, the degree of outside influence should not be over-exaggerated. We ourselves are responsible for the most part. The great and difficult question is, nevertheless, to know *what* one should do to obstruct the most detrimental trends in social development. I can only answer this question to a limited

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extent. Nevertheless, the following analysis of core trends of social development, and the factors that influence them, can bring us closer to the answer.

In an article in *The Economist*, I recently read the following: “To understand a country, you can study its economic data and demographic statistics. Or you can collect its jokes.”¹ The latter is naturally more amusing than the former, at least for a lecture audience. That same article contained a sample that says something about my profession’s esteem in this country: “Q: What’s brown and black and looks good on a lawyer? A: A doberman.”² While jokes are amusing, I nevertheless believe that a sociological and cultural-philosophical approach leads to a deeper understanding of the social development of a country. So there will not be much joking throughout the remainder of my remarks.

I. POSTWAR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

If one looks back on Norway’s near postwar period—the 1950s—we had a homogeneous and stable society. The Labour Party had a clear majority in the Parliament, we had full employment, and a wide stratum of the population enjoyed a gradual increase in prosperity. A modern welfare state with increasingly better social security was beginning to take form. The use of private automobiles was limited to only those granted public permits, and television was an unknown American phenomenon that we read about or saw in films. Criminality was under control, the public trusted the police and the courts, mother was at home taking care of her children, and marriages usually lasted a lifetime. The situation was roughly the same in Denmark, and Sweden—which had not experienced the German occupation—epitomized this pattern of development.

From the mid-1960s, a development started which continued at least through the mid-1990s and has brought the Scandinavian countries out of their state of innocence, for better and for worse. I shall concentrate on some of the more destructive signs of this trend which, in my opinion, outweigh

1. *You Think That’s Funny?*, *ECONOMIST*, Dec. 20, 1997, at 23.

2. *Id.*

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the positive. I am aware that my analysis is controversial and that others will place emphasis on the more hopeful aspects of this development. Many seem to be of the opinion that our society is constantly moving forward in a positive direction and they call those of us with other opinions “romantic nostalgics.” One can live with this label. Time cannot be turned back, but this does not mean that the course ahead should not be adjusted.

Between 1965 and about 1995, criminality in Scandinavia more than quintupled, even after adjusting for population growth.³ During these thirty years, I have witnessed the face of crime change. In the beginning of the period, thefts and burglaries seemed to play a predominant role. Although theft still predominates, violence has since increased in dimension. It is also my impression that within individual crime categories, there has been a steady transition toward harder criminality. Violence is more brutal than before. It is more often unprovoked, affecting completely innocent victims, and increasingly includes the use of knives and firearms. To understand this increase in criminality, it is necessary to consider that narcotics were introduced to Scandinavia in the 1960s, beginning with cannabis and expanding to a wide spectrum of drugs such as hashish, heroin, amphetamines, and cocaine. Use of narcotics is in itself a crime, and it generates other crime.

But it is not only the increase in crime that is troublesome throughout this period; another series of alarming tendencies has also increased. From 1970 to 1988, the suicide rate for young men in Norway doubled,⁴ an alarming sign that something is wrong in the society's development. The frequency of divorce quadrupled from 1960 to 1990.⁵ When interpreting

3. See KRIMINALITET OG RETTSVESEN [CRIMINALITY AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM] 29 (3 utg. [3d ed.] 1997).

4. See Finn Gjertsen, *Forskjeller i selvmordshyppighet i befolkningen: Historisk perspektiv med vekt på 1970- og 1980-årene* [Variation in Suicide Rate in the Population: Historical Perspective Concentrated on the 1970s and the 1980s], 1 MEDISIN OG VITENSKAP [The Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association] 115:18-22 (1995).

5. See Svenn-Erik Mamelund et al., *Skilsmisser i Norge 1886-1995 for kalenderår og ekteskapskohorter* [Divorce in Norway 1886-1995 by Calendar Year and Marriage Cohort], 19 STATISTISK SENTRALBYRÅ RAPPORTER [STATISTICS NORWAY REPORTS] 10 (1997).

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this increase, one must, in addition, consider the fact that in the second half of this period, cohabitation significantly increased at the expense of marriage. While it is undoubtedly known that cohabitation is less stable than ordinary marriage,⁶ thirty-nine percent of the children born in Norway in 1995 were born to such informal cohabitations.⁷

I shall not tire you with the details of these dismal patterns in the social development of Scandinavia during these years. Instead, I shall simply mention a few others, such as increases in mental disorders, eating disorders among young females in particular, prescription medicine abuse, and alcohol abuse. There is more than enough over which to philosophize regarding the background of this alarming development. In parenthesis please note that what I call a “dismal pattern” in Scandinavia may be just a pale shimmer of much worse trends in the social development of the United States. But such development is, nevertheless, interesting to note in an evaluation of the Scandinavian welfare states, which in international debate are often described as idyllic and equalized model societies. The causes of these developments will nevertheless stem from partly national or regional roots.

II. EXPLANATIONS OF NEGATIVE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

This background leads me to the really tough question: What can explain such an abrupt negative development in a society? The only sure answer is that it is not caused by one single factor. There are undoubtedly a series of contributing factors. One can approach these from different perspectives and with different theoretical analytical tools. Yet in our society, there have been exceptionally few attempts to try to understand this development.

A. *Failure of Traditional Marxist Social Policies*

I believe that one reason for this development is a breakdown in trust in the classic Marxist analysis and

6. See STATISTISK SENTRALBYRÅ [STATISTICS NORWAY], SOCIAL SURVEY 1993, at 94 (1994).

7. See Turid Noack, *Ekteskapelig status—statusvariabel på avveie?* [*Marital Status—A Statistical Variable Gone Wrong?*], 4 SOSIOLOGISK TIDSSKRIFT [JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY] 285, 290 (1997).

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understanding of society that was so popular until just a few years ago. It has, at any rate, shown its inadequacy. In 1980, I was stopped by an older man on a street in Oslo. I soon recognized him as the old political "leader" of the Labour Party, Einar Gerhardsen, Norway's Prime Minister through most of the postwar restoration period.

I had during this time gained a somewhat high profile in the public debate on criminal law politics. Mr. Gerhardsen circled around a bit before asking me the really difficult question. He pointed out that his party in the 1920s and 1930s carried out a crusade for ordinary peoples' rights: the right to work, the right to education independent of social or economic background, the right to social security in forms of health, disability, and retirement benefits. It was the Labour Party's true belief, he continued, that if we were able to create a society with common prosperity among people and security for all, social need and criminality would disappear. The Labour Party held the majority in 1945, and was in power almost continuously for twenty years. The realization of the vision from the 1930s created a secure and sound society for everyone in Norway.

I could only nod my head in agreement to much of what he was saying. But then he asked: Can you explain to me why we made such a fundamental error in presuming that criminality would decrease in a welfare state? Crime started its great increase at approximately the time we finished implementing our social constructions. The difference between poor and rich was much smaller than before, and social security was much greater, he continued with dismay.

I could not give a good answer at that time, and I probably cannot today either. Further, I do not know of anyone else who can. But I shall try to outline some circumstances that, while they do not completely explain the negative development, at least bear some connection to it.

I shall first point out that the traditional Marxist way of thinking is undoubtedly too elementary. If one removes poverty, social differences, unemployment and social insecurity, one does *not* at the same time remove criminality, anguish, mental agony, and malice among people. Older prophets than Marx have stated substantially wiser things concerning the role of evil in our life, although I will not delve into this theological discussion here. The irony is that not only do Marxists'

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expectations remain unfulfilled, but modern society—with its welfare and affluence—has to bear the cost of increased criminality, more suicides, and greater dissolution of the family more than the prewar society—a society characterized by strong class distinctions.

Nonetheless, the actual Marxist way of thinking has proved itself to be extraordinarily tenacious. For example, Marxism enjoyed an especially flourishing period in the 1970s, despite the fact that trendsetting academic circles found themselves in a dogmatic, ideological phase without any firm contact with the real world. Worse yet, even today the Labour Party remains out of touch. As recent as 1996, the Labour Party government wrote the following in a program on crime prevention: “The government believes that a society with small social differences becomes more secure for everyone, and concentrates therefore on equalization and benefits for larger equality.”⁸

I believe that this type of mental vacuity is a result of frustration over the fact that this traditional analytical tool has become obsolete and no replacement has been found. This is probably also why the Scandinavian debate on crime policy has, compared with the 1970s, all but ceased. At that time, strong ideological opposites clashed on fundamental questions. The debate today, in contrast, is almost limited to subjects such as extracurricular programs for the young, and how many restaurants with liquor licenses should be situated in densely populated areas. The Marxist-inspired critics of society have concentrated their attention on the abuse of power by authorities such as prison administrators and police, rather than on the meaning of crime in the development of society. On this latter subject they no longer seem to have any noteworthy contribution.

At this point it is necessary to emphasize that I am, of course, a supporter of equalization and socially secured welfare societies like those in Scandinavia. However, I cannot see how this model, in itself, hinders the increase in crime or other negative signs in development. I do not suggest that the

8. TRYGGHET OG NAERHET I HVERDAGEN: ET NASJONALT FOREBYGGINGSPROGRAM [SECURITY AND CLOSENESS IN EVERYDAY LIFE: A NATIONWIDE PROGRAM OF PREVENTION], EN <<TRYGGSÅK>> FRA REGJERINGEN [A “PRINTED WORK” FROM THE GOVERNMENT] 4 (1996).

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positive aspects of Scandinavian society—the social equalization and security—have created these alarming trends. The question then becomes what sides of the Scandinavian model society did contribute to this negative development?

B. Other Possible Explanations: Trends in Modern Society

One may argue, as did former Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland in a television debate with me concerning these questions, that we are talking about the trends of international development here: crime is increasing nearly all over the world, and in any case, in all of Europe. This may be true enough. But as already mentioned, the builders of the Scandinavian society brought social equalization and democracy especially far, and at the same time thought that they would thereby solve crime and other social problems. It is, therefore, an interesting phenomenon in itself that they find themselves so far from a solution. It is not inconceivable that the common statistical development of social phenomena in different nations during the same period can have different causes in the individual countries, especially as one crosses cultural borders. In any case, the relative weight of common explanatory factors may vary significantly; I consider this most likely to be the case.

With that background, I shall point out some sides of the development in Scandinavia which are often described as undividedly positive, and have even been declared political aims, but which can have side effects we do not like to speak about. From my side there will be more questions than answers.

1. The change of traditional roles of women

The Scandinavian countries, and Norway in particular, have been at the forefront of women's liberation. Women's entry into universities, higher schools of learning, and the workplace began in the mid-1960s and accelerated into the 1970s and 1980s. This was a historical necessity, and moreover should be considered an irreversible attainment of rights. But precisely because of this change, there is reason to evaluate dispassionately whether the development has gone too fast, and at what price—human and social—it has come to bear.

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There can be no doubt that the time parents spend with their children, especially the contact between mother and child, has been substantially reduced in our society over the past thirty years. In short, mothers left the home, and fathers did not come home.

To believe that fathers would quickly adapt to what has traditionally been the mother's role, as if to satisfy a collective guilt for centuries of suppression of women, would be a little bit too optimistic. Such a development would require changing deeply internalized patterns of gender roles with long historical roots. This must necessarily take time; but women left the home in the course of a few years. Although the time was right, many homes had to make sacrifices. That they sacrificed time is indisputable. But they also sacrificed nearness, security, love, and procurement of values from adults to children.

There were, of course, many reflective and responsible mothers who inexhaustibly tried to compensate for this time loss by having more intense and conscientious contact in every spare moment. Among the well-educated and politically conscious leaders of the women's liberation movement there were certainly many in this category. But herein lies part of the problem. It was these women who set the standard, became examples for other women, and started the mass movement out of the home. With the women's liberation movement as a catalyst, mothers of all social ranks entered the workforce as waitresses, domestic help, secretaries, and drivers, to name a few. One could hardly expect them to have the strength to say, "I am just a housewife and mother." This gradually became insufficient in the eyes of society as the principal role of mother was devalued and became perceived as subordinate.

A mother who leaves home every day at 6:00 a.m. to wash trains, and returns home exhausted late in the afternoon, however, is no leader in the women's movement. She can hardly be described as having found her true potential. She is, on the contrary, a kind of victim of this movement. There are quite a number of such victims, but they do not acknowledge their feeble status. They have, after all, discovered working life, however inane it might seem.

The movement did, however, lead to a near doubling of the family income. But then they were trapped. Suddenly they could afford new furniture, longer vacation trips, and a new car.

This “women’s liberation” did not seem so bad after all. The material assets made life worth living. And, as the cleaning helpers and kiosk employees heard daily in the media from the vanguard of the women’s movement, work outside of the home was a step forward for their dignity as women. This, perhaps, helped them get through the strenuous and routine workday—with the paycheck as the only bright spot ahead.

Were there other victims of this enormous, sudden change in family life? Most certainly. Private, voluntary care was greatly reduced and replaced by paid care. Historically speaking, the care-taking generation, consisting mainly of adult women, were pressed into a very tight time schedule. The victims were the children, the old, the lonely—those who once had benefitted from these women’s surplus energy. The surplus disappeared, and there was not much time for care.

Children were, to a great extent, entrusted to more or less improvised solutions before kindergarten—these facilities have become gradually better. Still, as is common to these solutions, as well as to kindergarten, parents transfer the responsibility for major aspects of their child’s upbringing to people whose values and suitability as role models they know very little about. Although most people in Norway would be unwilling to loan their new car to a relatively unknown person, at least over any length of time, many loan their children to strangers month after month and year after year, sometimes from their second year of life. Parents that would be anxious for damages to the car, close their eyes to the possible unfortunate influence parental detachment has on children—until it concerns something as drastic as violence from a babysitter or sexual abuse in a kindergarten, which receive, naturally enough, enormous media coverage.

Some signs indicate that the time away from children may yet increase, at least among more career-minded parents. At work parents function and develop in the pleasant company of like-minded colleagues. At work they get positive reinforcement that they mean something and their surroundings bring out their best qualities. At home, on the other hand, there is only hectic fuss and bother. And today one can purchase most things: ready-made food, babysitting for the afternoon, and evening domestic help. It would seem that all things point toward this direction; however, I will return to this theme later

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to discuss an interesting trend pointing in the opposite direction.

2. *The increasing emphasis on material goods*

As parents through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s spent increasingly less time together with their children and entrusted to a greater extent their upbringing to strangers, parents themselves, with many important exceptions, became consistently worse role models. One factor seems to have been increasing materialism, the desire to constantly own more and better things. This fundamental motive, to acquire expensive cars, larger houses, and extravagant vacations, has naturally played a central role in the development toward two constantly career-minded parents. And when the Norwegian nation advanced into the oil age and became one of the world's most important oil producers, it gave us all increasingly greater material advancement and higher self-esteem. We have become *nouveau-riche* and self-satisfied.

We are more preoccupied than ever with scrambling for unnecessary material success. It is probable, in fact, that we have never before been less preoccupied with our near ones—our children, our aging parents, a lonely aunt. This has not given our lives any great meaning. As a Norwegian folk singer concisely expressed: "We have everything and that is all we have." The same can be said about the situation of many children. They do not lack money. Their consumption is high. On the other hand, they miss parents who sacrifice some of their personal advancement and consumption to provide closeness, care, and warmth.

3. *The deterioration of marital commitment*

Perhaps even more disturbing than this rampant materialism has been the inclination many parents have had to forget their matrimonial promises. And the road out of informal cohabitation has been even shorter, even where the couple has brought children into the world. My generation, the so-called "68 generation," was, in several respects, the worst example. I have reason to believe that the progressive, well-educated, and successful were once again setting the standards. The "68ers" became experts on rationalizing away unfortunate effects of

their own behavior. Children became once again the losers and were offered on the altar of self-development. We have all heard statements like: "It was better to divorce than to let the children experience two parents who were constantly in conflict," as though this is the only alternative! The "68 generation" praised the freedom of the individual, but found it difficult to choose on any basis other than self-interest. Ours was, moreover, the same generation that most frequently used the expression "quality is better than quantity" concerning the reduced time spent with their children.

Many from this generation have changed matrimonial partners and common law partners up to several times. This has serious consequences for children who must adapt repeatedly to stepmothers, stepfathers, half sisters, and half brothers during the course of their childhood. More children constantly experience a restless life full of transitions between parents, disagreements on custody arrangements, and other conflicts. This is reflected in the increasing number of lawsuits dealing with these questions.

The trendsetting "68ers" have managed to rationalize away even this alarming trend, however. A well-known Norwegian professor of literature, who moved in with a female author some time ago, recently wrote that it was entirely beneficial for his half-grown children from an earlier relationship to become acquainted with his new partner's children and other family. If harmony and new friendships result from this extended family project, I will be impressed. But it is hardly the reality for most.

4. The additional influence of the media

One can conclude from my discussion of the changes in children's adolescent environments that children in this period have been much more vulnerable than children of earlier times to the influence of values other than those of their parents. Of course, there may be nothing wrong with this. But there are serious questions as to whether it is, on the whole, the best for child-raising.

Perhaps most significantly, at the same time that parents were delegating a greater part of their child-rearing responsibility to more or less coincidental babysitters—professional care givers, kindergarten employees, and teachers—the mass media, especially the television and

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video industries, became a constantly stronger cultural factor with great influence. After school, a larger number of children and youth became mass media prey until mother or father came home in the evening. In many cases it did not even matter that the parents came home. They were so tired after a strenuous day that the children's interest in TV actually accommodated them quite well. And the film menu for children and youth hardly includes depictions of nature or informative programs. Never before have so many children been so massively and destructively influenced by an industry of commercial violence and sex than has been the case in the last thirty years. And at the same time, families lacking adult models have been more vulnerable than in any earlier period.

III. RECOGNITION: THE FIRST STEP TOWARD CHANGE

On the whole, the period of time between 1965 and the present has experienced a revolution regarding the environment in which we raise our children. I find it troubling that until just recently, little has been written or spoken about the unfortunate effects of this development in society. Indeed, as mentioned, those who have sworn to the Marxist model are quite powerless when facing these changes in modern peoples' attitude, values, and conduct. An official Norwegian publication from the Central Bureau of Statistics illustrates this point. The report acknowledges that "children of single parents have a greater probability of becoming child-care probation clients than other children."⁹ Then comes this deep deliberation:

It is difficult to evaluate whether it has become better or worse

for children in the course of the last ten years. We know that there are more children who experience parental breakup. At the same time, the standard of living has increased and more kindergarten facilities have been created.¹⁰

But if post-Marxism is having difficulties in understanding a new age, what about the rest of us? Much is spoken and written about children's rights today in Scandinavia and

9. Berit Otnes, *SOSIAL- OG BARNEVERNTJENESTEN: ORGANISERING, OMFANG OG UTVIKLING 1980-1984* [SOCIAL AND CHILD CARE SERVICES: SOCIETAL ORGANIZATION, SCOPE AND DEVELOPMENT 1980-1984] 67 (1996).

10. *Id.*

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throughout the world, often specifically concerning problems in Third World countries, such as illegal child labor in Thailand, and the condition of orphanages and children's institutions in Romania and Russia. One can safely talk about these issues; we are quick to agree on how terrible exploitation of children is. We oppose sexual abuse and ill-treatment of children, as is evidenced by the numerous symposia, debates, countless scholarly articles, and daily press pieces condemning such acts. These are serious violations that deserve severe punishment in compliance with our penal codes. When such incidents are revealed and a child abuser steps forth into daylight, the nation gathers in a unanimous cry of disgust which can be heard in every corner of the country. We all take part in a large, mutual moral sauna and feel cleansed afterwards. We, of course, cannot fathom the idea of hitting or sexually violating defenseless children.

This is true enough—we are not a nation of child abusers. But the question is whether this collective cry of disgust against evident threats to the welfare of children gives us a false sense of comfort, a feeling of having children's interests in focus. We have used the collective outcry to draw our attention away from the enormous change in the child-rearing environment that our own need for self-realization has created, and for which we—at least deep inside ourselves—feel some anxiety. It is a question of whether the daily life of children and youth is more important for the development of a society than isolated, serious violations occurring in other remote parts of the world.

IV. CONCLUSION: POSITIVE FUTURE TRENDS IN DEVELOPMENT

As previously mentioned, it is a difficult task to give an adequate answer as to why criminality increased so abruptly from around 1965; why suicides among young men have increased; why so many young girls have developed serious eating disorders; and why the number of mental disorders have increased. I have pointed out some few conditions which, from my point of view, play some part in this negative development. It has been essential to point out that we have not had any particular debate on this development in society.

It has not been pleasant to convey such a dismal message from postwar Scandinavia. Having done so, I must remind you

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of one important fact: Criminality and other negative signs in our society's development are still on a level that is far more manageable than that in larger nations such as the United States. Scandinavia's international reputation has often been so positive. Even though we are such small nations,¹¹ the rapid changes in our pattern of life, values, and behavior are disappointing and deserve our attention.

In closing, let me supplement the picture by pointing out some brighter aspects of recent social development. The increase in crime has stagnated and seems to be on the decline in the Scandinavian countries since the mid-1990s.¹² The number of suicides in Norway has declined since the beginning of the 1990s.¹³ The divorce frequency also shows a declining tendency after peaking in 1993.¹⁴ We do not yet know if these are temporary bright spots. But there is reason to believe this is a positive turn on both political and cultural levels. Today's young parents may be reacting to the negative patterns established by their parents and grandparents.

My small contribution to the understanding of the source of these dismal aspects of the development of society in Scandinavia during the last thirty years would probably have been rejected as narrow-minded moralism in intellectual circles only a few years ago by those who characterize themselves as progressive. In social democratic circles, for example, my contribution would be considered a reactionary assault on women's liberation. This would have been an unfortunate fundamental misunderstanding. In the past two to three years, however, it has become increasingly acceptable to place a question mark in front of some of the unfortunate effects of the unprecedented rapid change in the pattern of family life and

11. Norway has no more than 4.2 million inhabitants, Sweden 8 million, and Denmark 5 million.

12. See Anmeldelsesstatistik Kriminalitetsudviklingen samt dræbte og tilskadekomne i trafikken, Information Fra Rigspolitichefen, 1996, 1. halvår. [Statistics of Reported Criminal Activity, Development of Crime, and Death and Injury in Traffic, Information from the Danish Chief of Police, 1996, 1. semi-annual]. The trend in Norway seems to be the same. See STATISTISK SENTRALBYRÅ, *supra* note 6, at 30. In Sweden, the decline in criminality seems to have started about 1990. See Brottsutvecklingen 1994 [Development of Crime 1994], in BRA-RAPPORT 12 (Jan Ahlberg ed., 1995).

13. See Gjertsen, *supra* note 4, at 1.

14. See Mamelund, *supra* note 5, at 31.

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the child-rearing environment which the women's liberation of the 1960s and 1970s brought about. Shorter hours at work for parents of small children and longer maternity and paternity leave have now become issues in public debate. The picture has not become as parent-friendly as it should, however. During this same time, strong forces are working for the development of after-school curriculum arrangements and full-time schools, which implies that school age children will be taken care of by persons other than mother and father. Kindergarten facilities for all children are still a general political aim.

Real conflicts have arisen in the Norwegian political debate since the Christian Democrats attained political power. The party has suggested cash support for parents of small children who choose *not* to have children in kindergarten so that more parents have the opportunity of being at home with their children while they are small.¹⁵ In the course of a few months, it seems that the Christian Democrats have doubled their popularity among the Norwegian people—especially among the young and women. Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik has also taken the initiative to appoint a broadly composed Commission on Values, which should open our country's debate. One hopes that debate will include a deep probing analysis of our society's normative foundation and direction. From my point of view, however, the possible outcome of the Commission on Values is not the most interesting issue. What is interesting is that the Christian Democrats have, with their concentration on questions concerning values, interpreted signs of the times correctly and appealed to many young people's basic feelings and their need for a more family-oriented life, at least while their children are small.

Thus, my presentation concludes in a more optimistic tone than it would have otherwise. Our politicians have recognized the need to ask questions about societal values. It now remains for me to thank you for the attention you have given to me by listening to personal reflections on a faraway and small society undergoing rapid change.

15. The party ran for election on this proposal, which was met with contempt by Social Democrats and feminists.