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LOCAL GOVERNMENT WOMEN'S COMMITTEES : A FEMINIST POLITICAL PRACTICE

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Julia Ann Edwards M.Sc.(Bath)

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Julia Edwards
University of Hull
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CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION

The celebration of anniversaries, be it birthdays for individuals, weddings for couples, or revolutions for nations, is a time of looking back on past achievements and looking forward with hope. This year (1993) women in Britain will celebrate the 75th anniversary of their right to vote, when there will be much to look back at - the cruelties endured by women in the suffrage movement; the nine years' wait for full enfranchisement and at the eighteen years since the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts came into force. Looking back on past achievements will be overshadowed with disappointment that the expectations of genuine equality for women have failed to materialise. For feminist authors, the repetitive task of cataloguing the almost unchanging statistics of women's inequality in society sometimes borders on the tedious, but that is of itself sufficient justification for doing so again. The seventy-fifth anniversary of partial enfranchisement will be celebrated by women having no more than 10% of the seats in the House of Commons; nor (on average) more than 20% of the seats in local council chambers; or occupy more than 2% of local authority chief executive posts; or be earning more than 77% of average full-time male wages; or number highly in any category other than poverty. Nor will any of the four basic demands made by women at the 1970 Ruskin Conference (24-hour nurseries; free contraception and abortion on demand; equal pay and employment opportunity; and equal education) be fully realised.

Some may complain that this gives far too gloomy a picture of women's achievements in the past seventy-five years and point (as the government did in a recent report) to the fact that: "Significant advances have been made in the field of equal opportunities between women and men in recent years, and are clear evidence that the equal opportunities policies are working." This report goes on to claim a whole raft of equality "successes" including the "second highest participation rate [in paid work] for women in Western Europe" (never mind that the majority of these jobs are part-time, low-paid and unsecured); and that "a quarter of all doctors, dentists, opticians, solicitors, barristers and veterinary surgeons in the UK are now women" (never mind women's continued failure to reach the most senior levels in these fields). [Social Europe 1/92]

Given this apparent complacency on the part of the government towards equal opportunities policies, how far will women at the 75th anniversary celebrations be able to look forward with hope to a closing of the gap between women's de jure and de facto equality? As Vicky Randall notes in her review of feminism in the 1980s: "If this brief account of the environment for feminism in the 1980s has painted a gloomy picture, it is incomplete without reference to one further, paradoxical, and quite heartening development: the establishment of women's committees and units in a series of local authorities.. "

[Randall 1992].

This study, based on six such women's committees aims to show them not only as local examples of equal opportunities work to close the gap between women's de jure and de facto equality, but also as models of feminist political practice which, when placed within their wider political context, demonstrates their potential to act as a model for other political movements concerned about the democratic deficit in British politics. It will be argued that the continuing struggle for women's political equality cannot be viewed in isolation from the movement for greater democracy in Britain since the achievement of that equality depends on radical change to the political, economic and social structures which systematically maintain complex patterns of domination and oppression in British society. That statement relies upon the work of many authors who will be specified at appropriate points throughout this work and particularly in the next chapter. The international development of feminist scholarship which has revealed the hidden web of interacting forces which sustain these patterns of domination and oppression, is a cause for celebration at the 75th anniversary of women's citizenship.

The women's committees which are the subject of this study, are distinguishable both by their objectives and their *modus operandi* from among a range of equal opportunities work in local government. As such they are a relatively rare political phenomenon, attracting a number of previous studies [see e.g. Button 1984; Flannery & Roelofs 1984; Halford 1987 and 1988;

Stone 1988; Edwards 1988 and 1989; Bottomley 1990; Boyle 1991]. Whilst all of these studies have been concerned both with the particular techniques of women's committees and the wider implications of their work for women's equality, none have attempted to do what this study aims to do, which is to analyse those techniques as a distinct form of feminist political practice and to explore the potential of that practice as a tool for alliance-building between diverse groups with the common objective of reforming democratic processes in Britain. By way of introduction, therefore, this chapter provides firstly a brief overview of this thesis, and secondly, defines the two principal subjects of the study by (a) distinguishing the particular type of women's committee which provides a model of feminist political practice and (b) explaining what is meant by that term.

An overview of the thesis:

It is the purpose of this research to explore the potential of local government women's committees (LGWCs) as a model for the transformatory processes which governmental structures in particular, would need to undergo for the feminist project of a different political, economic and social order to begin to be realised. For it is not enough, as Carole Pateman has said, "to 'rediscover' a patriarchal conception of civil society" [Pateman 1989] actions are required to change it. And since, as Iris Young argues, the causes of women's oppression "are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits and symbols, in the assumptions

underlying institutional rules and collective consequences of following those rules.... in short, the normal processes of everyday life" then, as she points out, this structured oppression cannot be overcome merely "by getting rid of the rulers or making some new laws, because oppressions are systematically reproduced in major economic, political and cultural institutions" [Young 1990].

What is required therefore, is a joint strategic approach towards a radical reformulation of the "major economic, political and cultural institutions" involving a wide range of diverse groups including peoples disadvantaged by e.g. gender, race, class or disability as well as democracy movements such as Charter '88 and those campaigning for regional autonomy. The variety of different perspectives and objectives of such a wide range of groupings may make the concept of a strategic approach seem illusory, but rainbow coalitions of various kinds do form and work together (the Arc-En-Ciel group in the European Parliament is one) by focussing on commonalities. Approval of decentralisation of decision-making and involvement of disadvantaged groups in policy formulation are just two common factors which a rainbow group of the kind envisioned could focus upon and work together to achieve. The main problem for rainbow groups is in working together without loss of autonomy for any one of the groups involved; what is required is more sophisticated techniques for cooperative practice. Local government women's committees have, in the last decade,

developed a number of such techniques and it the main argument of this study that they can be viewed as a model of feminist political practice which is available for wider application among more diverse coalitions. Moreover, as examples of practice within existing governmental institutions, they provide a basis for extending alliances across a broader spectrum of democracy movement than hitherto. Four of the six case study women's committees which provide the data base for this research were located in Scotland where the potential for alliance-building has been recognised to a limited extent. The fundamental obstacle to progress appears to be that the more well-resourced coalition organisations fail to appreciate the value of the techniques which the women's committees can offer, and the women's committees lack resources to demonstrate their potential more clearly. It is one of the aims of this study to clarify the potential of women's committees in this respect.

The arguments which will be made in the following chapters are these:

that LGWCs with their twofold objective of bringing autonomous women's perspectives to local policy-making and thereby changing the way that their local authorities work:

(a) expose the democratic deficit inherent in the patriarchal principles which guide intergovernmental relations in Britain;

(b) by exploiting the limited scope, within local government, for creative opposition to centrally-controlled public policy-making, LGWCs expose the inefficiency of such a top-down approach, particularly for the achievement of de facto equality for women;

(c) highlight the need for local authorities in Britain to have greater autonomy of the kind set out in the Council of Europe's Charter For Local Self-Government;

(d) reveal the extent to which the policies and funding arrangements of the European Community (EC) assist LGWCs and their local authorities in promoting equal opportunities for women and in resisting centralising forces; but also

(e) expose the democratic deficit within and between existing EC institutions which present further obstacles to the promotion of women's equality; and therefore,

(f) highlight the significance of the non-patriarchal guiding principles (of cooperation, harmonisation and subsidiarity) which underpin the EC, to envisioning alternative and more democratic forms of government.

The process of revealing all of the foregoing will be done through analyses of the obstacles which LGWCs encounter to their objectives and the transformatory strategies which they have

devised for overcoming them. As a result, it will be suggested that LGWCs offer a model for feminist political practice and for conceptualising an alternative form of government based on a politics of difference within a unifying concept of community - where the task of government is the management of reciprocity between autonomous groups and regions responsible for "conceiving of policies of [their] own and realising them". [Berlin 1969].

Structuring the Analysis

In the remaining part of this chapter, the characteristics of women's committees will be described together with a working definition of feminist political practice. Equipped with these clarifications - that is, having provided the basic definitions of what LGWCs are and how feminist political practice may be defined - the relevant theoretical contexts for a study of women's committees can be discussed (in chapter two) in order to demonstrate the inter-relationships between them. As indicated above, LGWCs are here presented as an example of feminist political practice which aims to tackle the fixity of women's unequal position in society. Some explanation is therefore needed to account for the failures of both formal citizenship (enfranchisement) for women and specific policies directed at outlawing discrimination, to produce de facto equality or equality of outcomes for women. Moreover, women are not an homogenous group; they are distinguishable from each other in terms of class, ethnicity and disability amongst other factors,

and their claims and allegiances vary accordingly. Important to this study therefore, are feminist understandings about asymmetrical power relations and about practices which accommodate difference.

Located within governmental institutions, LGWCs hold a unique position in theories of equal opportunities because they work at the democratic interface between the governing and the governed. They straddle the boundary between the bureaucracies in which they are located and the communities they serve and their transformatory strategies impact on both in an interactive way. This two-way position creates the need for a combined perspective on theories about government, democracy and citizenship particularly from the point of view of effective policy-making. Chapter two, therefore, takes an eclectic approach to the task of providing the reader with a theoretical tool-kit with which to evaluate the analyses of empirical data set out in later chapters.

Chapter three sets out the detail of the research into six LGWCs and discusses some of the methodological problems associated with data collection, analysis and making inferences from individual case studies to the wide contextual canvass that is presented in chapter two. As a work on feminist political practice, the research was conducted as far as practicable in accordance with feminist methods [see e.g. Harding 1987] of enabling participants to have equal control over the fieldwork

and findings. Chapters four and five deal respectively with analyses of the obstacles which the case-study LGWCs encounter and their transformatory strategies both for empowering women and changing the attitudes and organisation of their local councils' policy-making. These two chapters present the analyses drawn from the six case studies which provided the data base for this study [see chapter three].

In chapter six the European dimension to the inter-related struggles for autonomy by women and local government is considered. In the twenty years since Britain joined the EC the consequences of membership have increasingly impacted on women's equality and on domestic politics. In respect of the latter, and in the past decade in particular, tensions between local and central government and changes to EC procedures for administering structural funds for regional development have resulted in some Labour councils to look towards Europe for allies in preserving their local autonomy.

Finally, in chapter seven, the thesis is reviewed in the light of the empirical data from the case studies to test how far LGWCs provide a model of feminist political practice which has the potential for wider use as a tool for alliance-building between diverse groups and for judging the normative proposition that such a tool facilitates the envisioning of alternative and more democratic forms of government.

Local Government Women's Committees:

According to the 1991 Directory of the National Association of Local Government Women's Committees (NALGWC) less than 12% of local authorities in mainland Britain have set up women's committees.⁽¹⁾ What constitutes a "women's committee" for the purposes of this study, can be broadly described as follows:

(1) they are primarily concerned with the promotion of de facto equality for ALL women in their localities (not just women council employees);

(2) their guiding principle is a proactive one of positive action for women and not simply non-discrimination;

(3) their own policies and practices are grounded in a thorough analysis (achieved through direct involvement/consultation with local women - not political elites) of the obstacles to women's equality;

(4) they seek to change the policies and practices of their local authorities and other relevant local agencies to meet women's identified needs; and

(5) they aim to shift public resource allocations towards local women which would not otherwise be achieved by the customary functions and practices of such public agencies.

Not all of the 60 women's committees listed in the NALGWC directory are full standing committees of their councils; not all are exclusively concerned with women but may be more generalised equal opportunities committees; not all have sufficient resources to fulfill the criteria above (e.g. to be able to carry out extensive or on-going consultations with women). Nevertheless, what distinguishes them from other forms of equal opportunities practice is that the above criteria encapsulate the intention of the committees which affiliate (or associate) with NALGWC.⁽²⁾ The acronym LGWC, used throughout this study, applies only to committees with objectives in line with the above criteria.

The Politics of Local Government Women's Committees:

According to a survey conducted by the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1986, about half of the local authorities in Britain (excluding Northern Ireland) had some form of equal opportunities policy. [EOC 1988] They also found that what constitutes an equal opportunities initiative can vary from an official statement as part of an authority's personnel policy, up to a full standing committee of the council with control of its own budget and serviced by its own officer unit or department. An explanation for this variety lies in the legal basis for equal opportunities work by local authorities. The Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act (both as amended by European Community law [see e.g. Meehan 1993]) primarily impact on local authorities as employers rather than as public services

providers; with the exception of Education Departments, local government services were exempt from the effects of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. Neither was there provision in the legislation parallel to that provided under S.11 of the 1966 Local Government Act to promote good race relations. Consequently, there was little in the way of official guidance to local authorities in the mid-1970s when the legislation came into force.⁽³⁾ However, although the lack of official guidance may account for some local authorities failing to realise their potential role in promoting equal opportunities, on the other hand, the absence of it may account for some others developing a more positive approach than they might have otherwise.

There are, in short, two dimensions to equal opportunities work in local authorities; equal opportunities in employment practices and equal opportunities in service provision. In the former, there are statutory duties to comply with, and in the latter (with the exception of Education services) there are not. In both cases, there is sufficient scope for autonomous action within local government for authorities to interpret their powers and duties in either a minimalist or a more generous manner which is largely a matter of political will. What motivates councillors to take a minimalist or more generous approach is a complex matter, partly to do with ideological standpoints (attitudes towards state intervention) and partly to do with grass-roots pressure from women. These issues have been discussed in a number of published accounts of LGWCs e.g.

Perrigo 1986; Halford 1988; Stone 1988. Sufficient to say at this point that the majority of councils which have set up women's committees are Labour-controlled. Some previous studies of women's committees [e.g. Bottomley 1990] have made a strong link between them and the election of new urban Left councillors replacing more traditional (Labourist) councillors in their councils. However, this is not born out in this study as the data from case study authorities (see chapter four) will show.

Women's different perspectives

It was stated above that part of the twofold objective of LGWCs was to bring "autonomous women's perspectives" to local policy-making. Women are not an homogenous group and policy-making for women and by women must accommodate their different perspectives. Women per se are poorly represented amongst councillors [see Leach et al 1986; Barry 1990] but the particular needs, experiences and priorities of working class women, women of colour, and disabled women, are even less visible in the council chamber. Furthermore, women are also poorly represented amongst the chief officers of local authorities and therefore the professional advice to councillors tends to have a white/male/ middle-class bias as well. The problems which arise from this will be dealt with in more detail in later chapters, but by way of example of what is meant by "women's autonomous perspectives" a typical range might include the following in say, the matter of housing needs and priorities:

Low income women : availability - housing for families to shorten the waiting list; reduction of temporary housing (in bed & breakfast accommodation); affordable rents and efficient administration of housing benefit; efficient repairs services.

Women of colour : concerns about racist attacks on housing estates and adequate council policy on this; housing staff with appropriate language skills (or interpreting services) in areas where English is not the first language of significant populations of tenants; sensitivity of housing staff to people with different cultural inheritance.

Disabled women : physical access to housing; upkeep of estates e.g. external (pavement maintenance) and internal (lift maintenance); car parking facilities in convenient locations; adequate external lighting.

In addition to these, women's pressure groups may be demanding other priorities such as housing for women escaping domestic violence, or through mainstream voluntary organisations such as Age Concern, more warden-controlled flats for elderly women.

Similar lists of competing priorities could be drawn up for each public service that a local council provides - library services for example need to juggle demands for more books; good accommodation for children; books which adequately reflect different cultures; information services (jobs and training) as well as accessibility (disabled women and women in rural areas have a common interest in maintenance of mobile library

services); fears of censorship from lesbian women readers; and so on.

For their part, chief officers of these council departments may have entirely different priorities - housing managers may be more concerned about rent arrears control; occupation levels; sales of council houses etc.; whilst librarians might be more concerned about computerisation; stock maintenance/vandalism; income from fines or from information services to local business etc. And then again, councillors may also have different priorities arising from balancing delivery of their local political agenda against the demands of central government policies e.g. compulsory contracting-out of services.

Where there is no statutory requirement for a local authority to provide a particular service, increased central government control over council budgets makes it more difficult for councillors to meet demands on its discretionary powers [see chapter four]. It is perhaps understandable therefore, that councillors tend to take a "no news is good news" attitude and, without representation, the autonomous voices of different women go unheard. It is the task of LGWCs to ensure that their voices are heard and that chief officers and councillors give sufficient weight to their demands.

The range of LGWCs' work

In the day-to-day business of a women's committee, officers and Members (councillors) deal with matters which impact on:

- (a) the lives of individual women;
- (b) the lives of people generally in their communities;
- (c) the work of individual officers and Members in their councils;
- (d) the overall policy-making of their councils (including relations with local political parties);
- (e) relations between their councils and other local public agencies (e.g. the Health Authority);
- (f) relations between their councils and other councils in their locality (in most areas local government is split between two tiers - district/county; district/region);
- (g) relations between their councils and the local media;
- (h) relations between their councils and central government (including regional government in Scotland & Wales);
- (i) relations between their councils and local authority associations (e.g. COSLA in Scotland)
- (j) relations between their councils and other municipalities and their organisations in Europe;
- (k) relations between their councils and the EC.

Whilst it may be fairly claimed that this list is no more than a broad description of local government business generally, there are few individual council departments where all of these

matters impact on day-to-day work. What is particular to LGWCs in this respect is both the generality of their concern with women's lives (unlike most local authority departments and other public agencies which are functionally organised) and the lack of autonomy for local government. Despite the fact that LGWCs are themselves an expression of local autonomy, their ability to carry out substantive actions is constrained by the fact that almost any such activity falls within the official remit of some other public authority or agency - or rather parts of any such activity fall within the remits of several agencies. When, for example, an LGWC is asked to provide a shoppers' creche;

(a) responsibility for childcare falls within the remits of the local education authority and the social services authority and since 1992 (as a result of the 1989 Children Act in England and Wales) may also be the concern of a specialist local government department coordinating childcare services across a range of statutory and voluntary agencies;

(b) providing the physical premises for the creche will involve planning, architects, fire prevention and environmental health departments and staffing matters will involve personnel departments and trade unions;

(c) funding the creche - initial start-up and running costs - might involve organising money from a number of sources e.g. in one such real-life situation the creche was set up as a job creation and vocational training scheme with supporting funds from relevant agencies, including funding from the EC;

(d) publicity both to advertise the creche to users and to

attract supporting donations (in cash and kind) from local retailers would be organised through the council's own publicity department and the local media;

(e) success would result in enquiries from other local authorities and, as in one case, requests from a local authorities association to make "how to" presentations at conferences to share the experience of putting such a project together.

This snapshot of a single project is intended only as an outline sketch of some of the wide range of inter-related concerns which form the daily work of LGWCs; chapters four and five will reveal some of the struggles and controversies which are involved in achieving even small-scale projects like a shoppers' creche.

Two themes can be identified at this point which will be developed throughout this study:

(a) that early scepticism of LGWCs that they would be unable to resist the forces of bureaucratisation [see e.g. Flannery & Roelofs 1984] have not materialised; and

(b) that the amount of effort required to promote women's equality by LGWCs within local government is disproportionate to their achievements.

These two themes encapsulate the heart of the arguments to be made in this study, namely, that what needs to be focussed on is the capacity of individuals to effect change. The sceptical view identified in (a) above relied upon a uniformly negative

view of the capacity of individuals working within bureaucracies to resist its power to exact conformity. There is scope within bureaucracies for the creation of what Kathy Ferguson calls "the loyal opposition" [Ferguson 1984]. Individuals, acting alone and together, can use their power of professional knowledge and/or political legitimacy to effect radical change and to build alliances with others - often with different agenda - to achieve their objectives. On the other hand, the guiding principles for local government in Britain (see next chapter) limit the scope for this loyal opposition and, coupled with patriarchal attitudes (particularly those which are held privately by those purporting to be politically in favour of women's equality) combine to present some formidable obstacles to the achievement of women's equality by LGWCs which, as indicated at (b) above, exacts a high price in effort.

The foregoing is intended as only a brief overview of the wide range of work which LGWCs' officers and Members perform. Since the majority of them are grossly under-resourced both in terms of money and staff⁽⁴⁾ it has to be said that what is most exceptional about LGWCs is that they have survived the past decade of their history at all. That they have, is due primarily to the personal commitment and sheer hard work (much of it unpaid) of the women who work within them. Managing both the sometimes conflicting/sometimes converging claims of women, and this wide range of work within and outwith the bureaucracy requires not only the development of specific strategies (see

chapter five) but techniques of practice which facilitate the formulation of solidarities between different women; the construction of alliances with others; and the identification of, and challenge to, the causes of asymmetrical power relations, wherever they occur.

Feminist Political Practice:

Feminist political practice is here defined as the practice of promoting women's de facto equality through strategies of empowerment. For the reader who is not familiar with the language of feminist political criticism, some explanation of terms will be required in order to make meaningful the descriptions of practice techniques which follow. Jill Bystydzienski's definition of empowerment is useful for unpacking the issues involved:

"Empowerment is a process by which oppressed persons gain some control over their lives by taking part with others in the development of activities and structures that allow people increased involvement in matters which affect them directly. In its course, people become enabled to govern themselves effectively. This process involves the use of power, but not "power over" others or power as dominance as is traditionally the case; rather, power is seen as "power to" or power as competence (Carroll 1972:604) which is generated and shared by the disenfranchised as they begin to shape the content and

structure of their daily existence to participate in a movement for social change." [Bystydzienski 1992]

Clearly the first question which arises from this definition is whether women per se can be regarded as "oppressed persons". There are two aspects to this which require clarification, namely what is meant both here and throughout this study when the collective noun "women" is used, and secondly, what criteria are employed in the definition of "oppression" in this context?

(i) Women as a group:

In Iris Young's definition: "A social group is a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life" [Young 1990]. Feminism is grounded in the analysis of women as a group in addition to their differences in class, cultural heritage, abilities etc., by virtue of their common biology which has historically led to their being differentiated in other ways by men [see next chapter]. Hence the feminist differentiation between sex and gender; for it is not women's biology alone which distinguishes her from a man, but the fact that femaleness results in social differentiation. Drawing on Heidegger, Young speaks of the "thrownness" of groups: "one *finds oneself* as a member of a group, which one experiences as always already having been. For our identities are defined in relation to how others identify us, and they do so in terms of groups which are always already associated with specific attributes, stereotypes, and norms"

[ibid]. The problem for contemporary feminism has been that, initially, this thrownness of group identity was represented as primary and other group affiliations were regarded as secondary. Consequently, when black feminists accused white feminists of cultural imperialism [see e.g. Rich 1979] the notion of group identity had to be rethought. What has developed subsequently, is a concept of the multi-constitutive being. In Andrew Mason's terms, the self is constituted by membership of a group without being "engulfed" by it [Mason 1992]; indeed the self may be constituted by identification with a number of groups without any necessarily assuming a primacy over others. Thus an Asian woman is neither wholly "Asian" nor wholly "female" but distinctively an Asian woman [see also Spelman 1990]. Moreover, as Young also points out, being partly constituted by group identity such that one's "mode of reasoning, evaluating and expressing feeling are constituted partly by group affinities ... does not mean that persons have no individual styles or are unable to transcend or reject a group identity. Nor does it preclude persons from having many aspects that are independent of these group identities" [Young 1990]. For persons are not only social beings but moral beings as well; as Kate Soper notes (citing Satre) "it is not that we are free of social conditioning, but that we are able 'to make more of ourselves than what we are made of'" [Soper 1990]. Nevertheless, the ability to "make more of ourselves than we are made of" in practical terms depends in large measure upon the extent to

which our individual autonomy is circumscribed by others. In other words, the extent to which we are oppressed.

(ii) The Nature of Oppression:

"Oppression" is a dramatic word conjuring up images of peoples living under totalitarian regimes - politically a world away from women living in Western democratic states who not only enjoy the right to vote, but benefit from anti-discrimination law as well. But as stated at the beginning of this chapter and as further explained in the next, women's de jure equality has not led to de facto equality, which requires some explanation. Iris Young has distinguished what she terms "five faces of oppression". These are:

Exploitation - drawing on Marxist analysis, Young defines exploitation as the unrewarded and "steady process of the transfer of the results of the labour of one social group to the benefit of another... Women's oppression consists not merely in an inequality of status, power, and wealth resulting from men's excluding them from privileged activities. The freedom, power, status, and self-realisation of men is possible precisely because women work for them. Gender exploitation has two aspects, transfer of the fruits of material labor to men and transfer of nurturing and sexual energies to men" [see also Delphy & Leonard 1992].

Marginalization - is the exclusion of dependent persons from equal citizenship rights. "Being a dependent in our society implies being legitimately subject to the often arbitrary and

invasive authority of social service providers and other public and private administrators who enforce rules with which the marginal must comply, and otherwise exercise power over the conditions of their lives" [see also Ferguson 1984].

Powerlessness - "inhibition in the development of one's capacities, lack of decisionmaking power in one's working life, and exposure to disrespectful treatment because of the status one occupies".

Cultural Imperialism - "involves the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm.... [it] involves the paradox of experiencing oneself as invisible at the same time that one is marked out as different." [see also Anthias & Yuval Davies 1992]

Violence - "What makes violence a face of oppression is less the particular acts themselves, though these are often utterly horrible, than the social context surrounding them, which makes them possible and even acceptable.... Violence is systemic because it is directed at members of a group simply because they are members of that group." [all quotes from Young 1990].

To sum up thus far then, women may be distinguished as an oppressed group, not because individual members of the group are the same, but because they are collectively defined by another group (men) as different and unequal. As a consequence of this many different women experience common oppressions which gives them a reason for identifying with other (different) women. At the same time, within the generality of women, individual



members are also members of other groups which collectively and individually exercise oppressive behaviours on other groups some of whose members are women. Thus white women may oppress black people including black women; able-bodied women oppress disabled people including disabled women; women as members of professions may oppress dependent people including other women. But the point is that white women, black women, able-bodied women and women in professions are not "engulfed" by group membership and are capable of recognising and rejecting oppressive behaviours exercised by them in their group on others. Understanding how one oppresses and at the same time how one is oppressed by others is the key to making change. What is required is some useful tools of practice.

The Techniques of Feminist Political Practice

To return to Jill Bystydzienski's definition (above); firstly, empowerment is a process. In her elaboration of this, Bystydzienski cites the observation by Paulo Freire in respect of the literacy movement that: "learners are empowered by entering into dialogue with their peers. Through this dialogue they learn to read and write as they name their experience and speak about their world". [in Bystydzienski *ibid*]. In terms of Young's cultural imperialism, autonomous groups of different women need to organise for their "collective empowerment [to gain] a reflective understanding of their collective experience and interests in the context of the society" [Young 1989] where their experiences and interests are rendered invisible/

illegitimate by the dominant cultural hegemony. Or as Bernice Reagon has put it more descriptively:

"every once in a while there is a need for people to bar the doors and say 'Humph, inside this place the only thing we are going to deal with is X or Y or Z'. And so only the X's or Y's or Z's get to come in... Most of the time when people do that, they do it because of the heat of trying to live in this society where being an X or Y or Z is very difficult, to say the least... It gets too hard to stay out in that society all the time. And that's when you find a place, and you try to bar the door and check all the people who come in. You come together to see what you can do about shouldering up all of your energies so that you and your kind can survive... that space while it lasts should be a nurturing space where you sift out what people are saying about you and decide who you really are." [Reagon 1983]

The need for "a nurturing space" and to "decide who you really are" are essential elements of autonomous practice, as is identifying ways in which oppression occurs and who does it. The other side of the coin is engaging with other oppressed groups to find common issues from which to build a larger constituency of resistance and to uncover the complexities of oppression i.e. how the As, Bs and Cs oppress the Xs, Ys and Zs. This is always difficult territory and efficient practice methods are required to ensure that difference is not subsumed. What is required is a method for reciprocity.

Reciprocity is more than toleration and can best be explained by drawing on Michael Oliver's analysis of individual and social models of disability. In the individual model, disabled people are defined as "other" and their needs are defined as "special", so to facilitate their participation in our everyday life, we build ramps for wheelchair access to public buildings etc. In the social model, dis-ability is recognised as an everyday occurrence for all members of society - we go on holiday encumbered by luggage or we put babies in pushchairs and so although we are not paraplegic, we cannot use the stairs; or although we are not deaf, we cannot hear garbled announcements at stations so we need visual display information. With this understanding, accessibility can be routinely incorporated into the fabric of daily life to our mutual benefit. Reciprocity in this sense is the perception of "others" within ourselves which enables "us" to acknowledge the equality of different others without loss of our own autonomy or they of theirs. [see Oliver 1983].

Susan Mendus has defined what she calls the language of neighbours - neither the language of strangers as in the atomistic view of autonomy in Individualism where "the authentic self is autonomous, unified, free and self-made, standing apart from history and affiliations, choosing its life plan entirely for itself" [Young 1990]; nor the language of brothers where individuality is subsumed in the interests of the good of the whole - but "a middle way between the estranging liberal

doctrine that we are distant from our ends, and the restricting communitarian doctrine that we are constituted by our community" [Mendus 1992]. Reciprocity as practice is the means by which the language of neighbours can be concretised into actions, by and between autonomous groups [see also Young in Nicholson (ed) 1990].

The practice of reciprocity requires an understanding of power as method rather than as a commodity which can be distributed. This point will be developed more fully in the next chapter in relation to institutional contexts of power, but a brief explanation here is necessary. The distinction between "*power over*" and "*power to*" which Bystydzienski's quote (above) refers, has been attributed by Dorothy Emmett to Mary Parker Follett's work in the 1920s [see Emmett 1953] and is fundamental to feminist political practice. When power is viewed as method it becomes a matter of moral choice by the individual as to how the means of power (language, knowledge, property, physical and psychological force) at her disposal are deployed - to control others or to empower them. Power in Michael Oliver's individual model (above) is used in a "*power over*" way; in the social model it is used in a "*power with*" way.

A method for achieving reciprocity between autonomous groups may be found in the development of the practice of consciousness-raising by the National Women's Studies Association in America (NWSA). Consciousness-raising is a well-practised technique

among feminists; it was the means by which women in the early years of the contemporary movement discovered and named their oppression - in local groups and wider forums [see e.g. Wandor 1990]. The error that was made then, and which led to fraction within the women's movement [see e.g. Segal 1987] was in seeking to construct a language of sisters and subsuming difference, as noted above. Feminists in the NWSA, whilst recognising the cultural imperialism of "sisterhood", nevertheless sought "to hold on simultaneously to these two contradictory truths: as women, we are the same and we are different. The bridges, power, alliances, and social change possible will be determined by how well we define ourselves through a matrix that encompasses our gendered particularities while not losing sight of our unity" [McTighe Musil 1990]. As part of the "Bridges of Power" project, Davida Alperin has constructed what she calls an "interactive model" of alliance building in which she draws on the work of Audre Lourde, Bernice Reagon and Charlotte Bunch and which she summarises as:

"...the interactive model:

- (1) recognises the existence of institutionalized subordination and domination without accepting that there is a single form of domination (i.e. gender, race or class);
- (2) emphasizes the numerous and complex ways in which different forms of oppression interact; and
- (3) identifies consciousness-raising as an important method for broadening groups' understanding of their own oppression,

others' oppression, and the ways in which different types of oppression interact." [Alperin 1990]

The five faces of oppression which Iris Young has identified has been echoed by other feminist analyses e.g. Aafke Komter's common characteristics of asymmetrical power relations which arise from gender, ethnicity and class [see Komter 1991]. This, Komter argues, is no reason to conflate differences in power relations based on gender, ethnicity or class (or any other difference): "There is, however, no a priori reason to assume that power in gender relations works in a different way or has fundamentally different consequences from other power relations" [ibid]. If Komter is right in this respect, then a basis exists for autonomous groups of disadvantaged peoples to work together on developing strategies for social change. What is required is a two-stage process whereby people who identify themselves as disadvantaged (or oppressed) can organise autonomously and then, deriving strength from group cohesion, can build genuine alliances, through reciprocity, with other autonomous groups seeking change.

The extent to which LGWCs have achieved this in their feminist political practice will be discussed in chapter five and following a more detailed examination of the local political environments in which they struggle to carry out their practice [see chapter four]. Before that, however, it is necessary to review the wider socio-political context in Britain to account

for why LGWCs are necessary and why, as stated at the beginning, other public policies to promote equality for women have failed to produce effective outcomes. The next chapter therefore, will explore the common roots of patriarchy in the principles which guide relations between State and citizen and those between central and local government. The aim is to draw out the parallels and therefore the potential for coalition, between diverse groups with a shared interest in increased democracy in public policy processes.

CHAPTER TWO : PUTTING WOMEN'S COMMITTEES INTO CONTEXT

Having described, in the previous chapter, what LGWCs aim to do in their day-to-day work, and before proceeding further to analyse them in more detail, it is necessary to locate them within their two primary political contexts which are (a) women's inequality and (b) government. Feminist criticisms of mainstream political theory reveal "sexual inequality as something built into the very foundations of both classical and contemporary thought" [Phillips 1991a]. This chapter draws on some of those criticisms to explore the common patriarchal origins of women's continuing inequality and the principles and practices of government in Britain today. The continuing second-class nature of women's citizenship [see e.g. Phillips 1991b; Lister 1991; Dietz 1992] challenges the legitimacy of present forms of democratic government. In making their different citizenship claims, and still being largely ignored, women not only expose the male bias, but also the rigidities, in public policy-making systems which inhibit responsiveness.

In this chapter the socio-political context of LGWCs is divided into two sections. The first reviews feminist critiques of patriarchal democracy and their searches for more egalitarian principles for citizenship. In the second part, the focus shifts to the principles which structure governmental institutions and relations, to demonstrate their common roots in

patriarchal liberalism. Thus it is argued that the sexual division of labour is mirrored in Schumpeter's division of political labour and that a similar "*power over*" relationship exists between central and local government as well. Parallels can therefore be drawn between women's subordination, citizen's subordination and the subordination of local to central government; and because these subordinations are intertwined, there is a coalescence of interests between feminists and new democracy movements which provides a basis for alliance-building between them.

These are large issues which cannot be dealt with other than superficially within the confines of this chapter; nevertheless, some explanation is required to account for why LGWCs have come about in response to failures of legislation and policies which at least purported to bring about women's equal citizenship. In bringing together in this chapter a range of analyses from feminist and other writers, both accounting for women's continuing inequality and the apparent inability of modern democratic government to respond effectively to that, a contextual background can be sketched against which specific questions about LGWCs can begin to be raised, namely, why there is a need for them and indeed, why there are not more of them, as well as the likelihood of LGWCs making any significant impact on the public policy-making process. The extent to which this study has been able to answer those questions will be addressed in the concluding chapter.

Women's Inequality:

(i) How women have become defined in domesticity:

The re-emergence of feminist movement in the late 1960s/early 1970s in Western democracies, stimulated the recovery from history of earlier feminist writings which has enabled contemporary feminists to trace the "lost" tradition of feminist criticism and build upon their work of challenging mainstream political ideas. Works such as those by Okin [1980]; Kennedy and Mendus [1987] and Coole [1988] reveal the embeddedness of patriarchy in Western political philosophy which is structured by "a series of binary oppositions: mind/body; subject/object; reason/passion; form/content; culture/nature; order/chaos .. male/female. ..the first-mentioned term which is posited as a standard, or norm gaining its identity by distinguishing itself from .. its opposite [which] is negative, other.. [and in which] it is the male, and everything which is associated with it, that defines humanity and the highest goals and ideals of the species" [Coole 1988]. Such gendered oppositions, pervading language and culture, not only fix women's 'otherness' [see the nature of oppression in chapter one] but also the primacy of men and maleness.

That these dualisms are fundamental to the development of the principles of modern democracy is revealed in Carole Pateman's analysis of a "fraternal social contract" which derives from her re-reading of the classical texts of social contract theory (particularly Rousseau) and in which she, like the authors

referred to above, rescues from oblivion Mary Wollstonecraft's argument, made in 1791, that "the patriarchal character of civil society is quite explicit in the classic texts" [Pateman 1989]. In Rousseau's analysis, the public and private spheres of society were separate and gender-specific. Only the public sphere was regarded as "civil society" in which all men were equal in the formal sense of citizenship. The private sphere was a domain in which women provided both sexual attraction and family cohesion to act as a motivator to men as both "homo civicus" and "homo economicus" and to maintain the moral values of a stable state and society. Rousseau's assertion of women's unfittedness for participation in civil society relied upon accepted dualisms which defined a different feminine 'nature' - "[women] lack the right sort of reason, autonomy, judgement, sense of justice and ability to consent" [Coole 1988]. At the time he made these claims, Mary Wollstonecraft published her critique of Rousseau's arguments in "A Vindication of the Rights of Women" [Wollstonecraft 1982] which, although attracting a certain notoriety was not treated seriously in the way that Rousseau's work has been. That this is so is witnessed by the fact that only ten books of biography and criticism of her work were published (one of them anonymously) in the years between her death in 1797 and 1974 [see Preface to the 1982 Everyman edition of the Vindication referenced above]. In other words, whilst Rousseau's work was preserved and handed down for the education of political scientists since his death, Mary Wollstonecraft's work passed into relative oblivion and with it

her challenge to the patriarchal science of eighteenth century philosophy which therefore continued to corrupt developments in political theory, some examples of which are given below.

Rousseau's work and that of other classic social contract theorists e.g. Hobbes and Locke, established the principles on which contemporary democratic government in Britain has been founded. For the dilemma inherent in the democratic concept of citizenship to be resolved, i.e. that all citizens are at one and the same time equal and free, the former (equality of status) was defined in abstract and universal terms and the latter in concrete and particular terms. It would make this chapter overlong to review all the careful arguments by Pateman and others as to the process by which the classical principles have resulted in a form of citizenship which, in practical terms, still excludes women [see e.g. Pateman 1989; Phillips 1991b; Dietz 1992]. It is sufficient for this study to simply summarise the principles which emerge in contemporary politics:

(a) the original division of public and private society has been translated into public and private aspects of what was formerly solely the public realm: "public regulation versus private enterprise presuppose that the politically relevant separation between public and private is drawn *within* civil society. The shift in meaning of 'civil', 'public' and 'private' goes unnoticed because the original creation of civil society through the social contract is a patriarchal construction which is also a

separation of the sexes" [Pateman 1989]. But Rousseau's original construction of public and private persists insofar as the family (the original private sphere) and women's primary responsibility for it, is still regarded as essential to the stability of the state [see e.g. Forbes 1991];

(b) the concept of "equal" in equal citizen relates to uniformity of status before the law - not to material equality. In the same way that women's exclusion from civil society was regarded by Rousseau as "natural" and therefore not unjust, so in liberal Individualism, material inequality between equal citizens is the inevitable result of the "natural" distribution of talents and abilities and therefore also not unjust or politically significant. What male political scientists have traditionally regarded as politically insignificant largely accounts for present-day patterns of domination and oppression which are highly resistant to reforming laws based on a notional interpretation of "equality". All citizens therefore have equal rights in the sense typically expressed as "everybody has the right to dine at the Ritz", not that the state has a duty to ensure that everyone has sufficient means to exercise that right;

(c) this notional "equality" stems from the second element in liberal citizenship i.e. that all citizens are free. The concept of negative liberty constrains the state from interfering in the freedom of citizens to pursue their self-

interests. Thus material inequality between citizens is also a reflection of their liberty. The values of Individualism are integral to this idea of liberty insofar as the image of "homo economicus" on which it is based is one unencumbered by sickness or disability or burdened by responsibilities for others. He is the fully autonomous, even atomistic, individual depicted in Isaiah Berlin's essay referred to in chapter one, "an instrument of my own acts of will... moved by reasons which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were from outside... a doer - deciding, not being decided for..." [Berlin 1969].

(d) negative liberty, however, does not mean that the state has no responsibility - its duty is to ensure that the rules of competition under which individuals pursue their self-interest are fair - that there is equality of opportunity. This has given rise to two concepts which are important in explaining women's continuing inequality, namely that emphasis is placed on rules or laws and not people - it is the rules that have to be fair not the outcomes. Secondly it emphasises sameness, not difference; to decide whether a rule is unfair, like has to be compared with like and there is no room for any concept of "equal but different".

(e) the terms of the social contract were such that citizens, in return for being law-abiding, were protected from arbitrary actions by the state and provided with security, both internal and external i.e. the enforcement of law "without fear or

favour" at home and defence of the realm from warring nations. Consent to this contract in the original philosophy was largely presumed e.g. Locke's tacit consent [see Phillips 1991a; Pateman 1989]. Later developments gave substance to actual consent through voting, the right to which finally became universal and equal in 1928, but the mechanisms to determine what precisely is consented to (the party system) is not of the people. Elements of tacit consent remain, or as Chantal Mouffe has pointed out: "it is necessary to recognize that the *respublica* is the product of a given hegemony, the expression of power relations" [Mouffe 1992].

In summary, therefore, the principles of contemporary democracy are patriarchal versions of equality, liberty and consent, "raising the substantive problem of how we [women] can become civil 'individuals' made in the masculine image" [Pateman 1989]. The separation of public and private spheres has provided a foundation for modern social structures e.g. the separation of home and work with its attendant procedures such as waged/unwaged labour; working hours/careerism/working years which in their turn lead to other structures such as the notion of a family wage; gender-segregated labour markets; pension and social security structures. The "cultural imperialism" (see previous chapter) of women's "natural" fittedness for domesticity survives to the present day, and as Anne Phillips says: "There is no procedure that has proved itself so well suited to disguising women's oppression as the division into

public and private spheres; by directing our attention to specifically political or civil equalities, citizenship helps obscure what goes on in the home... the equal right to vote barely scratches the surface" [Phillips 1991b].

The laws which have been framed in response to the failure of formal equality to result in de facto equality for women, being rooted in these same principles, have themselves failed as was stated at the beginning of chapter one. As Forbes has pointed out (following Schaar 1971): "Equal opportunity, when restricted to making unlike individuals submit to a single pattern of achievement, unequally hampers the ability of some to benefit. There cannot be equal opportunity to engage in an unequal competition" [Forbes 1991]. This is particularly so in the case of women. Democratic states, in affording women equal civil rights with men, acknowledge their "sameness", but in refusing to take their differences into account e.g. to grant special rights to women in employment for maternity leave etc., the value of equality is undermined. In the USA, as Carol Bacchi shows, the judiciary have impaled themselves on the horns of this dilemma creating a diversion, in her view, from the real issue which is to construct a political system which offers citizens genuine equality of opportunity [see Bacchi 1991].

In Britain, the opportunity to incorporate the private sphere into civil society was specifically rejected in 1974 in the White Paper 'Equality For Women' which preceded the Sex

Discrimination Act 1975: "all exceptions weaken the principle of non-discrimination. The aim must be, therefore, to limit exceptions to the necessary minimum. These must include provisions to ensure that the legislation does not apply to personal and intimate relationships..." [HMSO 1974]. But as Anne Phillips argues: "while there should be certain aspects of our lives that we are entitled to treat as private, [there should be] no aspect that we are compelled to treat in this way... we would be acting as citizens if we publicly campaigned for men to take a full share in the household tasks; we would not, however, be acting as citizens when we sort out the division of labour inside our own home" [Phillips 1991b]. The White Paper, in conflating these two aspects, resulted in legislation which, as all indicators of women's inequality show, served only to maintain the status quo in gender relations and defeat the stated objective of the law. To be equal citizens, women must enter the public sphere of paid work to compete with men on men's terms, but they do so like snails with their homes on their backs. The actions which the then Labour Government might have taken to provide "a level playing field" could have included the types of policies which LGWCs have fought for e.g. parental leave schemes, workplace nurseries, job share and career-break schemes, and encouragement to men to participate in these schemes and take responsibility for childcare and domestic labour equally with women. Thus the negative liberty principle results (for women) in what may be called 'negative empowerment' insofar as a deliberate attitude of laissez-faire by government

when it has the power to effect change legitimises the injustice of women's continuing inequality of opportunity. Negative empowerment occurs when one observes that an injustice is taking place, but one does nothing to prevent it. Although not actively participating in the oppression, one thereby negatively empowers the oppressor. This concept of negative empowerment is prompted by Kate Soper's critique of poststructuralists' claims that the individual is socially constructed (see below).

There is perhaps no more significant evidence of such legitimized injustice than the patriarchal version of consent which as Pateman has shown in her analysis of the matter is a "failure in liberal-democratic theory and practice to distinguish free commitment and agreement by equals from domination, subordination and inequality". Tracing the corrupt reasoning of contemporary laws (on marital rape in particular) to the misogynist thinking of Rousseau and Locke: "According to Rousseau, men are the 'natural' sexual aggressors; women are 'destined to resist'", Pateman reveals the institutionalisation of violence against women. However, her project is not simply to reveal the particular ways in which "the fraternal social contract" is maintained in contemporary institutions such as the law, but to subject the concept of consent itself to the test of veracity: "Contemporary consent theory presents our institutions as if they were actually as consent demands, as if they were actually constituted through the free agreement of equal persons..... should not consent theorists look searchingly at

existing institutions .. to ensure that there is no denial or tendency to deny, the very status of individuals that is claimed to be upheld?" [Pateman 1989]

The net effect of these patriarchal principles therefore is to maintain relations of domination and oppression - in Iris Young's terms (see previous chapter) women's exploitation, through the discounting of their difference and non-valuation of their work, and the institutionalisation of violence against them, has led to their political marginalisation. Moreover, as the work of e.g. Jewson and Mason [1986], Cockburn [1989] and Forbes [1991] shows, legislation and policies based on these principles to provide for equality of opportunity for women "falters alarmingly, and liberalism itself demonstrates its incapacity to maintain any internal coherence in the face of the need to introduce change in society" [Forbes 1991].

(ii) The search for genuine egalitarian principles:

Contemporary feminist political criticism has not only been concerned with tracing the origins of women's oppression within political thought, but with developing its own standpoint - not just to revise mainstream political theory to incorporate women and the lost private sphere of civil society, but to render difference as politically significant and to concretise concepts of autonomy, equality and consent [see e.g. Hartsock 1985; Nicholson (ed) 1990; Davis et al 1991].

The ideas emanating from postmodernism and poststructuralism which challenge Enlightenment epistemology with its dualisms, essentialisms and universalisms, not only present feminism with new opportunities for developing its own standpoint, but with a new set of problems as well. One such problem relates to fixity of meaning; as Chris Weedon points out, in poststructuralist theory: "Neither social reality nor the 'natural' world has fixed intrinsic meanings which language reflects or expresses" [Weedon 1987]. Aafke Komter has expressed doubt about the usefulness of this, pointing out that given such ambiguity "terms like 'gender' and 'femininity' seem to lose their conceptual meaning altogether, as no definable referent seems to be accepted" [Komter 1991]. Thus, having traced the history of women's exclusion from political thought to patriarchal interpretations of women's 'nature' it is not very helpful now, to proceed to deny the significance of interpretations. Kate Soper is one of several critics of the argument from some post-structuralists "that subjects are entirely coopted by society" [see also Ferguson 1984]. The undermining of the capacity of 'agency' results in "a reluctance to acknowledge the 'moral' subject, as against the 'constructed' subject" and robs her of her power to effect change [Soper 1990]. Taking a humanist standpoint, she insists "that the individual is not to be theorised as wholly a product of social circumstance or ideological conditioning, precisely because the individual is also a moral person... Harsh as it may seem, I would want to insist that individuals must view themselves as actually

empowering (through their apathy or failure of resistance) many of those processes which they claim to deplore, and would perhaps contest more loudly were it not that they believe, or profess to believe, that they are beyond their individual control. Among the numerous and more negative examples of such processes, I would cite the arms race... environmental degradation, all of which are ultimately brought into being and reproduced only because millions of individuals either actively support them or (more usually) do not bestir themselves actively to dissent from them" [ibid].

This argument is not only important for teasing out satisfactory explanations about women's inequality - it can be used, for example, to lay the charge on intellectual men that, with few exceptions [see e.g. Hearn 1992] they have not bestirred themselves to actively dissent from patriarchal principles of equality and consent that maintain half the population in relative servitude - but also for underpinning the argument in this study of the value of feminist political practice as developed by LGWCs. Most particularly, Soper's idea of negative empowerment (through "apathy or failure of resistance") can be seen in practice terms as a process or technique; understanding (through consciousness-raising) how one empowers negatively enables one to move on to empower positively; it is the essence of much of the staff training which LGWCs do, as will be shown in chapter five. Furthermore, Soper's arguments are altogether more hopeful in holding out the prospect for "the

people" constructing a more truly egalitarian society if there is little which is "beyond their individual control".

However, as stated in the previous chapter, the power of individual agency, or autonomy, depends upon the extent to which social relations are based on "*power over*" or "*power to*" actions. As Weedon observes: "Resistance to the dominant at the level of the individual subject is the first stage in the production of alternative forms of knowledge or where such alternatives already exist, of winning individuals over to these discourses and gradually increasing their social power. The degree to which marginal discourses can increase their social power is governed by the wider context of social interests and power within which challenges to the dominant are made. It may well take extreme and brave actions on the part of the agents of challenge to achieve even small shifts in the balance of power" [Weedon 1987]. This observation could serve as a succinct description of what LGWCs aim to do; her reference to the scale of the problem - the need for brave actions - is germane in view of the absence (or fickleness) of more widespread political support for LGWCs, as later chapters will show.

Weedon's reference to "agents of challenge" suggests that she, as a poststructuralist, would not entirely disagree with Soper's criticisms; indeed, she says as much herself: "not all forms [of poststructuralism] are necessarily productive for feminism. . . a theory is useful if it is able to address the questions of how

social power is exercised and how social relations of gender, class and race might be transformed. This implies a concern with history, absent from many post-structuralist perspectives but central to the work of Michel Foucault" [ibid]. Foucault's work on what he called "disciplinary discourses", he described in 'Discipline and Punish' as: "a corpus of knowledge, techniques, 'scientific' discourses, is formed and becomes entangled with the practice of the power to punish" [Foucault 1977]. The concept of disciplinary discourse enables feminists to "uncover the particular regimes of power and knowledge at work in a society and their part in the overall production and maintenance of existing power relations" [Weedon 1987]. Accompanying the discourses are what Laffin refers to as professional communities and policy communities [Laffin 1986; see also Dingwall & Lewis 1983; Helco & Wildavsky 1974]. The discourses and the profession(al)s are interactive in constructing specialised knowledges, and the usefulness of Foucaultian analysis to bureaucracy - the discourses which become entangled with the practice of the power to govern - will be discussed in chapter four. But as a tool for analysing the development of asymmetrical power relations between the sexes and understanding historically how women have become defined in domesticity, and most particularly for seeing the vested interests in maintaining women in a subordinate social position, discourse analysis can be very powerful. Chris Weedon quotes the following example:

"Foucault points to the way in which women's bodies were given

meaning by and became subject to modern science from the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards. They were, he argued, subject to a process of hysterialization, made into nothing but wombs, and simultaneously made 'nervous':

"a threefold process whereby the feminine body was analyzed - qualified and disqualified - as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality; whereby it was integrated into the sphere of medical practices, by reason of a pathology intrinsic to it; whereby, finally, it was placed in organic communication with the social body (whose regulated fecundity it was supposed to ensure) the family space (of which it had to be a substantial and functional element) and the life of children (which it produced and had to guarantee, by virtue of biologico-moral responsibility lasting through the entire period of the children's education); the Mother, with her negative image of 'nervous woman', constituted the most visible form of this hysterialization.' (Foucault, 1981 p.104) This discursive production of the nature of women's bodies was central to the reconstitution of social norms of femininity, the patriarchal subjection of women and their exclusion from most aspects of public life." [Weedon ibid: her emphasis]

The power of discourse theory to explain the web-like development of mutually-reinforcing, subjectivising/objectifying processes does not necessitate the exclusion of the capacity of individuals to resist, as Foucault points out in his concept of a reverse discourse [see Foucault 1980]. A reverse discourse

challenges disciplinary discourse and is constructed from "alternative forms of knowledge" or "marginal discourses" as described by Weedon above. It may be argued that women's oppression, their being defined in domesticity, has itself resulted in what Carol Gilligan refers to as a different morality - one that uses a different voice to express responsibility and care, rather than to demand formal rights [Gilligan 1982]. Critics of Gilligan e.g. Judith Baer, are fearful for the juridical consequences of what appears to be a replication of Enlightenment biological essentialism [Baer 1991]. But viewed as a learned behaviour rather than a natural quality, women's different morality might be claimed as a "subjugated knowledge" (in Foucaultian terms) with the capacity for becoming a reverse discourse for agents of challenge of either gender.

Poststructuralism and the nature of power:

In doing what he called his archeological work of tracing the genealogies of disciplinary discourses, Foucault was concerned not only with the nature of power/knowledge but with the ways in which it works. He rejected the conventional notion of power as a commodity, and described it in more dynamic/organic terms: "[power] is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and

exercising this power.... In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application" [Foucault 1980]. Drawing on these ideas, Iris Young has put forward a theory of domination and oppression which does not rely on what she calls the "distributive paradigm" of justice:

"..a distributive understanding of power tends to conceive a system of domination as one in which power, like wealth, is concentrated in the hands of a few. Assuming such a condition is unjust, a redistribution of power is called for, which will disperse and decentralize power... For some systems of domination such a model may be appropriate....however, it is not appropriate for understanding the operation of domination and oppression in contemporary welfare societies. For these societies witness the ironic situation in which power is widely dispersed and diffused, yet social relations are tightly defined by domination and oppression. When power is understood as 'productive' as a function of dynamic processes of interaction within regulated cultural and decisionmaking situations, then it is possible to say that many widely dispersed persons are agents of power without 'having' it, or even being privileged. Without a structural understanding of power and domination as processes rather than patterns of distribution, the existence and nature of domination and oppression in these societies cannot be identified." [Young 1990]

Summary of feminist critiques:

In their search for more genuinely egalitarian principles with which to construct alternative forms of democracy to facilitate women's first-class citizenship, it can be seen that some feminists have drawn (not uncritically and not unselectively) on the work of Foucault. His concept of mutually-supportive disciplinary discourses, together with his ideas about the dynamic/organic nature of power, assist in the development of analyses which trace the historical development of these web-like structures of domination and oppression through the uncritical acceptance of professional/patriarchal "received wisdom" by negatively empowering actors. This not only emphasises their complexity, but highlights the need for strategic approaches to their undoing. There is by definition, therefore, a need for a "communitarian" solution to democratic reform, but one which employs the language of neighbours, rather than brothers or sisters, such that difference is not subsumed, and to empower "subjugated knowledges" as the reverse discourses of agents of challenge. Young's analysis of the subject as a multi-constitutive being, not only allows her to avoid the reductionism of analyses predicated on class, race or gender, but recognises that "group differences cut across individual lives in a multiplicity of ways that can entail privilege and oppression for the same person in different respects" [ibid].

These approaches offer far more scope for feminist political practice within and between communities of peoples where

difference can be valued equally without loss of solidarity, and where oppressive behaviours are not the exclusive propensity of dominant social groups; but where there is too, the opportunity for individuals to change behaviours and to become agents of challenge and change. However, these feminist critiques of the patriarchal past/present and their understandings about the potential for change, have to be set against the need for reform of existing institutions in which they would have to take place. And it is to these which the discussion now turns.

Government:

The foregoing feminist analyses show that the legacy of classical political thinking, particularly liberal contractarian theories, not only result in oppressive experiences for women, by excluding women from their first principles, but also, as will be further explained in this section, result in modern democratic institutions which are incapable of delivering the promise of their professed ideals. As Chantal Mouffe observes: "once we acknowledge that what constitutes modern democracy is the assertion that all human beings are free and equal, it becomes clear that it is not possible to find more radical principles for organizing society. The problem therefore is not the ideals of modern democracy, but the fact that its political principles are a long way from being implemented, even in those societies that lay claim to them." [Mouffe 1992]

(i) Patriarchal Democracy:

The claim to democracy in Britain rests upon the sovereignty of Parliament as the representative assembly of the people. As already noted, women's civil right to participate in the selection of that sovereign body is 75 years old but even after three quarters of a century, their representation within it qua women, has only reached 10%. As far as can be ascertained, no attempt has ever been made to make the House of Commons truly representative of the British people; there is no concept of group representation other than by political party.⁽¹⁾ The

present day campaign for women's fair representation (the 300 Group) does not envisage this occurrence by any means other than through political parties. Women's equal representation therefore, currently depends upon the willingness of parties to institute mechanisms within their selection procedures to ensure that female candidates are selected to a sufficient proportion of winnable parliamentary seats for a more egalitarian outcome to be assured. There are a number of ways that this could be done; in 1990 the Scottish Constitutional Convention accepted a proposal for 50/50 representation of women and men in any new Scottish Parliament by doubling the number of seats in the assembly [Women's Claim of Right Group: 1991]. But as Anne Phillips has observed: "If women are not elected in much the same proportions as men, and Africans or Asians not elected in broad proportion to their numbers in the electorate as a whole, then something fishy is going on..". Moreover, that "it is when groups have experienced oppression because of their 'defining' characteristic that they do see themselves in these terms. Once this point is reached, some form of quota system seems a legitimate demand" [Phillips 1991a]. Iris Young might reject the idea that anything "fishy is going on"; rather that the imbalance of representation is the result of "everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society"; one with unrecognised but nonetheless patriarchal forms of liberty, equality and consent (see Pateman above).

Young's work on identifying oppressed groups [see chapter one] concludes with a prescription for a politics of difference (see under local government below) which goes well beyond the simple notion of quotas and calls for the equal representation of autonomous groups: "Ideally, a Rainbow Coalition affirms the presence and supports the claims of each of the oppressed groups or political movements constituting it, and arrives at a political program not by voicing some 'principles of unity' that hide difference, but rather by allowing each constituency to analyze economic and social issues from the perspective of its experience. This implies that each group maintains significant autonomy, and requires provision for group representation."

[Young 1990]

The concept of group representation offends the basic liberal tenet of the (supposedly) free and autonomous subject as citizen; of just and impartial law measured against which, practices of particularity appear discriminatory. Moreover, liberals argue, such discrimination of socially disadvantaged or minority groups, serves only to confirm such groups in their oppression. Iris Young argues against this, emphasising the concept of the multi-constitutive individual: "Not all groups are oppressed....Oppression has often been perpetrated by a conceptualization of group difference in terms of unalterable essential natures that determine what group members deserve or are capable of and that exclude groups so entirely from one another that they have no similarities or overlapping

attributes. ..Social justice requires not the melting away of differences, but institutions that promote reproduction of and respect for group differences without oppression." [ibid]

The question is therefore, is representative democracy served by the present system which organises around policy agenda and the various perspectives of political parties or does this system simply serve the particular interests of dominant groups in society? Schumpeter's competitive model of democracy, i.e. "that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote" was formulated as being a more realistic and more realizable alternative to the democratic ideal [Schumpeter 1974]. Emilio Santoro suggests that a truly market-orientated view of the democratic process would ensure that politicians "are forced by competitive election to adopt voter-satisfying policies". To interpret Schumpeter's work thus, he asserts, is false and ignores the extent to which Schumpeter pointed out the capacity of politicians and parties to manipulate voters' preferences, ignore certain claims and keep certain policy options off the political agenda when these did not conform to party interests [see Santoro 1993]. Schumpeter's analysis that "the electoral mass is incapable of action other than a stampede" [see Pateman 1970] led him to the view that voter preference manipulation by political elites was inevitable. This so-called realist view of

the democratic process is self-reinforcing. If there are no mechanisms for people to organise around issues of particular importance to themselves as groups, to set their own policy agenda, or (coopting Isaiah Berlin's words) "to conceive of policies of [their] own and realise them" [Berlin 1969] then they can only behave as an amorphous mass of individuals, occasionally registering their consent to the political preferences of other people. For it is not peoples who are represented in Parliament, but the political parties and their policy agenda.

Moreover, when it is considered how parties arrive at their policy agenda - more and more in recent times through academic think-tanks - the smaller the groups of (professional) political views that are represented. Such a trend is, according to Jonathan Rosenhead, a dangerous one: "Policy on important issues is not the product of a delimited group assembled at one place and time. Policy formulation is, or should be, a more extensive process, which could benefit through enhanced multiple advocacy if analytic capability were more widely disseminated" [Rosenhead 1992]. But just as there are no mechanisms for groups of people to represent themselves in the democratic process, leaving them to be manipulated through the party system, so there are no mechanisms (other than isolated examples which Rosenhead describes) for providing citizens with "analytic assistance... to prepare and present their cases more

adequately, and position themselves more effectively in the policy space" [ibid] leaving public debate to be manipulated by the popular media with their own professionalised views of what constitutes "news" [see e.g. Glasgow University Media Group 1980].

The power of pressure groups in British society is generally only that of the lobbyist (the persuader and appealler to the self-interests of power holders); but those groups strong enough to have a direct ideological/funding link with a political party e.g. trade unions and the Labour Party or private business corporations and the Conservative Party, do demonstrate the power of group representation. The claims of groups without that level of power results in their claims being moulded and adapted to the established political agenda, as Joyce Outshoorn's analysis of issue perversion in equality policies for women in the Netherlands shows [Outshoorn 1991]. In Britain, this was evident in the processes leading to both the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975; in neither case were feminist groups able to influence the Labour Governments of the time sufficiently even to secure the more generous interpretations of equal pay and rectificatory justice that were subsequently imposed by EC Directives [see e.g. Bouchier 1983]. At the national level then, the ordinary person has little impact: "The allocative decisions which structure so much of politics remain in the hands of the political

professionals and the route to influence for the citizen is still largely through the parties and through voting for the packages they offer to the electorate. Schumpeter's division of labour still holds true in this very important respect" [Parry, Moyser & Day 1992].

That this division of labour mirrors the sexual division of labour is clear; like women, the electorate is defined into a passive role which services (legitimises) the working politician; their consent is generalised (as epitomised by the reluctance of MPs to consult them in referenda on particular issues); and their claims adapted to suit the dominant definition of the common (family) good [see also Foucault on women, above]. Just as women's passive role in support of the family is regarded as essential to social stability, so the passive role of the electorate is regarded as essential to political stability [see e.g. Pateman 1970].

(ii) Patriarchal Democracy and Local Government:

"Although local government has origins pre-dating the sovereignty of Parliament, all current local authorities are the statutory creations of Parliament and have no independent status or right to exist. The whole system of local government could lawfully be abolished by Act of Parliament." [Widdicombe Committee Report: Cmnd 9797 : HMSO 1986] The weakness of the constitutional position of local government in Britain was

highlighted during the mid-1980s by Acts of Parliament to abolish Labour-controlled metropolitan county councils and the GLC. Put forward as measures to restructure local government to improve its efficiency, the Acts nevertheless demonstrated the power of the executive in Parliament to remove centres of political opposition if it so willed [see also Chandler 1988]. A majoritarian electoral system does not result in a distribution of parliamentary seats which matches the distribution of actual votes for each political party; in the 1992 General Election for example, the Liberal Democrat Party ended the day with 20 seats in Parliament instead of the 116 that a 18% share of the vote might have accorded them. The system therefore tends to give a disproportionate power to the Government of the day which some argue [see e.g. King 1989] would justify the constitutional protection of local government such that it cannot be removed by a simple majority vote in the House of Commons.

In addition to this, the lack of a power of general competence for local government in Britain means that it is what Parliament (effectively the government of the day) says it is. The rules of *ultra vires* and *mandamus* act like legal leading strings forbidding local authorities either to go beyond the powers laid down for them by Parliament or not to carry out the duties expressly laid upon them. Individual councillors are personally liable for the financial consequences of going astray from these

leading strings, and in addition they may be surcharged, banned from public office or even imprisoned. It has been argued (see below) that these rules when they are invoked against the genuine political actions of local councillors are profoundly undemocratic as is their everyday controlling psychological effect. Such an argument stems from a concept of local government as a democratic counterweight to absolutism - particularly in a country where there is no written Constitution, no Bill of Rights for citizens, no right of free access to information and and no system of proportional representation. But can it be said that this is what local government in Britain is for?

When the Widdicombe Committee addressed that question in 1986 it was adamant that "there is no validity in the assertion that local authorities have a 'local mandate' by which they derive authority from their electorate placing them above the law" [para 3.6]. The authority that members of Parliament derive from election then is clearly qualitatively different from the authority that councillors derive from election. The only reason for local government (as opposed to local administration) to exist is, in the Committee's view, the contribution that it makes to good government and that depends on its attributes of pluralism, participation and responsiveness. Their definition of pluralism states that it is not an argument for "divided sovereignty, but rather for increasing the cohesiveness and

stability of the state by making it less brittle and allowing within it some safety valve for the expression of contrary views" [para 3.13]. As little more than a place to let off steam, therefore, the argument that local government provides a democratic counterweight to absolutism cannot, as Desmond King concurs, be sustained [King 1989].

The crux of the matter is stability; as was argued above, it is not people who are represented in Parliament, but parties and policy agenda. A system of local government which facilitates diversity might result in widely differing policy outcomes which would challenge the sovereignty, not of Parliament, but the Government of the day to control the policy agenda. The Widdicombe Committee made the point thus: "The more local authorities provide services that are central to people's lives ... the less realistic it becomes that they can be autonomous in the provision of those services. The political parties come to regard those services as the proper province of national politics and make pledges in general elections for them to be organised according to their particular philosophy... In [this] the political parties are to a large extent reacting to the wish of the citizen that there should be a reasonably consistent, although not necessarily uniform, right to services throughout the country." [para 3.40] Nevertheless, uniformity is (generally speaking) the result and it may be argued that the Committee were conflating the right to services with the manner

in which they are provided; a confusion which arises from the Schumpeterian division of political labour. In the absence of mechanisms which facilitate a genuinely pluralistic participation in policy-formulation, these implicit ideas that stability and uniformity constitute "good government" are not challenged. Moreover, as Page has observed, within this unitary concept of the State, local government is by definition "a subordinate institution" [Page 1991]. Nevertheless, it is open to question as to how far Britain is, in reality, a unitary state; campaigns for regional autonomy evidence dissent from this view. These issues will be discussed in more detail in chapter six, but the point to be emphasised in this context is the essentialist nature of central/local government relations which feminist analysis would see as parallel to the patriarchal determinism in gender relations. Local government is subordinate because central government says it is; official committees set up by the government of the day to inquire into the proper role of local government determine that it is proper for the government of the day to control the policy agenda.

Having said that, this study is all about the scope for autonomous action which does exist within local government. It lies in two areas, namely, the power of local authorities to interpret the powers and duties laid upon them (official guidance from Whitehall is not legally binding) and the power under S.137 of the Local Government Act 1972 (1973 in Scotland) to raise

money for the purposes of "expenditure which in their opinion is in the interests of their area or any part of it or all or some of its inhabitants." There are caveats to both these "freedoms", not least the psychological control (referred to above) which is inherent in central/local government relations and which inhibits some local authorities from being more creative in the interpretation of their powers - a factor which accounts (in part) for so few LGWCs. Chapter four will analyse these freedoms more fully when their fragility will be exposed. At the same time it will be argued, from the case studies data, that the strength of these freedoms is most in evidence when there is unity of purpose between the various actors (councillors and officials) in local government and that when the scope for autonomy is maximised, so too are pluralism, participation and responsiveness. Demonstrating this through the work of LGWCs (chapters four and five) will show that there is a coalescence of interests between women and radical democrats to work for a genuine power of general competence for local government.

In the meantime, the past fourteen years have witnessed radical changes in relations between central and local government. The three Thatcher Governments of the 1980s began to implement some of the ideas of the New Right, whilst at the same time some Labour councils were maximising their scope for autonomy to implement the ideas of the New Left. These broad descriptions

mask a variety of perspectives which a number of authors have analysed elsewhere e.g. Desmond King offers a typology of five [King 1989] and Gerry Stoker reviews four [Stoker 1991]. But broadly speaking, both Left and Right of the political spectrum have produced new ideas about what local government is for in reaction to the rising costs and remoteness of 'big government' and what (in another context) de Tocqueville called "administrative drowsiness" [see Keane 1988]. Their overall objectives are broadly similar and they both employ the term "enabling" local government i.e. to give the public greater control and to make public service provision more effective; the solutions they offer are very different. There is sufficient space here to sketch only outlines of the two loosely-defined categories of "communitarian" and "public choice" theories in order to provide a background for the tensions which arise in present-day local government between LGWCs' Labour-controlled councils most of which are trying to implement policies along "communitarian" lines in conflict with Government policies along "public choice" lines.

(iii) The Search for Alternative Guiding Principles For Local Government:

1. The Communitarian Approach:

John Stewart's concept of community government as developed in his later work [see Stewart & Stoker 1989] is a normative one dependent for its fullest expression upon local authorities

being granted a power of general competence: "As the community governing itself, the local authority is entitled to take actions that are sought by that community. It need not search for specific powers, because the powers derive from the concept of local government itself" [ibid]. This implies a more federal concept of government which runs counter to the unitary state principles in the Widdicombe Report. However, Stewart suggests that a form of community government could be achieved within the present doctrine of "*ultra vires*" by removing the limits on local authorities to raise money under S.137 (see above). But as chapter four will show, such a freedom by itself would be insufficient when, for example, powers have already been introduced by the Government (1989 Local Government & Housing Act) to circumscribe how S.137 money may be spent.

In emphasising local choice and diversity in the communitarian model, Stewart suggests that "The principle should be that the case has to be made for uniformity..." [ibid]. What functions local authorities should/should not have would be a matter for local choice dependent upon the scope for such choice in any particular function. Thus Stewart recommends that health services should be under local control whereas activities defined "according to narrowly prescribed national standards" (he does not specify) should not. The communitarian view of local government is closely aligned to the principles of the European Charter For Local Self-Government which emphasises the

importance of local autonomy as an expression of democracy and (in Article 9) recognises that legal autonomy is meaningless without a power to raise revenue and determine the level of local taxation [this is discussed more fully in chapter six].

The main plank of communitarian views of local government is increased participation by members of the community in deciding not only what services local authorities should provide but how they should be provided. In his work on the management of local government, Stewart speaks of "a learning organisation" i.e. one that can institute procedures and practices for engaging clients in the design and delivery of services in order to improve efficiency [see Stewart 1986]. Some local authorities have put these ideas into practice e.g. Bradford, East Sussex, and Kirklees [see respectively, Clipsom 1987; Hadley & Young 1990; Griffiths 1992]. "Responsiveness cuts much of the ground from under the anti-collectivist arguments against public service .. [because it] seeks to be sensitive to users' views and influence and aims to operate in a manner which is enabling rather than dependency-creating" [Hadley & Young 1990]. But as Peter May points out: "Adaptive management, social experiments, and policy-feedback provide, at best, instrumental knowledge about 'what works'. While important and helpful for future policy design, such feedback still leaves open the bigger questions about appropriate objectives. True policy learning involves learning about collective aspirations and objectives. Such

societal learning comes from the plurality of interests and influences that function as 'agents' of social learning." [May 1991:emphasis added].⁽²⁾ Although Stewart has criticised the strength of disciplinary discourses within, and encouraged by, functionally-organised local government [Stewart 1986] and more recently has promoted the extension of public participation beyond the "client as customer" idea: "Empowering the public as community thus involves the creation of new democratic frameworks which may be concerned with the full range of activities that can be undertaken by local authorities" [Stewart 1992] nevertheless his, and other 'communitarian' theories give no indication that they envisage the kind of organisation and power for groups to participate which Iris Young proposes in her polity of difference:

(i) self-organisation of group members so that they gain a sense of collective empowerment and a reflective understanding of their collective experience and interests in the context of the society;

(ii) voicing a group's analysis of how social policy proposals affect them, and generating policy proposals themselves, in institutionalised contexts where decision makers are obliged to show that they have taken these perspectives into consideration;

(iii) having veto power regarding specific policies that affect a group directly, for example reproductive rights for women, or use of reservation lands for Native Americans. [Young 1990]

Although Stewart speaks of community government as "not merely about the capacity of government to respond to difference but also the capacity to create difference" [Stewart 1983] neither he nor other communitarians [e.g. Blunkett & Jackson 1987] envisage such a radical approach as this to organising a polity of difference. As Susan Halford's work in Sheffield shows, male-dominated groups, particularly trade unions, strongly influenced local politics in the city to the detriment of women's representation [Halford 1988]. David Blunkett, in his time as leader of the city council, specifically rejected proposals for a women's committee [see Lansley, Goss & Wolmar 1987].

Criticisms of the communitarian approach to local government can be summarised as follows:

(a) the fundamental issue of the weak Constitutional position of local government under '*ultra vires*' is not tackled; a power of general competence and autonomous revenue-raising powers challenge the concept of a unitary state where sovereignty is vested in Parliament, as well as the Schumpeterian division of labour;

(b) whilst increased public participation might result in greater public investment in the protection of local government from Parliament, communitarians tend to take a rosy view of it and ignore what might be the negative effects of participation and increased diversity [see also King 1989]; there is no suggestion of the kinds of techniques, such as described under

feminist political practice in the previous chapter, which would be required to manage what Stewart calls "a balance between the interests of customer, citizen and community" [Stewart 1992]; (c) although Stewart envisages elections to local government by proportional representation as a way of improving diversity of representation, there is no attempt to move away from parties and political policy agenda; nor is a proactive approach to organising group representation envisaged to counter the advantage of powerful interest groups [see Parry, Moyser & Day 1992]. Accordingly there is little scope for fresh (genuinely bottom-up) perspectives on service provision as opposed to the mutually-reinforcing and citizen-controlling functionalist format of bureaucracies. The professional discourses of functionally-organised government are unlikely to be disempowered simply by learning organisations; as advocates of public participation, from J.S. Mill onwards [see Pateman 1970] have stressed, it is *publics* which need to learn in order to be able to challenge effectively the power/knowledge discourses which maintain the Local State [see Cockburn 1977] and realise the ideals of democracy.

2. The Public Choice Approach:

Public Choice theorists e.g. Niskanen 1973; Tullock 1976; Pirie 1980, start from the premise that 'big government' in welfare states arises from a tendency to over-supply more services than are actually required to meet the needs of disadvantaged

peoples. Notwithstanding the economic, ideological and historical causes which account for different models of welfare societies [see e.g. Esping-Andersen 1990; Baldwin-Edwards & Gough 1991] i.e. whether social benefits should be universally available as part of citizens social rights or targetted by means-testing on those most in need, public choice theorists have focussed on three factors within contemporary arrangements which promote over-supply. They are:

(a) competition between political parties to gain votes results in increasingly generous electoral promises which then have to be implemented by the government of the day and paid for either by raising taxes (the burden of which falls on beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries alike) or by deficit-funding which hides the true cost of welfare from the electorate;

(b) such party competition generates increasing demands from interest groups for more and more resources and encourages more interest groups to form and campaign/compete;

(c) the combined effect of (a) and (b) is to generate bigger and bigger bureaucracies which in their turn make demands in the service of their own interests e.g. departmental budget/staff maximisation; expansion of professional activity.

Fundamental to public choice theories is a perception of individuals as "homo economicus" (complete with perfect knowledge of the public service market) and neat, optimum-sized communities (the Tiebout hypothesis: see e.g. King 1989)

resulting from the assumption that people would shop around for the best value community to live in as they do for example for groceries to eat. Local authorities would respond to consumer demand and dissatisfaction, so the theory implies, resulting in local taxation and service provision adjustments to maintain balance between the two. The idea of redistributing power and control over local authorities more fairly among communities - empowering the silent majority - is laudable; the means envisioned for its achievement are, frankly, laughable. The analysis of the problems of big government are reasonable, albeit open to challenge [see e.g. King 1989; Stoker 1991]; the assumptions about people's behaviour in response to a market model of welfare provision are not. The "pure economics" view of public behaviour relies over much on *ceterus parabus* which of course, in the real world, they never are. More recently, Niskanen has refined his views on budget-maximising bureaucrats acknowledging the limitations on such behaviours by central controls [see Blais & Dion 1991].

Nevertheless, Conservative Environment Ministers during the 1980s, such as Nicholas Ridley and Michael Forsyth, sought to implement policies which to some extent reflected public choice ideas. Breaking the mould of British politics, however, not only involves great political risk, but an unacceptable level of laissez-faire which the Thatcher Governments' eschewed. Consequently the policy to make local authorities directly

accountable to their communities through the price mechanism of the Community Charge (Poll Tax) was tempered with central government controls like rate/charge capping which allowed local politicians to divert attention and debate away from the actual costs of services, and to focus instead on the Government as "robbing" local communities of "their" money and forcing councillors to make unpalatable cuts in service provision thereby strengthening public loyalty to traditional local government.⁽³⁾ Similarly, the popular impression of the outcome of the Government's housing policy is that local authorities have large sums of idle money from receipts from council house sales while local construction workers are unemployed and people are homeless or living unsatisfactorily in expensive temporary accommodation. In reality, local authorities overall are carrying huge budgetary deficits which are costly to service. In neither of these cases has the public had access to adequate information in which to conduct a proper debate about what services they require and how they could best be provided and at what cost. The lack of established mechanisms by which such informed debate could occur evidences the dubiousness of politicians claims that they are representative of and responsive to the wishes of the people.

Public choice theories are not alone in overlooking the multiplicity of roles which individuals play in their communities, although they might justifiably be accused as the

worst. The policy of compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) is an example of how this oversight results in nonsensical "robbing Peter to pay Peter" outcomes. In many localities, local government is a large, if not the largest local employer. Although time is still relatively short in which to make accurate evaluations of the value of CCT, as a 1992 Institute of Public Finance report shows, 58% of local authorities have contracted out at least one of their main services to a private contractor and a fifth had contracted out three or more.⁽⁴⁾ Although average savings of 20% had been achieved on contracted out services, this had been bought at the cost of staff reduction; for significant numbers of people then, lower council tax bills have been acquired at the expense of a livelihood. Moreover, early indications are that this level of savings cannot be sustained as private contractors have been operating a "loss leader" policy in order to secure contracts [see Black 1993].

All in all, Conservative Governments' attempts to implement public choice theories in their policies for local government throughout the 1980s have failed to remedy any of the problems which those theories analysed. If anything bureaucracy has increased as local government has been fragmented and squeezed financially, witnessed by, for example, the mountains of paper emanating from the Department For Education and going directly to individual schools. As Rosenhead comments: "Many [policies]

have produced administrative or political chaos (or both) or have failed even in terms of their own objectives." [Rosenhead 1992]

Summary:

Neither communitarian nor public choice theories of local government offer real alternatives to the patriarchal forms of government in Britain at national and local levels. Whilst communitarian approaches envisage the capacity of communities to participate in self-government they do not indicate a holistic understanding which accommodates the multiplicity of people's roles as private and public sector workers, service recipients, service providers (paid and unpaid) nor their membership of multiple groups; nor the scale of the task in democratizing the existing structures and discourses which control people's lives. The market models whilst offering some radical and insightful analyses of the problems appear to rely on a mechanistic view of human behaviour resulting in unrealistic solutions.

In the search for alternative approaches to government, and as will be explored more fully in chapter six, the EC concept of framework law, together with its principles of subsidiarity and harmonisation offer a more flexible approach to government than the centralising forces which have developed in the UK particularly in the last fourteen years. It has been argued here from a feminist standpoint, that the principles of

government in Britain are patriarchal (thinly disguised as realism) which is to say that they are predicated on "power over" relationships between central and local government; between government and the governed. In the European Community on the other hand, where the notion of sovereignty is shared between its member states, the principles of (self) government are perforce non-patriarchal/non-hierarchical. This is not to deny that in practice, the principles for governing the EC have become distorted, for example, as John Temple Lang has observed framework law, which ought to epitomise subsidiarity, has tended to be made in too much detail [Temple Lang 1992]. Moreover the distribution of power between the governing institutions of the EC are quite obviously undemocratic [see e.g. Williams 1990; Lodge 1991]. Nevertheless, such distortions do not rule out the possibility for EC principles to provide the basis for more radical approaches to democracy, particularly those which emphasise the significance and reality of group affinities [see e.g. Spicker 1991; Tassin 1992] nor indeed, as Lodge [1989] and Jacobs, Corbett and Shackleton [1992] show, for on-going processes of improving democracy within existing arrangements to take place.

What the analyses in this chapter have shown is that there are common origins and contemporary links between the subordination of women; the subordination of electorates; and the subordination of local government. Whilst the need for LGWCs

therefore, can be seen both in terms of the feminist movement and the democracy movement, the obstacles they face are similarly knitted into a formidable web of mutually supporting oppositions.

In turning now to the detailed study of LGWCs, the focus can be narrowed to examine more closely the specific obstacles they encounter at the local level, and their strategies and tactics for overcoming them, including (in chapter six) the extent to which the benefits of Britain's membership of the EC works to assist them. Such that in the final chapter, the extent to which LGWCs can be said to provide a working model of feminist political practice which has the potential for wider application to address the broader socio-political problems outlined in this chapter, can then be critically assessed. By way of introducing this more detailed study, the next chapter describes some of the methodological issues arising from the research.

CHAPTER THREE : THE CASE STUDIES

The patriarchy in Western philosophy reviewed in the previous chapter has also influenced the manner in which social science research has been conducted in the past. In developing critiques of "man-made" knowledge, feminists have also interrogated methodology to seek out the legacy of dualisms, universalisms and essentialisms and the way that they have distorted data collection and manipulation of realities [see e.g. Roberts 1981; Bowles & Duelli Klein 1983; Stanley & Wise 1983]. Part of the process of such criticism has been to develop a feminist approach to research methods [see Harding 1987] which inter alia, seeks to avoid the objectification of those being researched i.e. the so-called research "subjects" and to identify and acknowledge power relationships in the collection of "data". Although, as Maria Mies points out, developments in sociological research (stemming from Frankfurt School criticism of positivism) particularly the action research approach, pre-dated feminist critiques of methodology, its methods remained what she calls "the view from above", a semi-detached perspective which retains the power-over relationship between researcher and the researched [see Mies 1983].

Whilst some feminists have rejected the whole notion of research as elitist, and cultural feminists like Mary Daly and Susan Griffin lay claim to a superior form of knowing for

women, most feminists would argue, as Vicky Randall does, that in rejecting spurious claims of objectivity, feminist method demands "more rigour, not less". The researcher, instead of pretending to take a neutral position in relation to the research - what Catherine MacKinnon calls "the point of viewlessness" - must instead recognise her own point of view and take this into proper account in the collective processes (by researcher and researched) of selecting and interpreting information [Randall 1991]. Feminist research cannot be seen as some vague contribution to the body of knowledge, but as part of the process of women understanding more about their own oppression in order to change it and as such, it is part of feminist political practice. This chapter, therefore, seeks to set out as honestly as possible, the procedures by which the research for this study was conducted and to expose the problems presented by them for feminist practice.

Background to the research:

The primary source of material for this study is a set of case studies prepared following fieldwork in six local authorities during the period from October 1990 to August 1991. However, before commencing this particular ESRC-funded study, the author had already carried out independent research into LGWCs [see Edwards 1988 and 1989] which influenced the approach adopted to the current study.

Part of the previous research consisted of working on a voluntary basis with the National Association of Local

Government Women's Committees (NALGWC) which at that time was in the process of compiling detailed information about the individual member LGWCs, not only in order to compile a directory, but primarily to facilitate NALGWC's role of coordinating information-sharing amongst members [see also chapter five]. Questionnaires were therefore devised to elicit both basic information about the constitution of LGWCs e.g. the status of the committee; gender breakdown of councillor-members of the committee; their political affiliation; officer support staff etc; but also information about LGWCs' terms of reference, their current work programmes and priorities. In the process of doing this research, it became clear that:

- (a) the time costs to women's officers of preparing responses to the questionnaires was unacceptably high, although most did eventually comply with NALGWC's request;
- (b) although the quality of information sent in by LGWCs was good, it very much reflected their individual circumstances and ways of working (including their lack of resources) and it was therefore impossible to disseminate into a useful data bank without a great deal of additional resources which were not available at that time. All that could be done was to collate a wide range of material - committee reports, information booklets, publicity material etc., into box files organised around topics e.g. childcare; employment training; cooptee systems etc.

The experience of collecting and trying to collate this information, highlighted the following:

(i) written records about the operations of LGWCs are primarily in the form of council committee reports - both to the women's committee itself and to/from other council committees. These tend to follow an established format and, in many cases, a stylised form of writing that is sometimes difficult to understand. For example, references are made to previous reports; minutes of committee meetings; discussions and decisions taken elsewhere; such that a single report rarely provides a complete picture of work on any particular topic. Moreover, as public property (which non-confidential committee reports are) they rarely provide any indication of political contention surrounding an issue which might have arisen. Minutes of committee meetings do not generally record discussions in detail, if at all, but merely record any decisions taken. In short, all that is interesting about the operations of LGWCs, is rarely recorded in publicly-available official documents.

(ii) the time-scales of individual LGWC projects can be very long, making the process of following progress through a lot of documentation, time-consuming work for the researcher. In chapter five of this study, a project is described which took only sixteen months to bring to fruition from being first discussed in committee. Whilst some small one-off projects may be achieved more quickly than this, they are distinguishable by

being uncontentious; within the LGWC's remit to do by themselves (not requiring any input from other committees or council departments); low cost and within the current budgetary provision of the women's committee. Most LGWC projects do not fall into this category and many appear to be in a permanent state of on-goingness. Moreover, most LGWCs have small working budgets of their own and therefore projects have to be funded from "external" sources of money - either other council budgets or from funding programmes outwith the council e.g. Urban Aid/City Challenge or European Social Fund or, more often, from financial "packages" made up from contributions from a number of different sources. Making such complex arrangements usually involves a long process of negotiation and agreement between the women's committee and other "actors" in a series of reports and meetings. Not only does this account for the very long time-scales of LGWC projects, but also for the problems of gathering together a complete picture of work in any particular area or topic.

(iii) The workload on individual women's officers is such that not only are they frequently out of their offices and unavailable to the researcher to clarify questions arising from data collection, but a burden of guilt is laid on the researcher in adding to that workload which may tempt her to make educated guesses about received information rather than check it out properly.

In addition to this practical experience, reports from other researchers provided advanced warning of the type of errors which could be made from making inferences from data compiled at a distance. Susan Halford's 1986 research, for example, was based upon a nationwide postal survey of selected local authorities designed to elicit information from which to judge whether particular women's initiatives were merely tokenistic or not. Halford assumed that "the level of resources available to the initiative - including both the budget and the number of staff employed [would be] a basic indicator from which to judge the relative strength of different initiatives." In the event (after follow-up case studies) she concluded that "high budgets and central status are alone insufficient indicators from which we can judge the extent to which individual initiatives are tokenistic" [Halford 1987]. As will be shown in chapters four and five, all LGWCs are under-resourced for the work they seek to do; some can have very small budgets of their own and be severely hampered thereby, whilst others with small budgets can, through strategies to persuade other council departments to spend money on equality for women, achieve substantive results. Indeed, encouraging chief officers of other council departments to take responsibility within their budgets for "equalities work" is sometimes a deliberate strategy on the part of some LGWCs. When the number of factors which relate to how political decisions are made are so great and vary so widely between individual local authorities, questionnaires which are not unacceptably long and complicated, cannot be

devised to collect such information. Research done by a combination of questionnaires and in-depth semi-structured interviews can also result in conclusions which are so hedged about with caveats concerning their interpretation, that it is dubious whether quantitative methods are of much use at all in certain areas of social research. The work by Jim Barry on the experiences of women councillors in London, for example, begs such a question [see Barry 1991].

Armed with this background experience, it was clear that any research into women's committees would have to be done by the case study method. As Yin observes: "In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context" [Yin 1989]. The value of such research as Cynthia Cockburn has pointed out, comes not "from numbers, either of organisations studied or of people interviewed. Rather it gains what authority it has from the depth of insight made available" [Cockburn 1991]. On the other hand, and as indicated in chapter one, the author is making some large claims for the relevance of this study to current debates about democracy and citizenship in Britain. How can insights into the problems and achievements of a few isolated LGWCs have any general application? Politics is often described as the art of the possible; by their existence, LGWCs demonstrate that it is possible for ordinary people to

gain some control over the public policy process, for more representative forms of government to exist and for women to participate in society as citizens and not just as carers and facilitators of the independence of others. In other words, LGWCs exist as working models, albeit imperfect ones, as against the blueprints for democracy which egalitarians have so far failed to get off the drawing board. Case studies of individual LGWCs help to expose the design faults in these working models which will make them more attractive to those, like democratic socialists, who express an interest in taking them into full-scale production.

Furthermore, the case study method is more amenable to feminist approaches to research insofar as it facilitates participants having greater control over what is researched and the interpretations which are put upon the information gathered.

The current study:

For reasons to do with the problems of data collection as described above and as a work of feminist research, it was clear that any LGWC participating in the current study would need to be willing to allow free access to its records and staff. It was arranged therefore that at the NALGWC quarterly conference meeting held on Sunday October 21st 1990, the author would be given time to explain her proposed research and to ask for volunteer-LGWCs who wished to participate. Five LGWCs from district councils (four located in Scotland and one located in England) volunteered. Prior to the NALGWC meeting, one

metropolitan city council also volunteered to participate in the research.⁽¹⁾ The six case study LGWCs have been designated by their council type i.e. DC1-5 and MC1. Participating LGWCs were assured of anonymity to encourage openness and frankness in what was at that time, a politically uncertain situation generally and particularly for local government as the effects of the 1988 and 1989 Local Government Acts were feeding through i.e. controls on spending; the extension of compulsory competitive tendering; the designation of certain chief officers as "monitors" on the political actions of councillors; the political/financial fiasco caused by the Poll Tax; restrictions on publicity (particularly S.6 of the 1988 Act); the banning of cooptees and changes to conditions relating to S.137 budgets. Discussions at the NALGWC meeting about the likely impact of these changes on the capacity of LGWCs to make further progress in their objectives, prompted the author to begin fieldwork as quickly as possible, and work began in the third week of November 1990.

The Fieldwork:

The costs of fieldwork are a major constraint for most researchers; the four Scottish LGWCs were therefore visited in a four-week period - roughly one week in each locality - in order to reduce the costs of travel from Hull. DC1, the LGWC located in an English District Council, was also some distance from Hull and was visited in one week to reduce travelling costs. Only MC1 was located within daily travelling distance

for fieldwork to be spread over a longer period of time. These time factors were important in view of the manner in which the research was conducted [see below] and the prevailing political climate, both of which required the speedy establishment of trust between the author and participating LGWCs.

Supplementary research was carried out in six other locations in order to assess whether a bias was being created by the majority of case studies being located in District Councils. Two metropolitan city councils and one non-metropolitan city council were visited as well as two county councils and one London Borough - all six in England. The three city councils had LGWCs, as did the London Borough, but the two county councils did not. Additionally, in Scotland when research was being carried out at DC4, supplementary work was also done at the LGWC located within the regional council for that area. All in all, therefore, eleven LGWCs were visited of which six were studied in depth. Although neither of the two county councils visited had LGWCs, they were both developing strategic childcare policies with integrated Education and Social Services Departmental work. Since all of the case study LGWCs were working on childcare projects, these county councils provided a useful comparison. The value of this supplementary work was to expose the radicalism of LGWC strategies; the similarities between LGWCs, regardless of which type of council they were located within; and their difference from strategies developed in local authorities where there was no LGWC. In the

two county councils without LGWCs, the childcare strategies were clearly products of Education and Social Services discourses; despite strong feminist councillors in leading positions in both these councils, the childcare strategies had no specific focus on women as independent citizens.

Methods Employed:

Prior to commencing fieldwork, a rough plan was drawn up of the types of information which would be sought at each location so that comparisons could be made as to:

- (a) geographical location and industrial environment based upon Halford's suggestion that these factors significantly affected attitudes towards women's political activity [Halford 1988];
- (b) political cultures within each local authority and particularly the status of women within that local culture e.g. the amount of influence that the Chair of the LGWC had within the local Labour ruling group; the role of women within the local district Labour party and their influence on the local political agenda;
- (c) the organisation of the council - its committee system and particularly where power lay within that system e.g. were the programme committees (education; social services; housing etc) more influential than the policy and resources committee? How much control has the Leader over the politicians and the Chief Executive over the chief officers; how supportive are these leading figures of women's equality? These factors are particularly important with regard to an LGWC's ability to get

other council departments to carry out equal opportunities policy [see chapter five];

(d) the state of the council's finances overall (e.g. charge-capped) and the way in which the LGWC was funded.

In addition to these general questions about the local authority, a list of information required about each LGWC was drawn up covering basic data on its organisation and development within the council as well as its work programmes and successes and failures. These lists were used more as aides memoire to the researcher rather than being central to the information gathering process [see Appendix 1].

The intention was to focus (at each location) on one particular LGWC project for in-depth research in order to best illustrate the strategies LGWCs use to pursue their objectives. Since it was also intended to examine the role of the EC in relation to LGWCs' work (and in respect to that the author attended, in November 1990, a meeting of the European Parliament's Women's Rights Committee at which childcare policy was discussed) it was proposed to LGWCs that this in-depth project might be related to childcare. This was not accepted by all participating LGWCs only some of which had well-developed, discrete childcare projects. Those which did not, felt that other types of projects would best illustrate their strategies and working methods.

The primary principle in the conduct of the research was that the concerns and priorities of the women involved would guide it. Prior to the commencement of the research, through telephone conversations and by letter, attempts were made by the author to establish a rapport with the women involved (mainly officers rather than councillors) and to emphasise this principle of their control over the research process. This can be said to have been only partially successful. Whilst it was true that in rejecting the childcare theme, participating LGWCs changed the proposed direction of the study, at the actual fieldwork stage, the daily pressure of work on the women's officers made it impractical for the majority to take a more proactive stance in the control of the research. With hindsight, the imperative to start fieldwork as quickly as possible left too little time for preparation. A more satisfactory approach in Scotland might have been to have used the existence of SWEOF (Scottish Women's & Equal Opportunities Officers Forum) [see chapter five] to arrange a meeting with the four participating LGWCs to construct a more detailed method for fieldwork. On the other hand, this might have resulted in the more forceful personalities involved dictating an approach which would have closed-off access to some of the information which was gathered. It may also have alienated some of the participating councillors, some of whom are reported to be jealous of the officers' support group. Given the fragility of political support for LGWCs [see next chapter] such emotive tensions between the women working within them are

bound to arise. It may be, therefore, that any attempt to construct a collective methodology ahead of fieldwork would have been disadvantageous. It might also have imposed a distinctly Scottish approach which reflected the cohesiveness of LGWCs there which was not appropriate to the English LGWCs.

The general approach followed at each location was as follows:

(a) initial discussion with the women's officer to agree which project would be investigated in-depth; who were the most appropriate officers and councillors to interview; and to get her preliminary comments on the local political scene;

(b) investigation of LGWC files; particularly where the LGWC had been established for less than five years, an attempt was made to read all the official records of the committee. Albeit at times a tedious chore, the reports and minutes of committee meetings are by far the most accurate way of charting the development of individual LGWCs. Although, as stated above, they leave out all that is interesting about LGWCs they nevertheless provide a chronology as well as the official perspective. For example, records may show the committee as being concerned about a particular issue which is then subsequently conspicuous by its absence in later records. This acts as a prompt to find out why the issue was dropped from the agenda which can occasionally lead to interesting stories which the women's officer or councillors might not otherwise reveal, either because they had forgotten about it or because it was an embarrassment. In this study the whole issue of "divided

loyalties" i.e when political expediency wins over feminist commitment [see chapter four] arose from discussions in one LGWC prompted by such a finding.

(c) discussions with staff in economic development units to obtain background information on the locality and on any joint work between the unit and the LGWC;

(d) investigation of the agreed LGWC project, including examination of records of its development, interviewing of any relevant staff e.g. where the project was a women's employment training centre, visiting the centre and meeting staff and trainees.

(e) formal interviews with LGWC councillors and women's officers at the end of the fieldwork based on schedules of questions which were given to interviewees beforehand.

All interviews were recorded and later typed-up verbatim. Copies of relevant official reports and records were taken where permission was granted so that each individual case study could be written up on the basis of as much factual information as was possible to have to hand away from the locality itself. Each case study was written as a complete report on the individual LGWC covering the economic character of the locality, the local political scene, the development of the women's committee generally and the in-depth study of the designated project. Case study reports were generally about 10,000 words long and were sent to the women's officer of each participating LGWC.

Four of the six case study reports were returned with comments and criticisms which were then incorporated into the final reports. Of the two LGWCs which did not participate any further in the process, one was within a local authority which was at the time experiencing great political difficulties - it was later discovered that some of the women who had been interviewed had been speaking to the author with invitations to accept voluntary redundancy in their pockets. When the draft case study report was sent to that authority, the woman to whom it was addressed was absent on what became a lengthy period of sick leave. In that particular case, no attempt was made to pursue commentary or critical feedback on the report. In the second case, several telephone calls and letters, over a period of about three months, resulted in assurances that it was only time constraints which prevented feedback from the women's officer and this would eventually be forthcoming. In the event no feedback was received and no further pressure was put upon the women's officer to provide it. In two of the cases where LGWCs participated fully in the preparation of the final report, the women's officers indicated that they had used the case studies to prompt a review process between LGWC officers and councillors to the benefit of working relations. Less formally, during the course of fieldwork, all participating women's officers and some councillors commented on the usefulness of the research process for reflecting on their work and stimulating commitment to their objectives. All six case studies were used as the data-base for this study (see below).

Although as indicated above, the author had some previous experience of research into LGWCs as well as eleven years' experience as a local government officer, both of which were invaluable in the conduct of research for the present study, nevertheless, the generosity of all those interviewed, in terms of the time they willingly gave, and particularly the participating LGWCs, was remarkable. Several women, both councillors and women's officers of participating LGWCs, remarked on the importance to them of research as recognition and evaluation of their work and political struggle. All of these women were aware of the extent to which they were caught in a Catch-22 situation of needing more resources in order to produce more effective outcomes in order to attract/maintain wider political support and yet being unable to effectively demand more resources without first producing politically-significant results. Outside interest from government-funded research within respected universities was viewed by some women as supportive to their local political credibility.

The Supplementary Research:

As noted above, part of the purpose of visiting other non-case study local authorities was to balance what at first appeared to be a distortion, a bias of almost all district council case study LGWCs. Lengthy interviews were held with the women's officers at two unitary authorities with LGWCs (one London Borough Council and the other a large metropolitan city council). Apart from the fact that these authorities did not

encounter the difficulties of inter-authority working, the issues raised in the discussions all centred around similar ones encountered by the case study authorities which were primarily about making women visible as autonomous citizens. That is to say, that in party politics; in professional discourses and in the relevant legislation, the fundamental tenets of liberal individualism - of the political division of labour; the sexual division of labour; and the pseudo-egalitarianism of meritocracy, as described in chapter two - are so deeply embedded that the very concept of women's oppression has not yet been grasped by the majority of actors in local government regardless of how it is structured. These discussions confirmed to the author that the type of local authority was not a significant factor in a study of LGWCs.

Other supplementary research came from following up particular issues which arose in the course of working with the case study LGWCs. For example, fieldwork at DC1 and MC1 both resulted in work on childcare projects, and at this early stage of the research the idea emerged of focussing on childcare as a theme for the whole study. The opportunity arose to visit one locality where the county council (no LGWC) was developing integrated childcare services and at the same time to visit one of the district councils within that same locality where there was an active LGWC. Discussions with the county councillor revealed an unusual approach to integrated childcare - stimulated partly by changes to the political mix of the

council and partly by the expected impact of the Children Act 1989. A working party of councillors from all parties had taken on responsibility for developing childcare services and officer support for this group was located within the Chief Executives Department with responsibility for coordinating relevant work within Education, Social Services and Economic Development Departments. Organisationally this was interesting since many LGWCs are managed within the Chief Executive's Department both to give them authority and to establish their corporate status i.e. that they are concerned with all the council's activities. However, as stated above, the outcome of this discussion was to highlight the significance of LGWCs. Whilst there was much that the county council was doing that was resonant with the work of some LGWCs e.g. partnership projects between the public and private sector, childcare support for women's employment training etc., it was all very much an in-house creation - there were no mechanisms for empowering non-elite women to "conceive of policies of their own and realise them". It was still top-down policy-making of the "add women and stir" variety. At the local district council with an LGWC, discussions with staff focussed on the mismatch between their agenda and the county council's agenda. Whilst the county's policies were producing some useful childcare products, at the same time it was acting like a fire-blanket, smothering the LGWC's attempts to promote women's self-representation. One of the women's officers interviewed was from New Zealand and she compared the overt nature of

patriarchal attitudes there with their covert nature in Britain: "Here everybody says the right thing and is terribly polite, but I don't think there is any real commitment - it's all lip-service." Consequently, district councillors were content to let the county make the running in childcare policy and were not supportive of the LGWC's attempts to broaden the representation to the county's working party.

A second supplementary strand of inquiry resulted from MC1's attempts to use European Community funding to promote childcare development. MC1 is located within a designated area for the purposes of European Regional Development Funds (ERDF). Another local authority within the same region was attempting to promote a coordinated childcare project proposal in order to attract substantial ERDF funds. The LGWCs at MC1 and the city council which initiated the proposal, were enthusiastically working towards putting the scheme together - taking on the extra work of organising meetings etc. A visit to a county council within the region to discuss their attitude towards the project was disheartening. Councillors were so parochial in their thinking that they found it hard to grasp the idea of region-wide cooperation, despite the majority of councils in the region (including the county council) being Labour-controlled and regional autonomy being high on the Labour Party's agenda. There were no inter-authority meetings between the local Labour councillors even within the area covered by the county council, let alone regionally, which indicates that

control of proposals for ERDF operational programmes must rest largely in the hands of the local European Liaison Officers who are responsible for putting the regional bids together. [see also chapter six].

In summary, therefore, the supplementary research was most useful for confirming the uniqueness of LGWCs and their significance both in terms of feminist political practice for promoting women's citizenship and in terms of more democratic forms of policy-making and government.

The European Dimension:

It was originally intended that an in-depth study would be made of the European Parliament's Women's Rights Committee (WRC) in order to compare the obstacles it encountered and the strategies it employed to overcome them, with those of LGWCs. Time constraints, primarily on the author but also on MEPs, together with problems arising from the costs of carrying out in-depth research in Europe (relevant support staff to the WRC are scattered between several locations) made this project non-viable. Furthermore as the complexities (and attendant increase in data) of the main LGWC study were revealed, it became clear that a detailed study of the WRC would constitute a separate research project and to attempt to incorporate it with this study would result in something akin to a Heath Robinson structure. However, as already noted, a meeting of the WRC held in Birmingham in November 1990 was attended and

contacts made with the Chair, Christine Crawley and the rapporteur for the WRC's childcare Directive initiative, Anita Pollack both of whom provided invaluable material (working papers and draft reports) for this study. At this stage, it will be recalled, there was a proposal for this study to have a childcare theme. When this was abandoned it became clear that a broader focus to the European dimension was necessary, incorporating the EC's equal opportunities action programmes and liaison between the Commission's women's bureau and the UK's Equal Opportunities Commission, as well as issues arising from the Council of Europe's Charter For Local Self-Government and the EC's Committee of the Regions proposed in the Maastricht Treaty. Research, both primary and secondary, for these issues resulted in a heavy enough workload without adding further work on the WRC.

Nevertheless, recorded interviews were carried out with the European Liaison Officer at the EOC; officers at NALGWC and with one of the Scottish case study women's officers who had joint responsibility for preparing NALGWC's report on liaison with the WRC. For this latter, a separate visit was made to the women's officer in August 1991 and the opportunity was taken to follow-up on developments at her LGWC since the original fieldwork there in March 1991. An interview (not recorded) was also conducted with Bronwen Cohen, one of the co-authors of the European Childcare Network Report and the Chair of the Network (Peter Moss) was telephoned for confirmation and

clarification of certain relevant points. Interviews were sought with Anita Pollack and with MP Dr. Marjorie Mowlem in her capacity as spokesperson for women's rights within the Labour Party. Neither of these two women were able to offer time for interview, but both replied in detail to the questions which had been sent to them by letter. In connection with the Charter For Local Self-Government, lengthy telephone conversations were conducted with two women councillors involved with the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) and also with officers at the Local Government International Bureau in London. A conference on local government and Europe, organised in February 1991 by COSLA (the Scottish local authorities association) was also attended.

Research Failings

Apart from the problems already referred to of time and cost constraints, there were two further aspects which have subsequently been revealed as "failures" of the research:

(a) none of the case study LGWCs were located in areas with proportionately significant ethnic minority populations. Consequently, the "stories" which illustrate LGWCs strategies in chapter five, tend to reflect the needs and priorities of mainly white women. However, although a different set of volunteer-LGWCs might have produced different accounts e.g. perhaps more on inter-authority working to deal with problems

of racial harassment, the types of strategies as analysed in chapter five would not necessarily be any different;

(b) with hindsight, more effort might have been made to obtain more detailed information about the relative costs of LGWCs' own initiative projects so that a stronger argument could have been made in respect of the efficiency of bottom-up policy-making. On the other hand, tracking down the details of costs of individual projects would have been very time-consuming and might have jeopardised the collection of other data.

The Case Studies As Database

The six individual case studies provided the empirical data from which to address the questions set out previously in chapters one and two, namely:

- why is there a need for LGWCs? Or in other words, in what particular ways does local government policy-making routinely fail to address the needs of women as citizens?

- how far are these failings of local government related to its lack of autonomy from central government (patriarchal democracy) and/or to the personal patriarchal attitudes of individual actors within local government?

- how successful are LGWCs in bringing women's autonomous voices into their councils' policy-making processes? Or in

other words, how far do they provide a model of good local government (taking the Widdicombe Committee's definitions at face-value) namely that they are plural, participative and responsive?

The analysis of the data was organised according to these questions under two broad headings namely:

(a) the obstacles which LGWCs encounter to achieving their objectives [see page ten] as created by the political, organisational, legal and financial structures and regulations which govern local authorities; and as created by individual and societal patriarchal attitudes (and the interactions between the two);

(b) the strategies and tactics which LGWCs employ both to overcome these obstacles and to promote their objectives.

Initially, the analysis of obstacles (chapter four) was organised within a complex two-dimensional framework, using the Widdicombe definitions as a guide and identifying politico-legal/organisational/financial obstacles to each of the categories of pluralism, participation and responsiveness. This was a useful exercise which revealed extensive overlapping within the matrix, but as such it was poor analysis. The complexities served only to confuse and the necessary repetitions of points were tedious. The outcome of this

exercise was to identify more broadly-defined categories within which the individual examples of obstacles could be collated, namely:

the obstacles which arise from the lack of women's representation within political elites and professional/policy communities [see Laffin 1986];

those which arise from the structure of local government e.g. the functionally organised, two-tier system and the controlling regulations which attend that structure;

obstacles which arise from the nature of bureaucratic behaviours e.g. impartiality and the constraints these place on individuals as political "actors" and as agents of challenge and change. [See chapter four].

Analysing LGWCs' strategies for empowering women and for transforming the ways that their councils worked was more straightforward. Nevertheless, combining the two aspects of strategies viz the promotion of LGWC objectives and overcoming specific obstacles presented a problem insofar as the author wished to avoid manipulating the data to the extent that only obstacles which fitted the strategies were included. Such a false impression of tidiness would not only be dishonest, but oversimplify the constraints on LGWCs. The analyses of obstacles and strategies were therefore carried out separately resulting in an imperfect fit between the two. Paradoxically,

the greater complexity associated with the analysis of obstacles primarily stemmed from the differences between the case study local authorities, whilst the analysis of women's committees' strategies revealed more uniformity. Whilst on the one hand this was quite heartening insofar as it demonstrated both the scope for autonomous actions by local councils and their diversity, as well as demonstrating the power of networking between LGWCs to overcome lack of resources; on the other hand it demonstrated the lack of variety between the case study LGWCs which has already been commented upon above under the research failings. Nevertheless, there is sufficient variety in the types of strategies analysed to demonstrate the main arguments in support of LGWCs as feminist political practice. Moreover, the particular mix of volunteer LGWCs for the research does emphasise other findings such as the significance of EC policies towards regional development (Objective 2 areas) in support of the work of LGWCs in promoting equality for women.

With these comments in mind, the next two chapters set out the analyses of LGWCs obstacles and strategies, and the specific impacts of Britain's membership of the EC, which adds a further dimension to these issues of local autonomy and therefore LGWCs' ability to promote women's equality, follows in chapter six.

CHAPTER FOUR: OBSTACLES FOR LGWCS

Against the background sketched in chapter two of deeply-rooted patriarchal principles and attitudes which are the cultural inheritance of contemporary state and society in Britain, this chapter sets out in more detail how the rules and procedures for local government which flow from those structures create obstacles for the work of LGWCS. As mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, those obstacles are bound up with the question of why local government, which is meant to exist for the expression of local political preferences in policy implementation [see e.g. Page & Goldsmith 1987] routinely fails to address the needs of women [see e.g. Button 1984]. In short, why is there a need for LGWCS? Using concrete examples from the case studies, this chapter illustrates the arguments made in chapter two by demonstrating some of the particular ways in which the social constructions of women's inequality are maintained by the processes of the patriarchal state.

Moreover, by now the reader will be clear that the feminist case against the patriarchal state is not a simple dichotomous one of women versus men or collectivity versus hierarchy or even, in policy terms of bottom-up versus top-down approaches. Instead, and recalling the principles of feminist practice outlined in chapter one, it is about identifying diffuse and often unconscious power relations which maintain complex networks of domination and oppression between individuals and groups in

order to change "power over" relations into "power with" relations by which the ideals of democracy may be realised. Significant to these processes is the capacity of individuals within their multiple social roles to become agents of challenge and change. As this chapter shows, the extent to which LGWCs can pursue their objectives depends upon the willingness or unwillingness of their local authorities to maximise the limited scope for autonomous actions and interpretations of their powers and duties and this in large measure depends upon individuals acting as agents of challenge and change. Many of the obstacles analysed here can therefore be illustrated by contrasting examples from the case studies. Nevertheless, the scope for local autonomy is limited and the legislative changes made in the past thirteen years witness the power of the executive in Parliament to control political will at the local level - partly through increasing regulatory law, but most particularly through control of local authority finance.

Why are LGWCs needed?/Why does local government fail to meet the needs of women?

In answering this question and thereby exposing the obstacles for LGWCs in the pursuit of their objectives, the contents of the next chapter are born in mind in order to give coherence to the overall analysis of obstacles and strategies to overcome them; nevertheless, as noted previously, the fit is imperfect. Explanations for the failure of local government to meet women's needs are complex and overlapping, making clear presentation of

the analysis difficult. Therefore, as noted in chapter three, through a process of trial and error, three broad (and somewhat arbitrary) categories have been defined in which to collate the evidence and analyse the obstacles for LGWCs in terms of:

the lack of women's representation;

the structure of local government; and

the nature of bureaucracy.

WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION:

"Representation" in this context does not only apply to numbers of women working in local government as councillors or senior officers, but also the extent to which the heterogeneous community of women are visible in the policy processes of local authorities. The chief obstacle to women's representation is primarily to do with local government being organised along the same lines as national government which was discussed in chapter two namely, that it is parties and their policy agenda which are represented in the council chamber rather than people.

Therefore, and as Hadley and Young observe:

"Most of our public services are not directly responsible to those who use them but instead must answer to the representatives of the public in general, whether at local government or national government level. The customer in other words, is government, not the citizen user" [Hadley & Young 1990].

As research for the Widdicombe Committee of Inquiry showed, the numbers of independent councillors elected to local government

has dropped dramatically in the last two decades as the conduct of local authority business has become increasingly partisan [Leach et al 1986]. Women's representation depends, therefore, on the extent to which they are able to influence party agenda, either as councillors themselves or within local and national party machinery.⁽¹⁾ However, unlike national government, the political mix in local authorities is generally greater and since the 1993 local elections, the numbers of councils in Britain where there is no overall control has risen significantly. A more delicate political balance increases competition for votes between parties and in order to attract "the women's vote" policies which focus on women may be adopted by parties which might not otherwise do so. Similarly, policies for women can be made the subject of inter-party deals as was the case in Kingston-Upon-Thames during the mid-1980s when four Labour councillors held the balance of power and achieved, albeit for a very short time, the establishment of a women's committee in Conservative heartland [see Edwards 1988]. Increased competition between parties can, however, have the opposite effect when equality for women, particularly positive action programmes, are seen as "radical". In the course of research for this study, rumours were circulating in one local authority to the effect that equalities issues (gender, race and disabilities) would have to be "played down" by the Labour Party ahead of forthcoming local elections for fear of alienating electors. The role of the local media is a significant factor in such ideological adjustments by parties.

Local media and women's representation:

In only one of the case studies for this research was the local press fair-to-supportive of the women's committee. Local news reporters attend the main committee meetings of local councils and to a large extent they mediate the activities of the council to the electorate. On the whole, local newspapers are conservative in their editorial policies and dislike radicalism of any kind that upsets the status quo. When LGWCs decide to spend money on positive action projects, therefore, the local press tends to represent this in a negative light to readers.⁽²⁾ As such their interpretation of committee reports and decisions is what interested electors are guided by in their impression of the different political parties' performance. They can be very destructive:

"When [the Leader] backed down over the S.28 thing [a grant to a lesbian helpline] it's just breaking my heart, the whole thing, but with the general election coming and the district election a year away, he feels he can't possibly do anything to attract bad publicity but then that means the press are deciding the agenda of the Labour Party and I think that's very dangerous." [Chair DC3 LGWC]

This particular issue could have been represented in the press as the council taking sensible action based on advice from independent legal counsel to assist a voluntary self-help organisation offering AIDS-advice to a group of women who perceive their needs and problems to be inadequately understood by other public agencies. Instead of which, it was represented

as a homophobic attack on individual members of the women's committee and as councillors flouting the law as laid down in S.28 of the 1988 Local Government Act. The only way that ordinary members of the public could obtain the true story was either by attending the committee meeting or by reading the actual committee reports in the local library. Women with less leisure time per week than men⁽³⁾ are unlikely to have the time to do either. Poor quality and/or biased reporting of council activities is a serious obstacle to women's perceptions of how a local authority can act in their interests as well as undermining the acceptability of women's interests as a legitimate political issue. In other words, the press can directly and indirectly discourage women from representing themselves and their claims to the council and fuel patriarchal attitudes among all the actors in local government - councillors, officers and electors alike.

The extent of the media's role in influencing public opinion exposes the lack of effective machinery for direct communications between local parties and publics. The activities of local parties tend to revolve around their own memberships and have little contact with the general public outside of election campaigns [see Parry, Moyser & Day 1992]. LGWCs are unique insofar as they take on the business of concretising group representation [see next chapter] but they are too poorly resourced to be able to effectively counter the impact of the local press on the community at large.

Women As Councillors:

A great deal of research has already been done on women's access to political elites [see e.g. Lovenduski 1986; Randall 1987; Norris 1987; Phillips 1991a] and the problems they experience when they do become elected councillors [e.g. Barron, Crawley & Wood 1988 & 1991; Barry 1991]. There is insufficient space here to review this work in detail, but the primary obstacles created by the current organisation of local government are as follows:

(a) sponsorship of women by political parties: although most political parties have official policies to encourage women members to be active both generally within the party and in separate women's organisation e.g. women's sections/councils in the Labour Party, the extent to which any individual woman or local women's section or group is encouraged depends on the personal attitudes of (predominantly) men in leadership positions within the local party. Genuinely supportive attitudes are neither widespread nor consistent. Evidence for this can be found in:

- (i) the paucity of numbers of women councillors (19% overall in the 1985 research for the Widdicombe Committee; 30% for the average of Inner London Boroughs in 1990 [Barry 1991]);
- (ii) the fact that in 75% of Labour-controlled councils there is no women's or equal opportunities committee which is affiliated to NALGWC [Halford 1988];
- (iii) from anecdotal evidence e.g. Perrigo 1986; Halford 1988; and research for this study. In DC3 for example, although women

had been very active in the early 1980s - drafting policy for election manifesto etc. - the Chair of DC3 LGWC reported a dramatic falling off of support: "Prior to 1984 women's sections were very active, but now most of them have ceased to exist because, I don't know if its because women just don't have the time or lack the commitment, but I think something has gone wrong and its a shame because few of them are women on the GM [general management committee] and the CLP doesn't have a women's section at the moment." (4)

(b) divided loyalties: even the most committed feminist councillor can be torn between her commitment to representing women's claims upon the council and her loyalty to her party. The power of the press to generate antagonism to council policies, as in the case described above, may lead (as it did in this particular case) to some women councillors abandoning their commitment to women in order to support the party. The Minutes of LGWCs meetings showed that women members of opposition parties (particularly Conservative Party women) would routinely vote against committee proposals even when the records showed them to be not against them in principle. Opposition women would only vote in favour of a proposal if they thought they risked ridicule in the press (thereby bringing their party into disrepute) if they voted against e.g. support for cancer-screening programmes for women; aid to disabled women's groups etc. The power of the press therefore, like a finely balanced council, can work for or against women's representation. But in

putting their parties' interests before women's interests, these councillors expose the weakness in the argument that increased numbers of women in parties would automatically lead to improved outcomes for women (critical mass theory) and therefore also the fallacy of representative democracy as constituted through ideology-driven political parties.

In Scotland there appears to be a general practice of giving local Labour parties direct control over decision-making where Labour councillors form the ruling group on a council. At both DC3 and DC4 Labour councillors referred to this "democratic control" which, at the time of research, was putting the ruling group at DC3 in an untenable position.⁽⁵⁾ The net effect of this is that Scottish LGWCs are not only working to overcome patriarchal attitudes among their councillors but among members of the local Labour party as well.

(c) lack of childcare: women with children cannot participate in political activities (either within local parties or as councillors) unless adequate facilities are provided. As the research by Barron, Crawley & Wood shows, men in households with children who are able/willing to provide the necessary domestic support consistently, are rare. The absence of creche facilities in most Town Halls means that if childcare cannot be organised within the home, there is an additional burden of ferrying children between home and childminder. Additionally, with or without children, more women carry the double burden of paid work as well as most of the household work [see e.g. Snyder

1992]. Nevertheless, as the work by Parry and Moyser shows: "the single woman is more active than the single man and most active, in relative terms, are female single parents" [Parry & Moyser 1990] which suggests that it is men rather than children who present the barrier to women's political participation.

(d) attendance allowances: the amount of money allowed to councillors for their work does not provide full compensation for loss of earnings: "For many women the financial disincentives of being a councillor may well tip the balance in favour of not standing" [Kelly 1992]. As stated at the beginning of this work, women feature highly only in statistics on poverty; responsibility for childcare and domestic labour trapping many, if not most, in low-paid, part-time work and although the law requires employers to provide time for elected councillors to carry out their civic duties, these provisions do not necessarily apply for temporary or unsecured employment. Although many councils have provided childcare allowances for councillors, the trend towards providing a fixed stipend rather than out-of-pocket expenses will further exclude women from political activity.

(e) councillor workload: being a councillor requires high investment of time, particularly in councils where there is no overall control and attendance at meetings to vote is vital. As council budgets become squeezed, decision-making becomes more complex as priorities have to be weighed against each other. As

social legislation has become more prolific, so the number of sub-committees has increased to cope with increased complexity. All these additional time burdens militate against women's participation.

(f) patriarchal attitudes: apart from underfunding, the main obstacle for LGWCs and for women's representation within the council (as councillors, senior officers and within policies) is the persistence of sexist attitudes, not only within councils themselves but within local party organisations [see e.g. Perrigo 1986]. Exposing these attitudes in individuals is not always easy when the obstacles to women's activity in the public sphere (as councillors and officers) are complex and politicians and senior officers are sensitive to their political roles and used to guarding their tongues. Some, of course, (women and men) are quite openly anti-equality as at DC2 when approval for a women's training centre was being discussed in committee and one councillor remarked "What are we doing spending all this money on twenty women." And in another supplementary case (non-LGWC Labour council) women councillors lobbying for a Town Hall creche were told "You should be at home minding your babies - you've no business being here." [See also Campbell 1987].

Other Women's Representation:

Formal group representation on local councils has tended to be confined to tokenistic numbers of highly specified groups e.g. ratepayers; teachers and church-school representatives on

Education Committees etc. These cooptees have been highly restricted by council Standing Orders (maximum of one-third of committee membership) and since the 1988 Local Government Act are now banned from decision-taking committees with the exception of teachers and church-schools on Education Committees. Cooptees were politically significant because they had voting rights. For some women, cooptee status was a half-way house into local politics - the Chair of one of the case study LGWCs for example had previously been a cooptee member on a committee of a neighbouring council. Women in voluntary organisations like Age Concern have contributed to the work of a number of Social (Work) Services Committees where their "outsider" perspective has given councillors a second opinion on the recommendations of professional officials.

Various community representatives are still permitted within council committees but their role is now restricted to that which approximates to observer-status, otherwise any committee/sub-committee on which cooptees have voting rights cannot have decision-making powers. These 1988 changes were introduced as a measure to ensure greater accountability of local councils [see Leach 1989]; their effect is not only to squeeze women out of public participation but to further polarise what in chapter two was referred to as Schumpeter's division of labour i.e. the professionalisation of politics and the infantilisation of electorates. LGWCs have used the cooptee system in the past as a means of increasing women's

representation within their councils [see Edwards 1989] and this is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Women as lobbyists:

Women's groups are rarely depicted in the literature on pressure groups as a significant lobby [see e.g. Dearlove 1973; Newton 1976; Moran 1989] and feminist writing has tended to concentrate on the impact of interaction with local councils on women's group organisation [see e.g. Newman 1980; Brown 1992]. Recent research on pressure groups in Britain by Stoker and Wilson confirms Dearlove's original findings that their influence still largely depends on the coincidence of interests, values and priorities with those of the council's ruling group [Stoker & Wilson 1991]. Where there is no strong feminist representation within local political parties therefore, it is unlikely that women's groups per se will have much impact on council policies and allocations of resources, although women's groups allied to a particular issue e.g. race relations; domestic violence can exert pressure when those issues are high on the local political agenda, usually as a result of media interest in some local incident or event [see Perrigo 1986].

Pressure on funding for women's representation:

Funds to grant-aid voluntary organisations and community groups come from a variety of council budgets including S.137 (see chapter two). Since the 1989 Local Government Act, changes to the way in which revenue is raised for S.137 purposes (from a 2p

rate precept to a fixed £5 per adult capita sum for unitary authorities, £2.50 for others) will add pressure to prioritise grant aid allocations, resulting in less money for women's groups if Stoker and Wilson's findings hold true. Furthermore, changes to the way that central government calculates local authority grant - the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) system - means that departmental budgets are being squeezed which adds pressure from departments on the S.137 budget. In MC1 for example, a budget deficit in the Social Services Department was set to reach crisis proportions with the arrival of the date for implementation of the Children Act 1989 and disparity between the amounts of new money the Government had decided would be sufficient for this purpose and actual requirements locally. Instead of grant-aiding voluntary organisations supporting e.g. elderly and disabled people from the departmental budget, the Social Services Committee were looking with predatory eyes at the S.137 budget for these purposes to help them meet the shortfall on their statutory duties. Since all LGWCs are funded from S.137 budgets, these additional pressures - particularly in councils subject to charge-capping - constitute a major threat to LGWCs' survival as well as their capacity to support local women's groups.

As noted in chapter one, with all these political, legal and financial pressures on local authorities and ruling parties, it is unsurprising if councillors tend to take a "no news is good news" attitude towards their communities. Without the specific

advocacy by LGWCs, therefore, under-represented women's voices and claims will go unheard, particularly if the consequences of attending to them incurs political risk for councillors/parties. Again, it is the absence of mechanisms for genuine group representation which accounts for a lack of genuine plurality and highlights the elitism of existing political systems.

OBSTACLES CREATED BY THE STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Functional Organisation

As shown in the previous chapter, only one of the six case studies was carried out in a unitary authority (MC1) the other five, being based within district councils, had the problem of split functional responsibilities between their authorities and the county council or regional council serving their localities. A problem for these LGWCs therefore arises from the mismatch between the generalised concerns of women in their communities and the particular functions of a district council. One women's officer expressed the problem thus:

"If you imagine the work of the council as being contained within a large circle which denotes the boundary of the council's activity, then equality committees are situated at the boundary edge, and these committees are attempting to extend the boundary of local government to encompass the needs of women. At the same time, equality committees are also on the boundary edge of another system, that which comprises the articulated needs and demands of women upon the council, and sometimes these committees get impaled upon the interface of these two systems,

with the two quite different sets of expectations" [extract from address by DC5 women's officer to 1990 women's conference].

The overlap between these two "systems" when they are imagined as concentric circles can be expressed in the following example: Leisure services are a responsibility of district councils; if LGWCs start by saying "how can leisure centres be made more responsive to women's needs?" then it is possible to construct an agenda for change which accommodates different women's needs along the lines suggested in chapter one e.g. creche facilities for women with children; affordable entrance fees/good access by public transport for low income women; women-only swim sessions for Muslim women/older women/for anti-harassment purposes etc. On the other hand if LGWCs start by saying "how can women as independent citizens participate in civil society to the full?" then part of that answer might be accessibility to leisure centres and the same agenda for change as already itemised. Again, it must be stressed that such categorisations are problematic because they imply discreteness when that is not a true reflection of the multiplicity of women's needs and preferences e.g. low-income Muslim women with children. It also highlights the poverty of the argument that standardised public services are fair.

Where the split structure and functions of local government present a problem is that while district councils have responsibility for leisure services, county/regional councils have responsibility for childcare services. If district council LGWCs provide creche facilities at leisure centres will they, in

light of *ultra vires*, risk censure by the Audit Commission for going beyond their powers? There are two parts to the answer to this question:

(a) conflicting law; and

(b) the scope for autonomous interpretations by district councillors of their powers and duties.

In respect of (a) the 1989 Children Act which came into force in England and Wales in 1992 requires county and district councils to coordinate their daycare services for children which now facilitates LGWCs' working in district councils to provide childcare services at leisure centres. However, if the professional discourses [see chapter two] within Leisure Departments blinds those staff to the need for creches at leisure centres, then the money to provide them must be found from the S.137 budget by the women's committee. The Children Act does not apply in Scotland.

In Scotland, the criteria for the use of S.137 money have since 1973 included a caveat which prohibits expenditure on services which are the statutory duty of another agency without that agency's express permission. Since the 1989 Local Government Act that caveat now applies to the whole country. Therefore, whilst in England and Wales LGWCs providing creche facilities (at leisure centres or anywhere else) can legitimately do so, they are nevertheless subject to the approval of that action by the county council if the facilities are being paid for from S.137 funds. In respect of (b) therefore, all district council LGWCs' ability to provide creche facilities still hangs on whether

their councillors have the political will to argue with their counterparts at county/regional level that it is a legitimate activity for them to undertake. Two contrasting examples will illustrate this point:

DC1 is a district council in the south of England and at the time of investigations there (prior to the introduction of the Children Act) its services included a wide range of family and childcare provision which would usually be associated with a county council social services authority i.e. pre-school day nurseries, family therapy, day care for handicapped children, after-school care and toy libraries. In the early 1980s, DC1 changed its Environmental Health Committee into a Community Health & Welfare Committee by coordinating and maximising its powers under specific legislation covering public health and leisure services and its general powers under S.137, to develop strategic family policies based at local community centres. For the majority of district councils in Britain, "environmental health" means the provision of public health inspectors and "leisure services" means parks, sports facilities and recreation grounds, some of which might include play facilities for children but not an extensive childcare programme, even since the introduction of the Children Act.

But back in the early 1980s such a strategic approach to daycare for children was rare, if not unique in district councils, despite the fact that this was just the kind of approach to policy-making which the Bains Report [HMSO 1972] envisaged for the then new local authorities:

"They have an overall interest in the economic, cultural and physical well-being of their communities and should set up consultative machinery for frequent discussions with other local authorities and statutory organisations." [Preface, para 5 The Corporate Approach].

DC1 officers and councillors did not regard any of their activities as *ultra vires* or beyond the competence of a district council. As far as could be ascertained, the council had received no warnings from the Audit Commission, neither were they psychologically inhibited by any such potential threats. Their argument was that they had identified an unmet need in their community which, on advice from their legal staff, they could properly meet in accordance with existing legislation. Not only does this example show the scope for local autonomy, but also the scope for local diversity. As explained in chapter two, it is only recently that more local authorities have begun to experiment with the committee system and integrate service provision under strategic functions. In DC1 there was therefore, a very strong (communitarian) sense of local autonomy and political will to stretch the legal boundaries of their competences and by the time that they established their women's committee in 1988, DC1 were already well-practised in strategic policy-making.

Such attitudes can be contrasted with the situation found in DC3 (a Scottish district council) where every application for grant-

aid to the women's committee which contained within it some reference to childcare e.g. an application for money towards a women's event at which creche facilities were to be provided, would have to be referred (after full approval by DC3) to the regional council for further approval on the basis that the regional council's Social Work/Education Committees were responsible for daycare for children. Despite the fact that there were no financial or other implications for the regional council, this tortuous procedure was insisted upon by DC3's Director of Administration through an over-zealous interpretation of the regulations applying in Scotland to S.137 expenditures. Consequently DC3's LGWC was handicapped in its ability to financially support many one-off women's events because the approvals system took too long. It was brought to an end only when women's groups complained in sufficient numbers to councillors and a general agreement was arranged between the two tiers of local government (which appears to be common practice elsewhere in Scotland). Previous complaints from the Chair of the women's committee to the Director of Administration had proved ineffective. Moreover, although there was an LGWC at the regional level (as in all the Scottish case studies) the combined efforts of the two LGWCs had not been powerful enough to overcome the obduracy of the Director of Administration.

What accounts for these different attitudes?

It is clear from the above two contrasting examples that perceptions of a council's competence to act differ greatly and

since it is vital for LGWCs that their local authorities should have a sense of local autonomy - a sense of their own competence to introduce the long equal opportunities agenda (see chapter one) - the causes of such variations of perception need to be understood. In his analysis of local authorities' response to centralising forces introduced by the Thatcher Governments of the 1980s, Chris Moore defines a typology of reactions which he calls "resignation, reform and resistance" [Moore 1991].

Councils which have resisted most strongly, such as Liverpool and Lambeth, were distinguished by the "hard Left" politics of their ruling group of councillors. Reformist councils, on the other hand, eschewed direct confrontation with national government and manipulated the rules and regulations of local government to maximise resistance within the law. Sheffield's "creative accounting" techniques were cited as one example of this type of response. Moore suggests that these reformist councils tended to be of the New Left political persuasion. This is not verified by the case studies of LGWCs. DC1 was described by its women's officer as "a traditional or paternalistic council" whilst DC3 was described by the Chair of the Women's Committee as "soft Left" with strong commitments to decentralisation and democratisation of local government. Two factors emerged from the research which appeared to have more explanatory force to account for these differences in perspective:

- (a) relations between the two tiers of local government;
- (b) officer/councillor relations.

NB: The best contrasting examples are selected from all the case studies to illustrate these points rather than simply continuing analysis of the situations in DC1 and DC3.

Relations between the two tiers of local government:

Many district councils (and particularly those which had had Borough Council status prior to reorganisation in 1974/75) feel themselves to be in a "poor relation" stance to councils at county or regional level. The upper tier councils were allocated the lion's share of "mandated" services (e.g. education and social work services) which are often regarded as the "high politics" of local government [see e.g. Stoker 1991]. Even where both tiers of local government in one locality are controlled by the same political party, tensions can run high between them. In DC4, for example, a regional councillor referred to the district council as "the sweetie shop" and was clearly being derogatory by that term. In the DC1 area, however, control of the county council had passed from Labour to Conservative and had become increasingly dominated by "new right" councillors over the decade of the 1980s. Relations between the district and county councils were not amicable: "[We are] very active and County Hall are aware that we do a lot of things that county councils are supposed to do, so their attitude is that 'Oh well, we must see that other areas at least have the same as [town]'. There is no rapport there whatsoever, on the contrary, we're a thorn in their flesh." [Chair, DC1 LGWC]. The more the county council said they had no money for

partnership projects with DC1 because, speaking with tongue-in-cheek, they had to raise other local districts to DC1's standards, the more DC1 councillors resolved to expand their community services. Whilst strategic policy-making had been initiated by a paternalistic but socialist council anxious to provide a good social infrastructure to support working families, its maintenance and extension was prompted by inter-authority rivalry. Two other factors were no less important in sustaining this situation namely, a high-status women's officer⁽⁶⁾ and a pro-equal opportunities chief executive.

In DC3 on the other hand, although there was a similar lack of rapport between the two councils (both Labour-controlled) the women's officer felt it was primarily due to a lack of political vision in both councils. Regional councillors, she said, were predominantly traditional and paternalistic in their attitudes "they're always talking so arrogantly about my people, you know, you feel you want to give them a crown and sceptre!" whereas District councillors were split between traditionalists and new urban Left. Consequently, "there's no consensus; you either have to have a charismatic Leader or a driving, forceful Chief Executive. If you don't have either of those, you drift and that's exactly what's happening here." [DC3 Women's Officer]

There was a similar situation in DC5 where although there was more political cohesion amongst district councillors, the women's officer found "the problem with joint work with the region is that there is a real right-wing Labour old guard up

there.... they spend all their time worrying about whether they have the authority to do anything." [DC5 Women's Officer]

Given the tensions that can arise between the two tiers of local government, the requirement to seek permission to carry out autonomous actions which impinge on another council's activities will present a real obstacle to LGWCs unless general agreements of the kind found in Scotland (and eventually in DC3 - see above) can be arranged. On the other hand, these tensions might also result in district councillors being encouraged to maximise their own autonomy and give greater support to their LGWCs as a way of asserting their independence from the county council as was the case in DC1. With increasing numbers of public services being subject to compulsory contracting out (CCT) [see chapter two] and given that the Government has outlawed councils inserting equality requirements into contracts (with the exception of religious grounds in the case of Northern Ireland) it will become increasingly more difficult for LGWCs to pursue their objective of making public services more user-friendly for women. Contracted-out leisure centre services, for example, would weigh the costs of creche facilities against income from increased consumption, not whether it was justice for women with children. Moreover these market-led approaches to public service provision may encourage functionalism and discourage service integration e.g. underuse of leisure centres due to poor public transport serving their usually isolated locations. In the case of DC4 where a quango development corporation was in

consortium with local authorities and private business to renovate the local leisure centre, creche facilities were lost in the process; neither of the LGWCs at district or regional level had sufficient funds of their own or political "clout" to save the creche. The provision of a jacuzzi was thought more likely to improve centre use than a creche.

Member/Officer Relations:

Although seats in the council chamber in DC5 were divided equally between Conservative and Labour, relations between the Labour ruling group and officers were good. During an interview with the Chair of the women's committee she remarked that she did not ask her Director of Administration whether she could or could not carry out some action, she told him to find the legislation which would allow her to do as she wished. This implied authoritarian relationship proved to be unfounded and was in fact an expression of the confidence which the Chair had in the support of officers. At DC3, on the other hand, the Chair of the women's committee, as shown above, could not prevent her Director of Administration from erecting procedural obstacles - at least, not without organising strong political pressure first. The differences in Member/officer relations between these two councils were marked. Following the 1988 local elections, the decision as to which party would form the new administration in DC5 was made by cutting a pack of playing cards:

"When our nominee, the Convenor, drew the seven of clubs, we

just sat there with our heads down and when the Tory nominee drew the two of spades, we just couldn't believe it. Actually I wouldn't like it to happen again but it was wonderful because someone in our marketing department had made an ace card - red on one side and blue on the other - and all our staff were there, nobody could work that day. They were crowded out in the corridor and down the stairs and when someone went out to them holding up the big red ace, you could hear the cheers and that was great to know that the staff backed us." [A DC5 Councillor].

In DC3 on the other hand, although the Left Labour council had consolidated their slim 1984 majority in 1988, the Chair of the women's committee felt that the majority of senior officers were still loyal to their former Conservative ruling group:

"So many of these chief officers are Tory appointees from the time when they had control of the council and we are lumbered with them until they retire. Another thing that's coming up is for chief officers to be on fixed term/5-year contracts and I think that would be good because then if you are stuck with someone and they are working against you then you get rid of them. We've got a majority of chief officers who are not in sympathy with our aims and that is a big problem when we took over in 1984 there was really a conservative approach to everything here ... and it was such a battle to get them to do things and then in 1988 when we won again, we were determined to make changes. We've managed to get rid of one or two of the old-style chief officers and that's quite difficult to persuade

somebody that they've got to go." [Chair of DC3's LGWC]

Such unhelpful conflictual attitudes between officers and Members are the antithesis of what was hoped-for in 1972 for the management of the then new local authorities:

"The Maud Committee exploded the myth of policy being a matter for the elected members and administration for officers and it is disturbing to find, five years later, that many members and officers still see this as a sufficient description of their respective roles and one behind which they can shelter as occasion requires. It is perhaps even more disturbing to see how a rigid interpretation of the role of one or the other defeats any attempt to create a sense of **unity of purpose** within an authority." [Bains Report para 3.2: emphasis added]

This attitude towards the division of policy labour between Members and officers still exists:

"Here it's the politicians who make the policies and the officers implement and I feel [elsewhere] it's the officers who make the policy and the councillors say, 'OK, go ahead with it'. Any officer who is not toeing the line [here] would find themselves out of the door." [Chair DC4 LGWC]

That this is conspicuously untrue in DC4 is evidenced by the following:

"We [DC4 LGWC] have a tiny budget, but in theory there is this hidden budget which departments have for equal opportunities... The reason it's hidden is that the Auditor would have come down on equal opportunities according to the Director of Finance and

the Members accepted that. So what happens when I go along and ask for something from the hidden budget, they [departmental heads] usually say no, and we negotiate, and I usually manage to get half of it from them and half from us. Now you can imagine that if it's something we can afford to pay half of, it's hardly worth having.... but in some departments they are just going to laugh in my face; there is no way they are going to find any money for us." [Women's Officer:DC4]

The notion that the District Auditor would "come down on equal opportunities" has no basis in fact, providing the money is properly accounted for, but that "the Members accepted that" witnesses the professional power which an officer such as the Director of Finance can wield over councillors. As local government finance has become increasingly more complex over the past decade, many Members are dependent upon the advice of the their Directors of Finance and do not have sufficient knowledge to challenge it.

Also in DC4 the Director of Administration demanded that the women's officer cease all activity in respect of Joan Lestor's 1990 national campaign for Britain to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In her instruction to the women's officer, the Director of Administration said that this activity would, in her opinion, be contrary to S.2 of the Local Government Act 1986 which forbids local authorities to publish any material of a partisan nature. At least 51 other local authorities (by no means all Labour controlled) took part in

this campaign, which Joan Lestor emphasised was non-partisan, and none of them were taken to task by the Audit Commission for their actions or advised against it by their legal officers.⁽⁷⁾ Not only do these two examples contradict the councillor's perceptions of the division of policy labour in DC4 but they also demonstrate the power that professional officers can wield over councillors who, with their "amateur" political status do not have resources to fund independent research staff as has an MP at Westminster. There are two further points relevant to this:

firstly, although LGWCs in unitary authorities do not have the problem of split functions, the power which chief officers in their politically more significant councils can wield is formidable. Because of the primacy of childcare to women's equality, all LGWCs engage in projects which bring them into negotiating positions with Education and Social Work/Services departments. In all the case studies and supplementary research authorities, problems arose in dealing with Education departments. Unlike Social (Work) Services departments which, since 1970 have had a generic approach to service provision, Education is highly specialised in its functions and women's officers uniformly reported difficulties overcoming hubris in order to get Education officers to think more laterally about integrated childcare services. There are also technical financial procedures which mean that non-mandated departments such as LGWCs have had their budgets organised within the Education department budget (in MC1 women's employment training

projects were accounted for in this way) which in some areas gives Chief Education Officers at the least an added psychological control over LGWCs. In short, the problems for LGWCs within unitary authorities are not so very different from those in district councils; because of the power that chief officers have to ring-fence their own departments, they might just as well be in a different local authority. At times they are worse off since they cannot benefit from inter-authority rivalry.

The second point concerns the amateur status of local councillors. Since the 1989 Local Government & Housing Act, officers earning either more than £19,500 p.a. or those considered to be working in "politically sensitive" jobs in local government are excluded from standing as a councillor in another local authority. These so-called "twin track" councillors have in the past acted as a counterweight to professional power because as officers themselves they acquired "insider" knowledge (and contacts) which, in the case of DC4 above, would have enabled them to challenge assertions from the Director of Finance that the District Auditor would "come down on equal opportunities". They were also useful for what can be called "cross pollination" of good ideas for more effective public service provision between one council and another. The attempt to ban "twin trackers" has not been wholly successful; in the research for this study three Chairs of LGWCs were local government employees in neighbouring authorities - as women they

had not reached the giddy heights of salaries in excess of £19,500 p.a.

It will be clear from the above that the notion of political impartiality needs to be examined, and it is appropriate to do this within the context of the nature of bureaucracy as an obstacle for LGWCs.

OBSTACLES CREATED BY THE NATURE OF BUREAUCRACY:

Impartiality is another of those abstract concepts, like consent (see chapter two) which buttress liberal democratic structures and like consent has been incorporated into contemporary theory and institutions without being subjected to critical evaluation. Thus, to paraphrase Pateman, the conduct of local authority business is presented as if it were actually as impartiality demands, as if it were actually constituted through the impartial advice to decision-makers. Impartiality is rooted in Enlightenment dualisms which accord men the capacity of rational thought which characterises their activities in the public sphere. It is essential to bureaucracy which Weber described as "the counter-image of patriarchalism transposed into rationality" [cited in Parker & Ramsey 1992]. For the 1983-87 Thatcher Government political impartiality was central to its reform of local government and one of the main concerns of the Widdicombe Committee [see Leach 1989]. But as Iris Young points out: "The stances of detachment and dispassion that supposedly produce impartiality are attained only by abstracting from the particularities of situation, feeling, affiliation and point of

view. These particularities still operate, however, in the actual context of action..... [Consequently] It masks the ways in which the particular perspectives of dominant groups claim universality, and helps justify hierarchical decisionmaking structures." [Young 1990]

Some examples have already been given of different professional interpretations of what local authorities can/cannot legally do e.g. the Joan Lester campaign where the legal advice given at DC4 was contradicted by 51 other local authorities; and the different arrangements for settling authorisation of expenditure of S.137 money between Scottish regional and district councils. It can be argued that these differences in professional opinion arise by chance rather than partiality - support for Joan Lester's campaign is either permissible or not and in the absence of a definitive test case, legal advice might divide equally on the matter. The question would still remain as to what accounts for these differences of opinion if not "particularities of situation, feeling, affiliation and point of view"? Such particularities may be partisan or merely self-serving or both. One DC3 women's officer was very clear: "I don't think it is the legislation that's the problem - its the way it's interpreted. What happens is, we have a particular problem in our legal department and they are terrified to do anything which they think will be interpreted as not quite in line with the letter of the law, but they do interpret the law - interpret it for their own ends and they are particularly

conservative with a small 'c'... at the region you will find they do not have that problem with their legal department ... Their legal department are trying to find ways to help them do things whereas our legal department are trying to find ways to stop us doing things." [DC3 Women's Officer]

Given the assessment by another DC3 women's officer (see above) that the council lacked firm leadership either from the Chief Executive or from politicians, then the timidity and uncertainty in the legal department is more understandable.

On the other hand, and as discussed in chapter two, public choice theorists like Niskanen (who take an economist's view of bureaucracy) are convinced of a tendency among bureaucrats to generate work for themselves; deliberately creating uncertainty among councillors (through variable interpretations of the law) particularly in light of their personal liability for mistakes, makes them increasingly dependent upon the advice of officers. It is curious therefore, that the Thatcher Government should legislate to reinforce this dependency; the 1988 Local Government Finance Act placed responsibility on designated chief officers for legal and financial probity and placed (usually) the Chief Executive as Monitoring Officer in a position akin to "branch manager" of the Audit Commission. This has given rise (in a particular situation) to what one women's officer described as: "the triumvirate of the Director of Administration taking a very conservative view, the Chief Executive as Monitoring Officer producing a 'whistle-blowing' report and the

Director of Finance then refusing to sign the cheque, despite any decision taken by the elected Members." Therefore it is no longer the case that officers give their opinion and Members take the political decision to risk surcharge by ignoring it, if the Director of Finance is duty-bound to refuse to sign cheques under such circumstances. This not only contradicts the notion of a politically impartial service to councils, but increases the potential power of officers to manipulate elected Members, when there is no unity of purpose between them.

Territorialism results from the functionalist structure of local government and is bound up with the development of professional discourses which, as noted in chapter two, themselves become entangled with the practice of the power to govern [see Foucault 1977]. As will be illustrated in the next chapter, LGWCs encounter these discourses when they promote new services designed by and for women which are then rejected by mainstream service providers as being incompatible with their professional view of what services should be provided and how. The struggle to provide creche facilities at leisure centres is one example already referred to above. Public service providers are recruited and trained in accordance with a set of professional ideas which are reinforced in the local government setting by the letter of the law [see Stewart 1986]; these two factors build-in rigidities which undermine responsiveness. Other professional discourses e.g. management impact on the service providers add to the rigidity. Management techniques such as

performance indicators or payment-by-results, reinforce the ways in which the individual becomes dependent for personal status on her job. A tendency develops therefore, to identify any contradiction to the professional discourse as bad, leading to defensive behaviours. LGWCs encounter such defensiveness from many service providers [see next chapter] but a particular obstacle arises when the work of the LGWC overlaps with that of the Personnel Department. Working for women's equality brings LGWCs into close working relations with Personnel Officers the majority of whom (in the case studies) were at best mistrustful of LGWCs:

"We actually had appointed someone to Personnel who had responsibility for equal opportunities but she said she didn't like doing equal opportunities work because it was too demanding and the other stuff, the 'manpower stuff' (and I quote her) was much more fun.... It's really endemic in Personnel this notion that they are there as guardians of the purse strings and that professionalism is all and the human face of work doesn't count at all. I find it really difficult working with personnel departments" [Women's Officer DC3].

At DC4 there was a joint Personnel/LGWC forum:

"I don't know how long this [forum] has been going on.. but its a complete waste of time... the agenda has been the same since I got here... I can't imagine being able to inject any life into it - it hasn't really got a function. Well, yes it has got a

function because it keeps things off the agenda of management, and it keeps things out of the [political] arena."

In both these cases, the "personnel discourse" was being defended by women officers actively working against the interests of other women. Whilst the next chapter will illustrate examples of women networking across departmental boundaries to promote equality, there are also other examples within Education departments particularly, where hierarchical, functionalist organisation as well as professional discourse places women officers in a similar "divided loyalties" situation to that already discussed in respect of women councillors. In terms of the multi-constitutive being, the professional woman may be at one and the same time part of a dominant group and part of an oppressed group [see chapter one]. The power of agency is therefore significant within professional discourses to break down these territorial boundaries and make the connections between women's failure to reach parity at the highest levels within their professions (the glass ceiling) and the extent to which their professions are contributing to the maintenance of relations of domination and oppression. Since this point is fundamental to feminist political practice and crucial to the argument in favour of LGWCs' "insider" position [see the criticisms of e.g. Harriss 1989] it warrants further discussion.

The Feminist Critique Of Bureaucracy:

In her feminist analysis of bureaucracy, which employs Foucaultian analysis of disciplinary discourse, Kathy Ferguson argues that the effect of such organisation objectifies and depersonalises people who work in them, demanding a conformity which is alien to human individuality. The individual desires to resist this process and seeks to exercise authority or power by way of compensation. The lower the individual's position in the hierarchy, the less scope for resistance other than rigid adherence to rules which can be turned upon the public in the form of "I don't make the rules, lady, I only work here". More senior officials can resist by asserting professional knowledge either in ways which control clients e.g. social workers with their "dysfunctional" families, or by manipulating the policy agenda, ostensibly in the conscientious performance of duties, but privately to exercise control in some area which is personally disapproved of such as equality for women [see Ferguson 1984]. The experiences of women at MC1 illustrate the point:

"We found that very much on the [childcare] project, when we were putting it before the [chief officers' group]. First of all it was all about power games, some of the men were actively against childcare and how they are able to stall! Through using bureaucratic procedures, by not making decisions, by delaying; but other projects like tourism aren't questioned, they get through immediately, but this project is questioned left right and centre - what are the objectives; what can we get out of it?"

It is much more difficult for us [women] to set up anything, the process we have to go through is so laborious." [MC1 Women's Employment Officer]

Ferguson draws a parallel between women's oppression and the controlling effects of bureaucracy which she terms "feminization": "Feminization involves the extension of the depoliticizing, privatizing aspects of women's traditional role to the sectors of the population who are the victims of bureaucratic organisations, both the administrators and the clientele. Both groups of individuals are placed in institutional situations in which they must function as subordinates, and they must learn the skills necessary to cope with that subordinate status, the skills that women have always learned as part of their "femininity"." [Ferguson 1984].

This analysis of bureaucrat as victim stands in opposition to the arguments made above of the power of officers to manipulate both clients and councillors. Nevertheless, applied to DC3's legal department "terrified to do anything which they think will be interpreted as not quite in line with the letter of the law"; or to the DC4 case where opinion erred on the side of caution regarding support for Joan Lestor's campaign; then these actions can be reinterpreted not as those of the powerful but of the weak.

As will be shown in chapter five, LGWCs also seek to challenge these dehumanizing processes of bureaucratic culture by enabling

staff to see the connection between their own empowerment through the release of human agency (being given greater discretion in the performance of their work) and empowering clients to represent themselves and their demands. Organisational decentralisation facilitates this work through the necessarily greater autonomy that "patch-based" workers acquire. However, decentralisation is expensive and with increasing central control over local authority spending is less viable, although recent research in Tower Hamlets suggests that "decentralisation has encouraged the development of an effective form of enabling local government" [Lowndes & Stoker 1992] which both advocates of public choice and communitarian local government would applaud.

Summary:

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the obstacles which LGWCs encounter in promoting women's equality through enabling them to engage with local policy-making processes, also account for why local government fails to meet the needs of women, and therefore why LGWCs are necessary. The analysis which has been presented here, illustrates the interconnections between women's subordination, the electorate's subordination and the subordination of local government as maintained by the structures and procedures of government; or, as stated in chapter two, how the sexual division of labour is mirrored in the political division of labour. The Hadley & Young quote at the beginning of this analysis, reinforces the observations of

the Widdicombe Committee (see chapter two) that local government serves the policy preferences of political elites rather than local communities: "The customer, in other words, is government, not the citizen-user" [Hadley & Young 1990]. If the heterogenous community of women is not well represented within these political elites, including pressure groups, then there are no mechanisms for them to influence the local political agenda. The (male-dominated) priorities of both political parties and professions results in divided loyalties for women actors within them, such that increased representation is no guarantee of improved outcomes for women as a whole. Moreover, with the press selectively mediating between councils and people, women gain no insight as to how the council might work for them.

The functional organisation of public service provision reinforces the power/knowledge discourses of professionals, fragmenting the interface between government and people. Nevertheless, as the example of DC1 showed, autonomy-maximising local authorities can radically change their committee/departmental organisation to enable them to take a more strategic view of service provision which more nearly matches the integrated needs of families in their communities. However, these good outcomes at DC1 were not the result of "bottom-up" policy-making by local people but of political rivalry between the two tiers of local government in that locality.

The strength of political leadership at DC1 was not encouraged by the mechanisms of control which central government exercises over local authorities and councillors. Increased regulation throughout the 1980s by the Thatcher Governments has served only to undermine leadership and increase the dependency of councillors on professionals, leaving them vulnerable to manipulation. On the other hand, this same lack of leadership and increased regulation can also undermine the confidence of professionals creating a tendency to increase bureaucracy which serves neither government nor citizens well.

Finally, the obstacle of patriarchal attitudes which are less overtly expressed by political actors, nevertheless underpin many of the bureaucratic behaviours which women in local government encounter. Sexism is institutionalised, not only in the professional discourses of policy designers, with their assumptions about women's traditional social roles, but in the competitive nature both of party politics and hierarchical organisation.

These interconnected obstacles form a complex web of oppositions for LGWCs; how they tackle them in order to pursue their objectives is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE : LGWCs' STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

In describing LGWCs' strategies for change, this chapter not only sets out to demonstrate how LGWCs work to overcome the obstacles created by the lack of women's representation in local government, by its structure and the nature of bureaucracy, but also how LGWCs pursue their own objectives of promoting women's equality as described in chapter one. There is of course considerable overlap between these, but organisational transformation is only part of LGWCs' objectives and the aim here is to give equal attention to both aspects of their work - to balance as it were their internal (bureaucratic change) and external (promotion of women's equality) agenda, which also illustrates how they straddle the boundary between women in the community and local government. The analysis which follows therefore falls into four parts namely:

1. strategies which aim to create a constituency of women in the community from which LGWCs can develop their policies;
2. strategies which aim to change attitudes inside the council;
3. strategies for achieving public policy outputs;
4. strategies for networking in the wider environment.

Theoretically, there is a chronology involved in this format since creating a constituency and developing council equal opportunities policy (1 and 2 above) are pre-requisites to other work, but in practice, and particularly because of their lack of

resources, LGWCs have to work at all four strategies at the same time.

1. Constituency-Building/Policy Development:

Unencumbered either by a statutory mandate, or a professional discourse, and working in "bottom-up" fashion, LGWCs' policies and practices have the capacity to be a wholly local creation and hence widely diverse. The fact that their activities are in many ways quite similar is explicable as follows:

(a) despite their many differences, women's needs and obstacles to equality have much in common;

(b) shortages of resources, common bureaucratic obstacles and pressure to produce results have brought LGWCs together in their own network (NALGWC) where they learn from each other about 'what works';

(c) genuine "bottom-up" policy-making is a slow, educative process due to the long-standing "feminisation" (in Ferguson's terms) of the electorate, and thus local diversity would take time to emerge.

The concept of uniform public services is so entrenched in the public mind, that "conceiving of policies of [their] own" is not as simple as Isaiah Berlin's libertarian prescription might suggest [see Berlin 1969]. In order to be able to practise popular democracy, new civic skills have to be learned and new knowledges acquired; it is a great deal more complex than merely organising public meetings and asking women what they want. As

already noted, there is for the majority of people, no alternative to the role of passive consumer in their dealings with their local councils. Councillors often say that they listen to their electors in monthly surgeries or on the doorstep in election campaigns and they therefore know what people want. But by the time they get to the doorstep in election campaigns, the party policies are already written, mainly by those who, if elected, would carry them out; and in councillors' surgeries, even the word defines the "please make it better" relationship between constituent and councillor. The general public does not have enough insider knowledge of policy-formulation to be able to begin to conceptualise radical alternatives.

As the research by Parry, Moyser and Day shows, politically active people (usually organised in pressure groups) can influence the policy agenda, particularly at the local level, but this is quantitatively and qualitatively different from drawing up a separate political agenda which encompasses the necessary range of policies for the government of a community. Where such an agenda has been formulated by environmentalists, progress could be made only by organisation into the Green Party. Where local parties have drawn up a radical agenda and been elected, they are still trapped by the structural/legal/financial constraints imposed by central government e.g. the case of Liverpool City Council under Militant control. Creating new policies which meet ALL women's needs, therefore, requires not only the organisation of a group constituency, but also an

educative process which enables women to (a) discover their own needs; and (b) to find out about the workings of local government in order for them to be able to understand how to position themselves effectively in the available policy space. LGWCs have begun to do this in two ways - the formal and the informal routes.

1.1 The Formal Route (Cooptees/Community Representatives):

The basic notion of increasing women's representation at the formal proceedings of the council is fundamental to LGWCs' project. Until formal cooptees (with voting rights) were banned (see previous chapter) LGWCs used this procedure to bring additional members onto their committees, employing a variety of election methods [see Edwards 1989]. Enabling women who are not involved in formal political activity to have access to the committee has a demystifying effect and one which several former cooptees have said had an empowering effect on them as women. It is also a two-way process, enabling women in political elites to review their priorities - however painful the problem of divided loyalties. The term "women in political elites" does not just refer to Members; cooptees from established voluntary organisations, for example, have learned from the process too. Organisations such as Age Concern, WRVS, RNIB etc., sending representatives to the women's committee, sometimes have to face severe criticism when their views are challenged by groups of women they have not adequately represented within their own organisations. This is particularly true for women of colour

who find themselves having to challenge not only the institutionalised racism within the council but within other women's groups. The constraints on formal representation occasioned by legal and organisational obstacles e.g. cooptees with voting rights restricted to one-third of the committee before they were banned altogether from decision-making committees [see chapter four] were exacerbated by problems of giving cooptees adequate support. Community representatives with no previous experience of party politics required a great deal of help in understanding the language and procedures of local government. This support work fell primarily upon already under-resourced women's officers who had to provide it in a way which enabled women to absorb the professionalised thinking in committees without "losing" them to the system. The greatest value of cooptees' or community representatives' physical presence at committee meetings can be summed up in one woman's comment: "At times we get in the way of party jostling and that way we keep the committee in line." This is still true now that cooptees have been denied voting rights. As "advisers" (as most are now called) they still have the power to inhibit bureaucratic thinking providing the Members of the committee, and particularly the Chair, value their contributions, although the loss of voting rights leaves too much to goodwill when contentious issues divide loyalties.

1.2 The Informal Route (Women's Forums):

"Informal" means representative groups of women established to

provide support to women's committees, but not formally represented on them. This is not to say that there is no representation of these groups at women's committee; in some cases such groups may act very like a sub-committee to the women's committee, submitting reports and making recommendations and so forth. The distinguishing factor is the fact that they have an autonomous existence outside of the committee where they may be active in lobbying other public agencies e.g. the health authority; they do not include independent women's groups like the W.I., National Housewives Register, or XYZ Chinese Women's Group etc. (see below under "Consultation"). Some types of such informal groups are:

** women's forums - groups of women living and/or working in the locality, meeting on a regular basis and working to their own agenda. They may or may not have been set up by the LGWC but their aim is primarily to increase women's representation via the LGWC within local government and other public agencies in the area.

** working groups of women set up by the LGWC and focussing on their own experience as e.g. black women, disabled women, lesbians, older women etc.

** working groups of women set up by the LGWC and focussing on a particular issue e.g. childcare, health, benefits, sport and leisure activities, transport etc.

All these groups work in a variety of ways, but in the course of research for this study, the development of one such group was

traced, and the following record will serve as a pen-picture of the type of activities such groups engage in:

DC5's Childcare Working Group

At a public meeting of the newly-formed DC5 Women's Committee, the issue of the lack of childcare in the town was raised and agreed to be a priority for the majority of the 100+ women attending the meeting. A number of women in the audience volunteered to form a childcare policy working group with the support of the Women's Officer. Many of the researches into women's political behaviour [see e.g. Lovenduski & Hills 1981] account for their tendency to join short-term, issue-specific campaigns rather than "talking shop" established groups (e.g. political parties) because they do not have enough control over their own time to give to regular commitments. It comes as no surprise then, to find that women attending DC5's inaugural meeting, were keen to get to work on some issue straightaway, rather than simply leave the meeting with a "date for next meeting" in their diaries. The informality of the inaugural meeting, the commonality of women's experiences (the Chair of the women's committee had the same childcare problems as other mothers in order to attend the meeting) and the pressure of need, broke down the usual hierarchical barriers evident at such meetings. There was also a coincidence of interests in terms of the LGWC needing to be able to show some early results to justify their existence, and women in the community seizing the opportunity to get their hands on some extra resources. As is

evident from chapter four, LGWCs are not free to proceed exactly as they wish; they must balance the advantages of access to power and resources with the disadvantages of working within a bureaucracy - in this case, meeting performance review deadlines. This is not to agree with critics of LGWCs that they must therefore be forced to sacrifice their values, or that they cannot change the bureaucracy [see e.g. Harriss 1987].

To return to DC5's childcare working group; they worked very fast - the inaugural meeting was held in May 1985 and their proposals for their first project (a shopper's creche to cover the Christmas period) were put to committee in October of the same year. Following this initial success, the group became established, although individual members have changed. It's records show that in May of 1988, some three years after they formed, a review of achievements showed that many of the needs identified had been met. For example:

(a) they wanted a one-stop information service about facilities for children in the town e.g. which shops have baby-changing rooms; where and when are the playgroups; children-friendly restaurants and all the nursery classes and other local authority services (both regional and district). They produced and have kept updated, an information booklet which is provided free to women with children in the town.

(b) What started as a creche facility for shoppers at Christmas time developed into a permanent shoppers' creche.

(c) The need to provide information to women in rural areas and

playgroup facilities in these areas too, became a mobile playbus.

(d) The need for creche facilities at women's regular and one-off events resulted in an independent mobile creche service. They have not achieved all their initial goals e.g. extended nursery school provision, but with the setting up of a joint regional/district council workplace nursery project, their influence over regional council services could increase in future. That depends on the extent to which local politicians feel "obliged to show that they have taken these perspectives into consideration" [see Iris Young's prescription for group representation in chapter two].

Evaluation:

What began as a working group focussing on the lack of individual services, resulted (through DC5's LGWC) in the council adopting a strategic play policy for children incorporating these new services and knitting them into their existing leisure services, which have themselves been adapted to meet the needs of women e.g. women-only swim sessions and creche facilities at leisure and sports centres. This "history" of DC5's childcare working group provides a somewhat superficial snapshot of the role of "non-elected" women in the policy-formulation/service development process by one women's committee. It gives no real insight into the high-levels of hard work and commitment of personal time by the women concerned - mostly small numbers of ordinary members of the public,

supported by women's officers, guiding them through bureaucratic systems in order to get what they want. It is an intensively educative process, not only for women in achieving what they want, but for the council as well. As DC5's Play Development Officer noted:

"I think it would have been completely impossible for the shoppers creche or the playbus to have been initiated in Leisure & Recreation [department]. It had to come from the women's committee in a sense because it was new, it was prepared to take risks and be innovatory. They [the services] wouldn't have got a hearing anywhere else in the council and although they have both now moved to Leisure & Rec, about two years' ago now, by that point they were safe [popular] but at the time they would have been seen as too maverick and unconventional - they wouldn't have got through the system."

Overcoming Professional Discourses:

The reason why such services would have been considered "maverick and unconventional" was, as the Play Development Officer confirmed, because at the time of these innovations, the Leisure & Recreation service was dominated by managers (predominantly men) trained in large-scale leisure centre management which is functionally orientated. Such professional training (discourse) places emphasis on things like "unit cost efficiency" rather than "what do the kids do after school if parents are at work?". In the managers' view the latter question is a problem for Social Services or Education

departments (in a different council) not Leisure Services. It requires a paradigmatic shift in thinking, away from the safety of one's professional training and experience in order to contemplate new types of services - hence labels like "maverick and unconventional". As John Stewart has observed, in order for local government to become more responsive to community needs, not only do individuals, both officers and councillors, have to change their ideas about what activities are appropriate for the council to do, but they need more autonomy from central government policy-making:

"Structure, procedures and training give an apparent necessity to present practice. It is difficult to think outside that practice, when it is reinforced by the very working of the authority." [Stewart:1986]

With increased central control over policy implementation via the standard spending assessment (SSA) system, there is now less scope for "thinking outside that practice".

Bridges of power between autonomous groups of women:

Alongside the childcare working group, DC5 set up a number of other working groups namely, women and health; women and benefits; and also one on women and leisure. The work of these groups overlapped in various ways, for example, the childcare group worked on improving overnight stay facilities for parents with children in hospital which dovetailed into the work which the women and health group were doing on promoting cervical cancer screening and childcare for mothers attending hospital

appointments. The playbus serving rural areas enabled the women's health group to go out and talk to women about health care while their children were playing in the converted bus, and the women and benefits group used this facility in a similar fashion - both groups used the bus to carry advice leaflets routinely. In these various ways, the different groups of women could integrate their various perspectives e.g. middle class women's attitudes on health were modified through understanding the difficulties experienced by women in poverty contacted through the benefits working group. The links between health, poverty, childcare and employment, childcare and leisure time and so on, when they are exposed in these practical ways, reveal the need for strategic approaches to policy-making and highlight the inadequacies of functionally-organised public services.

Women's Forums as policy-formulation groups:

DC5's working groups are by no means unique. LGWCs employ a variety of such informal groupings to involve women in policy-formulation activities. As noted above, they may be short-term issue specific; long-term issue specific (like DC5); individual project groups; long-term forums which discuss a range of issues. All of these groups can be termed "policy discussion groups", and there are three main issues about them which need to be discussed:

(a) the women who have the time and inclination to become involved with policy groups tend to be "players" i.e. middle-class, well-educated and politically active, although as Parry

and Moyser's work shows, generalisations of this sort can be misleading e.g. high rates of political activity among single mothers [see previous chapter]. Even within groups representative of e.g. disabled women; women of colour etc., members' personal experiences may not be particularly representative of their cohort. A broader based group therefore, needs to be consulted in addition to these policy groups [see below].

(b) the policy groups (like cooptees) acquire "insider" information about the workings of the council and the inherent obstacles which have to be overcome. Their judgements about realistic objectives may therefore be better informed than "outsider" groups or they may over time, become distorted. But one former member of DC5's childcare working group described her view of the benefits of the "insider" position:

"A lot of us had experience of working in the voluntary sector and the whole point of working within the local authority is that you have access to resources that you just don't have anywhere else for this kind of work, and access to other officers and other parts of the council and so on and you have the opportunity to influence things in a much wider way and a more fundamental way than outside in the voluntary sector."

(c) the involvement of non-elected people from the community in policy-formulation can achieve much in terms of what LGWCs can do themselves by way of autonomous projects (see below); but the

main objective of LGWCs is to change the way the whole council works. Therefore, there must be strategies to change the receptivity of other officers and Members to the policy demands of outsiders:

"Its not for my unit to represent these groups; its my job to set them up, but it shouldn't be for me to act on their behalf. Its for the council to come face to face with the forums.... We have a problem in local authorities as to what the concept of consultation really means. DC2 has really taken on the disability forum and if we can expand that to women and race then that would be great. The Region doesn't have the same concept - for them consultation is about passing out information about what they're doing. They'll talk and have meetings, but that doesn't mean they're going to take on board what people say." [DC2 Women's Officer]

The process of changing attitudes within the council (see section 2 below) is enhanced when the forums they come in contact with are well-informed about the possibilities and obstacles for change. In Foucaultian terms, the forums acquire similar levels of power/knowledge to those officials and councillors inside the councils, but in addition they bring their subjugated knowledges or reverse discourses [see chapter two] to the proceedings which, together with their formal power as consumers/electors and their acquired skills of negotiation amongst themselves (feminist political practice) empowers them to negotiate for change on an equal basis. This is what is meant

in practice by the phrase "enabling women to position themselves effectively in the policy space". It is substantively different from "Skeffington-style" (top-down) consultations with the public, but even this approach is capable of being enhanced as the following example shows.

1.2.1 Consultation Exercises:

DC3 (the whole council) carried out a major survey (by questionnaire) of public attitudes towards the council and its services in 1989. The women's committee obtained approval to conduct its own **qualitative** survey based on discussions with women from 19 local groups representing three major categories i.e. geographical or community groups (such as a women's group on a housing estate); geographical/interest specific groups (e.g. a school-based Asian women's group); and common interest groups with no specific geographical connection (e.g. city-wide lesbian women's group). These 19 groups covered a very wide range of women in terms of class, political affiliation, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, age and religion. The consultation exercise was carried out by independent researchers rather than officers to avoid influencing responses, and they met with each group for about two hours generating small group and whole group discussions and completing questionnaires.

Criticisms of such one-off consultation exercises are focussed mainly on the fact that they are "arms-length" and short-term, rather than the more intimate and regular meetings of other

forums, and as such comments from those consulted may be "off the top of the head" rather than thoughtful appraisals.

Although DC3's qualitative approach gave women more time to think than other survey methods, the Consultants' report confirmed the problem:

"The comments were negative because the majority of the women consulted did not have sufficient information about the functions, policies or responsibilities of the District Council to enable them to make fully informed judgements, in all cases, about the quality of services provided. More regular consultation, plus more information about the council's policy and practice in a number of areas should gradually enable women to offer more constructive and positive criticism." [DC3 Women's Consultation Exercise Report 1990]

The majority of LGWCs have more than one avenue of consultation with women in their communities, although as resources become ever more constrained, they are hard pressed to maintain them and, at the same time, realise the expectations they thereby raise. This was a common concern amongst several women's officers, although others were more confident of where their priorities lay:

"I would go out to [suburb] or wherever and stand around for hours trying to persuade women to come to meetings and they don't want to come and meet people from the council, and I'd work really hard and get maybe two or three women and I thought there has to be an easier way.....Its very hard to do effective

and comprehensive consultation - its impressionistic...[and] there is a limit to the amount of consultation you need to do because women in [town] are no different from women [elsewhere] and when you do consultation the same issues come up everytime - its lack of childcare, lack of training, lack of services directed at them and there comes a point when you can say 'Yes, these are the issues' and you don't have to stop every woman in the street and ask." [DC5 women's officer].

1.3 Constituency Building:

Nevertheless, constituency development suffers when there are too few resources to keep large numbers of women adequately informed of the work of the women's committee. Effective publicity is expensive and, since the 1986 and 1988 Local Government Acts, hedged about with legal caveats. The local press are generally hostile to women's committees and there is a Catch-22 in terms of LGWCs' visibility. Perceived as working at the margins of council activities, the work of the women's committee may be disregarded (e.g. by the press unless there is some issue they can sensationalise); but when LGWC initiatives become incorporated into the mainstream of council activities the women's committee's role may be lost:

"I bet if you go out there, in the street, and stop any woman and ask her what she thinks of the women's committee, she will say 'It's a waste of money'. But if you were to ask her what she thinks of the shopper's creche, she will say 'best thing the council's ever done'". [DC5 women's officer]

Other strategies for constituency-building:

Reaching larger groups of women can be done by high-profile, one-off or regular events. Most LGWCs invest some of their resources in annual activities to celebrate International Women's Day. In 1990, DC2's arrangements included a number of workshops where women could meet with council officials to talk about the way services were provided and might be improved. The aim was to get women officials with particular expertise, not to defend their departments (territorialism), but to work as women with women to think creatively about how the council's services could better serve the public. Small results such as changing the way forms are designed can develop into more substantive changes, but only if the departmental women have (or can generate) the support of their chief officers, which emphasises the inter-dependence of all LGWC strategies (see below).

DC4 holds a women's health fair every two years. It is a three-day event, the 1990 one attended by some 2,000 people. Women's groups concerned with health and welfare issues (the interpretation is very elastic) set up stalls together with a number of council departments. Again, workshops focussing on a variety of topics bring together women and council officials to exchange views and at best to learn from each other. The potential for genuine reciprocity is enhanced when officials (and Members) have a good understanding of equalities issues, and that primarily depends upon the success of other LGWC strategies.

2. Changing Attitudes Inside The Council

LGWCs employ a number of strategies for changing officers' and councillors' attitudes to women's equality. Anti-feminist attitudes may stem from bigotry (here defined as self-interest in terms of the desire to retain power and control) or they may stem from simple ignorance - a failure to understand the many ways in which women are discriminated against and the policies and resources necessary to change that [see also Stone 1988]. Breaking down these forms of resistance requires a range of tactics within three main strategies, ideally working together. The first is to establish a formal equal opportunities policy for the whole council which legitimises the women's committee's work; the second is to provide training to individual people to remove the ignorance and to empower them; and the third is to build alliances between like-minded people within and between council departments to change the culture of the organisation.

2.1 Equal Opportunities Policies

The majority of LGWCs were formally established by their councils with either very vague or very long "catch-all" terms of reference [see e.g. Stone 1988]. Their initial task therefore was to concretise their *raison d'être* with a detailed policy statement which would legitimise their day-to-day work. By definition, all LGWCs are working to the long equal opportunities agenda [Cockburn 1989] with the objective of transforming the policies and practices of their local authorities [see chapter one]. Initially, many, if not most, of

the departmental chief officers and councillors sitting on programme committees in their authorities, will have had little or no comprehension of equal opportunities beyond what Celia Davies has called "a procedural clean-up operation" ⁽¹⁾ and this in relation to employment practices rather than service provision. Chief Personnel Officers have been suspicious at the establishment of women's committees since there is considerable overlap of concerns between them [see chapter four]. The policy statement that LGWCs draw up, therefore, is a highly political instrument for these reasons:

(a) a policy statement, approved by the full Council, has force throughout the council. Even when they are full standing committees, LGWCs have no authority over other standing committees - they can only advise and make recommendations. The power of their recommendations rests with the fact that they are the means by which the full council's policy on equal opportunities is operationalised. Theoretically, a committee cannot refuse to carry out LGWC recommendations if, by doing so, the committee is refusing to carry out council policy. But the force of statutory duty requires committees/departments to give priority to other commitments which may result in them delaying implementing the LGWC recommendation, and of course, some councillors and/or chief officers may use this as a convenient excuse to disguise sexist attitudes or professional jealousy or both - privately expressed in such terms as "I'm not having a bunch of women telling me how to run my department". But at the end of the day, they know they can be called to account for non-

implementation, and wanting to avoid unnecessary confrontation, formerly intransigent councillors and chief officers may find it easier to comply - resistance may collapse in the face of a fait accompli.

(b) Chief officers may be encouraged to comply if it enables them to bid for extra resources in order to do so. If the policy requires departments to provide staff training, for example, additional money for the departmental training budget may enable chief officers to make some marginal gains within their overall budgets for other kinds of training and/or bid for an increase in the following year. The motivation of self-interest reduces antagonism towards the idea of equal opportunities and prepares the ground for more positive thinking.

(c) Equal opportunities policy statements have to be operationalised by various procedures and one such has been to require that all committee reports throughout the council carry an "implications for women" statement which forces report writers to think about their proposals. A decision to close a small rural school because of falling rolls, for example, will have to be considered in terms of the impact for women's employment in the area, as well as children's education. Women's units have had to balance the need to help other departments make these considerations against the misuse of their resources. Although a potentially useful requirement, it

has back-fired on some LGWCs and others have learned from their experience:

"I know how other women's committees do it and the way the GLC Women's Committee did it where they ended up making a comment about implications for women on every policy area; but the GLC had a mass of staff and we had one officer, and initially I thought one of the ways of making an officer ineffective is to bog them down in paper and at the end of the day she will achieve nothing; so we never had a policy that said it was mandatory for committees to check with women's unit first - we had to do that. So we said OK, until we've got more staff in the women's unit that can take that on board, let's not give people a reason to kick us and say we're not achieving anything." [former Chair, DC5 women's committee]

In the event, DC5 placed responsibility for monitoring "implications for women" jointly on departmental heads and the Director of Administration's committee clerks. Any report going forward for inclusion in any committee agenda would be rejected by the committee clerks if there were no "implications for women" statements. (2)

(d) The policy statement is the basis for further work e.g. advice to staff on sexual harrasment, racism, training and promotion opportunities etc., which can generate discussion between staff in the workplace and empower victims of oppressive behaviours to demand change. The LGWC begins to develop its internal constituency.

(e) Policy implementation will generate feedback; a statement which says that the council aims for more equal representation of women in senior graded jobs for example sets in motion regular monitoring and review. Failure of such "procedural clean-up" policies to achieve targets exposes the long equal opportunities agenda and can help reduce tensions between Personnel Departments and women's committees when their respective remits are thereby clarified.

(f) Anticipation of increased numbers of women in the workplace at more senior levels generates demand for other services e.g. parental leave schemes; retainer/returner schemes; childcare provision (workplace nurseries or voucher schemes). LGWCs who experience difficulty in getting these service developments accepted by e.g. personnel officers and trade unionists [see Cockburn 1991] acquire allies to their cause/extend their internal constituency.

(g) Officers and councillors who are individually sympathetic to equal opportunities are encouraged by the existence of a formal policy statement, to build alliances with each other as well as the women's committee, and so functional barriers between people in the council begin to break down which challenges the inherent rigidity of bureaucracy [see chapter four].

As Stone [1988] found in her research, a substantial amount of anti-feminism stems from ignorance rather than bigotry. The

various impacts of an equal opportunities policy described above can create significant shifts of opinions of both men and women. A combination of encouragement and sanction (the latter particularly in the cases of sexual harassment and racism) can promote substantive change in the culture of the organisation and facilitate unity of purpose between Members and officers [see chapter four].

2.2 Training:

Equal opportunities training is vital for both men and women, for both the oppressors and the oppressed of either sex.⁽³⁾ With resources in short supply, who receives training is important and for many LGWCs this consideration has presented them with some difficult choices. Training for senior officers is necessary in order to operationalise the equal opportunities policy (see above) and for officers making staff appointments, in order to enable women to break through "the glass ceiling". Training for women officers (particularly in assertiveness) is also important and there are constituency-building and alliance-making implications as well. For example, directing resources to women staff encourages them and their trade unions to see the women's committee as acting in their interests and therefore to be supported and defended and underscores the ethos of LGWCs as being for women. Directing resources at managers may be essential to change the patriarchal culture of the bureaucracy, but it may be perceived as giving extra resources to men. The scarcity of training resources may be due in part to overall

budgetary restrictions, but it may also reflect the very lack of awareness about equal opportunities for which the training resources are needed (another Catch-22 for LGWCs).

The nature of the training is paramount; if it is advertised as "remedial" the trainee is thereby placed in a defensive stance. At DC2, the women's officer was trying to break down such barriers:

"I'm trying the whole time to put across the idea that it's not about "catching" people. Equal opportunities is a creative new dimension to the way you work.... we can't help doing it wrongly because we've all grown up in a society which discriminates and in the sessions I do at the training days, I want them to feel safe and understand that discrimination is often not intentional. We paint publicity material with all pink faces because in the paint box it says pink is "flesh"colour, so that's what we use. I live in a flat and its got stairs and now my arthritic mother can't visit - I didn't choose my home in order to discriminate, but I've become aware that it does discriminate..... I want people to realise that its not about me saying what's right or wrong, but about growing personal awareness." [DC2 Women's Officer]

This consciousness-raising approach to the development of anti-discriminatory practice in councils needs to take place in a "safe" atmosphere. In the case of DC2, it was common knowledge that the high status of the Chair of the equal opportunities

committee lent approval to attendance at training days. At DC5 (in its early days) the Leader took a seat on the women's committee to emphasise political priority. Individual officers and Members would attend for different reasons, either because they wanted to or because it was expedient. The reasons for motivation are rendered irrelevant if the quality of training makes it effective. But as with equal opportunities policies, training by itself is only of limited help; changing the culture of the organisation is half of the project, the other half is changing the structures of the organisation. The same kind of re-thinking has to be focussed on job specifications as on people specifications such that unquestioned "norms" (like the flesh-colour paint in the DC2 case above) are tested for their validity. This is relevant for all jobs, but particularly for more senior managerial jobs where specifications are less technical and recruitment relies on recognition of "the right personal qualities" i.e. a person who looks and sounds like previous successful incumbents of the job - usually white, male and middle-class [see e.g. Kanter 1979; Cockburn 1991]. As Iris Young points out, the fallacy of impartiality applies equally to job specifications and performance assessment procedures as it does to individual decision-making [Young 1990]. This can be a contentious area between Personnel Departments and LGWCs.

2.3 Alliance-Building:

"It is, I have argued, impossible to resist bureaucratic domination by recruiting individual women into bureaucracies, or

by organizing bureaucratically; in both cases the voices of opposition are engulfed and defused. It is possible to resist bureaucratic domination if a substantial number of people act collectively and in a nonbureaucratic fashion to challenge the discourse." [Ferguson:1984]

The existence of LGWCs and their officer-support units within councils can provide the centre of a web or network of alliances between like-minded, equality-orientated women and men throughout the organisation. Sometimes this is formalised as in the case of MC1's system of departmental "link" officers - individuals with a responsibility for monitoring implementation of the council's equal opportunities policy within their departments who meet together regularly with the women's committee to identify problems and review their strategies for change. It was not entirely effective due in part to the "macho" culture in MC1; the low status of the majority of councillors on the women's committee; and the lack of authority within their departments of the majority of the designated link officers.

An informal network can become influential as mutual interests are discovered. DC1 is in this category because, although there was a pre-existing basis for alliance-building with the early 1980s strategic policy-making, it was the growth of informal alliances between women officers (principally those in Personnel, Economic Development (EDU) and the women's unit)

which provided a core group that, with the arrival of a new Chief Executive sympathetic to equal opportunities, formed the engine which pulled the whole council into corporate policy strategies for women. On the other hand, informal networks may be reduced to meetings of its members where everyone plays the "ain't it awful" game, but achieve little else. This was the case in DC4 where there were supportive links between women officers in various departments at the district and regional councils but such animosity between councillors at the two tiers that proposals for joint work and sharing of scarce resources were actively discouraged.

2.3.1 Working in a non-bureaucratic fashion:

In the Ferguson quotation above, she suggests that these networks or groups of people who are to become the "loyal opposition" within the bureaucracy, need to act in a non-bureaucratic fashion themselves. In the early history of many women's units, deliberate attempts were made to organise as a collective, to eschew formal job-gradings and to share the information within the unit in regular group meetings. Most have abandoned these attempts in the face of impracticalities, [see also Freeman 1970 on "the tyranny of structurelessness"] but this cannot be regarded as evidence of "femocratisation"⁽⁴⁾ or that "non-bureaucratic" can only be defined as non-hierarchical. Non-bureaucratic ways of working do not have to mean uniformly-graded officers; a slavish attention to task-sharing; or formalised information sharing. Good teamwork is

dependent upon each member of the team being equally valued and respected which in itself creates a non-hierarchical atmosphere in which information is shared collectively because of unity of purpose. All the women's units researched were working in this fashion regardless of whether they were formally organised as a collective or not.

Moreover, there are many local authority departments where individual managers have focussed on team-building and more democratic relations between staff. These departments provide fertile ground for alliance-building and particularly for work on women's employment opportunities and breaking down the barriers between home and work. In DC1 for example, the head of EDU described the working environment in her department thus: "We have two job shares in this unit and two people on maternity leave and that means you have to be imaginative, you have to be flexible. We have to be able to pick up pieces of work that are going on to cover for people who aren't here. You've got to have constant exchanges of information; the emphasis has got to be more on working together. You just haven't got the opportunity of going along your very individual track towards your very individual objectives. There has to be more emphasis on coherency."

Strategic approaches to equality:

The women and men in this unit were highly task-orientated and used to absorbing the impacts of their own and colleagues'

private lives on the working day. There was no sense of hierarchy within the unit - no easily distinguishable office landmarks such as a separate office for the head of unit, no sense of "my desk/my chair/my filing cabinet". The women's unit at DC1 did not have to work to persuade EDU about women's employment problems. The two units were working jointly with the local TEC on a project to persuade local employers of the need for a partnership approach to long-term labour force planning and the need to support skills training and childcare provision. Local employers relied heavily on workers travelling to the town from outlying areas, but a major new development in the area threatened to draw people away from the town in future. Getting any but the largest (multi-national) companies to begin to think beyond the immediate economic recession was proving to be very difficult. Nevertheless, there are many women's officers who would envy the strategic coherence that had been achieved among "the social partners" in the DC1 locality. As described in chapter four, there was a similar coherent and published social infrastructure strategy in MC1, but women's efforts to operationalise it were thwarted at every stage by chauvinistic men who controlled resources. Working relationships with the local TEC (an independent source of money for LGWCs promoting women's employment training opportunities) were bogged down at MC1 by the council's political ideology, dominated by trade union influence.

The approval by the full Council of a detailed policy statement on equal opportunities; adequate training of women and men to improve understanding about the nature of discrimination; and the creation of a network of like-minded people within and outwith the organisation, are not only important individual strategies for changing the attitudes of officers and councillors, but need to be regarded as interdependent. That the existence of a formal framework is vital is evidenced by the fact that at DC4, where the women's officer has experienced such difficulty [see previous chapter and this one] the full council had not been asked to approve a detailed equal opportunities policy - there was only a bland statement of intent which was easily manipulated to prevent action. The women's officer's attempts to get her drafted policy statement approved by the corporate management team (the preliminary stage prior to full council) were subjected to delays and references back similar to the MC1 women's project described in chapter four. In the end, the draft policy document quietly slid off the management team's agenda and in the absence of any effective support from the Chair of the LGWC, the women's officer's efforts were neutralised.

3. Strategies For Changing Policies and Practices

So far this analysis of LGWCs' strategies for change has focussed on the inputs to policy-making. Attention is now given to their strategies for changing outputs - primarily the ways in which they operationalise the work of their policy formulation groups and their councils' equal opportunities policy statements. Broadly, and somewhat crudely, these can be categorised as (a) DIY strategies - if you want something done, do it yourself; and (b) the gradual approach to getting other departments to do what you want. A straightforward description of one case study in each category will provide the material for later analysis. The first example is a discrete project whereas the second is a more complex process.

3.1 The DIY Approach:

Within the short space of sixteen months, the newly-constituted LGWC at DC2 established a women's employment training centre funded in part (45% of costs) by grant-aid from the European Social Fund. This project was achieved primarily through the efforts of a new Chair working with the support of a newly-appointed Women's Officer⁽⁵⁾:

"I probably went about things in what would not be recognised as the proper way local authorities do things. I just asked - I approached people, or wrote to people when perhaps it should have been done through a whole different set-up and that may have annoyed some people or it may not, I'm not sure. But equally I'm convinced that if I'd done everything in the way

people normally expect local authority work to be done, this place [the training centre] still wouldn't be open yet. It would have taken much longer than it did to get up and running. Because we took the decision to do it; put in an application to Europe and were successful and that probably shocked some people - surprised them. If I'd waited, and I'm sure there are some people who think it should have been done this way - if I'd said OK, first of all we need to persuade the Education Department we have a role to be doing it, that would have taken a year or two or ten years, I don't know how long, and if we'd then gone to Social Work Department to persuade them we had a role in working with women and disability and we have a role in childcare; if we had tried to do it all by 'negotiate and agree; negotiate and agree' there are so many people to consult and agree with it would have taken for ever. And if they weren't committed to it, it would have just gone back and forth." [Chair: DC2 LGWC]

3.2 The Gradual Approach:

In DC3 the Women's Committee was promoting a formalised scheme for operationalising its equal opportunities policies. The scheme consisted of three working groups, each chaired by one of the three equalities officers (women, race and disabilities). Each working group comprised officer representatives from a number of council departments e.g. Housing and Community Services in one group, Leisure & Recreation and Libraries in another group and so on. The three departmental working groups were coordinated by a chief officer/Member group, responsible

for planning the overall equal opportunities strategy and for reviewing the departmental working groups' proposals for operationalising it. In an effort to create some unity of purpose within the council, Members were taking a more active role in the implementation of their equal opportunities policy.

The women's officer worked on the basis of what she called "a system of small steps" building on her alliances with sympathetic individuals within the working group she chaired: "[Where you find] absolute flat-out opposition from the Director and Deputy Director... you work with supportive staff at second tier level. They feel less threatened, so you can persuade them to do something quite small - like for example, when I worked in London we had got £10,000 to improve lighting in the external areas around the housing estates and £10,000 goes a long way in lighting; and after we'd done that, the external crime rate dropped 75% in the first year we lit the place properly. Having learned that down there, I persuaded the second tier people in our Parks Department to try something similar here where we had lots of lighting "black spots" in [the city park]. They in turn persuaded their chief officer and it was a huge success. From getting kicks left, right and centre, Parks got nothing but praise from councillors and the public and they positively glowed! 'Oh, we like this', they said; so then you can persuade them to do some more." [DC3 Women's Officer]

Similar "small steps" were achieved in other departments e.g. persuading Housing Department to provide play facilities for small children in their area offices. But the remit to the working groups was not just to address themselves to equality in service provision; an important link was made between equality of opportunity for consumers and for staff. For example, in work with the Housing Department, the women's officer could demonstrate the links between:

(a) providing play facilities in area offices which would cater for the needs of children; enable mothers to represent themselves more effectively at interview with Housing officers; provide a less fractious atmosphere in the office which would benefit staff;

(b) equalities training for Housing staff enabled them to overcome discriminatory attitudes and practices and to recognise that clients were not responsible for the inadequacies of departmental procedures. Housing staff were located in decentralised offices and therefore had more discretion in their work which they were encouraged to use to overcome individual complaints;

(c) equalities training for senior staff in the Housing Department revealed the extent to which discrimination was inhibiting the best use of resources by failing to develop and promote talented front-line (mainly women) staff.

This linking together of the interests of consumers and practitioners is a powerful one which emphasises the personal

nature of discrimination and its reverse side i.e. the power of individuals to act as agents of challenge and change. By debunking the reification of bureaucratic procedures (it isn't "the system" it is me and my managers and our councillors) the whole process can be turned around from one of following rules to one of taking responsibility. Good equalities training is a consciousness-raising process which empowers practitioners to evaluate their own behaviours in relation to the public, ie the arbitrary exercise of power over them, whilst at the same time understanding how they negatively empower other people (managers) to exercise power over both clients and themselves [see the feminist critique of bureaucracy in chapter four]. Such an approach contains within it the potential to change *power over* relations into *power with* relations, but the extent to which that can be achieved depends upon the whole council's perception of its scope for autonomous action and the degree of unity of purpose between officers and Members.

3.3 The use of strategies for changing outputs:

Before proceeding further, it is important to stress that in analysing these different strategies for change, there is no connection between individual councils and the strategies they employ. The examples quoted above are variously employed by LGWCs in different situations; the women's committee at DC3 established its own autonomous projects using the DIY approach (e.g. a workplace nursery), and DC5's childcare projects (the shoppers creche, playbus etc) were eventually incorporated into

the service portfolio of their Leisure & Recreation Department - a processual combination of the DIY and Gradual Approaches. At DC5 and DC3, training centres for women were established jointly by women's and economic development committees which is another combination of the DIY strategy.

What works, where and when depends on such a variety and mix of factors that strict correlations are impossible. For example, in the DC2 DIY case above, several factors can be analysed as being significant:

the individual councillor, her personality, skills, knowledge and European contacts;

the existence of other women's training centres successfully operating elsewhere;

the availability of the person who had helped to establish some of these centres to advise DC2;

the availability of ESF money;

the desire of a new council to demonstrate radical action to their electors.

At the time of research at DC2, the Chair of the LGWC had become influential within the ruling group, partly as a result of her success with the women's centre project, but the extent of her power as a new councillor, when she initiated this project was not significant.

A change in any of the above circumstances and personalities involved, might have resulted in a different outcome. If, for example, DC2 had been a unitary authority with the equal

opportunities budget being processed via the Education Department (as in MC1) resistance to the project might have been much stronger. As it was:

"... there was a major problem with the Region thinking it [the training centre] should have been their responsibility. Educational and training is a regional function in their view, but there is nothing written down to say they can only be; and there's no reason for the District not to do some. But there were some powerfully persuasive people in Education both politically and officers, who would have preferred us to have been stopped." [Chair DC2 LGWC]

Availability of funding, although obviously a powerful factor in the success or failure of a project, is no guarantee. At MC1, the women's group wanted a relatively small sum of available money in order to carry out a feasibility study into expanding childcare provision through a partnership of local public and private sector bodies. As described in chapter four, the women's group proposals were repeatedly rejected whilst other proposals (sometimes incurring greater expenditures) were approved, despite the fact that expansion of childcare was part of official policy. Two-tier local government, as noted in chapter four, can sometimes work to benefit LGWCs.

In view of DC5's processual approach, it was appropriate to consider whether the use of particular types of strategy correlated with the stage of an individual LGWC's development -

that is to say, are LGWCs forced to set up their own autonomous projects initially and only when they have demonstrated their success, can they use the gradual approach to persuade other council departments to act? Whilst this would seem logical, no evidence was found to support it. DC3's women's committee was established in 1984 by a left-wing Labour group taking control of the council for the first time. Member/officer relations were poor [see chapter four] and resistance to the women's committee and its officers was high. Two major early projects - the workplace nursery and the women's training centre - were set up in different ways (the latter very much as a joint project with the economic development unit) but both were large-scale, high-cost projects requiring substantial work from staff in departments other than the women's unit. Alliance-building between sympathetic officers, strong political pressure and trade union support were all influential factors in bringing these projects to fruition. This is quite a different scenario from that in DC2 and different again from DC5 where much of the preparatory work was done by the childcare working group and funding was arranged by the women's committee using external sources of money (MSC funding) as the basis for attracting "top-up" money to secure the initial shoppers' creche project [see chapter four].

All that can be concluded from these analyses therefore is:

(a) that in spite of the formidable bureaucratic obstacles against them, LGWCs can resist these forces and through sheer

hard work and imaginative use of various strategies, they can achieve (at least some of) their objectives; and

(b) that LGWCs are more likely to succeed when they are working in local authorities with strong perceptions of the scope for autonomy and where there is unity of purpose among (at least some) officers and Members.

Moreover, these are mutually-reinforcing; LGWCs' capacity to develop *innovatory ways of working* (their feminist practice) strengthens the capacity of individuals working in their authorities to resist centralising forces and maximise the scope for creative opposition. There is, in short, a coincidence of interests between feminists challenging the patriarchal nature of bureaucracy and those who, for the sake of efficiency, effectiveness and democracy, seek to preserve and strengthen local government as community self-government.

4. Networking (as a strategy):

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, common problems and lack of resources force LGWCs to work together and with other organisations at regional and national level that are concerned with women's equality. Underfunding plays into the hands of LGWCs' critics: "There you are, give 'em a women's committee and what do they do - nothing" [see Edwards 1989]. From the evidence collected for this research it is suggested that at DC4 in particular, such underfunding has been intentional and despite chief officers and Labour councillors publicly professing support for equal opportunities, many (if not the

majority) are privately prejudiced against it. Shortage of resources might be fatal to some LGWCs were it not for networking which enables them to save time, money and effort by drawing on the experiences of their longer-established counterparts elsewhere in the country. It is clear, for example, that at DC2, the opportunity for a new councillor to establish her political credentials quickly by importing an almost "off-the-shelf" project (the women's training centre) and benefitting from the "how to" experiences of other LGWCs was not only important for her committee, but subsequently, had a significant impact on the success of other DC2 strategies (e.g. attitude changing through in-service training) because of her heightened political credibility within the council as a whole. The primary network for LGWCs is:

4.1 The National Association of Local Government Women's Committees (NALGWC)

NALGWC is an association of LGWCs in England, Scotland and Wales begun in 1984 by the thirteen women's committees then in existence. It has two main objectives:

- (a) to provide a forum for LGWCs to meet on a regular basis (until recently on a quarterly basis) to share information and to consider topical issues (e.g. changes in local government legislation); and
- (b) to promote, through contact with other national organisations, the policy needs of women.

NALGWC is maintained by the affiliation fees which member

councils pay. Whilst the fees are small compared with those which councils pay for membership of other local authority associations, nevertheless, the sums charged means that individual LGWCs have to weigh the benefits of NALGWC membership against its costs and the benefits which might accrue from spending that money on other strategies. With increasing pressure on local government finance generally and S.137 money in particular [see chapter four] this dilemma has become more significant in the past two years, not only for individual LGWCs but for NALGWC as well. A drop in income from affiliation fees results in NALGWC being unable to sustain the services to individual LGWCs which make membership attractive. Recently, NALGWC has been forced to abandon its research activity which formerly produced useful reports to members on e.g. new legislation. For overworked women's units, the availability of disseminated information on complex new legislation together with reports on e.g. the Icelandic Women's Party offering fresh insights into women's political organisation and practice, were invaluable. The loss of this independent research facility results not only in the loss of new information, but the need to continue dissemination of essential information to NALGWC members means that the work of the research team has to be shared out amongst member LGWCs.

NALGWC has always supported a system of working parties made up of affiliated members focussing on specific topics e.g. the Black & Ethnic Minorities Women Working Group. LGWCs in

localities with high proportions of ethnic minority populations develop their own expertise in strategy-development to promote equality for women of colour. They come together in a working group to pool their expertise into reports which advise other LGWCs about best practice. But with the loss of the research team, NALGWC has to rely on individual LGWCs to do this for all relevant issues e.g. the implications of political and economic unity in the European Community. This adds to the workload of LGWC officers and reinforces questions about the efficacy of NALGWC membership instead of turning the attention of LGWC councillors to the underlying question of where additional resources should come from. It highlights the failure of councillors who are the organisers of NALGWC to generate additional political and financial support for the Association - for example, the Labour Party has funded the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) which has a separate Equality Unit with the potential to share resources with NALGWC. Likewise supporting funds could come from the trade union movement and local government associations which have both developed their own equal opportunities organisations.

That NALGWC has failed to develop the network of LGWCs into a wider network of organisations concerned with the promotion of women's equality is not entirely its fault. Both housed in Manchester, the EOC and NALGWC have inadequate contact - a problem as much to do with the internal functionalism of the EOC as NALGWC's shortage of staff. NALGWC holds a treasure-house of

information on the practical problems of policy-making and implementation for women's equality at the local level. The failure of the EOC to use this resource is evident in its policy recommendations on childcare [see Edwards & McKie 1993].

4.2 Regional Networking

SWEOF (Scottish Women's & Equal Opportunities Forum:

SWEOF is a Scottish women's officers-only group which meets regularly, not only to share information and ideas but to pool resources for common purposes e.g. training courses on new legislation. Newly-appointed officers and those with poor quality relationships with their councillors regard membership of SWEOF as a "life-line". More experienced and/or well-supported officers may derive little practical benefit from attendance at SWEOF meetings themselves, but are sensitive to their support role for others.

Scottish Local Authority Association : COSLA

Scottish local authorities have their own association (COSLA - Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) in which several Chairs of LGWCs have a role, particularly on COSLA's equal opportunities sub-committee. Because relations between COSLA and the Scottish Office are so acrimonious, there is a tendency for COSLA committees to by-pass the Scottish Office and lobby Whitehall directly on issues of concern. One such was in respect of women's equal employment opportunities and the lack of childcare provision. COSLA's Economic Affairs Committee

coordinated a Scottish submission to the Department of Employment in 1990 which contained detailed inputs from Scottish LGWCs. Although NALGWC, in concert with the Association of Metropolitan Authorities (AMA), lobbied Whitehall similarly, the political situation in 1990 was such that Whitehall was more likely to take notice of such lobbying from Scotland (in view of the fragility of Conservative Party support there) than it was from an English/Welsh local authority association such as the AMA.

Also at this time, the EOC produced its own childcare policy document "The Key To Real Choice" [EOC 1990] which was not specifically addressed to any Government Ministry or Parliamentary Select Committee. Now that responsibility for the EOC has moved from the Home Office to the Department of Employment, its ability to influence national policy may be improved although this new position places the emphasis of women's equality on paid work which, together with the functional organisation of Government (ministries) serves only to strengthen the neo-classical approach to equality and the maintenance of separate public and private spheres as described in chapter two. "The Key To Real Choice" was greeted with dismay by many women's officers, on reading the EOC's recommendation that local education authorities should be responsible for coordination [see chapter four]..

The Government's Ministerial Group on Women which is supposed to coordinate national policies relating to women between Whitehall departments has never successfully demonstrated that it is capable of doing so. Reports from COSLA therefore which emphasise the inter-relatedness of women's equality, economic development and the need for childcare to be considered as part of a national social infrastructure, going directly to cabinet ministers jittery about the political situation in Scotland are likely to have greater impact than the same reports from other sources. (6)

4.1.3 Scottish Women's Lobby:

There are a number of groupings of women in Scotland which are working for women's political and economic rights, apart from LGWCs. Whilst the idea of autonomous groups is important to feminists, fragmentation is not. Divide and rule is patriarchy's trump card and in recognising equality of difference, women need to hold onto solidarity. The Scottish Women's Forum was set up to try and overcome fragmentation, and to feed into the European Women's Lobby [see next chapter]. Scottish LGWCs have played a major part in hosting meetings of the Forum at which representatives were chosen to go forward to the EC Women's Lobby at Brussels, but LGWCs could play no part in these elections (apart from footing the bill) because the EC Women's Lobby is for non-governmental organisations. Consequently as Marion Hersh has observed: "the strong STUC (Scottish Trades Union Council) input has made this process more

bureaucratic than that in many women's groups. There is also a split between those women, close to the WLM (Women's Liberation Movement) who want a fairly loose structure with membership open to all women and those women, closer to the STUC, who want a more rigid structure with membership open only to groups, raising the problem of representation of women who are not members of groups" [Hersh 1991].

Despite not having formal representation, Scottish LGWCs in hosting these meetings of diverse women's groups are playing a vital role in maintaining the women's network. It is to be hoped that the representatives to the European Women's Lobby will campaign for a change in the rules to allow LGWCs to be represented.

The Women's Claim of Right Group is a feminist grouping set up in 1989. Its book "A Women's Claim of Right in Scotland" from which the Hersh quotation is taken (see above) reveals the many areas of political activity in which Scottish women are networking and the stimulus to that provided by the Scottish Constitutional Convention (of which there is now a specific women's group, chaired by Maria Fyfe) and as Isobel Lindsay says in her chapter:

"In the Scottish context, it was the prospect of a new and open debate on constitutional change which became the catalyst for a more radical and assertive response to the issue of women's representation in political life. The ensuing debate threw into sharp focus the clash between volunteerism and interventionism

and exposed the continued existence of complacent evolutionary assumptions" [Lindsay 1991].

It is clear from the above, that in Scotland women's political representation (in the broadest sense) is developing more cohesively through networking organised on a regional basis than the more fragmented picture in England and Wales where an under-resourced NALGWC is unable to make a significant impact on other major organisations. In recent times, the Scottish LGWCs have considered forming their own regional NALGWC; if this were to happen it would not only undermine the viability of NALGWC but would lose the opportunity for Scottish LGWCs to demonstrate the potential power of coalition between local government and women's organisations on a regional basis throughout Britain and within a European Community context. The efficacy of this is the subject of the next chapter.

Summary:

What this analysis of LGWCs' strategies shows is:

(a) that genuinely bottom-up policy-making is practicable, albeit within the constraints of limited autonomy for local government.

(b) that new services (diversity) can be produced which result in more efficient outcomes for women and enable them to act in the public sphere of society as first-class citizens;

(c) that practice methods can be devised which introduce greater flexibility into bureaucratic discourses, rendering them the servant rather than the master of policy formulation.

(d) that such practice methods encourage greater unity of purpose between Members and officers in local authorities which in turn facilitates the maximisation of local autonomy thereby rendering local government more plural, participative and responsive - the Widdicombe attributes of good government [see chapter two].

(e) that networking between women in diverse political groupings can facilitate alliance-building for a more strategic approach to constructing more radical forms of democracy, particularly within a regional context.

In this chapter and the previous one, the focus of this study has been narrowed to present the empirical evidence of a different and more democratic, feminist political practice. The significance of Britain's membership of the EC to the development of that practice has already been referred to in terms of practical assistance from EC sources of funding. In the next chapter this theme is developed with other examples of the impact of EC membership on the work of LGWCs, through EC equal opportunities law and policies. In addition, the potential for expanding LGWCs networking strategies will be explored by looking at a number of European institutions where

women are also working to bring a feminist perspective to policy-making. Furthermore, and as has been argued here, greater autonomy for local government is important to women's participation in policy-making. Accordingly, attention is also given in the next chapter to the campaign for local self-government which is being conducted under the Council of Europe's Charter for same, and the impact that institutional developments in the EC may have on promoting that in Britain.

CHAPTER SIX : THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION

Some indication has already been given, in the previous chapter, of the importance of Britain's membership of the EC to LGWCs in terms of the structural funds which have enabled some of their autonomous projects to be established. Funding is just one of the ways in which the EC supports the work of LGWCs; EC equal opportunities law and policies are two others which will be examined in more detail in this chapter. Although based on the same non-discrimination principle as British equalities law and policies, those of the EC have been differently formulated [see Hoskyns 1985] allowing for more generous (long equal opportunities agenda) interpretations and reflecting the influence of different welfare traditions in member states [see e.g. Esping-Andersen 1990; Baldwin Edwards and Gough 1991]. Thus EC equal opportunities law and policies are supportive to LGWCs insofar as they legitimise their objectives [see chapter one] even when the products of EC equalities policies are minimal.

In addition, there are a number of institutions in Europe where women are working to bring a feminist perspective into EC policy-making and the potential for networking between LGWCs and these institutions, as a strategy for the promotion of women's equality will be explored.

Thirdly, the coalescence of interests between women's political equality and autonomy for local government has been referred to at several points in this study. There is an established network of relations between local authorities in Britain and their counterparts in Europe which pre-dates the 1972 Heath Government's signing of the Treaty of Rome and is organised under the auspices of the Council of Europe - that wider forum of European states than the EC. As the member states of the EC move towards ever closer economic and political union, and the concept of the Community as a governable political space emerges, horizontal relations between municipalities in those countries not only become more significant, but the institutional boundaries between the EC and the Council of Europe are increasingly blurred. An example of this concerns the campaign for greater local autonomy organised around the Council of Europe's Charter For Local Self-Government which the organisation of European municipalities is pressing for inclusion within the constitution of the EC.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is not only to detail some of the practical ways in which the EC impacts on LGWCs and their local authorities, but at the same time, to begin to contextualise this in terms of the arguments which have been made in this study about women's representation as a group of multi-constitutive beings oppressed by patriarchal principles of government. As noted at the end of chapter two, it can be argued that the principles of government which have developed

within the EC provide a framework for envisioning an alternative, and more radical form of democracy - one which is more amenable to the ideals of communitarian local government and bottom-up policy-making and which provides more scope for a feminist political practice.⁽¹⁾ In the process of presenting such a normative theory, the realities of the undemocratic institutions which exist in the EC and which work against the realisation of its own principles, are exposed. By concentrating on the empirical aspects of these questions, this chapter sets the scene for the more normative discussion in the final chapter.

This chapter therefore, encompasses a number of themes, and by way of a guide to the reader, a numbering system has been introduced as follows:

1. The principles of the EC;
2. Practical ways in which the EC supports the work of LGWCs:
(2.1) legislation; (2.2) equal opportunities policies (including the equalities networks - not networking); (2.3) funding;
3. Networking as a strategy - women's organisations in Europe;
4. Local government and Europe.

1. The Principles of the EC

At the end of chapter two, the idea of comparing the patriarchal principles of government in Britain with the non-patriarchal principles of the EC was introduced. Whilst "patriarchal

government" is usually distinguished as rule by persons (rulers) as opposed to rule by law, in this study (as explained in chapter two) Carole Pateman's definition of patriarchal government has been adopted in the sense that women are excluded from its first principles and in its effects of subordinating electorates and local government. Employing the feminist distinction of *power over* as opposed to *power with* relations, it is argued here that whilst governmental relations in Britain can be described as *power over* - most particularly in terms of policy-making, in the EC the principles at least (if not yet the practice) facilitate *power with* governmental relations. The principles in question are: cooperation/cohesion; harmonisation; and subsidiarity.

Cooperation/Cohesion: The changes in the language used (in English) to describe the EC, mirrors the development from a free trade area to the more complex concept of a definable political space. In 1972 the emphasis was placed on "economic" in Britain's membership of the European Economic Community; as its political institutions and policy-making developed, so the term European Community became more appropriate; and more recently the trend is to speak simply of The Community. Albeit that the words "an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe" come from the Treaty of Rome, as Tassin observes, it was not until the 1972 Paris Summit that political union was defined as "the common ultimate goal of member states" and the debates began in earnest as to the interpretations to be agreed upon e.g.

constitutional -v- functional integration; federation -v- confederation [Tassin 1992]. But whether the desire for political cooperation stems from the perspective of peaceful coexistence between nations with a common culture, or from the more pragmatic one of coping with the busted flush of postwar industrial production, the principle of **shared** sovereignty and pooled resources is the same. The difference in perspective matters in the application of the principle - how much shared sovereignty; who decides how much resources are pooled and how they are shared out? The distinction between the "cooler" perspective of cooperation and the "warmer" one of cohesion then becomes evident. To some member states (e.g. the UK Government) the distinction is dichotomous, but to others it is processual. As a normative principle of national government [see note 1] the warmer perspective of cohesion facilitates unity of the state as in federal states.

Harmonisation:

Andrew Barry suggests that "harmonisation is a process designed to establish a particular territory as a knowable and governable economic and social space" [Barry 1992]. Harmonisation is part of the "art of government" insofar as it is about distinguishing between what must be regulated and what need not be; between the need for uniform standards and the recognition (valuing) of alternative ways of doing something [see also Stewart's argument in chapter two, that the case for uniformity should always have to be made]. It is therefore, an anti-bureaucracy, anti-*power*

over instrument: "Harmonisation makes possible the government of a large economic and social space without the extensive further development of a central state" [ibid]. As such it may be viewed as a technique of federalism i.e. "autonomy of the parts and unity of the whole" [Tassin 1992]. In the EC it is also about cohesion insofar as Article 117 of the Treaty of Rome implies the sharing of resources to improve the standards of living for the least well-provided peoples of Europe (upward harmonisation); a goal of a common citizenship in terms of social rights, if not civil and political rights as well [see Meehan 1993]. Harmonisation, therefore, within the nation state could avoid the negative aspects of diversity in local autonomy without either central control or reliance on market forces [see chapter two].

Subsidiarity: has been variously interpreted e.g. "the need to ensure that political decisions are not taken at any higher level than they need to be" (Millan 1990); and "a decentralised organisation of responsibilities with the aim of never entrusting to a larger unit what can better be realised by a smaller one" (Delors 1989) [see Spicker 1991]. The former is in the passive voice, the latter in the active voice; Delors' reference to a "decentralised organisation" implies a shift in focus away from the centrality of nation states (De Gaulle's *Europe des patries*) to incorporate sub-national levels of government as well. As Spicker observes: "Subsidiarity implies not only that the European Community should foster the

devolution of power, but also that wherever possible national governments should do the same" [ibid:emphasis added]. This theme will be explored further later in this chapter in connection with the Council of Europe's Charter For Local Self-Government, but the point to stress here is that "devolution" implies something stronger than decentralization of policy implementation processes as currently operating in Britain. It implies no less than a transfer of competences from central to local government or in Stewart's definition as "the (local) community governing itself" [see chapter two].

The principle of subsidiarity thus interpreted, is vital to the notion of bottom-up policy-making, as is harmonisation as the valuing of diversity within agreed common frameworks, essential to which is the principle of cooperation/cohesion. The three principles thus viewed interdependently, call for governmental institutions and processes which facilitate reciprocity (as defined in chapter one) whether between citizens, regions or member states as in the case of the EC [see also Spicker 1991].

The mis-match between these principles and the present institutional arrangements for the EC are clear: the Commission is a hybrid (part legislature/part civil service); the Parliament is a democratically-elected assembly but without legislative power; and whereas the members of both these institutions owe allegiance to the Community, the members of the Councils of Ministers do not, tending to treat the prime

legislature for the Community as a barter-market for their national interests. As Juliet Lodge has observed, it is not just that the distribution of powers between these institutions is undemocratic, but they are inappropriate for their tasks [see Lodge 1991]. The question of the general applicability of these principles will be discussed further in the final chapter, but presenting them in this way emphasises not only the mis-match between the principles and institutions of the EC, but also the parallels between that and the undemocracy and inappropriateness of unitary state systems - not just internally, but particularly for those operating within a wider political space as the following will show.

2. How have these principles translated into law and policies which support LGWCs and their local authorities?

2.1 Legislation:

As stated in chapter one, UK legislation for women's equality was established with the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act 1975. In neither case (as noted in chapter two) was women's political representation strong enough to deflect the British Parliament from holding strictly to the classic liberal (or as Pateman suggests, patriarchal) form of equality. Thus in terms of equal pay, "equality" was interpreted as meaning "exactly the same" which, given a gender segregated labour market, made a nonsense of the spirit of the Equal Pay Act. Similarly, in terms of sex discrimination, the non-discrimination principle was deemed paramount resulting in a

minimization of the scope for rectificatory justice for women. Relevant EC legislation namely, the Directives on Equal Pay and Equal Treatment passed in 1975 and 1976 respectively, provided more generous interpretations of "equality" in both cases. Equal pay was interpreted as equal pay for work of equal value and although the non-discrimination principle was the foundation of the Equal Treatment Directive, Article 2(4) provided that "This Directive shall be without prejudice to measures to promote equal opportunity for men and women, in particular by removing existing inequalities which affect women's opportunities in the areas referred to in Article 1(1)" [76/207/EEC:emphases added]. In her analysis of the processes by which the Equal Treatment Directive was framed within the Social Affairs Directorate of the Commission (DG5), Catherine Hoskyns notes that a distinction was made between the two elements of equal opportunity namely, *egalite de traitement* and *egalite des chances* and each accorded equal weight [Hoskyns 1985]. Recalling again Pateman on consent [see chapter two] it can be said that the EC Directives "present equality legislation as equality demands", unlike UK law which "presents equality legislation as if it were actually as equality demands". In other words, UK legislation provides for de jure equality for women whereas EC legislation provides for de facto equality for women. However, the problem for women in Britain has been the enforceability of EC legislation. As Morris and Nott point out, the Equal Pay Directive was based on Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome whereas the Equal Treatment Directive "is

not expressly tied to a particular provision of the Treaty, a fact which, ironically, may make it more difficult for individuals to use" [Morris & Nott 1991]. Nevertheless, LGWCs have used the more explicit provision for rectificatory justice in Article 2(4) as justification for their positive action policies, claiming a distinction between equal opportunity and equal treatment, the latter allowing for more purposive interpretations. This highlights the differences between the formal (top-down) approach to policy implementation and LGWCs' informal approach.

Formal Policy Implementation:

Although, in a landmark case (Pickstone -v- Freemans plc) the House of Lords bent over backwards to interpret English law "purposively" so that the Equal Pay Directive should apply to private as well as public sector pay disputes, "in order to achieve what Parliament must have intended, namely compliance with the Equal Pay Directive", nevertheless, the law is not always (some would say not often) interpreted in favour of women's equality. Morris and Nott suggest that in Britain equality laws have tended to be drafted "in such a way as to allow for judicial interpretation which effectively negates much of their potential usefulness" [Morris & Nott 1991].

The EOC has played a vital role in supporting important individual equality cases both in British courts and before the European Court of Justice. The need for a well-resourced (both

in terms of money and expertise) organisation to assist individuals to bring cases of discrimination before the law emphasises the disparity of power between the (patriarchal) disciplinary discourse of the law on the one hand and the (infantilised) individual on the other. Moreover, the burden of proof rests with the victim of discrimination, not the perpetrator. Furthermore, most discrimination cases are dealt with by Industrial Tribunals and in Britain, individual decisions (class actions are not allowed) in these courts do not create legal precedent. Therefore, in the snakes and ladders game of equality law, every ladder leads to a snake's head and back to square one.

The difficulties for the non-expert attempting to make sensible comments on these issues reinforces what has already been said concerning the power of state institutions to maintain citizens in passive mode. As David Held and others have pointed out, the incorporation of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms into British law would enable individual citizens to challenge Governments' and judges' interpretations of what constitutes their civil rights. [see Held 1989; Andrews(ed) 1991] Therefore, whilst both the EC and the Council of Europe are vital institutions for the promotion of women's equality through the establishment of these legal instruments, national sovereignty creates obstacles to their accessibility. Thus, for women, there is a strong argument for

the sharing of sovereignty between the institutions of government in Britain.

Informal Policy Implementation:

However as far as LGWCs are concerned, providing they are working within a local authority where there is unity of purpose between councillors and officers to maximise their scope for autonomous actions, uncertainties about the interpretation of equality law can be made to work in their favour. That is to say, that local District Auditors may be less inclined to issue a writ of *ultra vires* upon a local authority pursuing positive action programmes for women when the council might successfully argue that it is lawful, for example, under Article 2(4) of the Equal Treatment Directive and taking the Pickstone -v- Freeman plc judgement into consideration. However, since neither the Audit Commission nor individual councils would want to go to the expense of testing such an argument in court, the uncertainty can work against LGWCs as well. But this is not a zero-sum game - the majority of LGWCs have made gains from this uncertainty particularly in pursuing policies such as parental leave schemes; return-to-work and retainer schemes; or childcare in support of women's further education and training - none of which were compatible with the highly restricted scope for positive action allowed within Ss. 47 and 48 of the original Sex Discrimination Act.

2.2 EC Equal Opportunities Policies:

The main institutional setting for women's equality policies within the EC is the Commission. Within the Social Affairs Directorate of the Commission (DG5) there is a separate unit - formerly the Women's Bureau, now called the Equal Opportunities Bureau. As Catherine Hoskyns has observed: "Initially, [in the 1980s] the main aim of the Women's Bureau was to carry on the legislative programme so effectively developed in the 1970s" [Hoskyns 1992]. The intention was to build on the three equality Directives achieved in the 1970s on equal pay, equal treatment and equality in social security by bringing forward a series of Draft Directives on e.g. parental leave entitlement; rights for part-time workers; occupational pensions; and maternity leave. The existence of even draft Directives is supportive to LGWCs since they legitimise their own proposals for similar policies at the local level. Councillors cannot hide privately-held sexist attitudes by claiming that LGWC policies are "going too far" if similar policies might one day be imposed by Europe. Thus, where LGWCs are established, draft Directives may stimulate positive outcomes for women, even if they fail to pass through EC legislative machinery. The problem is that given the lack of autonomy for local government and the fickleness of party political support, these policies are always vulnerable.

However at the EC, in the protection of national interests (the cool approach to cooperation) all of this proposed legislation

has either been blocked or been watered-down by the Council of Ministers to the point where one of the fundamental principles of the EC - the upward harmonisation of social rights - has been placed in jeopardy. Part of the problem is the lack of adequate legal bases in the Treaty of Rome upon which to progress social rights. "Catch-all" provisions, such as Article 235 (which allows for any legislation necessary for the achievement of the aims of the Community) require unanimous agreement by member states in Council. Where there is no unanimity as to the necessity of social legislation, no progress is possible. But, even though the Commission has been unable to build upon the successes of the 1970s, it has at least been able to act to protect the existing social rights of European citizens. For in order to avoid a competitive downward spiral of social wages within a single market (social dumping) it is necessary to ensure that all member states at least agree on a minimum level of social provision (the Community prescriptive framework). In the European Parliamentary debate on 15th May, 1991 the Luxembourg Social Affairs Minister, speaking as President-In-Office of the Council, put the dilemma thus: "the main issue is whether we want to harmonize progressively or to try to draw up directives aimed at ensuring that established social rights in all the Community countries are preserved over the coming decade, in other words that they cannot be watered down." Since it is women who are the poorest and least protected workers in Europe [see Women of Europe Supplement No.36 1992] these minimal safeguards evidence the importance of the Community to women.

The failure of the Women's Bureau to make real progress via, in Hoskyn's terms, "the legal route", turned their attention to "the equal opportunities route" [Hoskyns 1992]. A rolling action programme on equal opportunities was initiated by the Commission in 1982. The First Equal Opportunities Action Programme established an advisory committee to assist the Commission in developing policies for women's equality. Known as the Equal Opportunities Advisory Committee (EOAC) it consists of relevant representatives from member states - in Britain this is the EOC - and staff from the Commission (mainly the Women's Bureau) together with the Social Affairs Commissioner. As noted in chapter five, the opportunity therefore exists for the EOC to act as a coordinator and conduit for women's campaigning groups and LGWCs into the policy-making arena of the EC. Its failure to do this may in part be explained by the extent to which the EOC has focussed its resources in fighting legal cases as described above, which substantiates the comment by feminist legal expert Carol Smart that "it is important to think of non-legal strategies and to discourage a resort to law as if it holds the key to unlock women's oppression" [Smart 1989].

2.3 EC Equal Opportunities Action Programmes:

The action programmes have an impact on LGWCs in a number of ways. Firstly, they demonstrate the same strategic approach to policy-making for women. The current (third) action programme 1991-1995 proposes measures around three key areas, namely:

(a) implementation and development of the law which includes

raising the level of awareness about legal rights and obligations within member states;

(b) the integration of women into the labour market by increasing women's participation in paid work, including self-employment initiatives and positive action in employment and training and reducing barriers to women's participation "particularly through measures aiming to reconcile working life and family responsibilities";

(c) improving the status of women in society including measures which "go beyond the sphere of employment" e.g. improving the image of women in the media and encouraging more women's participation "in the decision-making process in economic and social life" [COM(90) 499 emphases added].

This more holistic approach to policy-making nears the long equal opportunities agenda rather than the short "procedural clean-up process" (see chapter one) and provides legitimacy for the work of LGWCs which, as the previous chapter showed, are taking this more strategic approach using the powers of their local authorities. Not only to be model equal opportunities employers themselves, but to encourage that practice in other local firms by example and through planning gains⁽²⁾; to organise consortia of public and private agencies to provide the social infrastructure (childcare) in support of women's opportunities for paid work; and to improve women's status as first class citizens.

The means by which DG5 has operationalised this rolling strategic policy programme have been/are supportive to LGWCs in three respects namely, the equalities networks, the NOW community initiative and through the system of structural funds:

2.3.1. The Networks:

DG5 has instituted a number of pan-European networks to investigate, monitor and support its strategic policy. A few examples to match up with the criteria described at (a), (b) and (c) above are:

The Network on Implementation of the Equality Directives

The First Action Programme (1982-85) set up a network of expert advisers representing each member state, "to monitor the implementation of the Directives at national level, exchange information, and give advice on new measures needed" [Hoskyns 1992]. Although the number of resulting enforcement cases taken to the European Court of Justice (ECJ) by the Commission have been small - Hoskyns puts the figure at twelve - network members can also encourage national courts to apply to the ECJ for a ruling where there are doubts about how to apply EC law. There have been 47 such cases to date and "on the whole, the ECJ has used its power to give a broad interpretation to the legislation and to enforce **Community** rather than **national** prerogatives" [Hoskyns 1992: emphases added]. Whilst these figures are paltry in light of the evidence of women's inequality throughout the Community [Women of Europe: *ibid*] like DC3's gradual approach [see previous chapter] they are small steps and not insignificant when the lack of legal bases within the Treaties

is considered together with the imbalance of power between the institutions of the EC.

The Employment Networks

There are a series of networks aimed specifically at "fostering the development of positive action" in women's employment. The Women In Employment Network, set up in 1983, was one of the earliest and has collected a great deal of comparative data which has been incorporated into the EC's official statistics. Proof of women's inequality is an essential startpoint to making effective arguments for remedial actions. From this basis a number of other networks have been set up with a more specific focus e.g. the LEI Network (Local Employment Initiatives) has been responsible for running the Commission's women's employment aid programme enabling women to set up their own businesses. The IRIS Network promotes vocational training programmes for women and is specifically concerned with gearing training techniques to women to counter inequalities created by gender-specific subjects in education. It was IRIS which initiated the attachment of childcare allowances to women's training programmes. At DC2 the LGWC has used the existence of such allowances for trainees at their women's training centre as a precedent for gaining childcare allowances for other members of staff undertaking out-of-hours work. In only one of the case study LGWCs (DC4) was there no evidence of the active assistance of these networks and programmes; in all other cases the networks were supporting the work of LGWCs either in providing

information and advice or access to small grants of "seed money" which at DC5 have been used to fund one-off projects by women's groups.

There are a number of other specialist networks e.g. the Steering Committee on Equal Opportunities in Broadcasting and Television which do not appear to have any direct impact on the work of LGWCs, but given the generally negative reporting of their work in the local press, it is to be hoped that the Steering Committee's work soon extends to other media.

The European Childcare Network

As part of the Second Action Programme 1986-1990, the Commission set up the European Childcare Network; again this is a group formed of experts from each member state investigating existing childcare provision in their countries and coming together to produce a report to the Commission with recommendations as to what measures the Community might make to enable women to reconcile home and work. Investigations into childcare provision existing in each member state resulted in a league table in which Britain figured near the bottom. Without exception, all of the relevant LGWC committee reports studied during this research made reference to these league tables. Local councillors, particularly traditional Labourist ones, do not like to be told they are poor providers of social welfare. All the while comparative data shows only the in-country situation, many councils have been able to congratulate themselves on their performance in pre-school provision. When

the comparative data is Europe-wide, the picture changes dramatically and complacency undermined, particularly when countries, officially designated as "poor" within the Community, are making better childcare provision than Britain. Moreover, the professional standing of Peter Moss, the Chair of the Network, gives support to LGWCs when they are negotiating across local government tiers with Social (Work) Services departments.

When the Network presented its consolidated report in 1988, its primary recommendation was that the Commission should initiate a draft Directive on childcare. The justification for this was that not only do mothers suffer employment discrimination, but ALL women are disadvantaged in the labour market as a consequence of the social "norm" that women undertake primary responsibility for child care [Phillips & Moss 1989]. This statement has been used by LGWCs to justify the long equal opportunities agenda and featured in numerous reports in the course of the research, and particularly in the COSLA submission to the Employment Secretary [see chapter four]. The Network's insistence on the need for publicly-provided childcare also provided a synthesis between the goals of socialism and feminism which LGWCs have used to overcome resistance from some Labour councillors.

However, in a telephone conversation, the Chairman of the Network, Peter Moss, told the author that by the time he presented his report in 1988, it was clear to him that staff

within DG5 were pessimistic about their ability to take on the recommendation for a childcare Directive.⁽³⁾ The inadequacy of the legal basis for EC social policy as described above, and the known opposition of at least the British in the Social Affairs Council, made the defeat of any draft Directive a foregone conclusion. Nevertheless, the Commission did put forward a Recommendation on Childcare [COM(91) 233] which was passed in May 1992. As a non-binding instrument the Recommendation has no legal force within member states; but for LGWCs, its details act as a yardstick of minimum childcare provision, quantitatively and qualitatively, which they can employ to buttress their own arguments at the local level, together with the need for a strategic approach to the matter e.g. Articles 4 and 6 of the Recommendation refer to the provision of parental leave schemes to encourage greater democracy in the home and men sharing family responsibilities, and Article 5 emphasises the role of public institutions in providing a lead in such good employment practices.

The Women In Decision-Making Network

Established early in 1992, this network has been set up to analyse the obstacles to women's representation and to encourage women to take up positions of power. Concerned with the persistence of women's lack of status in society, the network has collected and published "Community-wide data on women's participation in European, national and regional parliaments, in government, local politics, public administration, trade unions

and employers' organisations" [from a Network press release]. Working by a series of Round Table discussions, the network is collecting information about the way women in member states and outside (e.g. Norway, Sweden and the USA) are making progress in increasing their representation in political and economic elites. That there is a wide political mix amongst the national experts is clear from the notes of the second Round Table which jumps from recommendations on company training seminars which teach women "How to take it with a smile" and "How to be tough" on the one hand, to legislative provisions such as contract compliance and quotas for women's representation on government committees and public boards, on the other. In November 1992 the network held a conference "Women In Power" in Athens, ending with a mock-European Summit. The list of participants to this conference reveals an encouraging breadth of representation - from the Women's Lobby, from the EAC, from European political parties, (including MEPs) from public and private firms, from journalism, from government ministries (including the Czech National Council) and a representative from NALGWC. This is the first time that NALGWC has been invited to a European conference of this nature despite its efforts to make links with MPs, MEPs, and other organisations.

Prior to the conference, some countries e.g. Ireland had organised pre-meetings of their delegates to plan networking strategies with other delegates, which indicates that their in-country networking between women's organisations is at a more

sophisticated level than it is in Britain. The summit closed with a Declaration pledging that women who already hold positions of power within their countries would work to further women's participation and called for changes to decision-making procedures "to ensure that women's interests and values are properly reflected". If the Network remains content with symbolic gestures like formal declarations it will be of little value to the majority of women in Europe. If it can formulate an agreed strategy for action by all women's groups in member states together with the promotion of practical methods for political practice, including alliance-building, [see chapter one] then it may generate sufficient political power to bring about real change. Much will depend on the amount and quality of resources at the Network's disposal.

2.3.2 Community Initiatives:

These are specified Community-wide programmes organised within the EC's Structural Funds which focus on a particular aspect of Community development. In July 1990, DG5 set up such an Initiative "to promote the vocational training and employment of women" called New Opportunities For Women (NOW). As such, it reflects the development within DG5 of what it refers to as "mainstreaming"; that is to say, like LGWCs it is expanding its menu of strategies for promoting equal opportunities to incorporate action on women's equality within other EC activities. NOW is a Social Fund initiative and will be

described in more detail below under the section on financial impacts.

2.3.3 EC Funding and LGWCs

Chapter five detailed some of the ways that the Community's structural funds are a valuable source of external finance for LGWCs to promote new services for women, and particularly (as at DC5) when the disciplinary discourses within mainstream local authority departments reject these services as too "maverick and unconventional" for inclusion in their work. Apart from the EC's (or rather member states') parsimony in allocating money to the Social Fund, the problems for under-resourced LGWCs in obtaining access to these funds can be broadly categorised as (a) problems created by the administration of the funds by the EC; and (b) problems created by the attitude of the UK Government towards women's equality and towards local government.

The Administration of Funds:

The structural funds which are most relevant to LGWCs are the regional development funds (ERDF) and the Social Fund (ESF). The ERDF was established in 1975 both to channel common resources to the least well-off areas of the Community and to promote upward harmonisation of living standards [see e.g. Armstrong 1989]. Funds are targetted according to five primary objectives for regional development, namely:

1. Promoting the development of less developed regions;

2. Restructuring/redevelopment of areas of declining traditional industries;
3. Combatting long-term unemployment;
4. Encouraging young people into employment;
5. (a) Speeding up adjustments in agricultural areas; and
(b) Promoting rural development.

At present, the only Objective 1 area within the UK is Northern Ireland (the whole of the island of Ireland is so designated). However, proposals are in hand for the Highlands & Islands region of Scotland and Merseyside to be upgraded to this category, although neither of these areas have LGWCs. All but one of the case study LGWCs were located in Objective 2 areas; the one which was not (DC1) was in many respects the most "successful" of all the case study LGWCs. It cannot be claimed therefore that there is a causal link between access to EC funding and success for LGWCs. But it is true to say that LGWCs in Objective 2 areas do benefit from that link as follows. Moreover, as Halford found, areas of declining industry tend not to be sympathetic to LGWCs [Halford 1988]. Whilst they have been set up in these areas, many as a result of mid-1980s enthusiasm for decentralisation rather than feminism, their ability to sustain themselves as political fashions in the Labour Party have changed, may be attributable to EC support.

LGWCs in Objective 2 Areas:

Many local authorities in the UK have a designated European Liaison Officer, responsible for disseminating the information

on the likely impacts of the Single European Market (SEM) on local government e.g. Community wide public purchasing. Liaison Officers within Objective 2 areas have the added responsibility of collating together and preparing bids within the Community Support Framework for their region. That is to say, that under a rolling programme for regional development, the EC sets out broad parameters within which local authorities propose appropriate projects which contribute to the development of their region as a whole and packaged into a 3-year operational programme. Some very large-scale projects may be incorporated into these programmes such as the building or extension of an airport to serve the region, together with associated infrastructure linking local industrial or civic centres thereby attracting new economic developments to replace declining industries. Economic Development Departments within such local authorities can take on a more powerful role in coordinating the work of the council with the quango development, employment and training agencies in their area. Thus, despite the loss of competences by local government in the 1980s, local authorities in EC designated areas have been able to maintain an influential role in their communities. This is important for LGWCs when they are putting together funding packages for their projects and seeking support from e.g. TECs/LECs.

Moreover, since ERDF programmes now have an equal opportunities requirement attached to them, LGWCs can (in theory) ensure that e.g. "infrastructure development" includes adequate childcare

provision as well as roads, utilities and telecommunications. But, as in the MC1 case described in chapter four, patriarchal attitudes can thwart their efforts through delaying tactics and obduracy. Nevertheless, the women's group at MC1 did eventually succeed with their project, encouraged in their persistence by the fact that EC regulations were in their favour. However, the lack of an adequate system of monitoring the adherence to the equal opportunities requirement is a major fault in the present system.

Since 1988 the Regional Affairs Directorate at the Commission has developed procedures which allow for more direct communications between regions and the EC which not only reduces the "gatekeeping" role of central government in the administration of ERDF, but also encourages more "traffic" between local authorities and the Regional Affairs Directorate which LGWCs can join. As described in the previous chapter, the Chair of the LGWC at DC2 went to Brussels to obtain ESF funding for her women's training centre (45% of total costs). Part of the reason for her success was due to assistance from the Scottish lobby bureau, but also because it dovetailed into the regional council's ERDF operational programme. The element within the ESF package which was earmarked for childcare support contributed to the expansion of childminders which was one of the objectives of a relatively large-scale childcare development programme for which the region had obtained ERDF support. However, this did not stop complaints from some regional

councillors and officers more concerned with whether DC2 had the competence to provide the training centre. Such parochial thinking and inter-authority rivalries create unnecessary obstacles to local government maximising the opportunities provided by developing links with the EC.

The European Social Fund (ESF) is differently administered and in Britain is channelled through Whitehall which takes the lion's share of the UK's allocation to support its own employment training schemes which are now administered through the TECs (LECs in Scotland). However all of the LGWCs studied (including DC1) were benefitting from some Social Fund support. Again, monitoring of the use of funds by the EC is a problem resulting in insufficient flexibility in the criteria for projects. This leads to "cart before the horse" situations where local authorities are creating projects which meet ESF criteria rather than what is most needed locally. The content of women's training centres is an example of this where emphasis is placed on courses for women in non-traditional areas e.g. computer technologies and electronic engineering skills rather than in areas like hotel and catering or tourism. Not only are these latter skills in more demand in some areas, but the women who are targetted as trainees e.g. women with no formal qualifications, may have less of a psychological leap to make in taking them on:

"I think the whole thing is upside down anyway; we should be doing a lot more preliminary work [with trainees] on the

vocational skills assessment side. I think initially it was about getting money from the Social Fund and you could get money for non-traditional skills training; its changing though, the women's training network and IRIS have campaigned to get further training recognised as a success for projects rather than just the numbers of trainees getting jobs....The trouble is finding the time to plan; there isn't time to do anymore with year-on-year applications than simply repeat what you've done before. If the funding was more secure I [could] offer two-year courses and do a lot more outreach work using existing trainees."

[Manager: Women's Training Centre DC2]

The additionality principle:

One of the criteria for EC structural funds is that money must be used to create projects which are in addition to what a local authority or other agency would have provided through its own resources. This "additionality" principle has created many problems in the past when H.M. Treasury has taken a "double-entry bookkeeping" view and deducted the value of EC grant from central government grant to local authorities. The dispute between EC Commissioner Bruce Millan and the UK Government on this matter over the release of RECHAR funds (support to coal mining areas) was widely publicised and with the UK backing down, it is to be hoped that local authorities will benefit accordingly.

Finally in this section on ESF funds, the Community Initiative described above (the NOW programme) was an allocation of 120 million ECU to promote women's employment projects. The British Government took the view that such specified funds contravened the non-discrimination principle generally and UK equality law in particular. What has come to be known as "the NOW row" was eventually resolved by the UK Government using a face-saving formula and saying that British agencies would have access to NOW money when it accorded with the principle of positive action for women as laid down by Ss. 47 & 48 of the Sex Discrimination Act i.e. to support women's employment training in areas where women are under-represented and/or women returners. Since these criteria are broadly the same as those for the NOW programme, the issue was rather a storm in a teacup. Nevertheless, at the time, some LGWCs reported themselves as "holding their breath" lest the row stimulate a challenge to some of their positive action projects from opposition parties. Clearly, pressure from H.M.Treasury would have focussed on the need for Britain, as a net contributor to the EC budget, to claw-back as much as possible in ESF grant; but since the programme is only funded with 120m ECU Community-wide with the bulk of that going to priority areas, there was very little for the British Government to make a fuss about in the first place. However, it serves as an indication of political fears about the influence of the EC on British policy.

3. Networking As Strategy : Women's Organisation in Europe:

As the previous chapter shows, networking is an important strategy for LGWCs, not least in respect of maximising their limited resources as the case of establishing the women's training centre at DC2 illustrated. Additionally, NALGWC's working groups which produce information on best practice on particular issues e.g. black/ethnic minority women, service other LGWCs, not only saving them effort, but raising their awareness to issues that may not emerge in their own daily work. LGWCs in areas with small ethnic minority populations therefore, benefit from the experience of LGWCs in high ethnic minority population areas.

There are a number of institutions which have been established to further women's equality within the EC namely, the Parliament's Women's Rights Committee and the Women's Lobby. In addition, the pan-European organisation of local authorities mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, is represented in Britain by the Local Government International Bureau which also has a women's group. By looking at the work of these three forums in relation to LGWCs, it is possible to capture both the potential and the failings of networking between women in Europe. In so doing, the failures of the present hierarchical and inappropriate [see Lodge 1991] institutions of the EC for effective policy-making, becomes evident.

3.1 The European Parliament's Women's Rights Committee

The Standing Committee on Women's Rights (WRC) was established in July 1984 "with a mandate both to monitor the implementation of the directives already in force in the field of equal opportunities and to analyse and investigate other fields of relevance to women: education, employment, vocational training, the new technologies, women migrants and child care" [Reports and Activities of the Committee on Women's Rights: PE.145.089]. The origins of the WRC, as described in the aforementioned report, are interesting in relation to LGWCs. Only three months after the commencement of the first Parliament formed by direct elections in 1979, an ad hoc committee on women's rights was set up. This committee presented an extensive report and resolution to Parliament in February 1981 which was duly passed. "The women Members of the European Parliament subsequently realized that without any structure within Parliament itself for monitoring the implementation of the many demands set out in the resolution of 17th February 1981, those demands might come to nought." [ibid] A councillor at DC5 made a similar observation about the need for women's committees: "working individually within [programme] committees, trying to get equal opportunities, doesn't work and you need the focus of a women's committee to work across the whole council... Too many people say they are committed to equal opportunities but then they don't do anything." In Iris Young's prescription for a politics of difference [see chapter two] autonomous groupings

of oppressed people are separate from decision-makers who "are obliged to show that they have taken these perspectives into consideration". LGWCs and the WRC combine the elements of oppressed group and decision-makers; they provide a forum for women to focus on their own oppression, to "gain a sense of collective empowerment and a reflective understanding of their collective experience and interests". Not only can they represent themselves collectively within the full council/Parliament, but as individual members of other committees, they can ensure that women's interests are taken into consideration in the decisions of those other committees.

Another parallel which can be drawn between LGWCs and the WRC is the relative powerlessness of their assemblies. No sovereign power rests with the European Parliament in the way that it does in the British Parliament for example. On the other hand, as Jacobs, Corbett & Shackleton point out: "the European Parliament is able to amend the budget to increase expenditure, something which the French parliament is not able to do under the French Constitution. But no one would want to say that the French parliament is not a real parliament" [Jacobs, Corbett & Shackleton 1992]. In the 1991 Budget for example, the Commission proposed a budget of 2.8 million ECU for the equal opportunities programme; the WRC argued for a figure of 4.7 million: "Parliament agreed with the Women's Committee and called for an extra 1.9 million ECU to make up

the difference. The Council of Ministers finally voted for a budget of 4.234 million ECU" [CREW Reports:1991]. As this example shows, the European Parliament can exert more power in some respects than can British local government. On the other hand, the WRC's attempts to persuade the Commission and Council of Ministers of the need for a Childcare Directive rather than a non-binding Recommendation failed, despite all-party support for it in the Parliament. It is particularly ironic that the Commission should reject the recommendations of its own Childcare Network, partly because of the certainty of the British Conservative Minister vetoing a Directive on Childcare in the Social Affairs Council, whilst in the Parliament, Conservative MEPs were voting in favour of it. [see European Parliamentary Debate 22.11.91]⁽⁴⁾

There is no scope for the European Parliament to engage in autonomous activities in the same way that British local government can under S.137 of the Local Government Act 1972.⁽⁵⁾ A close parallel to this would be the Commission's rolling equal opportunities action programme, and as the budget amendment situation described above shows, the Parliament can embolden the Commission to be more ambitious in its plans for promoting women's equality. Other similarities between the European Parliament and British local government e.g. the centrality of the committee system, would lead to an expectation of close liaison between LGWCs and the WRC.

However, it was not until 1991 that NALGWC made a formal approach to the WRC and this primarily at the prompting of the Scottish LGWCs which, as the previous chapter showed, tend to be more sensitive to the European dimension to their work.

The Failure to Network:

NALGWC, as mentioned before, is grossly under-resourced for the work it seeks to do, but it has accumulated a treasure-house of information and expertise on effective policy-making for women. As such it ought to attract supporting contributions and/or payments for advisory services from large organisations like the EOC and TUC and from political parties. In the course of research for this study, some disturbing facts emerged to account, in part, for why this is not so. At a meeting of the WRC held in Birmingham in November 1990, MEP Anita Pollack presented her report on the proposed Childcare Directive. In conversation with the author at the end of the meeting, Mrs Pollack expressed her regret that she had not known about LGWCs and their work on childcare prior to writing her report. Commitment to the Directive was set out in the Labour Party manifesto for the 1988 elections to the European Parliament. The Labour Party first proposed a Ministry for Women's Rights in 1986; in the discussion document setting out those proposals it stated: "The Ministry for Women's Rights would seek to support those initiatives [LGWCs] and to ensure that other local authorities took similar action." In the policy document

published in March 1991 "A New Ministry For Women" these intentions were reaffirmed; and from correspondence with the present Labour spokesperson on Women (Dr. Marjorie Mowlem MP) it is clear that there is a long-established system of liaison between Labour women MPs and MEPs [Letter to author dated 18.11.92]. In the light of the foregoing, it is surprising not only that it fell to NALGWC to make the initial overtures to the WRC, but that there would appear to be little policy coordination on women's rights within the Labour Party as a whole.

To date the links between NALGWC and the WRC remain tenuous; although representatives from both attended the "Women In Power" conference (see above) unlike the Irish women, there was no coordination of effort around the theme of promoting equality for British women as citizens of Europe. Clearly, it is not simply a matter of the unequal distribution of power between the institutions of the EC which works against women's equality, but a failure among political elites to recognise and promote, working models of their own policies (LGWCs) where they do exist.

A similar observation can be made in terms of the links between the WRC and the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC): "There is no formal liaison between the two institutions" [Letter from Anita Pollack 13.11.92]. Angela Guillaume (Conservative and

former Chair of the UK Section of the European Union of Women) was rapporteur for the ECOSOC report on the Childcare Directive. She notes: "There was a lot of discussion, and we took a great deal from men, about the possibility of a Directive but it was inappropriate - or considered to be - as a first time attempt by the Commission in this field. As you will see there is room for manoeuvre in the future for something stronger. We were anxious to get something through" [Letter from Mrs. Guillaume 18.11.92].

3.2 The European Women's Lobby:

According to Jacobs, Corbett & Shackleton, "Brussels is becoming increasingly like Washington in the variety of lobbyists based there (now over 3,000)" [ibid:1992]. As the numbers of lobbyists increase, so the competition for the attention of MEPs, Commissioners and Permanent Representatives becomes fiercer. Nevertheless, lobbying can be highly effective; Juliet Lodge, for example, cites the case of CECOM, the photocopier manufacturers group, obtaining a tariff barrier against Japanese imports [Lodge 1989]. Women have been slow to form their own lobby - it was not set up until September 1990 - due, in Hoskyn's view to "the hostility and/or distance between 'traditional' and 'feminist' women in most countries, and on the lack of interest of the latter in either the EC or mainstream politics" [Hoskyns 1991]. In a footnote to the article from which this quotation is taken, Catherine Hoskyns

explains that by "traditional" she means "those women's organisations which essentially work within the existing system", and by "feminist, those which seek to change it" [ibid]. Such a dichotomous interpretation highlights the importance of groups like LGWCs as bridges between the two.

However, the work of the European Network of Women, fostering links between women's groups and encouraging campaigning at the EC level, gradually established an environment within which the idea of a Lobby became more generally acceptable. Although the Women's Bureau in DG5 did much of the preparatory work of formulating the provisional statutes or procedures by which the Lobby would be set up, they "gave little guidance as to how the national delegates should be chosen. In the UK, the decision was made to elect them on a regional basis.." [ibid]. As shown in the previous chapter, although LGWCs have facilitated the selection of the Scottish regional representative to the Lobby, they have been excluded from active input to it. This is unfortunate because LGWCs' expertise in practice methods which facilitate the representation of different women within a framework of solidarity, appears to be much needed by the Lobby. As Hoskyn notes "the vast majority [of Lobby delegates] were white, professional and middle-aged... only two out of the seventy were ethnic-minority women" which raises the question of whether the Lobby can be "sufficiently broad-based, democratic and accountable (and well-enough resourced) to

justify its claims to represent women across the EC?" [ibid]. Unlike the photocopier manufacturers above, the Women's Lobby has a diverse constituency to which it is, or ought to be, accountable. If it is not to become a mirror image of political parties, manipulating and controlling policy agenda and representative only of itself, then it needs to develop a feminist political practice along the lines provided by the LGWC model.

3.3 Local Government International Bureau Women's Section:

The impact of international links between local authorities in Europe on the work of LGWCs might not have arisen in this study had DC2 not been one of the participating case studies. As noted in chapter five, the Chair of DC2's LGWC had developed strong European links, not only within EC institutions, but within the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and its sister organisation the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE). CEMR is the European section of the International Union of Local Authorities, established in Geneva in 1951, and fostering links between municipal organisations in 24 European countries. Its origins are parallel with those of the EC and it has maintained strong links with Community institutions. CEMR has a Standing Commission of Women Elected Representatives of local and regional authorities and at their conference held in Heidelberg in September 1992, there was strong representation from the EC

e.g. Social Affairs Commissioner (then Vasso Papandreou) and senior officials from the Women's Bureau. British delegates at this conference were from the UK Working Group of Women Elected Members which is made up of women representatives from the local authorities associations e.g. COSLA, ACC, ADC, AMA as well as CEMR individual members. Although EC policy for equal opportunities was a main theme of the conference, there was no formal representation from the WRC. Moreover in spite of the fact that CEMR, DG5, WRC, NALGWC, EAC and EOC representatives were all together at the Women In Power conference, there was no attempt at coordinating a fringe meeting to focus on British women and the role of local government in promoting their equality. Fragmentation of effort remains a major problem in progressing women's equality.

Evaluation:

In the course of research for this study, it was frustrating to witness the amount of information which is being produced by and for women in Britain and the EC but which is under-utilised for lack of effective networking. As already mentioned, NALGWC holds a treasure-house of experience/expertise which needs to be disseminated more widely to women working in EC equalities policy-making and within the network of European local authorities. Not only that these groups should be better informed, but also to connect LGWCs' constituencies of women citizens with the political elites which are working in their

name. Without that, policy-making remains "top-down". All of the women interviewed in these various groups were mindful of the need to improve their networking and whilst under-resourcing is a major problem, nevertheless, barriers are created by difference. Divided loyalties, particularly political allegiance, but also territorialism e.g. the lack of cooperation between women in different institutions of the EC, separates women. This is not an argument for subsuming difference, or for radical/cultural feminist separatism, but for the need for feminist political practice tools to overcome differences - or rather to work with them. Given the strategic approach to equal opportunities in EC policies, and given the structure provided by the equalities networks, clearly what is missing is the practice.

4. Local Government and Europe:

Reference was made at the beginning of this chapter to the long established organisation of cooperation and exchange between municipalities in Europe. Whilst these links have contributed to the cultural life of Europe, and particularly the education of young people, they have not of themselves been of great political significance, at least as far as British local government is concerned. It is only with the development of the EC, more particularly since the Single European Act (SEA) came into force in 1987 that the economic and political implications of these links have become more apparent. EC

Directives covering public works and supplies have been in force since 1971, but among the preparations for the finalisation of the single market by the end of 1992, were new and more forceful Directives to encourage greater competition in these areas. The Cecchini Report estimated that the value of public purchasing contracts in 1986 accounted for some 15% of the combined GDP of member states [Local Government International Bureau 1990]. British domestic policies for local government in the 1980s [see chapter two] also stimulated the opening up of contract tendering e.g. Merseyside's public cleansing contract was awarded to a French company. At DC2 a system of exchange for engineering apprenticeships had been developed between the council and its "town twin" in Spain. Therefore, as the political and economic significance of European inter-authority links increases, particularly with the free flow of capital, goods, services and peoples provided for in the SEA, so an increasingly partisan local government in Britain seeks greater autonomy, encouraged by the EC principle of subsidiarity [see e.g. Crawford 1992; Cram & Richardson 1992].

Whereas the British Government has been anxious to claw back policy-formulating powers from the Commission in order to reassert the sovereignty of national governments within the EC framework, local government (Labour councils on the left in particular) claim that the principle of subsidiarity should be

made to apply to all levels of government. Although, as noted in chapter two, the concept of decentralised government is favoured by democratic socialists, the communitarian approach to local government enjoys much wider political support. At a conference organised by the Local Government International Bureau in July 1992 the Chairman Councillor John Chatfield, who is also Conservative Chairman of the Association of County Councils, said "The principle of subsidiarity itself demands that the democratic deficit in Community governance be overcome. This is why my colleagues and I set so much store by the Committee of the Regions to be instituted under the Maastricht Treaty...I am deeply convinced of the need for an extended and ever more effective dialogue between the Commission, Parliament and Council on the one hand and representatives of local government on the other." [LAA 1992]

Article 198a of the Maastricht Treaty which establishes the Committee of the Regions as an advisory body (similar to ECOSOC) was originally drafted to read "A Committee consisting of regional and local authorities ..."; but in the English translation this was changed to read "A Committee consisting of regional and local bodies..." [see Martin 1992]. The reaction of local government in Britain to this change was that "We are shocked and dismayed by the assertion that local government is only one among several so called 'interest groups' to be accommodated in the new Committee" [LAA 1992]. The Local

Authorities Association (LAA) lobbied vigorously for their right to occupy the UK's 24 places on the Committee and their success can be measured by the subsequent amending vote on the matter in Parliament. How effective the Committee of the Regions is likely to be might be guessed at by comparison to ECOSOC which would not be very encouraging. However, in more recent times, the Commission has moved to involve "the social partners" - representatives of industry and trade unions in ECOSOC - more closely in policy-formulation as a means of countering dissatisfaction with Commission control over this process; a move which upset MEPs in the Parliament not a little [see EP Debates 15.5.91].

All of the foregoing gives greater significance to the campaign for local self-government which has been organised by the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE). Although CEMR was instrumental in originating the European Charter of Local Self-Government as a Charter of Municipal Liberties, "no attempt was made to persuade national governments to take action" [Lock 1992]. CLRAE as a body within the Council of Europe, with its European Court of Human Rights, recognised the importance of giving legal force to such a Charter and adopted its own Declaration of Principles on Local Autonomy in 1968. As Sir Duncan Lock notes CLRAE's intention was always based upon the perception of a link between human rights and local autonomy: "it is worth reminding

ourselves of one paragraph in the preamble [to the Declaration] which reads 'One of the essential guarantees of the rights and freedoms of man (sic) lies in the guarantee of the rights and freedoms of communities'" [ibid]. But it was not until 1981 that CLRAE finalised the European Charter in its present form and set it on its progress through the machinery of the Council of Europe to be formally adopted as a Convention by the Committee of Ministers (the Council's executive body) in June 1985. It was then opened for signature and ratification as a binding legal instrument by the Council's member states. This is a slow process and as at July 1992 only a little more than half of the Council's 27 member states (15) had ratified the Charter, although 19 have signed it. As noted in chapter two, the main planks of the Charter are a power of general competence for local authorities and independence from central government in revenue raising capacity [see Articles 4(4) and 9(3)].

Britain, despite encouraging post-Communist European countries to adopt the Charter, has poured scorn on the idea of doing so itself [see Crawford 1992]. However, as Crawford also notes, the current review of local government structure: "known as the 'Heseltine review' includes for discussion the question 'what is the case for a power of general competence?'" [ibid]. Furthermore, in a speech to the LAA Conference (see above) in July 1992, John Redwood then Local Government Minister, whilst

arguing strongly against the idea of regional government said: "Don't invent new layers of government. Give necessary layers of government enough room to breathe and **enough discretion** to leave pride and tradition intact" [emphasis added]. This may well be reading far too much into a junior ministers words, but on the other hand, it might be interpreted as a coded response to pressure from the LAA which in March 1991 issued a joint statement on 'Principles of Local Government' "many of which are expressed in similar terms to those in the Charter" [Crawford 1992]. Nevertheless, Mr. Redwood's speech reiterated the public choice theory version of "the enabling council" [see chapter two] in which case, a power of general competence to what may become only a residual authority might be easily accommodated by the Government. Since then, however the Government has received what the Prime Minister described as "a bloody nose" at the May 1993 local elections as well as losing the vote in Parliament on representation on the Committee of the Regions (see above). How far either or both of these events can be attributed in part to European influences on British political life is difficult to assess. But many local politicians interviewed by the BBC as the local election results were being declared, spoke of public dissatisfaction with Government policies perceived as undermining local government. Similarly in the Maastricht Treaty debate on the amendment to restore the original interpretation of Article

198a, the importance of elected representatives had cross-party support.

European influences which strengthen the arguments of communitarians for greater local autonomy are important for LGWCs since this would remove some of the obstacles they encounter. Regional autonomy also offers women the opportunity to win equal representation when new constitutional arrangements are being drawn up as in Scotland [see chapter two]. A "Europe of the Regions" as envisaged by the European Parliament would have a Regional Assembly as a second chamber in a Parliament with full legislative powers [see e.g. Martin 1992]. Whilst some regard this as "so far from reality that it must be a deliberate attempt to mislead" [Scott 1992] others see it as a possible solution to intractable sovereignty disputes such as Northern Ireland [see e.g. Kearney & Wilson 1993].

For some feminists, these structural debates are an irrelevance; it matters not whether the assembly is regional, national or European if women are not equally represented in policy-making, or "as Emilienne Brunfaut, the Belgian trade unionist put it in 1983: these are men's rules for women's rights" [Hoskyns 1992]. For LGWCs which have learned the lessons about oversimplification of women's representation, it is not numbers of women that matters but whether methods are

practised to ensure the identification and equal representation of oppressed groups. Such practice has to start at the local level with people themselves in control of policy agenda, and therefore local autonomy (genuine subsidiarity) is paramount.

Summary:

It is clear from the foregoing, that in the past, the higher authority of the EC has provided British women with more opportunity for achieving de facto equality than the national legislature. But it is equally clear that the present arrangements for policy-making, limited by:

- (a) what is possible from the legal terms of the Treaties; and
 - (b) given the dominance of national interests in the Council of Ministers; and
 - (c) the lack of resources available to promote equality through the equal opportunities route;
- are unequal to the task.

The lack of consensus on how the principles of the EC should be interpreted has resulted in a lack of unity of purpose, resulting in the developing practice of "opt-outs" in treaty-making. Such papering over the cracks deflects from the need to critically review the mis-match between the principles of the EC and the institutional framework for their realisation and represents a political failure of responsibility to the citizens of Europe and to women and other oppressed groups most of all.

In spite of these problems, this chapter has demonstrated how Britain's membership of the EC has impacted favourably on the work of LGWCs, most especially through its legitimising effect on their policies, but also through the availability of even small sums of "outside" money, which for hard-pressed local authorities, gives them credibility. Even the problem of additionality appears to be less politically significant to Labour councillors, more concerned to demonstrate a measure of autonomy which these outside sources of money afford them. What is more difficult to explain is that given this, most local politicians fail to appreciate the potential for maximising their autonomy through cooperation on a wider basis. This is particularly true in parts of Scotland where the tensions between the two tiers of local government, in all cases studied, Labour-controlled and Objective 2 areas, inhibit more effective collaboration. Such territorialism mirrors the barriers to effective networking between women as described above. Indeed, an argument may be made that there is a parallel between the imbalance of power between the institutions of the EC, and between the institutions of government in Britain, and in both cases, parochial attitudes are fostered which work against effective government (certainly against bottom-up policy-making) and therefore against the interests of women. These points will be pursued further in the final chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN : CONCLUSIONS

In the introduction to this study it was stated that the main purpose of the research was to demonstrate that LGWCs provide a model of feminist political practice which has the potential for wider application by groups concerned with conceptualising more democratic forms of government in Britain and Europe. The strategies and techniques of practice which LGWCs have developed over the past decade, it was suggested, could be employed processually to formulate and hold together a rainbow alliance of diverse groups with the common objective of radically changing economic, political and social institutions and processes which maintain relations of domination and oppression between men and women; white and people of colour; able-bodied and disabled people; adults and children; young and elderly people; rich and poor people and between peoples of different religion, language and place. It was not the purpose of this study to say how, specifically, such a rainbow alliance could be constructed, but by detailing the methods employed by LGWCs - both for progressing their own objectives and overcoming the obstacles created by existing structures - to present their work as a tool for that larger project. This has been done by setting the narrow research on LGWCs within their broader contexts of women's continuing inequality and unequal inter-governmental relations in Britain. The impact of Britain's membership of the European Community on both these inequalities

has added a further dimension to this study, such that in this final chapter, therefore, the task is two-fold, namely:

(a) to test the validity of the claim that LGWCs provide a model of feminist political practice; and

(b) to judge the normative propositions made in respect of the radical potential of that model, particularly in light of the radical potential of the principles of government of the EC.

LGWCs As Feminist Political Practice

In chapter one, feminist political practice was defined as "the practice of promoting women's de facto equality through strategies of empowerment". Empowerment, as Jill Bystydzienski's definition shows [see page 21] is essentially a group process between oppressed peoples, and therefore an argument needed to be made to demonstrate that women can still legitimately be regarded as an oppressed or disadvantaged group in society, in spite of their many differences (not least in their access to/control of the means of power e.g. wealth) and their formal enfranchisement as citizens. The arguments were set out in chapters one and two to demonstrate the validity of (a) the concept of women as a multi-constitutive group; and (b) the subordination of that group in contemporary society. Iris Young's work on defining oppressed groups was drawn upon to clarify the complexities involved from the point of view of the individual woman - finding herself defined by others, as a member of a group, or more than one group, (the "thrownness" of

group identity) yet having also the capacity to choose to identify herself with those groups, or others, or to reject all or part of some group membership. Thus the idea of the multi-constitutive being implies an individual identity which is in part constituted by group membership without being "engulfed" by it. But the development of individual autonomy, the capacity to construct one's own identity and control the direction of one's own life, it was argued, depends on the extent to which others exercise *power over* the group(s) one finds oneself identified with, and over oneself individually. Thus all women's autonomy is hobbled by society's expectation of the responsibilities they will take for "the family" as a result of their reproductive capacities [see also the observations of the European Childcare Network cited in chapter six].

The origins of this hobbled autonomy and the causes of its maintenance in contemporary society were found to be bound up with the origins of the principles of liberal democratic government and as such, can account for the continuing fixity of women's subordination, since these principles also guide the formulation of current social policies. Policies designed to facilitate women's civil equality are bound to fail when they are based on what Carole Pateman has analysed as patriarchal forms of liberty, equality and consent. These arguments were set out (necessarily superficially for lack of space) in chapter two, showing that in the modern definition of civil society, it

is not that women are conspiratorially excluded from the public realm of citizenship, but that that realm continues to exclude the activities and concerns of the domestic sphere which remains constituted by a majority of women. The discounted sphere of the domestic realm is nonetheless deemed essential to social and political stability [see Young's definition of exploitation in chapter one]. Negative liberty, fundamental in liberal thinking to the concept of the individual free citizen, has the effect therefore of negative empowerment [Soper 1990] in maintaining the de facto exclusion of women from the public realm.

Moreover, in clinging to the abstract notion of equality in anti-discrimination legislation (fair rules not fair outcomes) the obstacles to women's equality of opportunity in the public sphere, are largely ignored [see page 40]. As Chantal Mouffe observes: "it has to be recognised that the *respublica* is the product of a given hegemony" [Mouffe 1992] and that hegemony is patriarchal.

Having thus established the legitimacy of women as an oppressed group, the necessity for governmental action to tackle that oppression is clear, and particularly so since women are not numerically a minority group. That is not to say that public resources should not be spent on tackling oppression of minority groups - far from it, since the oppression of any group in a democratic society challenges the legitimacy of democracy. But when the oppressed group represents more than half the

population, the malaise within the democracy is chronic. LGWCs by having as their primary objective [see page 11] the promotion of equality for ALL women in their localities can rightly be viewed as such legitimate governmental action. But the absence of effective mechanisms for group representation within the British political system forces an uneasy alliance between feminist movement and political parties, exacerbating differences between women and dividing their loyalties. On the other hand, the struggles of the 1980s by some local authorities to resist centralising forces and retain their limited scope for autonomy and diversity provided an opportunity for feminists (socialist feminists in particular) to focus on local government as a site for alliance-building between groups with different political agenda, but with some common objectives between them. Thus it was argued in chapter two that the parallels between, and common origins of, the subordination of women, the subordination of the electorate, and the subordination of local government provided a framework within which feminists, organised as LGWCs, could develop a political practice whilst at the same time, accessing the resources to do so. Their validity as feminist political practice can be tested by examining how far the strategies which LGWCs employ actually empower women as an oppressed group. That is to say, in Bystydzienski's terms, how far they enable women to "gain some control over their lives by taking part with others in the development of activities and

structures that allow people increased involvement in matters which affect them directly" [see page 21].

1. Constructing A Group Polity (Taking Part With Others)

In chapter five it was shown how LGWCs seek to establish and/or support a variety of forums which serve these purposes:

(i) to facilitate the self-organisation of autonomous groups of women in which they can "gain a sense of collective empowerment" [Young 1990]. Whether these groups are independent of the LGWC (e.g. the [DC3] Chinese Women's Group) or specifically set up by them in conjunction with some policy initiative (e.g. the childcare working party in DC5), the job of the LGWC is to support and validate these women's experiences (their "subjugated knowledges" in Foucault's terms) and to provide a conduit into the council's policy-formulation processes, enabling them to represent themselves and render their claims visible and legitimate. It is not, as the women's officer at DC2 remarked, the task of LGWCs to represent women: "its my job to set [these groups] up, but it shouldn't be for me to act on their behalf. Its for the council to come face to face with the forums". Feminist political practice is, in Foucault's terms, "*debout et en face*" [Burchell, Gordon & Miller 1991]. The early fears that LGWCs would become "femocratised" [Flannery & Roelofs 1984] appear therefore, to have been based on an assumption that LGWCs would mediate between the council and women, interpreting the political needs and expectations of the bureaucracy to the

women's groups and adapting/manipulating women's demands to suit the bureaucratic processes of local government. Whilst there is sometimes a coincidence of interests between the women's groups and the needs of the bureaucracy - in chapter five for example, it was observed that DC5's LGWC had a need to show early results to maintain their political support [see page 153] - the evidence of conflict between LGWCs and their councils witnesses their capacity to resist bureaucratisation. The overturning of the LGWC decision to grant-aid a lesbian women's advice line at DC3 and the dismissal of DC5's shoppers creche as "maverick and unconventional" are two examples of such conflict given in chapter five. A "femocratised" LGWC would have accepted the council decision not to set up a shoppers creche rather than set about finding the resources to ensure that it was.⁽¹⁾

(ii) to facilitate the movement between groups by individual women to reflect their multi-constitutive identities; thus individual single mothers in DC5's "Women and Benefits" policy group were also involved with the childcare working group. This cross-pollination of perspectives between groups ensures that policy proposals reflect different women's claims [see chapter one].

(iii) to enable different women to meet and gain understanding of each others' perspectives and in the process of identifying common oppressive experiences, to gain insight into ways in

which women oppress each other. The management of reciprocity [see chapter one] between different women requires a high level of interpersonal skills and support resources e.g. assertiveness training for some women. The existence of other groups and the semi-formal status of forums provides flexibility such that if a group does breakdown, members can be assimilated into other groups until such time as the original group reforms, or alternatively the work of the unsuccessful group may be assimilated into other groups. Failure, although painful for the individuals concerned, does not have to be utterly destructive and may come to be seen as a learning process.

(iv) to build a constituency of women in the local community which seeks to break down barriers between government and the governed. As in the case of the inaugural public meeting of DC5's LGWC, the Chair of the committee experienced the same problems of organising childcare as did many of the women attending. Moreover, and since council officials also constitute "government" and are part of the marginalisation of oppressed groups [see page 24], the work done to bring women as governors and governed together e.g. DC2's workshops for International Women's Day, promotes alliance-building and a sense of the capacity to be an "agent of challenge" [Weedon 1987]. Common experiences and strategies to break down fragmentation of personal identity by the nature of bureaucracy

[see chapter four] help to create solidarities between different women, and a group polity.

As noted in chapter six, women's committees (including the Women's Rights Committee of the European Parliament) are, in themselves, autonomous women's groups within which members "can gain a sense of their collective empowerment". What prevents them from being more like their own forums is the party system which creates divided loyalties for women, building in rigidities through political agenda and ideologies which are representative of male-dominated thinking. In this, MEPs on the Women's Rights Committee are formally in a more privileged position through their Rule 2.2 [see note 4: chapter six] although overall, party or political group allegiances appear to have the same effect. Nevertheless LGWCs, by opening up representation on their committees to community representatives or advisers (formerly cooptees) ensure that there are autonomous voices which "get in the way of party jostling" [see page 151] and counter bureaucratising forces.

2. Bottom-Up Policy-Making (Taking Control Over Their Lives)

Since, as has been shown on page one, the policies which have been instituted by government to bring about women's equality have failed, how far have the policies which LGWCs have developed in conjunction with their women's groups and forums been more successful? In chapter five, two broadly-defined

approaches were distinguished as "DIY strategies" and "the gradual approach". The former consisted of policies and projects which LGWCs carried out autonomously, and the latter consisted of changing the way that other service-providers worked in order to incorporate women's perspectives of their needs.

The DIY approach was shown to be something of a misnomer since LGWCs, although unimpeded by government mandate themselves, are subject to the constraints imposed on other local authority service departments because most of the activities they wish to pursue involve existing local authority functions. The recent changes to the operation of S.137 [see chapter four] has added to these constraints, and although the increasing trend towards restructuring local government into unitary authorities may be helpful to LGWCs in some respects, it may not be so in others. DC2's women's training centre, which was the example given of the DIY approach might have been stopped or slowed down if, as the Chair of the LGWC said, "we had tried to do it all by negotiate and agree" [see page 179] which they might have been forced to do if the local education authority had not been the responsibility of a different tier of local government. In the case of DC5's shoppers creche, on the other hand, attempts to get the mainstream Leisure Department to provide the service failed because the creche was considered to be "too maverick and unconventional". The LGWC at DC5 was only able to establish the

creche itself because it had access to alternative sources of finance. With the transfer of responsibility for certain activities from local authorities to quango agencies; the introduction of competition for urban development projects; and the movement away from direct service provision (CCT), LGWCs will have more difficulty in putting together such funding packages in order to bring new public services for women to fruition. Hence the importance to them of both the EC as an alternative source of funding and providing the framework of a different (strategic) approach to equal opportunities policies.

Nevertheless, the ability of LGWCs to empower women through bringing to fruition the policies and services they demand has been amply demonstrated in chapter five:

(a) enabling mothers (and single fathers) to enjoy child-free hours, whether they are partaking in paid work; in leisure pursuits or participating as citizens in political activities, encourages them to experience themselves as autonomous individuals. Parenting is only a life-enhancing experience if one is not forced to be engulfed by it [see also Phillips 1991b].

(b) the development of public childcare provision evidences a community's willingness to share responsibility for its children and to treat them as a group of citizens with their own rights

to quality of life. This community approach to child citizenship, developed by the LGWC at DC1, effectively challenges both the assumption that it is women's primary social role and responsibility and that it is a private realm activity wherein women and children are rendered non-citizens.

(c) enabling women to improve their life-chances through women-only education and employment training opportunities which are designed around women's needs e.g. with a range of support services (including childcare, transport, counselling etc) to overcome the material and psychological obstacles to their participation. In making such provision at DC2, the LGWC highlighted the inadequacies of established public provision e.g. nursery provision at the local college of further education with its restricted access (both to entry qualifications for students and age barriers to nursery care) and numbers of places provided. Such "establishment" provision evidences the power of professional discourse in determining policies based on perceived rather than actual needs and hence the need for policy processes to be under greater public control.

At another of the case study LGWCs there was a scheme which provided women with access to small business start-up grants and loans coupled with an EC-funded specialist adviser addressing the particular problems of businesswomen e.g. the reluctance of some banks to treat women seriously/equally when they apply for

loans. This scheme was not only restricted in size but hedged about with legal caveats for the same reasons that the UK government objected to the EC's NOW initiative [see chapter six] namely that it constituted positive discrimination in the form of money specifically earmarked for women. Without the LGWC it is unlikely that this scheme would have been set up; without unity of purpose between councillors and officers in various departments, neither the political will nor the legal arguments could have been assembled to bring it to fruition in view of the political (and for councillors, personal financial) risks involved.

3. Transforming the Organisation (The Development of Structures)

The analysis of LGWCs strategies in chapter five distinguished between strategies which empowered women in their communities and strategies which were aimed at transforming the attitudes of individuals and the bureaucratic processes of their local authorities. These latter group of strategies are essential to women's empowerment because without them, the activities of LGWCs remain marginal to the activities of local government as a whole. That is not to imply that the constituency-building and autonomous projects which LGWCs achieve are not capable of empowering women to seek these structural changes themselves; indeed, as already noted, engaging in direct dialogue with other parts of the council is part of that set of strategies. But as the Play Development Officer at DC5 noted [see page 156] there

is a limit to what can be achieved from the "outsider" position. The unique value of LGWCs is that they can employ the resources and procedures of local government to effect transformational change upon itself. Such change is qualitatively different from Stewart's instrumental learning from feedback [see chapter two] where policy formulators (professionals) retain control over the policy agenda. But, as chapter four showed, the control which central government exercises over local authorities undermines the capacity/will of both officers and Members to "let go" of their control over policy formulation.

In examining what constitutes the scope for autonomy in local government, much emphasis has been placed on the concept of the multi-constitutive individual as an actor in the public policy process. In chapter four, for example, the unity of purpose between officers and Members in a local authority was shown to be vital in maximising interpretations of the law to enable LGWCs to pursue the long equal opportunities agenda. The concept of impartiality was revealed as a myth - another of liberalism's fallacious abstractions - providing scope for manipulative behaviours and inefficiencies, as well as maintaining dominant-group control over the policy agenda. Far from being democratic [see e.g. Etzioni-Halevy in Pollitt 1986] it is instrumental in the marginalisation and disempowerment of the people [see Young's analysis of oppression on page 24]. It also serves to fragment the individual in the bureaucratic

setting [see Ferguson 1984] leading to an over-reliance on rules and reinforcement of rigidities in procedures. DC3's strategy of linking anti-discrimination training to the provision of improved working conditions [see chapter five] enabled them to restore personal integrity to staff through giving them greater control over their work in decentralised offices; taking responsibility for their own behaviours; and the quality of their service to the public. Iris Young's analysis of the diffuseness of power within bureaucracies, coupled with Kate Soper's notion of negative empowerment, provides a framework for understanding how these LGWC strategies can work to empower people working within, and subordinated by, the nature of the bureaucracy. Reciprocity is achieved when the inter-relationships between their own empowerment and that of the community at large, of which they (for the most part) are themselves members, is perceived.

The personal commitment of leading politicians and/or chief officers to women's equality were also shown to be important; indeed it cannot be emphasised too strongly that it is actors as much as factors which account for the success of individual LGWCs. The techniques of consciousness-raising and alliance-building which are the tools of feminist political practice and which are employed by LGWCs in this set of strategies aimed at transforming bureaucratic organisation, exposes the individual actor to the position she/he holds in relation to the network of

power relations which constitute the practice of government. As the Women's Officer at DC2 observed, staff training for equality has to take place in a safe atmosphere to reduce defensiveness and restore personal integrity to the individual officer, empowering them to distinguish between *power over* and *power to* behaviours and to perceive themselves as agents of challenge and change in the construction of more democratic local government [see chapter five].

Whilst it may fairly be claimed therefore, that LGWCs provide a model of feminist political practice, as noted in chapter three, the working model is by no means perfect. Moreover, the question frequently alluded to in this study as to why there are not more LGWCs has not yet been specifically addressed. Furthermore, having made a case for the worth of LGWCs, an additional question also arises as to why they have not achieved more than they have. These questions need to be dealt with before the issue of the radical potential of feminist political practice can be explored.

Why so few LGWCs?:

The obstacles for LGWCs were set out in broad terms in chapter two and more specifically in chapter four. Clearly, an explanation for the small number of LGWCs country-wide, can be found in part in the widely-differing perceptions of the scope for autonomy in local government. Although, by definition, the

six case study councils were sufficiently proactive to have established their LGWCs, yet it was clear that they differed from each other, with perhaps none taking quite so broad an interpretation as DC1 [see chapter four]. There, a combination of pro-equal opportunities officers, antagonism between the two tiers of local government, and the economic need to attract and retain workers in the town, stimulated both a psychological change in councillors' and officials' attitudes and experimentation with organisational change. In the course of fieldwork at a number of local authorities in different parts of the country, with or without LGWCs of their own, reactions of experienced councillors and officials to the type of work going on at DC1 confirmed that it was rare in both the breadth and nature of its autonomy.

However, whilst a sense of local autonomy is a pre-requisite to the establishment of LGWCs, it is not the main active ingredient - that is a grassroots demand from local women active within political parties and within the women's movement [see e.g. Perrigo 1986]. But in order to get a political commitment to establish a women's committee, women must have a sufficiently strong influence on, usually, the local Labour Party, either directly or through the trade union movement. For example, there is only one Welsh local authority listed in the 1991 NALGWC Directory and as the Widdicombe research showed, the average of 5% women councillors in Wales is well below the

national average [see Leach et al 1986]. Whatever the strength and nature of women's political activity in Wales, it is not through the party system.⁽²⁾ The lack of mechanisms for direct group representation forces women into parties where their loyalties become divided between the parties' interests and their own. Moreover, and as noted in both chapters two and four, women's groups do not have sufficient influence by themselves to overcome the exclusivity of the party system to have a direct input to election manifesto commitments, or have the resources to stand as independent councillors, and consequently, as Catherine Hoskyns observed, many are not sympathetic to the view that direct engagement within patriarchal institutions can be productive [see chapter six]. Although, as the work of Parry, Moyser and Day shows, relatively small numbers of women are actively involved in public participation, and they can have an influence on local political agenda, slow bureaucratic processes work against the influence of women's groups as shown in chapter four. This is an interesting point in terms of the arguments by the public choice theorists [see chapter two] that competitive interest groups and competitive political parties interactively contribute to increased public consumption. There may be an argument that bureaucratic processes, designed to safeguard against corruption, actually promote bureaucratic interest groups and restrict plurality by being unable to respond quickly to small one-off requests for grant-aid from short-term groups or for

single events, as was the case at DC3 [see also Brown 1992]. The Catch-22 for LGWCs is clear; they exist in order to extend women's representation in local government, but they cannot be set up before women's representation has already achieved a sufficient level of influence within a local party.

Why not more achievements?:

Similarly, once established, LGWCs' ability to achieve their objectives depends primarily upon the political will to sustain support for them. As shown both in chapters four and five, the evidence from the case studies suggests (although it is hard to quantify) that some local councillors have opposing public and private attitudes towards women's equality. Such personal dishonesty can be overcome by political leadership as well as LGWCs own training courses for staff. Procedures such as ensuring that all council committee reports consider any implications for women in their proposals can also have an educative effect. But as chapter four shows, the opportunities for using bureaucratic procedures as an excuse for avoiding actions to promote women's equality are available in plenty. Notwithstanding the large extent to which a local authority's priorities are pre-determined by statutory duties, coupled with the more direct control which central government has taken in recent times over how money is spent on providing public services, there remain substantial areas for councillors' discretionary decisions. As an officer at MC1 explained: "If

the [childcare] project had been a big priority then probably they [councillors] would have found the money for it because they did for other things. Maybe the people responsible for it just weren't pushing hard enough... I mean, there was a clear recommendation from the committee and it just wasn't carried out". Despite a system of departmental link officers at MC1, responsible for monitoring implementation of the council's equal opportunities policies, actions on decisions such as in this case, could still slip through the net by being allowed to quietly fall off the agenda, unnoticed until after the current budget had been allocated. The sheer volume of work in local authorities (particularly large metropolitan city councils) makes close monitoring extremely difficult without generating yet more bureaucracy; the opportunities for non-decision-making on non-mandatory matters therefore, are great. There was only hearsay evidence that the woman Chair of this committee allowed the matter to fail:"I'm not saying she was the only one, but I gather that her view was the [committee] couldn't finance the recommendations and she was generally against it" [a woman's policy officer MC1].

Political will is the chief reason for LGWCs' success - problems of legal competence to undertake actions in pursuit of their objectives, and the limited budget for discretionary activities, have been overcome by creative strategies, most easily assembled when officers and councillors have clear political direction and

management, giving them confidence to work together on identified goals. Where political will is fragmented and officials undermined as in the case of DC4, the LGWC has an uphill task with both officers and women in the community disillusioned at the paucity of results [see chapter four]. The greatest threat to LGWCs, therefore, is the ability of central government to curtail political will at the local level. Policies with the objective of creating residual local authorities as "purchasers" of public services rather than "suppliers", coupled with additional legal controls limiting the nature of the contractual arrangements entered into, may substantially close off LGWCs' ability to influence the manner in which such services are delivered. Present indications are that LGWCs are meeting this in terms of the Government's policies on quality of public services (Citizen Charters).⁽³⁾ Advisory material from both the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) and The Local Government Management Board show how equalities can be built-in to service quality performance monitoring systems e.g. to ensure that service delivery routines are sufficiently flexible to take account of the varying needs of different categories of customer (elderly/disabled people; women with children; etc). Such approaches require the council and the service supplier to have effective (expensive) consultation and feedback systems [LGIU 1992]. Since, as discussed in chapter two, there is some doubt about the ability of private contractors to provide services more cheaply than

local authorities, and additionally that the practice of re-hiring ex-council workers on lower wages may be found in the ECJ to be illegal [Black 1993] it is unlikely that money from savings will be available for high quality consultation schemes, however strong the political will to implement them. Central government's control of the purse strings has the capacity to negate political will. The case for increased autonomy and thereby the scope to create diversity at the local level is a strong one, and the argument has been made, in chapter six, for women's groups to support the campaign for local self-government.

Having thus demonstrated that LGWCs provide a model of feminist political practice, it is also clear that it is an imperfect model, limited by both an over-reliance on political patronage and more generally, by the limitations on the scope for autonomous actions by local government. What then, is the basis for claiming that LGWCs as feminist political practice, have a radical potential?

The Radical Potential of Feminist Political Practice

As argued at several points in this study, but particularly in chapter two, the problem with liberal democracy is that it denies difference; the free, equal and consenting individual on which it is based is far from being universal, even as "man". In denying the political significance of difference, therefore,

liberal democracy denies the possibility of realisation in practice of its own principles. At the other end of the ideological continuum, communism falls into the same trap, with its universal "brotherhood", enslaving individuality to a fictional common good. Gender politics, on the other hand, requires a synthesis of the universality of species sameness, with the difference of the two sexes, and as Anne Phillips observes: "... democracy must deal with us not just as individuals but groups" [Phillips 1991a]. Not as individuals or groups, but as individuals *within/moving between* groups.

Such a radicalised view of liberal democracy would require, according to Chantal Mouffe, a fundamental reformulation of the concept of citizenship: "a radical democratic interpretation will emphasize the numerous social relations where relations of domination exist and must be challenged if the principles of liberty and equality are to apply. It should lead to a common recognition among different groups struggling for an extension and radicalization of democracy that they have a common concern and that in choosing their actions they should subscribe to certain rules of conduct; in other words, it should construct a common political identity as radical democratic citizens" [Mouffe 1992].

But even in this definition, Mouffe does not appear to acknowledge the fluidity/dynamism of group membership which has

here been conceptualised in the notion of the multi-constitutive being and as applied in practice by LGWCs' range of forums which accommodate and integrate different women's perspectives.

Nevertheless, Mouffe clearly indicates that citizenship in her vision of radical democracy not only requires that individuals act as agents of challenge and change, but that they do so within their different groups.

It is argued here that the ingredients for the practice of such an active, group citizenship and the realisation of a radical democracy have been explained in the foregoing, namely the establishment and development of political mechanisms which enable/empower individuals to take part with others in gaining some control over their lives. What is now required is to demonstrate how these ingredients might be brought together to envision the form that radical democracy might take; in short, how they might be utilised to make progress in reversing Schumpeter's division of political labour and to transform the present structures of government. For democratic citizenship cannot be practised outside of the present institutions of government, nor is revolution part of its agenda. Therefore two questions arise, viz:

- (i) what kind of governmental structures are envisioned in radical democracy? and
- (ii) what strategies are needed to progress from the present to the future?

In offering no more than an outline proposal here, the radical potential of both LGWCs and the principles of the EC will be revealed.

Self-Representation of the People:

Firstly, and given that radical democracy demands that the ideals of liberal democracy (liberty, equality and consent) be concretised, then citizenship, as Dietz explains, must be actively practised:

"... democratic citizenship is a practice unlike any other; it has a distinctive set of relations, virtues and principles all its own. Its relation is that of civic peers, its guiding virtue is mutual respect, its primary principle is the 'positive liberty' of democracy and self-government, not simply the 'negative liberty' of non-interference" [Dietz 1992].

However, as Phillips argues, a revival of classical republicanism is neither practical in the modern world nor compatible with the principle of liberty - active citizens should not have to be "engulfed" by civic duty [see Phillips 1991a]. The variety of forums and groups which LGWCs have established could provide a model for mechanisms through which self-organised groups could represent themselves in local government. Given what has repeatedly been stated about the multi-constitutive nature of human beings, and given the evidence from LGWCs, such groups need not replicate the competitive pluralism of liberalism, but operate and cooperate

in more dynamic ways [see also Young 1990]. As shown in chapter five, failure of any one group does not have to be destructive and the greater the number of groups, the less likely it is to be so. And as Young points out, groups form/disband/reform in response to a variety of circumstances in the same way that individuals may attach themselves to one or more groups at different times.

In Young's analysis, she envisages that such groups would be restricted to oppressed groups of people, and in view of the fact that the construction of radical democracy would have to start with contemporary structures, this is a valid point. It does not however, exclude the prospect that representation of all citizens could be organised in this way at some future date. In such circumstances, the present system of representation organised around ideology-based parties, containing/constraining people within confrontational interest "blocks", would become unnecessary. This would also have the effect of negating the present "divided loyalties" position of women within parties, since there would be no need for choices to be made between one loyalty and another when they are equally represented. Radical democracy would therefore be more genuinely pluralistic than liberal democracy.

The practice of reciprocity as defined in chapter one, would ensure that relations between groups did not drift back into

domination and oppression. Collective decisions between equally-valued groups would require negotiated settlements. At the very least it would ensure that policy-making became a more reflective process, since all policies would have "publics" [see May 1991] and equality of contributions to the debates would encourage participation. Radical democracy would therefore be more genuinely participative than liberal democracy. The obvious risk is that decision-making might become slowed to the point at which it would stall, but as Iris Young observes: "If the alternative to stalled decisionmaking is a unified public that makes decisions ostensibly embodying the general interest which systematically ignore, suppress, or conflict with the interests of particular groups, then stalled decisionmaking may sometimes be just" [Young 1990].

Taking Control of the Policy Agenda:

Stewart's model of communitarian government [see chapter two] provides for a community to govern itself in those matters which it deemed itself to have competence i.e. in Delors' terms, never entrusting to a higher authority that which is governable locally. The principle of subsidiarity takes on a more radical potential when the policy process begins at the lowest level, i.e. with the people in their communities. When citizens are no longer subordinated by the political division of labour, but take responsibility for representing themselves, then they become the policy community⁽⁴⁾ with their own (subjugated)

knowledges of the services and resources they require. And, as the women's groups described in chapter five shows, the business of deciding "what do we want" did not result in the formulation of grandiose projects, but in relatively small changes linking existing packages of public welfare in an integrated way, together with privately provided services (e.g. facilities for children in shops and restaurants); in short, reconciling home/work/community in terms of the reality of women's everyday lives and the realities of a mixed economy allowing for both state and private provision based on efficiency rather than ideology. Thus "taking control of the policy agenda" does not involve reaching for a fresh sheet of paper on which to draw up some grand new plan, always doomed to failure as Pressman and Wildavsky's case study of policy implementation shows: "the reforms of the past lay like booby-traps in the path of [new policy implementation]" [Pressman & Wildavsky 1973]. Public policy-making, thus released from ideology, can genuinely reflect needs, rather than either the competitive spiral (as criticised by public choice theorists) or their minimalist "market forces" response [see chapter two]. Radical democracy would therefore be more genuinely responsive than liberal democracy.

Moreover, with a genuinely bottom-up approach to policy-making, the disciplinary discourses which have become entangled with the practice of the power to govern, would become the servant of

policy-making rather than its master. Without the confrontational politics of parties, a myth of political impartiality is no longer required and citizens with expertise need not fragment themselves into private and public persona but simply bring their knowledges into the public arena, along with the subjugated knowledges of different groups on an equal basis.

Inter-Governmental Relations and Shared Sovereignty:

When the authority for actions derives from the community itself so too does responsibility for paying for them. Since this could lead to gross distortions between communities, local government could still be largely funded from general taxation with the principles of harmonisation and cohesion (rather than uniformity and stability) being brought into play.

Harmonisation, as defined by Andrew Barry [see chapter six] provides for the government of a wider political space without the growth of a large central bureaucracy. When the wider political space is that which is not local i.e. regional or national government, then, as stated in chapter one, government becomes the management of reciprocity between autonomous local authorities, resulting in agreed approximations of public service provision, to allow for diversity without the potential negative side effects [see King 1989]. The EC principle of cooperation/cohesion provides a more flexible, and realistic, alternative to unitary state theory in which sovereignty is shared between citizens in their localities rather than vested

in elitist institutions purporting to be representative of them but in reality, controlling/excluding them from the business of government. Regional concerns can therefore be more easily accommodated, since confrontational stances between lower and higher levels of government would no longer apply.

It would be for different (not higher) levels of government, not to assume the responsibility for policy-making and allocations, as in the Widdicombe assertion [see chapter two] but to manage (arbitrate) collective decision-making about the overall limits of public provision. As noted in chapter two, it does not serve democracy that citizens are deprived of the truth of the costs of public services. But it does need to be the whole truth including the costs of publicly-funded services over which citizens have, at present, little or no control such as defence and the foreign service [see Parry, Moyser & Day 1992]. Active citizenship would not be confined to local policy-making when group representation extended to the national Parliament. Competences of regional and national levels of government would result from collective decisions as to what was appropriate for such assemblies to control. With the policy process in reverse order, the hierarchical pattern of government would no longer apply; there would be different assemblies formed as appropriate for the tasks assigned to them, not superior/subordinate levels of government.

In an international context such as the EC, radical democracy

might facilitate the pan-European network of local government [see chapter six] developing their existing practices for cooperation in economic and cultural affairs.

All the foregoing can, and should be, subjected to thorough criticism, and not be dismissed simplistically as mere flight of fancy, for only in that way can the practical realities of what is meant by radical democracy be revealed. The intention here was to do no more than sketch out some possible implications of concretizing liberty, equality and consent to demonstrate just how radical, radical democracy might be and to attempt to capture the scale of the task of bringing it to fruition. On the other hand, the evidence that has been presented in this study of LGWCs, clearly demonstrates that citizens, oppressed by social disadvantage and the division of political labour, can be empowered to represent themselves in the public policy space; to achieve a shift in the allocation of resources which would not otherwise have been made; and to effect some beneficial change in the professional and bureaucratic discourses which govern their lives.

According to Mouffe, radical democracy is "the only viable alternative for the Left" [Mouffe 1992]. To the extent that LGWCs can be considered as a working model of what might be regarded as a first phase in the development of radical democracy, then "the Left" when that incorporates democratic

socialists in the Labour Party, needs to re-examine its attitude towards them. That is calling not simply for a party policy evaluation, but a personal evaluation as well. Individual women and men within the Labour Party, (and social democrats in other parties) at local, national and European levels, need to re-examine their attitudes to LGWCs and ask how far their lack of support can be attributed to self-interest, sexism and elitism? Moreover, they need to examine how far their claims for democratic socialism or social democracy have already been realised in the activities of LGWCs e.g. decentralisation of power, empowerment of disadvantaged groups, evolutionary transformation of the institutions of government, and to examine how far their own practice tools differ from those of LGWCs as described here. It is not only at the European level that there is a mis-match between the institutions and processes of government and its professed ideals.

To return to the start of this study and the anniversary of women's enfranchisement. Since citizenship as presently constituted from the liberal democratic tradition has failed to confer on women the status of "civic peer" and moreover, maintains the majority of its citizens in passive mode, then feminists and all others seeking a democracy which lives up to its name, need to work together to bring about the necessary changes in existing institutions and processes. That necessitates a practice which engages with existing institutions

and processes to encourage those working within them to understand both how they contribute to their own and others oppression and their capacity to be agents of challenge and change. The model of feminist political practice which has been analysed here through the work of LGWCs, demonstrates a potential for more widespread and radical application, not only in the construction of alliances between political groups and movements, but in methods (practise tools) for transformative change in the political, economic and social structures which maintain relations of domination and oppression.

APPENDIX 1

FIELDWORK INFORMATION : AREAS OF ENQUIRY

1. Locality/Environment:

Location of case study - type of town/city;
Population profiles - gender; economic activity; race; age;
Economic profile - industrial decline/regeneration; retail etc
Employment figures - gender breakdown?
EC area status

2. Local Authority:

Type
Political Control - party mix; gender; local influences;
Organisation - committee system/power balances; political significance;
- departmental organisation (gender chief officers)
Finance - total budget & departmental split; capping?

3. Women's Committee:

Background - how established? Political/WLM influences; status throughout history of committee; gender mix; relationship to other committees.
Current Situation - councillor representation; political/gender mix; non-councillor representation - selection procedures; support to e.g. childcare allowances; travel etc.
Changes in non-councillor representation (voting rights);
Officer Support - numbers, grades, departmental location; status of Women's Officer (seat on corporate management team?) Comparison with other equal ops units/personnel;
Working relationships with other chief officers; councillors;
Additional structural features if any: e.g. departmental reps; cooptees pre-meetings; sub-committees; working groups;
Policy-making procedures - implications for women reports? monitoring systems?
Budget - sources of money and who controls it e.g. own budget (with/without staffing) grants/projects budget? Other departments budgets e.g. training? joint projects?
External sources of funds e.g. Urban Aid/EC;
Products:
Equal ops policy statement - impact on other departments?
Service Provision changes - departmental policies and products;
Autonomous service provision - town hall creche; women's employment;
Links with other organisations: trade unions; women's groups; health authorities; employment (training) agencies;
Media Coverage.
Case Study Project - who initiated the idea?; how was it designed? [NB: Who was left out of this process]; progress through committee(s); funding (how much/where from/how secure?) outcomes - successes/failures/impacts [who benefits?]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Notes To Chapter One:

(1) The figure of 12% is arrived at from the numbers of LGWCs in the 1990 Directory published by the National Association of Local Government Women's Committees (NALGWC). There were 41 affiliated and 19 non-affiliated local authorities on that list. 60 as a percentage of the 514 local authorities in UK (excluding N.Ireland) = 11.7%.

(2) NALGWC's list of non-affiliated local authorities represents those groups of women struggling to work as LGWCs but unable to afford/obtain authorisation to affiliate. One of the case study LGWCs (MC1) was in this position at the time of research. Non-affiliation may sometimes indicate a lack of political support for an LGWC or alternatively, that the council is in deep financial difficulty.

(3) This lack of official guidance to local authorities reflects a number of structural problems associated with social policy implementation e.g. functional fragmentation; central control over local government finance; legal control. Guidance on equal opportunities issues during the second half of the 1970s emanated from a number of Whitehall ministries e.g. DES, DoE (housing) and the Department of Employment, accordingly there was no corporate approach to gender equality issues such as the links between education/training services and housing women made homeless through domestic violence. In times of financial restraint, official guidance does not encourage local authorities to spend money such that town hall officials may not grasp the possibilities for new local policy-making. The restrictions on employment training in the original 1975 Act made it difficult to provide positive action in further education for women without doubling up costs to provide similar

courses for men. On all these points see e.g. chapters by Austerberry & Watson (on housing); Deem and Stanworth (education) in Ungerson (ed) 1985; Kennedy 1987; Scott 1988.

(4) Earlier research into LGWCs e.g. Stone 1988 and Halford 1988 made detailed comparisons between LGWCs' terms of reference and their staffing/budgets; and between resourcing for LGWCs and other non-mandatory local authority activities. In both cases the authors commented on the difficulties of collecting accurate data and/or making meaningful comparisons. For this study, the author took the view that LGWCs' under-resourcing was well established and the point was not worthy of the time to gather additional verification.

Notes To Chapter Two:

(1) The formation of a Women's Party in 1917 was a short-lived affair which, in spite of some feminist aspects to its programme, was "not essentially interested in creating gender-based politics". [Coote & Pattullo 1990] It never gained any parliamentary seats.

(3) To be fair, attempts were made in East Sussex to organise community consultative groups as well as client feed-back, but there was insufficient political support from the Labour group on the council [see Hadley & Young 1990].

(4) The very poor results for the Conservative Party at the May 1993 local elections may be evidence of this.

(5) By far the largest proportion of contracts (88%) have been won by in-house direct services organisations. [see Black 1993]

Notes To Chapter Three:

(1) This situation arose from ongoing contacts between the author and a woman policy adviser in the authority. Consequently, the bulk of the research at this case study was conducted from the policy unit rather than from the LGWC. It was unsatisfactory from the point of view of not being consistent with the manner in which the other five case studies were conducted; on the other hand, the different perspective yielded access to sources of information which might not otherwise have been available. Since a full case study report was completed, it was decided to include it in the data base.

Notes To Chapter Four:

(1) Women's influence on political parties at both local and national level (and the inter-relationship between the two) is difficult to assess. In the Labour Party, for example, the democratising campaigns of the late 1970s and early 1980s attracted feminists to the party [see e.g. Segal 1987; Coote & Patullo 1990] who then (1981) established their own campaign (Women's Action Committee). WAC's activities resulted in real reforms of party organisation and policies for women culminating in the quota system within the PLP. Since then it may be fairly said that enthusiasm for women's representation (and in the London area, for LGWCs) has lessened within the party [see Edgar 1988]. These activities at national level stimulated membership and activities in local parties [see e.g. Perrigo 1986] which contributed to the increase in numbers of LGWCs. Whilst it is clear from this study that in some areas, local support by and for women has dwindled in parallel to support at the national level, in others it has been stimulated by new democracy movements such as the Women's Claim of Right in Scotland. It is an area which requires more focussed research.

(2) Routine reporting of LGWCs' activities is confined to local newspapers - local radio and t.v. may cover some particular event related to their work e.g. during fieldwork at DC5 the women's officer was invited to conduct a radio phone-in programme concerned with domestic violence prompted by a local incident. Media journalists have their own professional discourses and it may be that national tabloid press coverage of the GLC Women's Committee in the mid-1980s has had an influence on reporters in provincial newspapers [see GLC 1986].

(3) There are conflicting statistics about how much less leisure time women have compared with men. Kelly [1992] cites the figure of three hours less per day; the 1985 World Report on Women puts the figure at between 24 hours and 1 hour leisure per week [New Internationalist 1985].

(4) The remark that "women lack commitment" may appear curiously derogatory from a woman councillor chairing a women's committee. It requires to be put into context; the interview was being conducted immediately following a full council meeting at which several of her members, troubled by divided loyalties, had withdrawn their support for a project they had previously agreed to, leaving her politically very exposed. To exclude the comment from this quotation might have been fairer to the councillor, but such "doctoring" of quotations is unethical.

(5) The Labour ruling group at DC3 had a manifesto commitment to a programme of decentralisation of council activities. Two "neighbourhood" offices had been established resulting in a high level of demand for additional services. DC3 was "rate-capped" and the choice therefore was to either abandon the plans for further neighbourhood offices or to fail to meet the new demand that had been generated. The ruling group favoured the former, but the DLP insisted on the latter, which in most councillors' eyes was political suicide.

(6) The Women's Officer at DC1 was the only one among case study women's officers with chief officer status and a seat on the corporate management team [see also Stone 1988].

(7) Information from telephone conversation with Joan Lestor's Eccles constituency office 5.6.92.

Notes To Chapter Five:

(1) Davies C. "Workplace action programmes for equality for women: an orthodoxy examined" - paper presented to the conference Equal Opportunities for Men and Women in Higher Education, University College, Dublin, September 1988 [cited in Cockburn 1989].

(2) DC5's success with this approach relied heavily on the unity of purpose between officers and Members [see chapter four].

(3) Whether an LGWC is a women's committee or an equal opportunities committee with responsibilities to other disadvantaged groups, the complexities of relations of domination and oppression which result in many individuals being both oppressor and oppressed, extends training target groups across the whole of the workforce. Training courses focussing on sexual harassment against women, for example, may bring to light oppressive attitudes among victims of harassment against e.g. lesbian and gay colleagues. Moreover, in view of the political sensitivity raised by S.28 of the 1988 Local Government Act (outlawing encouragement of homosexuality) many women's committees find themselves taking on the work of supporting gay men in their local authorities.

(4) Femocratisation is a term used by Flannery & Roelofs [1984] to describe "the danger of feminism becoming bureaucratised and co-opted into the patriarchal power structure".

(5) In 1988 DC2 changed the status of its LGWC from being a sub-committee of the Policy & Resources Committee to being a full standing committee of the council. This was a 1988 local election manifesto commitment by the Labour Party reflecting the selection of new and more radical candidates to stand as prospective councillors, as well as a recognition of the failure of the previous tokenistic sub-committee.

(6) The Chair of COSLA's Economic Affairs Committee was also Chair of DC4's Economic Development Committee. Although the LGWC at DC4 contributed to the COSLA report, at the domestic level, there was no attempt to set up joint working between the women's committee and the economic development unit - the women's officer proposed it, but was prevented by her Chair who had very low status within her ruling group and was unable to make substantive progress on equality issues.

Notes To Chapter Six:

(1) This discussion of EC principles is intended to present them both as general principles of government which might be applied within nation states, as well as the principles which guide the EC. The purpose is to set the scene for the arguments in the final chapter that they are more appropriate principles for government when that is interpreted as the management of reciprocity between citizens/communities/regions/states [see chapter one].

(2) Planning gains occur when a local authority is able to extract a concession or make a requirement conditional to granting planning permission. Thus a developer wishing to build a shopping mall or office block may be required to include space for childcare facilities.

(3) It is clear from DG5 documentation, however, that as late as 1990, there was still the intention to bring forward a Directive on Childcare at some time in the future. These documents (reports from DG5 to the EAC) indicate that there was conflict between what may be called "the pragmatists" and "the optimists" among the staff of the Women's Bureau.

(4) Rule 2.2 of the European Parliament's procedures requires that MEPs "shall vote on an individual and personal basis. They shall not be bound by any instructions and shall not receive a binding mandate" [EP Rules of Procedure: 7th edition February 1992]. How far Conservative MEPs were following this rule and how far they were aiming to impress the members of the European People's Party (EPP) which at that time Conservative MEPs were anxious to join, is not known. Conservative women MEPs in the WRC tend to behave like Conservative councillors in LGWCs i.e. routinely voting against proposals [observation of the WRC at its meeting in Birmingham November 1990]. Since all Conservative MEPs voted for the WRC "own initiative" report for a Childcare Directive, it may be that it was more to do with Parliament versus Commission, since relations between the two were particularly acrimonious at this time [see Parliamentary Debates 15.5.91]. Attempts to clarify this point with MEPs proved unsuccessful.

(5) The Women's Rights Committee has used Rule 124(3) of the Parliament's Rules of Procedure to hold formal Hearings e.g. from the Childcare Network when it was campaigning for a Directive and such events can generate publicity to create a constituency for an issue [see Jacobs, Corbett & Shackleton 1992] but this is far from the power of LGWCs to realise their own policies.

Notes To Chapter Seven

(1) Whether the women's committee at DC3 has yet found a way for the lesbian women's advice line to receive additional support, in cash or kind, or from alternative sources to the council is not known.

(2) Susan Halford's work on women's political activity and the nature of localities makes a link between areas of traditional industries/strong trade unionism/male-dominated local politics [see Halford 1988].

(3) The Citizen's Charter, launched in July 1991, covers the whole of the public sector and aims to provide consumers with the means of redress to poor quality services - some of the London Boroughs and other authorities claim that they have had such schemes in place for some time. As an LGIU briefing paper states: "One of the fundamental flaws of the Charter is its concept of the citizen... issues around the quality of services on offer, the diversity of services required and the range of special needs within any community are not addressed" [LGIU Equalities News No.12 : September 1991]

(4) This is not to suggest a functionalist approach as defined by John Burnheim in "Is Democracy Possible?" [Burnheim 1985].

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