

Guest Comment

On **NRO**

Liberté! Egalité! Stupidité!

France declares war on Mother Nature.

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Those who do not know failed social experiments are destined to repeat them. Especially when they are politicians who have imbibed the elixir of good intentions. Once under its spell, the lessons of history are often lost on them.

As a case in point, I offer France — specifically, the decision of its legislature to bow to demands of a movement called *La Parité*. The name is short for its stated goal, *la parité entre les hommes et les femmes*, which, in English, means “What part of quota do you not understand?”

Like any good gender warrior, *La Parité* says it is motivated by the principle that the sexes deserve “equal representation” throughout society. *Au contraire*. The low number of females among prison inmates, workplace fatalities, and non-custodial parents does not trouble this crowd. It focuses solely on stations in life that involve money, power, and prestige. *La parité*, it seems, is French for a world where women are guaranteed at least half of the good stuff, and men most of the bad.

Assuming one views political office as good, the movement scored a big victory with the passage of France's electoral parity law. It required political parties to field sex-balanced slates for France's recently completed municipal elections, assuring females of a large share of most local positions. (Towns with 3,500 or fewer people were exempt.) The law, which imposes fines for noncompliance, also affects upcoming parliamentary elections. However, because these are conducted differently than municipal elections, its impact there remains to be seen.

Granted, this is not the first effort to bring more women into politics. Nor is it the sole example of sex quotas, in Europe or elsewhere. However, such quotas are typically not as extreme or binding as France's parity law.

History has also seen far more comprehensive approaches to increasing the presence of women in the political arena--such as the radical egalitarianism of the Israeli kibbutz. Heroic efforts were made to relieve females of the “baggage” believed to explain their lesser participation in decision-making. Domestic functions were provided collectively. Mothers were freed from the demands of infant care soon after giving birth. Females had the same rights to education, work, and decision-making as males.

But things did not go as planned. In *Women in the Kibbutz*, anthropologists Lionel Tiger and Joseph Shepher reported that females remained less active than males in political life, particularly at the highest levels. When they did participate, they tended to concentrate on social and educational issues. Even the most ardent gender activists conceded that this was due to female choice, not male sabotage.

Tiger and Shepher estimated that 10 to 15% of the women were unhappy with their sex roles. “The overwhelming majority,” they concluded, “not only accept their situations but have sought them. They have acted against the principles of their socialization and ideology . . . in order to be able to devote more time and energy to private maternal activities rather than to economic and political public ones.” Despite success in achieving many of its other goals, the kibbutz movement was forced to abandon its gender-bending ideology.

This well-meaning experiment made clear the fallacy of assuming that equal opportunity will produce equal outcomes. Add to it a huge literature in psychology demonstrating sex differences in interests and values across cultures, and one has to ask why equal participation of the sexes in politics should even be expected. Yet, a quarter-century after the collapse of the kibbutz’s gender ideology, public policy revolves more than ever around the discredited view that discrimination is the primary cause of sex differences in the workplace.

Even more startling is who does most to advance this notion. Among its strongest supporters is the European Union, which has adopted a vigorous campaign to promote “gender mainstreaming.” Its program not only defines equality based on outcome, but also appears to see sex differences in interests, values, and abilities as either non-existent or readily amenable to social engineering.

The EU has also been credited as a force behind France’s parity law. According to the *New York Times*, some say that the EU “played a big role in embarrassing France” with statistics showing other countries “doing better” at electing women to their parliaments. Perhaps France was so horrified at the prospect of being seen as Europe’s the last bastion of male chauvinism that it overlooked a key fact. The countries held up as far superior to it achieved their results not through natural processes, but quotas. [Click here for details.](#)

Another relevant factor may be differences among countries in the percentage of females employed full-time. Swedish women, for instance, are considerably more likely to work full-time than their French counterparts, and, perhaps therefore more willing to consider jobs, such as national office,

with heavy time demands. Some may see the lesser presence of French females in the full-time labor force as discrimination, but there are alternate explanations. One is the lower rate of divorce in France, another its lesser incidence of out-of-wedlock births. Either may provide more freedom to work part-time, or not at all.

Actually, on some indicators that gender activists hold dear, France is arguably “doing better” than Sweden. A study of its female professors claims France has a better record than Sweden. Sex differences in high school science achievement are also smaller. In fact, Sweden and Norway were among the four countries with the largest sex differences on an international test of science achievement. (Not that I see this as evidence of unequal opportunity — but gender activists typically do.)

Of course, selective presentation of facts is the standard operating procedure of victim feminism, and unlikely to stop anytime soon. Nor is the EU likely to cease its campaign to force androgyny on its member states. Legislation to mandate parity throughout the professions and private sector will probably be next. This is, after all, a revolution — one that will last until we accept that the laws of man are no match for the laws of nature.