Party politics as we knew it? Failure to dominate government, intraparty dynamics and welfare reforms in continental Europe
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9 How Dutch Christian Democrats Said Farewell to Famialism

Like in Germany, chapter five found that power resources theory explains family policy until the early 2000s. However, once the CDA returned to office in 2002, CDA-led center-right governments opted for expanding policies supporting working mothers. This chapter analyzes whether our proposition on organizational change can help to explain these remarkable findings.

To do so, the first section discusses family policy from 1982 to 1994, the period when the CDA was the leading coalition party. Afterwards, I turn to the “purple coalition”. Section three studies family policy under CDA-led center-right coalitions from 2002 to 2006. Section five concludes.

9.1 Family Politics until 1994: Politics as Usual

By 1980, women’s labor force participation remained the lowest in the OECD countries, and the Dutch welfare state strongly supported the male breadwinner ideal. Especially after 1985 it rose sharply. To be more precise, it increased from 34 percent in 1980 to 36 percent in 1985 and jumped to 48 percent in 1990. Nonetheless, the Dutch rates still lagged behind the levels of Germany and Austria (OECD 2008a). Moreover, growth can largely be attributed to part-time work. As a consequence, more women held part-time jobs than in any other OECD country. Notably, the share of working women in part-time employment rose from 45 percent in 1985 to 53 percent in 1990 (Yerkes 2006: 12).

Along with increasing labor force participation came increasing political mobilization and representation. The decline in union membership among male workers occurred at the same time as more women joined the labor force. Though Dutch unions mainly represent full-time workers with standard contracts, women constitute the largest part of new union members, and the share of female members gradually rose from just over 10 percent in 1975 to 23 percent in the mid-1990s. Accordingly, both FNV and CNV begun to take up issues such as child care and parental leave Visser and Hemerijck 1997: 85-86; Huber and Stephens 2001: 285). Women’s activity in political parties also increased. Within the PvdA, the women’s organization, established in 1969, vehemently supported policies aimed at equal
gender rights, including child care. Its representatives had personal ties to the PvdA leadership and had strong influence on the PvdA’s policy preferences in the 1970s and 1980s (Van Praag and Brants 1980: 19; Van Praag 1994: 147).

Within the CDA, we shall see that a coalition of famialists remained dominant until the mid-1990s and that the role of the women’s organization remained marginal until then. As such, the party certainly did not respond mechanically to increasing female labor market participation and secularization. As to the latter, the CDA was supported by more than half of all Catholics and over a third of all Protestants between 1977 and 1989. However, the share of Catholics in the electorate declined from 40 percent in the early 1970s to 29 percent in 1990. For Protestants this development was even stronger as its proportion dropped from 30 percent to 12 percent. Furthermore, especially those attending church services have been loyal to the CDA over time. Around two thirds of all Catholic people that went to church supported the CDA in 1977 and 1989. In addition, slightly more than half of all Protestants attending church services voted for the party (Van Wijnen 1998: 56).

By and large, the remaining part of the practising Protestant voters opted for three small fundamentalist Protestant parties, that is, the State Reform Party (SGP: Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij), the Reformed Political Association (GPV) and the Reformational Political Federation (Reformatorische Politieke Federatie: RPF). The combined total national vote for all these parties was around 6 percent in 1981 and 4 percent in 1989. Representing different strands in fundamental Dutch Protestantism they portray the Dutch tendency towards political fragmentation. In policy terms, however, they share many features. The bible is their compass in all matters and moral issues are evidently of key importance. They are completely opposed to abortion and euthanasia, want to restrict divorce and advocate the traditional family ideal (Jacobs 1989b).

Like the main confessional parties and their successor the CDA, the small Protestant parties were particularly challenged by the fact that the share of practising confessional voters structurally declined from 52 percent in 1956 to 33 percent in 1980 and 31 percent in 1990. The number of practising Catholics dropped from 30 percent in 1956 to 26 percent in 1977 and 14 percent in 1990. As to the Dutch reformed and the Calvinists, the two main Protestant groups, the proportion of practising Dutch Reformed declined from 12 percent in 1956 to 9 percent in 1977 and 8 percent in 1990. Finally, the number of practising Calvinists dropped from 10
percent in 1956 to 9 percent in 1977 and 8 percent in 1998 (Jacobs 1989b; Van Wijnen 2001: 56).

Despite the presence of small fundamentalist Protestant parties and a context of secularization, the PvdA’s emphasis on equal rights faced strong but subtle opposition from the CDA. For instance, the elections of 1981 had resulted in a patched-up coalition between the CDA, the PvdA and D66. It lasted only eight months as the PvdA resigned over the issue of welfare retrenchments. In family policy, positions between the CDA and PvdA also diverged too much by then. Notably, Elske ter Veld, a dedicated representative of the PvdA’s women’s movement and the former head of the FNV’s women’s department, had worked out a proposal to expand public child care together with a parliamentarian of a small socialist party. This was embraced by the PvdA’s emancipation under-minister, Hedi d’Ancona, who had co-founded ‘Man Woman Society’, the main feminist group in the Netherlands. However, the responsible Christian democratic minister vehemently opposed the plan as it could not be reconciled with his Dutch Reformed beliefs (Verschuur 2005: 32).

The plan was off the table once the CDA-VVD government came to power in 1982. Research of an interdepartmental working group on child care had indicated that 12,000 places were lacking in 1984. Yet, the Protestant minister of wellbeing, health and culture, Elco Brinkman (CDA), posed that ‘caring for children is first and foremost a task and responsibility of parents’ (in ibid: 34). The liberal under-minister also stressed parents’ personal responsibility. Hence, this provided a justification from both a liberal and a confessional perspective to minimize the government’s role. Accordingly, the subsidy for child care was lowered from 40.5 million guilders in 1983 to 35.5 million in 1984 (ibid). Moreover, obligatory parental contributions for child care were raised in March 1985. Though this may be also justified by the fact that the Netherlands suffered economic and budgetary problems that extended those of our other cases, the government did find the financial resources to increase child allowances for large families in 1983 (De Jonge 2005: 4).

In addition to the interdepartmental working group on child care, several advisory bodies to the government, like the Emancipation Council and the Dutch Council for Family Affairs, countered that the government needed to ensure sufficient, affordable and high-quality child care. To raise political pressure, two PvdA parliamentarians submitted a bill that awarded companies fiscal advantages
when supplying child care. Finally, the EU set up several action programs in the 1980s that were aimed at promoting equal gender rights. The programs mentioned child care as a prerequisite for women’s emancipation, and even made it the top priority in 1989 (Verschuur 2005: 35-37). After a number of rulings by the European Court of Justice and years of legal proceedings there were indeed some expansions of equal rights. Notably, the rulings provided the impetus for ending the formal discrimination against married women in disability insurance, unemployment benefits and public pensions. The latter had the widest-ranging impact, as it entitled both parents to equal entitlements. However, it left women at a comparative disadvantage as they had to pay contributions while housewives did not while having similar entitlements. In 1985, the unit of contribution to all public social security schemes was changed from the household to the individual, but health care remained exempt, and the household remained the calculation unit for means-tested programs (Huber and Stephens 2001: 286; Anderson 2007: 234-7).

During the election campaign of 1986, the PvdA again pleaded in favor of a greater responsibility for the government in providing child care facilities. Using a familialistic discourse, the Dutch Reformed parliamentary leader of the CDA, Bert de Vries, replied that the PvdA seemed to be willing to take children away from their parents quickly after birth and to send them to public child care. As the CDA-VVD coalition continued after the elections, so could minister Brinkman. Soon afterwards, he made his familialistic orientations public in the most widely read Dutch women’s magazine by arguing that bringing children to child care implied that ‘one would leave children a little bit up to themselves’ (in Verschuur 2005: 37).

Yet, those supporting equal rights got unexpected support as the Christian democratic social minister De Koning, Dutch Reformed like his fellow partisans Brinkman and De Vries, posed that the lack of child care provides an ‘obstacle in striving towards our goal: economic independence for women through paid employment’. From his perspective, child care could be useful for companies to attract female employees as soon as the economy improves. Accordingly, the social ministry began gathering foreign “best practices” which could be implemented. Furthermore, the CDA women’s movement started mingling itself in the party’s discussion by emphasizing equal rights. The latter required an expansion of child care. In addition, the unions and an increasing number of employers preferred more public money for child care. From the perspective of the employers, this provided an
opportunity to attract female workers now that the economy yearly grew with around 3 percent since 1984. Though Brinkman’s civil servants worked out a proposal for a central fund to stimulate child care, he himself remained far from convinced. In fact, the minister ensured that a large number of child care arrangements would be transferred to municipalities in 1987. At the same time, the municipalities’ budget for social and cultural work was cut by 200 million guilders, that is, by 42 percent. Accordingly, several municipalities retrenched child care facilities from 1987 on, the year that social minister De Koning had announced that 160,000 places were lacking (ibid: 38-54).

After 1989, the CDA formed a coalition with the PvdA. The latter had once again stressed that it was of utmost importance to enable women to reconcile work and family life (PvdA 1989). However, initiatives in the direction of equal rights were far from popular amongst most Christian democrats. Neither was the new Christian democratic social minister, Bert de Vries, an active promoter of dual-earner arrangements like parental leave and child care (interview with CDA-insider). The result was a sort of stalemate. For instance, parental leave was introduced in 1990, but it remained unpaid and thus an unattractive option. Interestingly, it had been initiated by social minister De Koning in 1988 (www.parlement.com). Afterwards, the social democratic under-minister Elske ter Veld rather than minister De Vries took over the initiative (interview with Bert de Vries).

Likewise, at least in the sphere of family policy, the orientations of the Christian democratic spokes woman on child care closely resembled those of the social democrats rather than those of most within her own party. Notably, during the coalition negotiations, CDA negotiators Bert de Vries and Elco Brinkman did not want to go further than providing fiscal incentives for companies arranging child care as agreed upon by the social partners in the Social Economic Council. However, the CDA’s spokes woman on child care and the PvdA could push for 290 million extra guilders. In the face of looming budget deficits, PvdA party leader and finance minister Wim Kok could halve the 40 million guilders reserved for 1990. In response, Hedi d’Ancona – the social democratic minister of wellbeing, health and culture – then quickly spent the additional 250 guilders (Verschuur 2005: 46-7). Subsidies were provided for child care facilities, day care host parents, and care for young school children. Between 1990 and 1993, the measure increased the share of children in subsidized child care from 2 percent to 4 percent (Huber and Stephens 2001: 286). By
Dutch standards, this was an impressive result as 40,000 extra places were created in three years time. In the meantime, minister D’Ancona had developed plans to extend the subsidies to 1994 and 1995.

**9.2 Purple Family Politics: Politics as Usual within an Unusual Coalition**

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the pivotal power of the CDA was so strong that it had managed to draw the PvdA and the VVD so close together that they were able to form a government without the CDA in August 1994. The “purple coalition” was strongly favored by a social-liberal party, D66, the third coalition party. Accordingly, a near century of confessional rule ended and the CDA’s party leader, Elco Brinkman, resigned. Yet, forming a purple coalition was not straightforward. To quote Wim Kok, the PvdA leader who became the new prime minister, ‘I felt that the distance to the VVD was largest… though we had obviously become more pragmatic and a social liberal stream started to become visible in the VVD (Kok 2005: 67).

Though the VVD, like D66 and the PvdA, in principle supported equal gender rights, representatives of its social-liberal wing were the most active in this regard. One such a representative was Frank de Grave, the new under-minister of social affairs. In November 1987, for instance, he had developed a proposal that involved tax advantages for dual earners. Though De Grave would officially represent the purple government in emancipation policy, it was the social democratic social minister Ad Melkert who became the focal point (interview with family policy expert). To quote a PvdA politician, ‘Melkert continuously insisted within cabinet that difficulties in reconciling work and family life were the central family policy issue and pushed through much legislation aimed at reconciling work and family life’ (interview). Moreover, he used the Dutch EU presidency in the first half of 1997 to put this issue higher on the European agenda (interview with family policy expert).

Apart from Melkert, Karin Adelmund, the former head of the FNV’s women’s department and PvdA parliamentarian from 1994 to 1998, stood at the forefront in promoting equal gender rights. As one PvdA colleague puts it, ‘Karin Adelmund explicitly looked for support of women’s groups, trade unions and social scientists. This put women’s issues on the agenda’ (interview). These efforts from individual politicians were increasingly necessary, since the PvdA’s women’s organization had lost a lot of support in the 1980s and mainly functioned as a discussion network in the
early 1990s (Van Praag 1994: 147). It had been integrated into the party in 1995 and was renamed in 2000, but has thus far not been all that influential.

A key example of Adelmund’s role in promoting equal rights lies in her function of chairing an internal PvdA commission on the modernization of the welfare state. In September 1996, the commission proposed a life course savings scheme that includes paid parental leave (PvdA 1996). Social minister Melkert responded enthusiastically to the commission’s report and by 1997 employees taking parental leave were entitled to receive benefits between 2 and 6 months. However, employers’ associations had successfully lobbied the VVD for ensuring that employees were only entitled if employers could arrange a replacement (EIRO 1997b).

Moreover, the EU parental leave directive, adopted in June 1996, required considerable changes. Notably, it required an extension to all employees, whereas the Dutch 1990 law on parental leave only entitled employees whose weekly working time was at least 20 hours per week. This was particularly important because about 35 percent of all Dutch employees and 55 percent of all Dutch women were working on a part-time basis in 1995. The actual significance of the directive, however, is greatly reduced by the fact that social minister Melkert had initiated a national review process of the 1990 law on parental leave well before the directive was passed, and the reform proposals issued by the Dutch government as a result of that review already incorporated an extension of parental leave to all employees. Though the soft law provisions in the directive generally did not play an important role, trade unions successfully pushed for the adoption of the directive’s recommendation that employees should be entitled to parental leave until the child’s eight birthday (Falkner et al 2002: 14).

The government’s ambition to promote equal rights rather than the traditional family ideal also becomes visible in other domains of family policy. From 1995 on, for instance, children’s age rather than family size determine the value of child allowances. Moreover, already in 1986, PvdA parliamentarians had proposed tax cuts for companies which invested in child care. This was impossible to push through in a coalition with the CDA, but was adopted within a few months after the purple coalition came to power. More specifically, 20 percent of employers’ child care costs were to be fiscally compensated (Verschuur 2005: 36, 81, 87).
As the purple coalition continued in 1998 so did expansions in family policy in the direction of equal rights. The 2001 tax reform removed the remaining shared taxation components, thus further lowering disincentives for second-earners to work more hours (Visser 2002: 33). Notably, the 2001 law on labor and care added several new arrangements such as 16 weeks paid maternity leave and a paid two days paternal leave. Moreover, employers who continue to pay 70 percent of the minimum wage during a period of parental leave receive fiscal compensation (Hoop 2004: 74). Last but not least, the government aims to further stimulate child care in order to promote female labor market participation. As the social democratic under-minister responsible for child care put it: ‘I think child care is a public interest. It is necessary for an equal labor market participation of men and women’ (in Verschuur 2005: 92). Therefore, the second purple government aimed to create 70,000 extra facilities by 2003, that is, to nearly double the existing number. Each year 250 million guilders was spent on child care and 15 million on experiments varying from swim classes to schools with child care facilities. Furthermore, employers could get 30 percent rather than 20 percent of their expenses on child care fiscally reimbursed (ibid: 87).

9.3 Family Politics since 2002: The Usual Party of Government is Back with an Unusual Agenda

We have thus far seen that family policy has been an ideologically polarized domain with Christian democrats and social democrats adhering to two different normative views on the role of the family. However, we can witness a remarkable process of convergence of the CDA towards the family model of the PvdA once it had returned to office in 2002. If we want to understand how this happened, it is first necessary to return to the sudden expel to the opposition benches in 1994.

In line with my central proposition on organizational change, failure to dominate government triggered the replacement of the CDA’s dominant coalition of familialists by equal right supporters in a context of secularization and women’s emancipation. Around two thirds of all Catholic people that went to church supported the CDA by 1994, but their share had halved from 26 percent of the total electorate in 1977 to 13 percent in 1994. Further, around half of all Protestants attending church services voted for the party. However, their relative size had nearly halved between 1977 and 1994, declining from 20 percent to 11 percent of the electorate (Van
Increased women’s emancipation increased strains on the traditional family ideal. Between 1980 and 1995, female labor market participation rates had rapidly increased from 34 percent to 54 percent (OECD 2008). Moreover, the claim that both husband and wife should contribute to income was supported by a mere 29 percent of Dutch respondents in 1990 and a massive 81 percent in 1999 (World Value Surveys). These trends also impacted on the position of the women’s movement within the CDA. By the mid-1990s, according to a CDA politician, ‘the CDA women’s group had a reasonable degree of influence within the party. This was supported by a social-cultural trend in society which the CDA could not ignore. More and more well-educated women participated in the labor market. The economy needed them. Within the party, this reinforced the call for policies to support and facilitate this trend’ (interview).

In the 1994 election, the CDA experienced the worst ever result suffered up to then by a Dutch political party, declining from 35 percent to 22 percent of the votes. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this cannot be explained by only pointing at changes in the composition of the electorate. In fact, the neo-liberal election program had scared away many floating voters as well. As the economic predictions worsened, the CDA’s electoral commission accordingly sharpened the retrenchments in the election manifest, including a freeze of the basic pension. The Catholic director of the party’s scientific institute, Jos van Gennip, tried to make the program less neo-liberal and more social by building upon the program of principles. However, the position of the institute was rather weak and its employees were only incidentally involved in recalculating the required amount of cutbacks (Kroeger and Stam 1998: 294-309).

Earlier, the scientific institute had tried to move the CDA towards an equal rights perspective in family policy. A study published in 1986 was the first CDA document that stated that homosexual couples with children should be considered as good a family as heterosexual couples (CDA 1986). Furthermore, Jos van Gennip and a parliamentarian had written a new program of principles in 1993. The program addressed ‘themes demanding great attention during the coming years’ (CDA 1993: 1). One of which was the reconciliation of work and family life. Here, it was argued that ‘the government should stimulate participation in the labor market, especially amongst elderly and partners without a job… Where women and men – despite their
age – want to work, barriers in the form of discrimination, insufficient child care facilities or resistance against returnees must be overcome’ (ibi: 24).

In opposition, the CDA wrestled with its identity. According to a CDA politician, ‘the period after the massive defeat of 1994 had been a very useful period for reflection. This should not be the case since you should also make sure that the thinking process continues during a period of governmental responsibility’ (interview). Indeed, Jos van Gennip posed that ‘the opposition years represented an opportunity rather than a threat for the scientific institute’ (Van Gennip 1998: 204). According to Ab Klink, Van Gennip’s successor as director of the scientific institute, ‘the relationship between Enneus Heerma (CDA parliamentary leader from 1994 to 1997: author’s information) and Jos van Gennip, was pretty close since 1994. This resulted in an attempt by Heerma to put the family on the political agenda during that notorious debate in which he was laughed at by representatives of the purple coalition parties’ (interview). To be more precise, Heerma pleaded for a family minister in 1995. The reason why he met laughter was partly due to the fact that Christian democrats had had the possibility to create such a portfolio since 1918 and failed to do so, and partly since it was suspected to be a move in promoting traditional family values. Heerma responded to the resulting criticism by stressing that his party by no means wanted to return to the traditional family ideal. From his perspective, partners were equal in ‘modern families’ (interview with family policy expert).

Afterwards, Heerma established the working group ‘modern family policy’. The working group held an expert conference in which the chairwoman of the CDA’s women’s organization emphasized that the parliamentary group did too little to distribute care tasks more equally among men and women, and to stimulate female labor market participation (Hippe et al 1997: 34-5). Amongst other things, the working group decided that modern family policy required an expansion of child care. In a report published in January 1997, the CDA’s scientific institute further worked out the findings of the working group in order to stimulate policy proposals aimed at reconciling work and family life (CDA 1997). This was discussed at several regional conferences so that it could find its way to the 1998 party program (De Boer et al 1998: 30).

In the 1998 elections, the CDA lost four seats but psychologically this was a major blow as the purple coalition could continue with ease. In the words of a CDA politician, ‘the period between 1994 and 1998 had been the desert period of the CDA.
When we lost again in 1998 we said against each other: we have to renew our range of ideas if we want to take our responsibility again and obtain office. This resulted in a series of studies by the scientific institute entitled ‘Tired of waiting’ (interview), indicating the CDA’s hunger for government participation. Part of the series was a report labeled ‘The pressure of the kettle: Towards a life cycle arrangement for durable labor market participation, and time and money for education, care and private affairs’. The report was published in September 2001. It argued that people in the rush hour of their lives have difficulties in reconciling work and family. This has adverse consequences for both family income and female labor market participation. Therefore, the report promotes an individual savings scheme for parental leave, educational leave and flexible retirement. This was to be facilitated via tax advantages (CDA 2001). As to the three authors, Peter Cuyvers was a scientific employee at the Dutch Family Council, an independent advisory body on family policy. Guusje Dolsma currently is the secretary of VNO-NCW, the main Dutch employer federation after the VNO (Federation of Dutch Enterprises) had officially merged with the NCW (Christian Employer Federation) on December 31, 1996.

Last but not least, Ab Klink had been director of the scientific institute between 1999 and 2007. Klink was a personal friend of Jan Peter Balkenende. The two had been scientific employees at the CDA’s scientific institute. Amongst other things, they had worked on the 1993 program of principles which argued that reconciling work and family would be a key challenge for society. In September 2001, the CDA’s parliamentary fraction opted for Balkenende to become their leader as the former party leader and the party executive had resigned after a struggle over the candidacy list for the 2002 elections. This further reinforced the position of the scientific institute within the CDA. As Klink admitted in 2006, ‘the ties between the scientific bureau and the party have become very direct… Here, it also plays a role that Jan Peter and I happen to know each other for a long while’ (interview).

In the 2002 elections, the CDA rose from its deathbed, obtaining 27.9 percent of the votes and regaining its pivotal position. This left the PvdA and the VVD far behind. Undoubtedly the crucial aspect of the elections was the rapid rise of the right-wing populist List Pim Fortuyn (LPF). Only in late 2001, Fortuyn had announced his intention to run for parliament with his own party and he had consistently climbed in the polls. Whereas the purple coalition parties had no answer to Fortuyn’s reprimand that they had created a mess, the CDA could not receive blame this time and, unlike
the other major parties, clarified that it did not rule out a cabinet with the LPF. Elections were held nine days after Fortuyn’s assassination on May 6, contributing to the party’s rise as second largest party. In late May, Jan Peter Balkenende came to lead the CDA-LPF-VVD coalition.

The government aimed at implementing a life course arrangement. However, the eventual law was a very weak version of the proposal included in the CDA election program. According to a CDA-insider, ‘the CDA fully gave in to the scepticism within the VVD regarding the life course arrangement and came with a financially weak variant based on the already existing wage saving arrangement’ (interview). Furthermore, the CDA’s lengthy preparations in opposition could not prevent a short-lived term in office. Strives within the LPF caused the government to collapse within three months. This contributed to the LPF’s rapid fall in the elections of January 2003. The PvdA, by contrast, gained 19 seats and became the second largest party, just after the CDA. Accordingly, the CDA and the PvdA began government negotiations. To quote Frans Leijnse, the PvdA politician who investigated on behalf of the queen whether a CDA-PvdA cabinet would succeed, ‘we extremely fast reached an agreement with the CDA on life cycle policy. I wrote that piece of the concept government agreement myself… I can tell you that one of the reasons why the CDA agreed with my appointment was that they thought that I was among those within the PvdA who were highly in favor of this’ (interview).

According to a CDA-insider, ‘the change of power distributions within the CDA in opposition and the political situation in 2003 were crucial in developing policies aimed at reconciling work and family life. It was hardly noticed that the CDA had re-oriented from anti- towards pro-working women within a decade and was now close to the PvdA in family policy’ (interview). As Klink put it in 2006, ‘the concept of the male breadwinner is fully outdated for the CDA. We should stimulate female labor market participation and facilitate it as much as possible. In fact, female labor market participation has stood at the base of economic growth in the 1990s’ (interview). A fellow CDA-politician complements that ‘this is also the reason why economists like Lans Bovenberg got involved in further developing the life course proposal within the CDA. They see very sharply that a reorientation from the male breadwinner model towards the dual earner model implies that we have to spend less on women. Working women will contribute to GDP’ (interview). Furthermore, there is evidence of strategic use of the European Employment Strategy. According to a CDA politician, ‘the
European Employment Strategy helped to legitimize our call for policies aimed at reconciling work and family life’ (interview).

Despite the fact that negotiations between the CDA and PvdA failed due to diverging views on social security retrenchments, a more generous life course scheme was implemented by the CDA-VVD-D66 coalition that came to power in May 2003. Franse Leijnse poses that the CDA told the VVD during the subsequent negotiation ‘no, we really want to have that life course arrangement now. We could have had it with the PvdA and now we really want it’ (interview). Accordingly, the second bill on life course policy was drafted in September 2003. In parliament, the PvdA, Green Left and the Socialist Party proposed that those using the life course scheme for parental leave would be reimbursed 50 percent of the minimum wage, around 650 euros, for a period of six months. This received the support from the CDA’s parliamentary fraction, but not from the VVD and D66, and became law in 2004 (TK 25.11.04: 28-1854).

The re-orientation of the CDA towards a social democratic perspective on family policy is also visible in child care. In 2005, a CDA-insider claimed that ‘we used to have an ideological blockade anchored in a number of individuals. If powerful individuals swap you see changes coming. The current chairwoman of the CDA (chairwoman of the CDA women’s organization from 2001 to 2002: author’s information) is absolutely in favor of child care as a basic entitlement. Hence, the taboo on child care gets broken through. The CDA women’s movement has struggled to break through this taboo in previous years. The nice part is that the PvdA women’s movement has lost power, but within the CDA the women’s organization has actually initiated the breakthrough’ (interview).

Within government, social minister Aart Jan de Geus (CDA) rather than the minister of health, wellbeing and sports was responsible for child care policy between 2002 and 2007. This confirmed the role of child care as a labor market instrument (Plantenga 2007: 5). De Geus could build on a proposal from the previous PvdA under-minister of health. The proposal aimed to introduce more generous, income dependent public subsidies and to replace the complex set of funding arrangements for municipalities by subsidies for parents. In legitimizing the proposal the CDA spokeswoman on child care argued from an equal rights perspective that ‘an increase in labor market participation is heavily required the coming years. Good child care is
important in that respect, because it enables the combination of labor and care’ (TK 21.04.04: 69-4541).

In parliament, the proposal got broad support. In fact, only the State Reform Party fully opposed it. Here, we can still find a famialistic discourse. For instance, the party’s leader posed that he had ‘fundamental criticism on the proposal... From our perspective, the extensive individualization and emancipation within society also show up with respect to child care policy and bump up against the protection and care needed for a young child in the family’ (TK 21.04.04: 69-4504). Furthermore, just as during its participation in the purple coalition, the VVD managed to prevent the introduction of an obligatory employer contribution. However, the CDA successfully demanded that an evaluation of employers’ participation in 2006 could change this (TK 21.04.04: 69-4542). In addition, the CDA got parliamentary support for its proposal to fiscally compensate small employers when having child care expenses (TK 22.04.04: 70-4629). Moreover, in 2005 the government raised the budget for child care by nearly 200 million euros in order to lower parents’ contributions.

This is remarkable, since we have seen in the previous chapter that the government opted for several substantial welfare retrenchments in a fiscally austere climate. Notably, with respect to family policy, the cabinet lowered child allowances in 2004 – an instrument favored by the CDA at the expense of child care until the mid-1990s (Van Daalen 2005: 11). Still, the evaluation in spring 2006 demanded by the CDA made it clear that one third of the employees did not have (sufficient) access to child care due to a lack of employer contributions. Accordingly, all parliamentary parties, with the exception of the VVD and the State Reform Party, made employer contributions obligatory from January 2007 on (TK 08.02.06: 47-3103). Due to the introduction of this requirement, the government raised its budget for child care by 477 million euros in 2007. Furthermore, around 130 million euros extra were invested in child care in 2006 and in 2007 to lower parents’ contributions. Taken together, these expansions are massive and extended those of all previous Dutch governments. Between 2005 and 2008, public expenses on child care rose from 667 million to over 2.8 billion euros. The public share in child care financing rose from 42 percent in 2005 to 55 percent in 2008, employers’ contributions increased from 21 percent to 27 percent, but parents’ contributions on average declined from 37 percent to 18 percent while parents with minimum incomes now pay merely 4 percent (Commissie Kinderopvang 2009).
9.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explained a quite remarkable process of convergence of the CDA towards the PvdA’s family model once the party had returned to office in 2002. Until then, power resource theory did a good job in explaining the development of Dutch policy. Afterwards, we have seen that, against a background of secularization and women’s emancipation, government exclusion from 1994 to 2002 spurred a critical moment of reflection, that is, puzzling within the CDA. This had important consequences for the internal power distribution, considerably weakening politicians supporting the traditional family ideal at the expense of those oriented towards working mothers. Once the CDA returned to office in 2002, the re-orientation in family policy became visible in policies supporting employed motherhood.

Notably, during the campaign preceding the November 2006 elections, both the CDA and the PvdA expressed their intentions to expand arrangements supporting working mothers (CDA 2006: 10-1, 67-8; PvdA 2006: 4-5, 18-9). In February 2007, the CDA formed a coalition with the PvdA and a small confessional party, the Christian Union. The latter was a merger of the Reformed Political Association and the Reformational Political Federation. The party has familialistic orientations and perceives marriage between man and wife as the preferred form of cohabiting (cf. Christian Union 2006: 9). As demanded by the Christian Union’s leader, the government installed a family and youth minister for the first time in Dutch history (NRC 10.01.07; cf. Christian Union 2006: 10). The party leader himself obtained this portfolio. Since the intention of the CDA and the PvdA to expand child care policy could not be reconciled with his preferences, PvdA education under-minister Sharon Dijksma became responsible for child care (Plantenga 2007: 2).

Between 2007 and 2011, Dijksma sets aside € 2.4 billion extra to accommodate the growing use of child care places (Commissie Kinderopvang 2009: 43). Nonetheless, Wouter Bos, PvdA party leader and finance minister, expressed his concerns about the increasing public costs due to the previous government’s expansions in child care. The budget was to be exceeded with over 1 billion euros. Accordingly, Dijksma announced plans to retrench the popular measure, despite the fact that free child care for three days and cheap child care for lower income groups during the fourth and fifth day was a central proposal in the 2006 PVDA election program. Not surprisingly, especially the PvdA was blamed for the proposed cut
(NRC 14.05.08). Accordingly, the party plumped in the polls and internal divisions have once again risen to the foreground. Some embraced a return to traditional values and co-operation with the Socialist Party, while an under-minister would rather see the current course to be strengthened in a ‘progressive alliance’ with D66 and Green Left (NRC 31.05.08). As to the CDA, we have seen in the previous chapter that internal disagreements are off the agenda, with its firm, dominant role in office.