

Parental leave system puts unfair burden on mothers, says Nick Clegg ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Britain has an "Edwardian" system of parental leave that places the burden of childcare on mothers and discourages fathers from taking a central role in the upbringing of their children, Nick Clegg will say today.

In a speech on the family at the Demos thinktank, the deputy prime minister will outline government plans to build on Harriet Harman's reforms to allow parents to share their parental leave.

....

Clegg will attempt to show that the Lib Dems are making a difference in government when he outlines his plans for the reform of childcare. [...] He makes it clear that a change in the law will be needed to help less well off parents.

He will tell Demos: "Right now, when a child is born, fathers are entitled to just a paltry two weeks of paternity leave. These rules patronise women and marginalise men. They're based on a view of life in which mothers stay at home and fathers are the only breadwinners. That's an Edwardian system that has no place in 21st-century Britain."

Clegg will say that children and mothers suffer. "Mothers are expected to take on the vast bulk of childcare themselves. If they don't, they very often feel judged. If they do, they worry about being penalised at work. So it's no surprise that many working women feel that they can't win.

"Children suffer, too often missing out on time with their fathers. Time that is desperately important to their development. We know that where fathers are involved in their children's lives they develop better friendships, they learn to empathise, they have higher self esteem, and they achieve better at school.

"And men suffer too. More and more fathers want to play a hands on role with their young children. But too many feel that they can't. It's madness that we are denying them that chance."

He will praise Harman, whose reforms will be implemented this April. They will allow parents to share 46 weeks of parental leave if the mother goes back to work after 20 weeks. This means that a father would be entitled to take over the mother's leave, on statutory pay of £125 a week, for 26 weeks. If the mother went back after 30 weeks then the father would be entitled to 16 weeks.

-reprinted from the Guardian

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