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WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

Paper prepared by Laurel Black
for the 6th Duke of Edinburgh
Study Conference, May 1986.

WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

INTRODUCTION

The last 20 years have seen remarkable changes in the pattern of women's employment in Australia. Amongst the most fundamental of these changes has been the increase in women's participation rate in the labour market. The strongest period of growth was from the early 1960s to about the mid 1970's, corresponding with the significant growth in the Australian economy at that time. Since then, the rate of increase in women's participation has been slower, reflecting the onset of severe economic recession in Australia in the latter half of 1974. Nevertheless, women's participation rate has continued to grow, despite adverse conditions, in contrast to the participation rate for men which has been falling steadily in the last decade.

Before considering the factors which have contributed to the growth of women's employment, it will be useful to clarify the distinction between women's participation rate in, and women's proportion of, the labour force. The participation rate refers to that percentage of the female population over the age of 15 years in the labour force. As can be seen in Table 1, women's participation rate has risen markedly since 1947, an increase which is attributable largely to the movement of married women into the labour force. In 1947, the participation rate for married women was only 6.5% and in 1976 this had risen to 43.8%, the same as that for all women. As with men, marital status alone is no longer a reliable criterion in determining women's labour market status.

The other measure of the extent of women's movement into the workforce is the percentage of women in the total workforce. Referring again to Table 1, it can be seen that in 1947 women were 22.4% of the labour force and in 1985 they constituted 38.6%; assuming moderate growth, this figure is expected to have reached 42% within the next decade. ⁽¹⁾

The strongest growth in both women's participation in, and in women's proportion of, the labour force since the 2nd World War, occurred largely in the absence of specific government policies to secure women's equal access to the labour market. The factor which appears to have been the most important determinant in this growth, was the increased demand for labour in a time of industrial expansion and economic growth.⁽²⁾ This is evidenced by the fact that similar changes in the gender composition of the workforce have occurred in other Western industrialised countries in accordance with economic growth patterns. Governments did, however, take action to ensure an adequate supply of labour to meet this increased demand. In Australia, two such measures were the removal, in 1966, of the work restriction which prevented married women from being permanently employed in the Commonwealth Public Service and the progressive removal, beginning in 1973, of age limits to certain clerical administrative, clerical assistant and typist positions. By taking the initiative in these ways, the Government, through its own actions, was able significantly to broaden opportunities for married women throughout the labour market, so that between August 1966 and August 1985, the participation rate for married women rose from 29% to 44.3%.⁽³⁾

The growth in the number of women in the workforce has been accompanied by some change in societal attitudes to women's traditional role in the domestic sphere. Although women still take major responsibility for child-rearing and domestic work, there is now a wider recognition that women have a legitimate claim to the same employment opportunities as men. This has meant not only increased access to the labour market but also an awareness that career options for women are becoming a reality.

Changes in the pattern of women's lives have further consolidated women in the labour force in so far as these changes have acted to stimulate both the need and the aspirations of women to work. Women are having fewer children (the fertility rate decreased from 3.0 in 1947 to 1.9 in 1984)⁽⁴⁾ and most have completed childbearing by their early 30s, leaving many years to participate in the labour force while their children are at school. Also the divorce rate has increased while the median duration of marriage has decreased so that many women are obliged

to work not only, as is commonly assumed, to supplement the family income, but to support themselves and, in many cases, their children. The stereotype of the nuclear family, with the man providing the income and the woman remaining at home to care for children, is now a much less common living arrangement. In 1982, only 34.1% of households consisted of a married couple family with dependent offspring.⁽⁵⁾ A variety of other living arrangements existed; for example, 30.5% were married couples with no dependent children and 4.3% were one-parent families; 11.1% of dependent children now live in single-parent families.⁽⁶⁾ Changes in the family structure have therefore led to a situation of women entering the workforce in ever greater numbers, despite the impact of the economic recession, and many women need to work to escape the alternative of dependence on low incomes or social security payments.

The increasing incidence of women occupying a permanent place in the labour market is also reflected in the educational arena where girls are staying at school longer than boys and now constitute almost 50% of university enrolments. Higher levels of education amongst women are likely to effect employer demand for women in so far as further education is seen as enhancing workers' job prospects. Given this, and the increase in the number of years which women can now be expected to participate in the labour force, the upsurge in women's pursuit of formal education is an indication that women will expect a return on this personal investment.

A wide variety of both demand and supply factors have, therefore, been responsible for the broader and more continuous participation of women in the paid labour force, the current extent of which is best revealed by the participation rate amongst women of working age (15-60 years) which, as of August 1985, was 57%.⁽⁷⁾ The more important of these determining factors have been high levels of economic growth which have acted to expand job opportunities in areas in which women have traditionally been employed; changing patterns of family life and living arrangements; the expansion of part-time work (to be discussed in more detail below) which has appeal to some women with children of school-age; higher educational levels amongst

women and "raised expectations amongst younger women about their economic status".⁽⁸⁾ These changes have not only improved women's access to employment but they have consolidated women in the labour force. This means that women will no longer move in and out of the labour force with the same facility as in the past in response to fluctuations in economic activity.

Although women's participation in the labour force has increased markedly in the past 20 years and although this process has been accompanied by gradual change in the relevant social attitudes, equality in the labour market still eludes most women, for in character and quality, women's employment is very different from that of men.

CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

As a whole, women's employment has a number of features which distinguish it from that of men. The most salient of these which will be discussed below are:

- occupational and industrial segregation
- lower wages
- higher levels of part-time employment
- higher levels of unemployment

Occupational Segregation

Gender segregation, both within industries and occupations, is one of the most significant contributing factors to women's comparatively poor position in the labour market. Women are over-represented (in terms of their proportion of the labour force) in clerical, sales, service, sport and recreation and professional and technical related occupations; women are represented in this latter category mainly as teachers and nurses. (See Table 2) In industries, they are concentrated in wholesale and retail trade, finance and business services, community services and entertainment and personal services.

The division of labour by gender in the Australian labour force is more significant than in most advanced industrialised countries. Women constitute 81.5% of the labour force in the four occupational categories specified above,⁽⁹⁾ and in only 69 of the 267 Australian Bureau of Statistics designated occupational classifications is the proportion of women employed equal or greater than the proportion of women in the labour force.⁽¹⁰⁾ Some 40% of women would have to change occupations in order to make the proportions of women in each occupation equal to those in the labour force as a whole.

A similar situation exists with regard to the industrial distribution of employed women. Women are over-represented compared with their proportion of the labour force in the wholesale and retail trade; finance, property and business services; community services; and recreation and personal services industries. (See Table 3) Women constitute 72.2% of workers in these four industries,⁽¹¹⁾ and the representation of women in each industry has increased since 1966 in all but the recreation and personal services industries.⁽¹²⁾ The lack of movement in occupational and industrial segregation has extensive implications for women's occupational choices when viewed in the context of the dramatic increase in women's labour force participation over the same period. The unavoidable implication is that the range of women's occupational choices is still a narrow one; sex stereotyping of occupations continues to be a major contributor to sustaining inequity in both women's access to employment and the type of employment available.

Wages

Equal pay was introduced in Australia under legislation and by award provisions of the various Federal and State industrial tribunals. The Conciliation and Arbitration Commission handed down a judgement in 1969 stating that it accepted the concept of equal pay for equal work. In 1972 the Commission stated a new principle of "equal pay for work of equal value" which meant that award rates for all work should be considered without regard to the sex of the employee. The new principle was phased in over a

period of two and a half years, so that the equal pay principle has applied in Australia since 1975. Despite these judgements, the equalization of average wages has not occurred. Women still earn considerably less than men. In 1972, the ratio of female to male earnings was 65%; by 1980 it had increased to its highest point at 80%, but by 1985 this had dropped to 79%.⁽¹³⁾ If part-time earnings are taken into account, the differential is even larger. According to the latest ABS Average Earnings and Hours statistics, in November 1984, female average weekly earnings for both full and part-time earnings were \$255, i.e. only 65.5% of male earnings.⁽¹⁴⁾

There are many reasons for the continued existence of inequalities in male and female average weekly earnings. More men work overtime and receive over-award payments and bonuses than women. The interrupted career paths of women workers, brought about by extended absences for child bearing and rearing, mean that they often rejoin the labour force at a lower point in the career structure than their male counterparts, and this adversely affects female earnings in relation to those of males. Also, in the past, women have had less formal education than men and have limited access to both on-the-job and off-the-job training, a situation which translates into lower wages. The two major reasons, however, which account for women, on average, earning less than men, are the predominance of part-time employment amongst women and the continued existence of occupational segregation. Equal pay legislation cannot redress the earnings gap between men and women while occupational segregation exists because male dominated occupations, are, on the whole, better remunerated and are more likely to have fringe benefits attached.

Various explanations have been put forward to account for this. These include the argument that lower pay for female dominated occupations may result from the devaluation of skills traditionally held by women, or from the greater capital intensiveness and market power of industries in which men predominate. It could also result from the higher ratio of potential supply to demand for labour in female dominated occupations owing to the crowding of women into limited

occupational sectors, from the existence of a reserve army of female labour, or from the fact that male dominated sectors of the labour market have been able to bargain more effectively through their unions. However, whatever the focus of the individual explanations, it seems clear that the fundamental underlying cause relates to women's location in an occupationally segregated labour market.

Part-Time Employment

In Australia, the trend towards part-time employment is well-established. In 1981, the OECD found that the percentage of women employed on a part-time basis in Australia was, at 35%, amongst the highest of the OECD member countries at that time.⁽¹⁵⁾ Between 1970 and 1981, the total Australian workforce grew by 19% and of this 85% was in part-time employment.⁽¹⁶⁾ The major contribution to this latter growth has been in women's employment. The rate of increase in part-time employment has, however, slowed in recent years. Of the increase in employment between June 1981 and June 1985, part-time employment constituted 57%.⁽¹⁷⁾ Nevertheless, women's share of part-time employment remains high. In June 1985, 79% of all part-time employees were women and 37% of total female employment was part-time.⁽¹⁸⁾ Whilst almost 75% of the female part-time workforce consists of married women, there is also a growing trend towards the employment of teenage girls on this basis. In June 1985, 37% of employed teenage girls were working part-time, though a considerable proportion of these would have been doing so in conjunction with full or part-time study.⁽¹⁹⁾

The increase in part-time employment amongst women is the product of both demand and supply forces. Most of the increase in part-time jobs in recent years has been in the fastest growing areas of women's employment such as community services and retail trade. Although some women engaged in part-time employment, particularly those with school-age children, may prefer to do so because such a working arrangement is the most personally satisfying and is consistent with other responsibilities, a significant number of women who are employed part-time would prefer full-time work (16.8% in August 1983).⁽²⁰⁾

It is often argued, that given the choice, women would prefer to work part-time. However, the structural and institutional barriers impeding women's participation in full-time work, particularly in relation to their domestic responsibilities, are rarely considered seriously in this context; neither can changes in the patterns of labour demand be ignored in accounting for the growth in part-time employment. Management practices aimed at securing greater workforce flexibility often result in the replacement of full-time jobs by part-time jobs and other forms of marginal and insecure working arrangements such as fixed-term contracts, temporary work and outwork. These practices can act to obscure the real level of unemployment (or underemployment) and may further entrench labour market inequalities. Further disadvantages of part-time work include the depreciation of existing skills, as on-the-job training is rarely available, limited promotion prospects and ineligibility for superannuation or retirement schemes. Part-time workers are also disadvantaged in relation to job security, since they are often the first to be retrenched.

Unemployment

Since 1966, the recorded rate of female unemployment has almost always been higher than the male rate, and in some years it has been significantly higher. In 1966, the male unemployment rate was 1.1% while the female rate was more than twice this figure at 2.6%. In 1975 the male rate was 3.5% and the female rate 6.5%. Since then, the gap has narrowed and is now only 0.2% (the male rate is 7.8% and the female rate is 8.0%) but the female unemployment rate has never been below the male rate.⁽²¹⁾

To rely only on recorded rates of unemployment, however, is to ignore large numbers of women who, whilst not officially defined as unemployed, would wish, nevertheless, to be part of the paid labour force. For the purposes of the Australian Bureau of Statistics' data collection, to be designated as unemployed a person must have actively sought work in the week covered by the survey and must be available to start work within four weeks. This definition reduces the likelihood of women being recorded as

unemployed since women are less likely than men to define themselves as actively looking for work and may be more likely to have had a few hours casual work in the survey week.⁽²²⁾ For every woman who fulfilled the criteria for this definition in March 1985, there were another two who wanted to work.⁽²³⁾ These women were regarded as having, in ABS terms, "marginal attachment" to the workforce. If these women who constitute the hidden unemployed are counted together with the recorded unemployment figures, then in March 1985, the rate of female joblessness was 24.7% compared to 10.5% for males.⁽²⁴⁾ Whilst this is not a widely accepted definition of unemployment, it is now generally agreed that levels of recorded unemployment in the ABS labour force series statistics understate the severity of female unemployment, given that women are far more likely than men to leave the labour force on leaving employment.⁽²⁵⁾

Actual unemployment levels amongst immigrant women and Aboriginal women are even more difficult to assess in the official count of unemployment. While aggregate figures for migrant women suggest that there is a slightly higher rate for women born overseas than for Australian born, this obscures differences between ethnic groups. For example, the unemployment rate for Vietnamese women was 20% in August 1985, in contrast to 7.3% for women born in the United Kingdom and Ireland.⁽²⁶⁾ Aboriginal women also have extremely high levels of unemployment with estimates sometimes as high as four times the national average. The real level of unemployment among Aboriginal women is impossible to determine because of the discrepancies between official measures of unemployment, such as the census and Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) registrations. In September 1985, only 25.4% of all Aboriginals registered with the CES were women.⁽²⁷⁾ Of these, the majority were young and relatively well educated.

Studies have shown that the severity of young women's unemployment is also underestimated.⁽²⁸⁾ In a 1981 survey, it was found that 14.4% of teenage girls who had left school could not be accounted for by full-time employment or officially recognised unemployment. The shortcomings of the ABS official data on unemployment suggest that there is a need for these to be supplemented by other measures of unemployment to gain a fuller

picture of the labour market experience of women. In particular, factors such as the availability of childcare need to be taken into account in determining whether or not women are actually unemployed.

RECENT LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE WOMEN'S STATUS IN THE LABOUR FORCE

Existing Legislative Machinery

The last decade has seen Governments take an active role in improving women's labour market status in Australia. Initially, this took the form of legislation making it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of sex and marital status in employment. Such legislation was introduced first at the State level in South Australia in 1975, and has now been introduced in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia. In 1984, the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 was passed in Federal parliament. This act covers unlawful discrimination on the grounds of sex, marital status and pregnancy; it also makes unlawful discrimination involving sexual harassment in education and employment. The legislation is complaint-based and enforced through the processes of conciliation and adjudication undertaken by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, the Human Rights Commission and the Federal Court. It gives effect to some provisions of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, ratified by Australia in July 1983, and promotes recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle of equality between men and women. (29)

As a corollary to sex discrimination legislation, Governments in Australia have also adopted equal employment policies in relation to their own employees. Legislation has recently been introduced providing a basis for the implementation of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Programs in the Commonwealth Public Service and in the NSW and WA State Public Services. In 1985, all Commonwealth departments were required to prepare an EEO program and submit a written statement of the program to the Public Service Board. Under the Act, an equal opportunity program is a program whose objective is to ensure that:

- appropriate action is taken to eliminate unjustified discrimination against women and persons in designated groups in relation to employment matters in the department and,
- measures are taken to enable women and persons in designated groups to compete for promotion and transfer in the department and in the service generally, and pursue careers in the department and the service as effectively as other persons.

The Public Service Board has the responsibility for monitoring departmental EEO programs and may, after receiving a statement or report, make recommendations to improve the program's effectiveness. The Board is also required to report to the Prime Minister on the functioning of the EEO programs throughout the service. (30)

Affirmative Action

In accordance with the Government's commitment to enable women to improve their labour market prospects, it was announced in 1983 that the Government would take extra measures to facilitate this. One of the most important and extensive of these Government proposals for achieving equal opportunities for women in employment is Affirmative Action.

The Policy Discussion Paper on Affirmative Action for Women (Green Paper) published in 1984 states:

...the Government defines Affirmative Action as a systematic means, determined by the employer in consultation with senior management, employees and unions, of achieving equal employment opportunity (EEO) for women. Affirmative Action is compatible with appointment and promotion on the basis of the principle of merit, skills and qualifications. It does not mean women will be given preference over better qualified men. It does mean men may expect to face stiffer competition for jobs. This is not discrimination. (31)

The first step in progress towards Affirmative Action (AA) legislation was the introduction of an AA Pilot Program. Twenty eight large companies and three higher educational institutions participated in the pilot program which commenced on 2 July 1984 and operated for twelve months. In May 1985 a Progress Report on the Pilot Program was published. The Progress Report stated that:

For an individual affirmative action program to be successful, Pilot Program participants have stated it must be tailored to the industry or institutional culture and organisational context. In addition, it must fit within the broader context of community values and take account of the changing roles of women. In the longer term, participants suggest that the specialist roles they have created for the introduction of an affirmative action program in their organisation should be integrated with, and absorbed into, the ongoing personnel function, and that management as well should have responsibility, and be accountable for the success of the program.⁽³²⁾

Drawing on the results of the Pilot Program, the Government developed prospective AA legislation which will be introduced into Parliament in the 1986 Autumn Session. The legislation will take the form of a new Act, the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act which will cover all private sector companies with more than 100 staff and all higher education institutions.⁽³³⁾ It will require these organisations to adopt an AA program in accordance with the steps outlined in the Government's AA implementation manual.

A monitoring agency will be established under the new Act within the Employment and Industrial Relations portfolio and organisations will be required to submit some information to the agency for publication through a report tabled in Parliament. The organisations will also be required to provide further information on a confidential basis. Failure to provide the requisite information, without a reasonable excuse, will result in the organisation being named in the agency's annual report to Parliament for non-compliance with the legislation.

The coverage of the AA legislation will be phased in over a three year period. Higher education institutions and companies with over 1000 employees will be required to lodge reports with the agency twelve months after the proclamation of the legislation or on a specified date. Companies with between 500 and 999 employees will be covered after twenty four months and those with between 100 and 499 employees after thirty six months.

NON-LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE WOMEN'S ACCESS AND EQUALITY IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Community Employment Program (CEP)

The Community Employment Program was officially launched by the Prime Minister in August 1983. The CEP is a public sector employment program with the fundamental purpose of creating short-term jobs to provide employment and work experience for disadvantaged unemployed people, particularly the long-term unemployed. The aim is to improve the long-term employment prospects for this group.

In accordance with the Government's recognition of the fact that women encounter difficulties in seeking jobs in the current labour market, the CEP guidelines provide for women to receive 50% of the jobs created. CEP has incorporated a number of components such as the Repairs and Maintenance program and the Jobs on Local Roads (JOLOR) component. Although a 50% female participation rate has now been achieved under general CEP, this was not considered to be a realistic target in the CEP component programs, given the very small percentage of women who are employed in the areas covered by these components. In 1984-85, JOLOR was set a target of 25% female placement and a 25.6% level was achieved.⁽³⁴⁾ The Repairs and Maintenance program which operated for the first year of CEP, employed, in June 1984, 1,686 persons of whom 22% were women which compared favourably with only 10% in the building and construction industry as a whole.⁽³⁵⁾

By December 1985, 32% of female participants under CEP had been placed in jobs not traditionally performed by women. Although CEP was not addressed specifically to breaking down occupational segregation, the targeting procedures employed and the relatively high percentage of females placed in non-traditional jobs, "reflects the Government's conscious attempt to promote female employment in non-traditional areas."⁽³⁶⁾

The Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs

In 1983, the Government established the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programmes. The terms of reference of the Kirby Inquiry required the Review Committee to examine the objectives and cost-effectiveness of training and labour market programs and to consider equity issues relating to the distribution of these. An evaluation of the level of accommodation of women's training needs within current programmes was also included in the terms of reference.

In December 1984, the Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs presented its Report (the Kirby Report) to the Government. In the Report, the Committee recommended the adoption of a principle of targeting for equitable access to employment and training programs. In practice, this would have two elements - targeting should reflect an equal participation by women and men and, within this 50% division, places should be allocated to identified especially disadvantaged groups on the basis of each group's share of joblessness and duration of unemployment. The Report's recommendation concerning a 50% participation rate by women, is based both on a recognition of the fact that women bear a disproportionate share of the burden of unemployment and an acknowledgement of the long-term disadvantage which women continue to face in an occupationally segregated labour market.

On this latter issue, it was observed in the Report that occupational segregation is one of the main factors contributing to women's relatively inferior position in the labour market. The Report regarded the reduction of this segregation as an important aim of labour market policy if the Government is to secure its

social and economic objectives.⁽³⁷⁾ In addition to its recommendation on targeting for equitable access to employment and training programs, the Report made a number of more specific recommendations relating to women's access to structured training and labour market programs.

To ensure a greater spread of women across occupations, the Report discussed a range of strategies, important amongst which were measures to encourage women to take up non-traditional work. Women are very minimally represented in non-traditional skilled trades and, of course, they are also poorly represented in trade training. Female participation in apprenticeships in non-traditional trades currently stands at around 4%.⁽³⁸⁾ The Report noted that the Government has employed measures to encourage a greater participation of females in training for non-traditional trades. In 1983-84, the Government provided a one-off monetary incentive to employers taking on additional female apprentices in non-traditional trades. Given its short-term nature, the scheme had some problems in terms of its capacity to make a significant and enduring impact on the proportion of apprenticeships held by women. In the face of the high degree of female under-representation in non-traditional trades, measures which address only demand elements are limited by the fact that a variety of social factors act as a severe constraint on the supply of young women willing to enter non-traditional trades. The Report argued that these social restrictions could best be addressed by setting targets for female intakes into Commonwealth funded trade-based pre-employment courses and by the continued efforts of Governments to encourage females into non-traditional trade training.⁽³⁹⁾

One of the measures which the Government has taken to improve women's access to trade-based pre-employment and pre-vocational courses (and subsequently to apprenticeship training) is the provision of preparatory bridging courses for females. These preparatory courses have been conducted in Technical and Further Education colleges and have been successful in some of the States, notably South Australia, in recruiting girls and in securing positions for them in TBPE courses or apprenticeships.

In accordance with the Kirby Report's view that the obstacles to greater participation of females in trade training will not be removed unless systemic changes are made, the Women's Bureau of the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations is currently co-ordinating the development of a comprehensive strategy which will consider not only the problem of demand but also the far more significant problem of an adequate supply of females motivated to undertake training in non-traditional trades. A number of factors which contribute to the supply problem have been identified and will form the focus of the strategy. These are:

- the attitudes of girls at school, parents and teachers
- attitudes of employers, particularly in smaller firms, of male co-workers and of trade union officials
- lack of available information about opportunities for females in the trades
- lack of those qualifications generally accepted as necessary for entry to many non-traditional trades

It was also recommended in the Kirby Report that substantial upgrading of vocational preparation for young people should be undertaken through the introduction of a traineeship system. This system, which is currently being implemented, will allow young people to receive structured combinations of on-the-job training and work experience in non-trade occupations with complementary off-the-job training. Initially, traineeships will be concentrated in the retail, finance, tourism and public administration industries. It is intended that there be an equal distribution of traineeships between women and men and efforts will be made to maintain this balance to ensure that the gender segregation of the labour market is not exacerbated as the system develops.

In relation to adult training, it was recommended in the Kirby Report that existing skills and individual training programs should be amalgamated into a single program. The major policy outcome of this recommendation has been the establishment of a new adult training program which will cater to the vocational requirements of various disadvantaged groups including women re-entering the workforce after a long absence.

CONCLUSION

The changes which have accompanied the growth in the employment of women have been extensive. Governments at State and Federal levels have indicated both by their legislative and policy measures that they are committed to improving women's access to employment and their longer-term status in the labour market. There are still, however, areas in which legitimate claims can be made for the removal of obstacles to women's equality in the workforce. The Women's Bureau of the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations is currently funding, under the Women's Research and Employment Initiatives Program, a national study on maternity leave in Australia, an issue of profound importance to working women, and a further study on the extent and character of part-time and casual employment will be undertaken shortly.

Another important area in which women have a legitimate claim to press for change is on the issue of family roles and the structure of power within the family. Women's work is still seen as secondary and women continue to bear the major responsibility for housework and childcare. Existing legislative measures to secure equality for women in the workforce are not formulated so as to address the problem of working women carrying a double burden. There is a need, therefore, to consider measures which will promote equality in all aspects of the lives of working women.

This issue could be brought to the fore by the ratification of the International Labour Convention (ILO) 156 - workers with family responsibilities. This convention aims to promote equality of treatment for men and women workers through the provision of facilities to assist working parents. The Prime Minister has announced the Federal Government's commitment to ratifying ILO Convention 156 as a "logical extension of our commitment to eliminate discrimination in all its forms from employment and occupation". He went on to say that his Government "recognises the need for a more equitable sharing of family and domestic responsibilities, the provision of support services and recognition in working conditions of workers' family responsibilities to enable women to participate in employment on an equal basis with men".⁽⁴⁰⁾

The Convention reflects the need for a more egalitarian approach to the sharing of duties and responsibilities within the family and aims at eradicating discrimination between women and men workers with family responsibilities and between such workers and other workers. Its ratification by Australia will, therefore, be a step forward in the process of securing equality for women in the workforce and, together with the existing legislative and policy measures discussed in this paper, it will ensure that the next two decades will see extensive improvements in the position which women currently occupy in the Australian labour force.

FOOTNOTES

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TABLE 1

Women in the Australian Labour Force, 1947 to 1984

Year	Women as a proportion of the labour force (per cent)		Married Women as a Proportion of the female labour force (per cent)		Women's labour force participation rate (per cent)	
	Married Women	All Women	Married Women	All Women	Married Women	All Women
June 1947	3.4	22.4	15.3		6.5	24.9
June 1954	7.0	22.8	30.5		12.6	26.3
June 1961	9.6	25.1	38.3		17.3	28.9
June 1966	14.1 ^b	29.5	47.8 ^b		26.6 ^b	35.2
June 1971	18.0	31.7	56.8		32.8	37.1
June 1976	22.3	36.3	60.2		43.8	43.8
June 1981	22.2	37.0	60.0		42.3	44.6
June 1982	22.2	38.0	60.5		42.4	44.5
June 1984	21.8	38.1	57.2		43.5	45.5
June 1985	22.0	38.6	57.1		44.5	46.2

Sources: CBCS Census 1947, 1954, 1961, 1971, 1976; ABS June 1981, 1982, 1984

- (a) Married women, as defined in the census, do not include widowed, divorced or permanently separated women. The definition used in the labour force survey estimates does not include widowed, divorced or separated women.
- (b) This category is overstated compared to earlier censuses due to change in the definition of the labour force in the 1966 Census which had the effect of including previously excluded women part-time workers.

TABLE 2
Occupational Segregation^(a) - August 1985

Major Occupational Group	Female	
	No.	% of Occ. Group
Professional, Technical	476,000	45.3
Administrative, Executive & Managerial	79,600	17.7
Clerical	888,000	73.4
Sales	320,900	52.9
Farmers, Fishers, Timbergetters, etc.	106,400	23.4
Miners, Quarry persons	*	*
Transport and Communications	43,600	13.1
Trades persons, production process workers and labourers n.e.c.	227,000	12.2
Service, sport and recreation	415,100	64.5
TOTAL	2,557,100	38.5

- . 6.35% of female employees were concentrated in three major occupational groups: Clerical, Sales and Service etc.
- . While 18.5% of female employees were in professional and technical occupations, 39.7% of these were teachers and 29.1% were nurses.
- . The disproportionate employment of women part-time means that women's relative share of available employment is less than appears. For example, in the Clerical, Sales and Service etc. occupations, women's share of employed persons was approximately 66% in August 1985, but 40% of women in these occupation groups are employed part-time, compared with just 11% of males.
- . At the time of the 1981 Census, 37.32% of employed persons were women. In only 69 of 267 occupational categories was the proportion of women employed equal to, or greater than 37.32%.

* Subject to sampling variability too high for most practical uses.