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Who is doing what is to be done?

The problems summarised

In this book I have tried to demonstrate that it is not the case, as some have suggested, that 'the consciousness formed outside the workplace is brought into the workplace' (Baxandall et al. 1976: 2). Rather, the consciousness of workers is crucially formed in the experience of the interaction between the family-household and the workplace. As Petchesky (1978: 376) eloquently put it, 'work and the family ... are really intimately related modes that reverberate upon one another'. Similarly, the relationship between these two sites of class reproduction, as borne by both women and men, is not static. On the one hand, personal characteristics, habits and views developed in the one place may be transferred to the other, and on the other hand, as one moves through the life cycle, the significances and meanings and hence the energies expended will vary, sometimes favouring the household, sometimes the workplace.

Paid workplaces, as described here, induce and reinforce feelings of stupidity, ignorance and powerlessness. Working women and men inherit, develop, create and utilise a set of strategies in the workplace to cope with, and sometimes to combat, this massive, sustained and pervasive onslaught. Some strategies, like domestication and displaced violence, are gender specific. Others, like escapism, game-playing and rate-setting, are similar across the genders. Still others, like solidarity and organised resistance, have similar effects but sometimes take different forms.

These strategies affect and are affected by those developed within the family-household, the central burden of which is the creation and maintenance, and hence the allocation, of labour time. Labour power is created through biological reproduction, of course, and then by defining how much

time will be spent on work out of and within the lifetimes comprising the family-household. The ability to work is maintained both through its unpaid utilisation and through its expenditure for money. This division is in itself extraordinarily strongly gender biased and linked to biology, so that the bearers of new human life (women) are assumed to have the major and intimate responsibility for its continuation, while men's lives are more fixedly devoted to wage labour. The joy in male workers' lives revolves around finding and ensuring nurturance, comfort and meaning from and within the family-household, the income of which over time, and in the greater part, is provided by the sale of male labour power. Women workers, on the other hand, overwhelmingly seek happiness in motherhood and the provision of physical and psychic comfort, tasks which decrease women's earning capacity in a market based on the purchase of labour power which takes its male appearance as the norm.

In seeking to sustain masculinity, which is at least as much undermined in the workplace as created there, labouring men develop an intense emotional dependency on the family-household, particularly on its central figure, which in turn threatens the masculinity (re)constructed there. This dependency is recognised as being a necessary precondition for continuous engagement in the world of work, which is entered in order that the means for continual participation in it can be obtained. The result of an analysis of working-class men's lives which refuses to remain locked within the factory gates is an understanding that the confusion, hostility, anger, fear and violence which sometime feature in all men's lives is the result of a set of structures which centrally encompass and comprise the family-household and the paid workplace and their mutual determinations.

In neither place, however, are the various elements which make up a man able to be experienced as anything other than fragmented and contradictory. Instead, a masculinity undermined at work is assuaged at home, and a masculinity slipping at home is bolstered at work, in a never-ending and always unsatisfactory emotional and psychological hopscotch. Problems created and injuries inflicted by these two institutions and their interrelations are seldom perceived as such and are more frequently ascribed to a lack of manliness, an individual inability to cope.

Similarly, working-class women maintain the centrality of mothering even while escaping from the prison of domestic labour back into the paid workplace. Engagement in low-paid, boring work is rationalised as being 'for the family', but to an even greater extent women also confirm the centrality of the family-household by performing the majority of the work carried out in it. This has two effects. Lower wages are both ensured and justified; and a woman's commitment to the household, the centre of her life, is rendered fundamentally insecure by the fact that it is essentially dependent, if not on the presence of a man, then at least on receipt of part of his wage. 'Keeping her man', in both its senses, then becomes yet more work to be performed as 'keeper of the household'.

Different as these strategies are, and crucial as they are to the survival of working-class men and women, their implementation has the effect of locking them into ways of doing, ways of being, definitions and perceptions of themselves as men and women which militate against the recognition of their common interests either as producers or as reproducers. It is not simply that labour power is never ungendered. More than that, in the very process of struggling to maintain their subjectivity and humanity, working-class women and men are set against each other even as they are bound together.

Solutions

Lessening economic dependence on the male wage is possible if the worker increases her engagement in wage labour or increases the value of her labour power. While either or both of these have a major undermining effect on patriarchy within the family-household, further commitment to the ridiculous routines and demands of paid work paradoxically reconfirms the centrality of mothering as against the soullessness of wage labour. At the same time, an increase in the total amount of time spent in paid work, training or union agitation leaves less time and energy available for home life, just as its emotional significance increases. This is experienced as guilt and uncertainty about one's adequacy as a wife and mother.

A man in the same situation experiences a loss of power as the male wage is reduced as a proportion of the family income. He also experiences increasing uncertainty about the reasons for wage-working as the breadwinner myth subsides. The search for reassurance is likely to be met with requests for a more reasonable division of domestic labour, the performance of which is a further blow to the male self-image.¹

It is within the family-household that these currently unsolvable tensions and dilemmas are mediated. As an entity, the family-household has, since the mid-1970s, been experiencing a drop in purchasing power, and at least since the end of World War II, the amount of labour power it sells over its lifetime has risen. Consequently, its manoeuvrability has been substantially reduced and its crisis management mechanisms eroded.

Once the problem is perceived as structural, the material preconditions for the creation of happy people are easy to identify. All workers must be able to earn a living wage and have both the time and the energy necessary to undertake the domestic labour necessary for their own subsistence and that of those members of the family-household unable to perform it. To meet even these basic requirements, working people need equal pay; comparable worth; gender desegmentation of the workforce; shorter hours; increased holidays; paid study leave; paid parental leave; childcare in the community, workplaces and union offices; more flexible work schedules; and pro-rata conditions for part-time workers. This transformation needs to be accompanied by a thorough rehumanisation of paid work itself and a

redefinition of masculinity and femininity. Such a redefinition comprises several overlapping essential elements, such as changes which enable men and women to experience sexuality less attached to and formed by gender, the end of compulsory heterosexuality, access to abortion, birth control and continuing sex education and the freedom of parents and children to live outside marriage (see Vance and Snitow in Segal 1990: 214–15).

Men's consciousness-raising groups are likely to be of little strategic utility, preoccupied as they are with the immediate problems of bandaging bleeding egos and learning emotional self-defence. Within the Australian Labor Party (ALP), gender issues still seem to be given a low priority. In New South Wales the ALP's women's conference was abolished some years ago, and only two women are in the Shadow Cabinet. According to Meredith Burgmann, women trade unionists don't see joining the ALP as a natural progression from their union activism, for they see the ALP as male. It is, she says, 'a gruesomely male party' (Clark 1990: 4).

Programs for rehumanisation can perhaps only be developed in the political organisations of the left and social movements. Yet, within these, the possibilities of building a series of integrated and mutually supporting proposals for a unifying of personal life are being denied by those who consistently drive a bigger and bigger theoretical wedge between workers as they appear when they sell their labour power and workers as they appear as supporters of the social movements. The latter are putatively places in which critical self-reflection is unavoidable, but it is with the former that effective power for social structural transformation is located.

Practically, the dichotomisation fostered between the class and the movements precludes the transmission of experience and knowledge from one to the other. The mutual exclusivity posited by those who confuse the recomposition of the working class with its demise has meant that political parties in which political education (however truncated) was a feature, and in which connections and linkages (however one-sided) were made, have ripped themselves apart. Those which are struggling to re-emerge are 'issue-oriented', either in the sense of being 'single-issue' (the Greens, the Nuclear Disarmament Party, Grey Power) or 'multi-issue' (the New Left Party; the Rainbow Alliance). The issue or issues which are central to these endeavours are defined as such precisely in distinction to one another. The relationships between the issues are seldom explored because the parties' very existence is predicated on their separation. Thus, even in the multi-issue parties, activists are brought together on the basis of their differences ('red' meets 'green'), not on the basis of what they might have in common in their intimate, undeniable and ineradicable ways of living. Thus 'issue orientation' displaces a theoretical sense of the coherence and interrelatedness of class processes, in which issues are reflected on not as discrete and exclusionary, but as (conflicting, puzzling) parts of the lived experience of working-class people.

The point is that if the rehumanising conditions listed above are seen as

'issues' to be addressed by issue-oriented groups, their achievement is jeopardised. Each is part of the other's solution. It is above all the broad view that is required, one which is bigger, less partial, less isolated and less contained. It is perhaps in the struggles which are currently evident that we may seek indications of the pathways and directions for future action.

Getting there

As Lenin observed, trade unions are defensive institutions operating within capital's constraints and on its terms. They are intrinsically defensive organisations concerned with the protection of their members. Of necessity, their primary objective is to keep non-unionists out of the labour market and to keep unionists provided with work for the greatest possible reward. To maintain these principles requires fighting for and maintaining union coverage, closed shop and the enforceability of awards. Against the intransigence of capital, these things are difficult to achieve and never easy to retain. Consequently, the trade union movement has oriented towards its strongest sections, which for the variety of reasons explored in this book, means those male and particularly 'skilled' workers employed in major enterprises. And its interest is confined to the worker at work, specifically to the 'eight-hour male'. Feminists have pointed out that the labour movement's inability to take the fact and nature of the division of work between women and men into account has meant that some of the victories of the labour movement have benefited limited sections of the working class. Rather than building working-class unity, these have increased the degrees of disadvantage within it.

For precisely the same reasons that unions orient towards particular workers in particular places, women, and especially mothers, find it hard to become involved in them. But while this remains the case, even the most sympathetic leaderships find it difficult to promote and to attach priority and clout to the excellent policy positions their own organisations often take concerning women workers.

A particularly silly, but nonetheless tenacious, view sees the working class as mostly comprising inherently conservative males ('rednecks') to whom are married working-class women who are especially 'traditional' and patriarchal. The evidence presented in Chapter 2, is to the contrary, showing that women workers form a normative community sympathetic to the women's movement; that support for women's rights increases as labour-force involvement increases; and that paid work experience inclines them more to feminism. At the same time, amongst those women otherwise inclined to feminism, there is a view that feminists are both 'like men' and 'against men', and that feminism is against fun and family, that is, that it seeks to deny the expression of their heterosexuality and their maternity. This is all the more serious since, as we have seen, it is in both of these concepts that working women perceive and develop individual means of

survival and bases from which to push for change.

The women's movement, as split and divided as any social or political current, is at this moment engaged in defending the freedoms won and institutions created in its second wave as patriarchal rage links with New Right ideology not just to slash funding to women's centres, refuges, health centres and abortion clinics, but literally to expunge them. More generally, privatisation as an overall strategy is particularly gender and class specific in its effects. When the institutions of the state are under attack as at present, women suffer most, for it is within the state that they have achieved better pay and more power and it is from the state that a substantial number of working-class women not in the labour market receive their actual sustenance.

Only when women are just as likely to be 'the breadwinner' as men will the division of household paid and unpaid labour time and household income reflect genuine choice, rather than patriarchal power. The division of labour by which women assume primary responsibility for the family-household means that women do not have even the right to equal exploitation. Only when equal pay is achieved will it be possible for working-class women to be able to escape from the necessity of being married. Only then will marriage be able to become the option that it might be rather than the economic contract it so often is, in which nurturance and unpaid labour are exchanged for part of a man's wage. Only when the wages of a woman worker are adequate to support her children will power in the family-household approach balance.

Certainly people's attitudes to equal pay and the right of women and mothers to work have changed substantially in the last decade. In Canada, male steelworkers, women steelworkers and steelworkers' spouses almost unanimously supported the general principle of equal opportunities for women in the labour market. By the early 1980s, the majority of Canadians expressed support for equal job opportunities for married women, although small majorities still opposed married women with young children working outside the home (Livingstone and Luxton 1989). The National Social Science Survey of 3000 adults revealed that conservative views of what was appropriate for women were held only by between a quarter and a third of Australians. (See Table 5.1 below.)

In Australia, following agitation and representation from the Council of Action for Equal Pay (CAEP) formed in 1937, the ACTU adopted CAEP's policy on equal pay in 1941. CAEP called for equal occupational rates based on the nature of the job and not on the sex of the worker, equal opportunity and training and an end to discrimination against married women. The struggle was carried on through the 1950s by the Union of Australian Women, and in 1969 the ACTU brought before the Industrial Commission a claim for 'equal pay for work of equal value' meaning, for the ACTU, the eradication of the difference in the male and female basic wage, standing then at 25 per cent. Following a favourable outcome, less

Table 5.1 *Australians' attitudes to women's roles, 1984, in percentages*

	<i>Strongly agree/ agree</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Disagree/ strongly disagree</i>
<i>'I approve of a married woman earning money in business or industry even if she has a husband capable of supporting her.'</i>	62	14	24
<i>'A woman should devote almost all her time to her family.'</i>	32	20	48
<i>'A married woman should not attach much importance to a career.'</i>	27	22	51

Source: National Social Science Survey 1984, First Round Code Book, pp. 148–50.

than one in five women workers received pay increments. Subsequently, women organised a massive program of action, including picketing the ACTU Congress, and in 1971 convened an alternative Trade Union Women's Conference. The ACTU resubmitted the case in 1972, and midway through the hearing, the newly elected Labor government supported the ACTU position, and the Commission decided in favour of equal pay. In the 1974 National Wage Case, an equal minimum wage was granted to women (McNeill et al 1985: 17–18). But despite the victories in the Commission in 1969, 1972 and 1974, and despite equal pay legislation, in 'male industries' both men and women earn more than women and men in 'female industries'. While equal pay for equal work applies in most awards, the payment of over-award wages for men maintains the wage differential (Women's Employment Branch 1987; Thiele 1986: 363). Further gains are unlikely without gender desegmentation of the labour force, and recent research indicates that this is not happening. To the contrary, it appears, in Australia at least, the segmentation is increasing (Karmel and MacLachlan 1988).

In Australia, minimum wages are set by state and federal Arbitration Commissions which make awards on the basis of submissions put forward by employers, governments and unions. Once the decision is reached, specific unions can run further cases for pay rises based on productivity increases or changes in 'work value'. Under the Prices and Incomes Accord reached between the ACTU and the Hawke Labor government, 'work value' (and 'comparable worth') are constrained by guidelines which prohibit those wage increases which might dramatically effect employers'

costs, and which further forbid flow-ons to other industries and occupations. On the other hand, the Accord has provided 'social wage' benefits such as Medicare, less tax, an 8 per cent real increase in pensions, and a package for low-income families with children which the ACTU estimates corresponds to wage increases of 15–30 per cent depending on the family's circumstances (*Women at Work* 1987–88e). More recently, the 'two-tier' wage fixing system implemented by the Arbitration Commission has advantaged women workers in the sense that it has helped lower paid workers, giving them two flat increases of \$10 and \$6 (the first tier) and up to 4 per cent (the second tier). Three-quarters of full-time women workers earn less than the average male wage, and since nearly one-quarter of all women full-time workers earned less than \$240 per week, the \$16 increase represents a 16.6 per cent pay rise for them (Winters 1989: 16; *Women at Work* 1988g). But the combined effects of the 1987 and 1988 flat-rate increases of \$10 on male and female wage relativities was only about 1 per cent. If two flat increases of \$10 were the only increases granted each year, in ten years women workers would still only be earning 85 per cent of male wages (Winters 1989: 17).

However, most women workers have certainly won more than they could under 'enterprise bargaining'. The shift to more flexible forms of wage-setting, such as the individual contract system adopted by the domestic airlines and by the federal Opposition's industrial relations policy, will increase the wages gap between men and women. In the United States, with its largely deregulated wages system, the pay differential between women and men is between 11 and 20 per cent. The pay gap between British workers is wider in Thatcher's Britain than at any time since equal pay legislation came into force in 1975. Full-time female manual workers receive 72 per cent of the male wage, and non-manual workers 61 per cent (Millett 1989: 5; ICEF Info 1989: 4). 'Enterprise bargaining', particularly where it involves 'voluntary employment agreements' which exclude unions, as was the case in Queensland, will not benefit workers. Even that form of bargaining which maintains minimum award conditions and allows enterprise agreements 'on top' will benefit those in the larger enterprises and the better organised, that is, men in trades.

Comparable worth strategies seek to establish the relative value of entirely different jobs, such as those of secretaries and warehouse workers, in order to demonstrate the existence of wage discrimination. Wage-equity laws, such as in Canada, encourage the comparison of a range of jobs within an enterprise in terms of skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions (Burton et al. 1987: 112). It is a matter of contention whether comparable worth in the Australian context is the best way to achieve wage justice. In 1985, the ACTU ran a test case on behalf of the nursing unions which was rejected by the Federal Arbitration Commission. The Commission said that 'such an approach would strike at the heart of long-accepted methods of wage fixation in this country and would be particularly destructive of the

present wage-fixing principles'. Some, as Pringle (1988: 260–61) pointed out, have argued that the ACTU was not careful enough in presenting its case. Others (notably McNeill et al. 1985) have argued that nurses were not the most suitable candidates for such a test case. Either way, it is hard to see how the ACTU industrial officer, Jenny Acton (1986: 23), could fairly claim, as she did, that 'the decision was a victory for the ACTU'.

Whatever the culpability or otherwise of the ACTU, women's wages are lower than men's, partly and precisely because of women's lack of power to determine the 'worth' of their work to their bosses. The problem with evaluating work in a sexually segmented labour market is that women's skills and abilities are often not recognised or are systematically undervalued. In 1907, Justice Henry Higgins, having established the 'family' or basic social minimum wage, went on to determine the 'rate for the job', the comparable worth of various types of work. Higgins established a number of dichotomies defining skilled and unskilled work, namely: heavy/light; dangerous/less dangerous; dirty/clean; interesting/repetitious. These became the basis of what is known as 'the margin for skill' and constitute the basis for wage relativities which now exist (McNeill et al. 1985: 17). Currently and typically within the context of award and restructuring negotiations, managing people is more valued than caring for them; physical effort is more valued than most mental effort; responsibility for machines or money more valued than responsibility for people; supervision more valued than co-ordination; subordination and super-ordination more valued than co-operation; strength more valued than accuracy and concentration (Burton et al. 1987: 7, 31, 88, 94).

For federal trade union secretary Anna Booth, a solution lies in the latest phase of the Accord process, award restructuring, which trades off productivity increases against training. According to Booth:

Great strides have been made, but there is a hell of a lot more work to do. Women still earn only 89 per cent of the male wage and are trapped in low status jobs. They are not getting jobs which come through undertaking training and they are not leaders in big business. The key to the solution is Award restructuring, where we create career paths which are accessible to women and which acknowledge their families. (Conway 1989)

The Metal Trades Federation of Unions has required employers to contribute to training to be provided in work time, which will include English-language literacy and numeracy for those who require it. Similarly in the textile, clothing and footwear industry, award restructuring involves training leave (Doran 1988: 16, 22). This is extremely important for working women, who generally find themselves in the least skilled occupations, manual or non-manual, where they form the core of a secondary labour force that is unskilled, untrained, low-paid, with no prospects, easily taken on or laid off and predominantly female. Overall, half the men in the workforce are in what is considered 'skilled' employment, compared with

less than one-third of women workers (Moss 1980: 67; Rutherford 1990: 105). Horin (1989a: 15) is sceptical of award restructuring, which:

may pass like a fad in the night. Unfortunately, workers be warned: we must come to grips with what it means or else we may be victims of a con. We may find employers chipping away at hard-won conditions and calling it award restructuring. The New South Wales Government has taken this line in its negotiations with police and TAFE teachers.

In theory, restructuring means that all workers will get access to training provided mainly by their employers, redesigned jobs requiring a broader range of skills, and a way out of dead-end jobs. In fact, will women be selected for retraining, or will 'breadwinners' take preference? Will the training be held at times and in places that take account of the double shift? Once trained, will women be promoted? Who will the bosses find to replace the women that may be ready to move 'out and up' when men would not touch their jobs with a ten-foot pole? Will women be upgraded only within 'women's occupations'? Will restructuring push women's occupations and the women within them further down, while males are elevated? Is it true, as Anne Junor, a former research officer with the New South Wales Teachers' Federation, remarked, that 'Award restructuring is about achieving greater skills and more flexibility. The trouble is that men get the skills, and women get the flexibility' (Poynting 1990: oral communication).

Those workers most advantaged in the labour market, those with some power in some sectors, may be able to upgrade their skills and increase their wages through productivity bargaining. Despite the opportunity apparently offered by restructuring, those in jobs which for historical reasons are poorly organised and hence 'unskilled' will still find it difficult, for the same reasons, to benefit under the current climate. Many women are susceptible to the exporting of their jobs, have little to trade off and are in weak unions (Bolton 1989).

Indeed, the whole notion of restructuring may apply differently to women. Machinists in the textile, clothing and footwear industry, for instance, already do work which is broad-banded and flexible. A process worker in the electronics industry may place components on a circuit or she may test and identify faults in the board. Both are usually classified the same and paid the same wage. Similarly, shop work is generally regarded as 'unskilled', although job advertisements most frequently require 'experience', indicating that in fact it is not. What is needed is not 'multi-skilling' but a recognition of the complexity and variety of skills already involved (Hall 1989; Windsor 1989).

It is not clear, either, that our educational institutions are able to cope with what is required. A study of the Technical and Further Education system in 1984-85 found that disadvantages for women are entrenched within it. Not only are certain key resources such as childcare undeveloped and underfunded, but even traditionally female fields of training such as

secretarial studies and fashion are not receiving their fair share of the TAFE dollar (*Women at Work* 1987–88a). Excluding hairdressers, women still make up a woeful 9 per cent of tradespeople (Lumby and Kirk 1989: 14). The problem with employer-provided training, on the other hand, is that where it so far exists, especially for women, it is enterprise-specific, narrowly training people for specific jobs with very specific skills, thus locking workers in, rather than enhancing their market value (Windsor 1989: 5).

In Australia, the federal government introduced the *Anti-Discrimination Act* in 1977, outlawing discriminatory hiring practices. In 1986 affirmative action legislation was passed, under which all employers with more than 100 employees are required to develop an affirmative action program and report yearly to the Affirmative Action Agency. Companies which fail to comply with the legislation can be named in Parliament. Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) programs change existing recruitment, selection, training and promotion procedures to remove obstacles in the progression of women and minorities from one job to a better one.

The problems with affirmative action and EEO have been well noted. As Hall (1989: 15) has so aptly observed, 'the analysis required for successful Award restructuring has much in common with the analysis required for equal employment opportunity planning' for the 'practices, policies and value systems' of both are 'securely grounded in meeting the organisation's objectives and making the best use of the organisation's human resources'. Not much room to move here!

But it is not simply that 'the orientation of affirmative action officers towards management perspectives' compromises the relevance of EEO to working-class women (Franzway et al. 1989: 103). Rather more fundamentally, EEO changes the very meaning and manner of being a 'working woman'. For while EEO allows women to make it as 'honorary men' under the mask of gender neutrality, it does nothing for those women who do not wish to work 'like men' and/or who may reject 'career paths' which, when they do exist, lead them away from their network of mates. According to Hague (1984: 21–22), 'reviews of personnel practices and more staff development programs are fine in their way in encouraging women to seek more promotions positions but when all is said and done, women bosses are still bosses'. As long as continuity of employment and the availability to work full time are what secure the better jobs, EEO will not be real to most working women 'who take their families seriously', but will rather 'assist a privileged minority of women (and ethnic minorities) to the top' (Lynch 1984: 43). Maroney (1987) has argued that 'for government "affirmative action" promised a trendy, low-cost alternative to the enactment and enforcement of rigorous equal value legislation; selective promotion of a few both promotes individualism and serves the interests of formally qualified professional and managerial women.'

The annual report of the Affirmative Action Agency (1987–88), tabled

in the federal Parliament one year after the legislation was introduced, indicated that most employers were complying with the legislation by lodging their affirmative action reports. And yet about three-quarters of those complying in the private sector and about half of those in higher education, had not consulted the relevant unions, even though this was required by the Act (Fells 1989: 10).

Nonetheless, while there is no doubt that those women who benefit most, are and will be those in middle-class occupations or on the cusp of them, there have been benefits for working-class women as well. A study of the responses of 157 Victorian companies to the legislation discovered that 47 per cent of them found that affirmative action had helped women establish career paths; 25 per cent claimed that morale was higher; 25 per cent said it encouraged women into less traditional jobs; 23 per cent said they now intended to provide permanent part-time jobs; 16 per cent were contemplating offering job-sharing and 12 per cent said they may introduce employer-sponsored childcare facilities (Neales 1989a: 55).

Working-class women have certainly benefited from the decision of the New South Wales Equal Opportunity Tribunal which found that BHP had discriminated against women in its Port Kembla steelworks by 'initially refusing to hire them as production ironworkers and placing their names on a waiting list for three to seven years, while male applicants were hired without much delay; retrenching or threatening to retrench them on the basis of a "last on, first off" rule which placed them at a disadvantage in comparison with male employees who had been hired promptly' (Burvill 1986: 7). The decision, awarding damages of more than \$1 million to the 34 workers who brought the action, was upheld against appeals from the company by the New South Wales Court of Appeal and by the High Court. The Tribunal also found that BHP had not only discriminated against this group but against all women who applied or had applications pending for jobs between 1 June 1977 and 30 September 1981 (Simpson 1989a: 5). The success of this legal battle means that, even if a company has stopped a particular discriminatory practice, if nothing has been done to redress the balance to make up the for the harm inflicted historically, the workers can seek damages for indirect discrimination. A similar case was brought by a Public Service journalist, Helen Styles, against the Department of Foreign Affairs. She claimed that her rejection for a posting overseas was because of long-term discrimination which had led to 174 men and only five women making it to the top rank within the department (Neales 1989b: 7).

Other, less dramatic, effects of anti-discrimination and EEO legislation are the changes which are occurring in workplace and company culture. The appointment of EEO officers with managerial status and networks of grievance mediators in workplaces cannot but change workplaces. Shortly after the Port Kembla steelworkers' win, Ian McLean, who was working, in the words of the local newspaper, to 'prepare the bullets fired by BHP's advocates against the 34 women' (*Illawarra Mercury* 25/10/88, 18) de-

clared in the local paper that the experience had 'turned his attitudes inside out', and that he was taking up a position as Equal Opportunity co-ordinator in the steelworks. BHP shortly announced that 'pin-ups' would be banned from the steelworks as a matter of company policy. McLean said that the move was made after discussions with the company's 700 women workers who made it clear that they found pin-ups and 'girlie' calendars offensive. To reduce male animosity, BHP offered to supply or enlarge any approved posters, or photos of landscapes, sports or family scenes (*Women at Work* 1989b). In the middle of 1989, a childcare study was launched by the company and a joint working party established.

Esso has found that its introduction of childcare, part-time work and equal opportunities for women has increased the proportion of women returning to work after maternity leave from 53 to 77 per cent. Similarly, after two years' negotiation, the Commonwealth Bank Officers' Association reached an agreement described by the president of the Industrial Relations Commission as encompassing 'the most fundamental and far-reaching changes to employment conditions since the inception of the Commonwealth Bank'. The new arrangements include: easing the restrictions on the employment of part-time workers; allowing full-time workers to become part-timers where practicable and desirable; and pro-rata pay and conditions for part-time workers. The bank workers have also won the opportunity of a 'career break' in which those who wish to leave their jobs for an extended period can continue to work casually, and renew their full-time employment in the future (Brass 1990: 7).

It is difficult to know how widespread such initiatives will become. Certainly they are generally opposed by peak employer bodies. The deputy director of the Australian Chamber of Manufacturers remarked at the end of 1984 that:

sex discrimination, equal opportunity, affirmative action, occupational health and safety ... might be justified on some sociological or humanitarian reasoning, [but] it should ... be understood that if at the end of the day the cumulative risks make employment of people an unattractive proposition, then the process of replacing people with machines must inevitably speed up. (Lane 1985: 98-9)

And some of the distance to be travelled within the union movement can be gauged from the comment of Australian Workers' Union and New South Wales ALP power broker Charlie Oliver: 'There's no place for married life in the union or politics.' (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1990g: 8)

For the mass of working women, the slow, hard slog through the unions may be the only sure way to win wage justice, and in its way EEO may have its greatest significance by the changes it is bringing to trade union consciousness within the labour movement itself. The Women's Section of the International Federation of Chemical, Energy and General Workers' Unions (ICEF) met in Brussels in October 1989, and emphasised that

affirmative action programs in sectors covered by the ICEF should:

- encourage trade unions to lead by example within the personnel policies of their own unions;
- ensure that women have a place at the negotiating table during collective bargaining sessions;
- focus on the pay and conditions of unskilled and semi-skilled women workers, as 'equal opportunity should not just be for high-powered career women';
- promote 'family-friendly' working hours. (*ICEF Info* 1989: 4)

Certainly it is in the interests of the whole trade union movement to support these and similar demands. The absence of equal pay has a depressing effect on all wages and the existence of a pool of undervalued workers is a threat to the wages and security of other workers. Raising the wages of the lower paid exerts an upward pressure on those who are better paid. Reducing the large group of workers 'kept in their place' by sexism and gender discrimination removes a downward pressure on wages and a threat to job security. As long as men's work is the more valued, the incentive for employers to deskill and fragment jobs into cheaper and less interesting 'women's' jobs remains. At the same time, pay inequity limits the occupational choices of men, especially since their sense of themselves as (potential) breadwinners requires that they take the best-paying job they can (King and Hoffman 1984: 96-7).² As Barbara Regan, a shuttle car driver, explained, 'If you have to take care of a family, the salary has to be uppermost in your mind. Where can I put in eight hours and get paid the best for it?' (Burnett 1984: 87).

In the last decade or so, the ACTU has been able to win in the Arbitration Commission the maternity leave decision of 1979, the adoption leave decision of 1985 and the decision of 1988 to remove discriminatory provisions in awards. The significance of the last-mentioned case is that some awards have different wages and classifications for women, different ratios between adults and juniors for each sex, restrictions on women working overtime and shifts, restrictions on women working with dangerous machinery and processes and restrictions on women lifting heavy weights. In the ten years since their achievement, maternity leave provisions are now in place in 95 per cent of all awards.

In September 1989, the ACTU Congress adopted a new strategy on equal pay, one of the major thrusts of which was to seek the establishment of an Equal Pay Bureau within the auspices of the federal Department of Industrial Relations. Addressing the Congress during the debate on the issue, Anna Booth, the federal secretary of the Clothing and Allied Trades Union, said: 'The right wages policy will boldly state that male workers have had a better deal than women workers; that certain groups of men and women have been worse off than other groups' (Larriera 1989b: 8). ACTU

secretary, Bill Kelty said that it was time unions asked young people and women—groups where trade union membership was weakest—what they wanted from unions: ‘We have to ensure that women are seen and involved in unions as equal partners—anything less is a failure’, he said (*Illawarra Mercury* 1989c: 17), announcing that it was his intention that women should make up half the ACTU Executive by the turn of the century.

At the previous Congress in 1987, the ACTU had endorsed the document ‘Future Strategies for the Union Movement’ which, among other things, said that the ACTU and its affiliates must: continue to fight for affirmative action for women; increase the number of women trade union officials; increase the number of women in policy-making positions; and see that unions take into account the effect of their decisions on women workers. It also adopted a strategy statement on women’s employment which outlined priorities for the ACTU and its affiliated unions for the next two years. These included: support for a parental leave test case; education campaigns to promote the sharing of domestic and family responsibilities; pressure for greater provision of childcare; further pursuit of superannuation coverage for women; consultation with employers on affirmative action; removal of discriminatory provisions and language in awards; and increased participation of women in decision-making positions in unions (*Women at Work* 1987a: 1–2; 1987i)³.

At the same Congress, the ACTU voted to expand its executive from 31 to 38, with three positions reserved for women. Bill Kelty told a seminar organised by the ACTU Women’s Committee that the three positions would be based on the existing factional divisions within the ACTU, but ‘they would not be a substitute for normal processes of election, and we hope to get more women up that way as well’ (*Women at Work* 1987i). In addition, Jennie George from the Teachers’ Federation became the first woman vice-president and Joan Baird from the Hospital Employees’ Federation was elected to the executive as a representative of the health group of unions. In 1990, the ACTU Executive had five women members: Marilyn Beaumont (health unions), Di Foggo (education unions), Kate Wood (Municipal Officers’ Association), Tricia Caswell (Victoria Trades Hall Council) and Pat Staunton (New South Wales Nurses Association) (*Women at Work* 1990: 3).

About 3 per cent of delegates to the 1977 ACTU Congress were women. After the merger with the ACTU of unions previously comprising the Australian Council of Salaried and Professional Associations in 1979 and the Council of Government Employee Organisations in 1981, women’s representation increased to 11 per cent in 1981. In 1983 and 1985 this had risen slightly to 12 per cent, and then to 17 per cent in 1987 (Davis 1987–88: 3). The proportion of women speakers in debate has improved dramatically, however, from about 11 to 50 per cent at the 1983 and 1987 Congresses respectively (Burgmann 1984: 15; *Women at Work* 1987j).

The ACTU (1989: 8) commented in 1989 that ‘it is now being realised

that women cannot have true equal opportunity in the workplace until there is more equality in the home and a greater sharing of domestic responsibilities between men and women'. Attitudinal changes do seem to be occurring. A national poll in Canada in 1981 found that 72 per cent agreed that husbands should share in domestic work compared with 57 per cent in 1976. In the same survey, 47 per cent of the men said they helped regularly with domestic work, although only 37 per cent of the women said the men did (Luxton 1986: 20). Nonetheless, significant changes in the performance of unpaid labour by working-class men do seem to be taking place. It is not only a generational change, in that younger men enjoy cooking more and undertake more shared cooking and shopping (Worsley 1988: 8); existing patterns of patriarchal power are being eroded. When Luxton (1986) restudied the mining town of Flin Flon after a five-year absence she found that the men had increased their domestic labour time from 10.8 hours per week in 1976 to 19.1 hours in 1981. The difference between men and women had been halved in five years.

Table 5.2 Domestic labour in Flin Flon 1976, 1981, hours per week

	1976	1981
<i>Women</i>	35.7	31.4
<i>Men</i>	10.8	19.1
<i>Difference</i>	24.9	12.3
<i>Household total</i>	46.5	50.5

Source: Derived from Luxton 1986: 26

Similarly, a study of 5 000 married people in the United States found that men were putting in one hour of domestic labour for every two put in by women, compared with one to six in 1965 (*Illawarra Mercury* 1989b: 8). Luxton noted, on the basis of her study, that in working-class households important changes in the division of labour were beginning to occur as working-class women contested male privilege and men assumed more responsibility for domestic labour. She concluded that large-scale social transformation was occurring as traditional household patterns were eroding and new ones emerging, and that this may, in the short run, be intensifying family conflict (Luxton 1986: 23, 34, 35).

There is growing awareness that the fundamental issue is not only about changing the division of labour, but about the nature of the relationship between paid work and the life of the family-household, particularly in the allocation of time between the two places. In Britain in 1977, parents made up 43 per cent of the labour force, and 75 per cent of all parents were employed (Moss 1980: 29). To change the ways in which masculinity is constructed, it is essential to loosen the vice-like hold that paid work has on men and to achieve a more equal balance between it and parenthood for both sexes. The problem is definitely not that of 'working mothers', which

definition allows men to 'sidle innocently away from any controversy, leaving women on the defensive ... and men, employers and society at large avoiding any responsibility' (Moss and Fonda 1980: 17). Children need to be well cared for if they are to become productive, creative and nurturing adults. And it is becoming increasingly clear that they need care and attention from fathers as well as mothers. Child development research stresses the significance of fathers in children's lives, and the importance—for himself, for his spouse, for his children—of a father's participation in family life is receiving more explicit recognition. Fathers are now acknowledged as important in providing support other than breadwinning and, in particular, in complementing and enlarging the sense of family cohesiveness and contributing to children's sense of competence (Kamerman 1980: 107, 108; Rapoport and Rapoport 1980: 183).

One way in which this has been addressed is through the introduction of parental leave. At least one year's paid or partly paid parental leave has been won in Sweden, Poland, the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, the Federal Republic of Germany, Iceland, Hungary and the German Democratic Republic. In Belgium, Greece, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal and Spain, such leave is unpaid (ACTU 1989: Attachment 2).

Swedes have had access to nine months' parental leave on 90 per cent of their wage since 1974. Either mother or father may use the leave. When it was first introduced, only 2 per cent of eligible fathers used it. By 1977, this had risen to 11 per cent, by 1978 to 14 per cent and by the mid-80s, to 22 per cent. Not surprisingly, the take-up by men was much higher if their wives earned a good wage. Three of the nine months can be used at any time until the child is eight, as full- or part-time leave. There is also an entitlement of one day off per year per child to attend the child's school. Parents also have the right to take unpaid leave until the child is 18 months old, and to work only six hours a day until the child is eight. In addition, parents are entitled to an amount equal to their own sick leave, paid at the same rate, to permit them to care for an ill child at home. In 1976, 40 per cent of families with two working parents used the scheme, fathers accounting for some of this leave in one-third of them. Where fathers took the leave, they accounted for more than half of all days off. Studies generally suggest that most Swedish fathers are now doing an equal share of the caring for non-infant children (Kamerman 1980: 105, 98; *Women at Work* 1987d; Moss and Fonda 1980: 197; Sandqvist in Segal 1990: 312).

Australian workers are far behind their Swedish counterparts. The ACTU's Working Women's Charter, introduced in 1977, called for various types of parental leave, including maternity and paternity leave, extended parental leave and leave to care for sick dependents. In 1979, the ACTU ran a test case in the Arbitration Commission on maternity leave and won the right for women to have up to one year's unpaid maternity leave and their job back after that leave. This provision has now been inserted in 95 per cent of all awards. In the public service in most parts of Australia, three months

of that leave is paid. An 'Action Program for Women Workers' was adopted in 1984, which included measures to assist workers with family responsibilities, such as the increased provision of childcare, flexible working hours and further test cases on parental leave. This resulted in 1985 in the extension of maternity leave to adopting mothers and, in the federal public service, paternity leave was gained as well. In 1987 in South Australia, adoption leave was extended to fathers, and in 1989 the ACTU presented a claim for a national test case for leave for fathers similar to maternity leave (52 weeks unpaid) and five days' unpaid leave for parents to look after sick children or to meet their children's educational requirements (ACTU 1989: 1-3, 7, 13). The paternity leave request was 'totally opposed' by the Confederation of Australian Industry in the Industrial Relations Commission (Norington 1990: 4).

Working parents with young children list the absence of good, reasonably priced childcare as their primary problem in coping with work and family responsibilities. Their solutions, as we have seen, include: working different shifts so as to share care; depending on relatives, friends and neighbours, often several in combination each week; or organising a complicated package of nursery care, child-minder and one or more neighbours. The end result is that working parents may resort to three or four types of care for their children in one week (Kamerman 1980: 91). Where quality childcare is available at a reasonable price, the effect on women's participation in the workforce is dramatic. According to Sister Debbie Picone, 40 casual nurses at Prince of Wales Children's Hospital were interested in becoming permanents if they had access to childcare (Southwood and Jones 1989: 17). Nurses using a new childcare centre at St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney said it had 'transformed their lives', enabling them to return to regular work rather than to persist with odd casual shifts (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1990b: 2).

Dex's (1985: 5, 8) comparison of working women's experience in the United States and Britain found that American women work far more than British women—and in full-time jobs—over the family-formation period. American women return to work sooner after childbirth and are more likely to work between childbirths than British women. Childcare constraints explain the difference. American women can pay for childcare and get tax deductions against childcare expenses, while British women are more likely to work part-time and/or rely on families for childcare.

It is difficult to understand employer reluctance to consider work-related childcare. More than eight days per employee per year are lost to capital accumulation for child-related reasons. The Union Bank in the United States saved \$35 000 a year through reduced absenteeism and maternity leave and 67 per cent of new staff said they joined the bank because they knew it had a childcare centre (*Sydney Morning Herald* 1989: 3E). The evidence is conclusive that childcare reduces absenteeism, turnover and lateness and that it improves morale and productivity. It also

reduces replacement costs which, according to the New South Wales Labor Council, are \$1422 and \$1471 respectively to replace a hotel attendant or shop assistant who leaves because of the lack of childcare (*Women at Work* 1988c).

The price of the care, though, is a sticking point. Few could afford the cost of privatised childcare. A letter to the *Financial Review* (20 December 1989), noted:

Kinderworld of the US has now set up a smart centre to catch the well-heeled population of the North Shore in Sydney. However at \$45 per day (for baby) even those women will find it difficult to use the centre for more than just occasional care while they have a sauna or play bridge. What working mother who depends on a second income to keep the family together can afford \$225 per week per child after tax for childcare?

In 1983, the ALP was elected with a policy of childcare as a right for all families and the rapid expansion of services. It soon abandoned the goal of universal access, withdrew completely from funding early childhood education and reduced childcare funding (Franzway et al. 1989: 79–80). Nonetheless, between 1983 and 1988, as part of the Accord between the government and the ACTU, the number of government-funded childcare places had more than doubled from 46 000 to 110 000. At the 1987 Congress, the ACTU adopted a childcare and child services policy which 'declares that all parents and their families should have access to good quality children's services available on a universal basis. Congress recognises that in our society high quality child care in which parents can feel confidence and trust, is fundamental to women's access to the paid workforce.'

In the 1988 Budget, the government announced a further 30 000 childcare places to be funded before 1992, and in the same year the ACTU made a detailed submission to the government for a new program for employer-supported child care, in which employers would provide some funding, in a joint venture with the government, for childcare in the workplace. On average the Commonwealth would pay a quarter, the employer a third and the worker the rest, with eligibility for tax concessions (ACTU 1988: 3–7, Attachment 1). Indeed, it is difficult to see how the government could lose. A study completed by the ANU's Centre for Economic Policy Research in 1988 looked at childcare as a component of the economic system. It concluded that the \$200 million spent by the government had more than paid for itself. An estimated \$300 million was netted from savings on the dependent spouse rebate, sole parent pensions, the Family Allowance Supplement and the Family Allowance, while income tax and Medicare levy receipts increased (Palestrant 1989: 39). Since March 1989, a federal government task force has been considering a childcare package which will include incentives for employers to provide childcare to those family-households who need it and the possibility of

workplace childcare being included in awards (Kingston 1989: 11). The 1989 ACTU Congress document 'Towards a Fairer Australia' said that 'priority action areas' should be: the expansion of work-based childcare, especially in the private sector; the elimination of the conditions that keep women and migrant workers trapped in underpaid jobs by improving wages, conditions and career structures through award restructuring; the implementation of programs to help girls to study a wider range of subjects, particularly maths and science; and the undertaking of a campaign to extend full award rights and conditions to part-time workers.

The limits of reformism

It is still too soon to say with confidence, but it certainly seems that current workplace restructuring will further disadvantage women workers relative to their male counterparts. It just may be that on this issue women and men workers have competing agendas for workplace reform, and given that women are so less well-resourced than men, with much less to trade off, it is not hard to guess which agenda will have less success. In the current climate of big (male?) unions and enterprise bargaining, some capitalists may prove less gender biased than the peak bodies of the unions and the union movement. There are already signs that some employers are quite ready to accommodate the demands of women workers outside of awards, and even despite established industrial relations practice. Yet the undeniable fact of the matter is that the union movement needs women more than ever before. Indeed, its very survival as a social force depends on attracting them, and its attraction must involve reorganising its sense of priorities, combatting sexism of attitude and structure and broadening its concerns to encompass the relationship between the workplace and the family-household.

As for equal pay, there is no such thing as a 'fair wage', certainly not one which the state or the employers think is owed to any workers, male or female. There is only what can be won. In the struggle between capital and labour, the least powerful within the working class are the most exploited. It is here, in the struggle for the right to equal exploitation, that the limits of reformism are surely met. All workers must be able to earn a living wage and have the time and energy necessary to undertake the domestic labour necessary for their own subsistence and to pursue their individual life interests. Working people need equal pay, comparable worth, gender desegmentation of the workforce, shorter hours, increased holidays, paid study leave, paid parental leave, childcare in the community, workplaces and union offices, more flexible work schedules, pro-rata conditions for part-time workers and outworkers, and publicly funded and democratically run social safety nets. Can reformism attain these gains which will give us back a larger portion of the time of our lives and which will increase the ability of the working class to organise and energise? Can capitalism

provide them?

Despite the caterwauling of the post-Marxists of various persuasions who keep telling us that the working class is incorporated, fundamentally flawed, suicided or disappeared; despite a Labor government which has abandoned all but the last vestiges of labourism; despite left parties which seem intent on abandoning Marxism as quickly as its central insights and methods of analysis are proved more accurate, precise and useful than anything else around, what has been achieved in the 1980s by the organisations of the labour and women's movements at a time when the crisis of capitalism grows daily deeper is quite remarkable. Now that *is* puzzling.