

Barton Lectures

THE NEW DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WOMEN

Barton Lecture No. 5

Professor Lois Bryson

Reflecting on the lives of women since federation I am struck by how much has changed, but also by how much has stayed pretty much the same. Suffragists would rightly be proud and I think Louisa Lawson, mother of Henry, and also described as the mother of women's suffrage in NSW, would be happy about many things. In 1888 she started the first Australian magazine for women. She called it *The Dawn* and declared through its pages her vision for Australian women. Its success suggests that many women shared this.

Among many women's issues raised through *The Dawn* were the suffrage, conditions of work, unionism, education, equal opportunity in the workforce and the reform of marriage, divorce and property laws. Louisa also advocated building a residential college for women at the University of Sydney. So I am sure if she were here she would be keen to reflect on women's position. No doubt she would be disappointed that some of her dreams took so long to be realised, and that some have yet to succeed. Because Louisa was a tenacious fighter for women's employment rights, she would also be disappointed that just as women take up their more equal opportunities, the wheels seem to have fallen off with deteriorating work conditions for many. And she would have been dismayed at the growing gap between those in good jobs, those in bad jobs and in no jobs, which is resulting in new differences between women.

If we listed all the changes since Louisa Lawson's time, we would find most has changed in relation to the formal requirements of equal citizenship. Virtually all the pieces are now in place to achieve this. But every day we confront the drag of the past. Old ideas about women's and men's roles and ways of behaving still flourish, and get in the way of actually achieving the possibilities that formal rights promise. The situation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and the unresolved issue of domestic violence both provide dramatic illustrations of this.

In terms of the theme of these Barton lectures, unity and diversity in Australia today, the change has provided a far better basis for unity between the sexes now than at federation. Now women's rights and lives have been brought more into line with men's. While we mostly focus on women's struggle for equality in the public arena, through the suffragists or the women's movement, there has been a subterranean struggle at the face to face level as well. This is a major theme for example in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney* the current book reading on Radio National. Louisa Lawson and her readers were also well aware that the personal is political. Constant concern was expressed in *The Dawn* about 'the man question' and the double standard, about drinking, gambling and violence. It was Louisa's mission 'to level men up to the moral standard of women'. I remember a similar undercurrent in the talk of my female relatives and their friends when I was a child staying with my grandmother in the 1940s and 50s. They particularly resented the fact that in tight economic times, their husbands still felt entitled, as

breadwinner, to their beer, their cigarettes and a bet or three. At the same time, these women were making over hand-me-down clothes, planning cheap meals and earning what they could from the informal economy by the likes of selling eggs or ironing. As women's lives and men's have moved closer, diversity among women has become more recognisable. I say recognisable because some of this diversity has always been there. There have always been ethnic, religious and class diversity, for example, and women have lived in lesbian as well as heterosexual relationships. But many of the differences are in clearer focus in an environment far more attuned to and more tolerant of difference. This provides a good basis for unity because tolerance minimises exclusion.

As well as greater acceptance of the older differences, there are new differences emerging between women. These have not only resulted from changed gender relations, but also from the other economic, political and social transformations of the late 20th century, which are continually but far too loosely, attributed to globalisation. The results have been high levels of unemployment, reductions in the conditions of work for many workers, and increasing levels of inequality. As Belinda Probert discussed in an earlier Barton lecture, Australia has gone from being one of the most equal to being one of the most unequal of nations.

In these inauspicious times, new forms of class differences are surfacing as women take a more active role in shaping their own class position, but inevitably start from very different positions in the hierarchy. Because of the pace of all the change, new differences are also emerging between the generations. The differences between the experiences of young women, women in their middle years, and older women have become more marked.

It would be impossible to provide a comprehensive picture of all the things that have altered in women's lives over the century, nor do justice to the diversity that has existed. Instead I have chosen to focus on change in a few key areas which I hope when taken together, will provide an overview. These areas also give us an insight into the why the gender revolution is, as we know only too well, still incomplete. I will first consider political citizenship; then women's employment and social welfare policy and then change within families. Finally I will turn to the new differences that have emerged between women and look to the future.

The vote

First the right to vote. Though not actually covered in the constitution, a bill passed in 1902 gave white Australian women those two fundamental symbols of citizenship, the right to vote and the right to sit in parliament. In doing this again Australia was an international leader, this time as first nation in which women achieved the right to both vote and to sit. Earlier, South Australia accorded women, including Aboriginal women, both these rights.

It is ironic and indicative of a grudging attitude, that it was something of an accident that South Australian women won the right to sit in parliament, as well as vote and it was this that influenced the Commonwealth to follow suit. What had actually happened in South Australian was that anti-suffragists in the parliament had proposed the right to sit as a spoiler amendment, knowing the government was against it. But such was the momentum that the Bill with the amendment was passed anyway.

It took until 1923 before all white women in all states had the right to vote and to sit in parliament and until the 1960s for Aboriginal women. But whereas in most countries women were elected, soon after gaining the right, in Australia it took until 1943 before women were elected to the Commonwealth parliament. In the first fifty years after federation, only 22 women made it into the 13 houses of the nation's parliaments. And it has taken until 2001 for the first Aboriginal woman to be elected - to the seat of Kimberley in Western Australia. The long journey of Aboriginal Australians provides a powerful illustration of how there is not just one history of Australian women but many. The fact that there had been white manhood suffrage for fifty years before the few women meant that Australian politics were already very firmly in men's hands. It is encouraging that in a newer, though admittedly less powerful, party like the Democrats, many more women are involved and have dominated the leadership. On the other hand it was necessary in the 1990s to establish an organization, Emily's List, to support Labor women's election campaigns.

Employment

With male parliaments, it is not surprising that there was a strong masculine bias in the constellation of policies now referred to as the Australian settlement, that after federation underpinned economic and social life. But as Mary Kalantzis's previous Barton lecture made clear, not all men's interests were served, but rather those of men of British and Irish backgrounds. The federation story is well known, though less so from women's perspectives. My reading of this story is that an alliance between business, country and labour interests was formed and policies were hammered out that aimed to guarantee that business profitability was not threatened by cheap imports and that workers wages and conditions were not threatened by cheap labour. Tariff policies protected business, while for workers, the goal of protection was elided with racist sentiments and led to the infamous White Australia policy as well as a system of state regulation of the conditions of employment.

What is often missed is that women also were identified as cheap labour and in competition with men for jobs. Unions sought the answer in exclusionary policies, sometimes the guise of offering protection to women because of their alleged frailty. Certainly not much unity was in evidence, as Louisa Lawson discovered when she employed an all female staff to print *The Dawn*. Having refused to allow her workers to join the printers union, the NSW Trades and Labour Council then called on all affiliated organizations to boycott any printing establishment employing women. Louisa belled this by castigating the union because:

they have not said we object to your working because women usually accept low wages and so injure the cause of labour everywhere" they simply object on the selfish grounds to the competition of women at all.

Adrian McGregor, in a recent article in the *Australian*, referred to such labour policies as part of the legacy of 'a century of calculated and instinctive discrimination of women by men'. Today, although the formal restrictions on women's employment have been removed, the legacy is a concentration of women in less well paying jobs, and under-representation in most unions and at the top levels of the occupational and professional hierarchies.

Basic to the policies which formalised differences between women and men, were policies which constructed men as family breadwinners and women as their

dependents. Over most of the 19th century in the relevant government statistics, most women were counted as economically active, effectively co-breadwinners. But at the turn of the twentieth century, partnered women's household contributions were redefined as non-economic and expunged from the national accounts and they were recorded as dependents of their spouse, or another male. Only very recently has consideration been given to how the value of unpaid work can be reinstated in national accounting systems.

Also around federation male unionists gained the family wage, meant to support a man, his wife and his three children. Unique to Australia and New Zealand, it was a ground breaking social experiment and established what we now call a wage earners' welfare state. More accurately it was a white male wage earners' welfare state which aimed to guarantee a family's economic well-being, through a minimum male wage set by regulation, and struck at a level judged to be adequate, rather than being set by employers. All employed white men were entitled to it, whether they had a family or not. But women workers received only 50 per cent of the rate, even if they were a sole breadwinner. It was abandoned in 1974 as the last step in women's achievement of (formal) equal pay.

The wage earners' welfare state did deliver to most Australian families a reasonable standard of living, with less income inequality than in most other countries. However this favourable assessment of Australian inequality relies on treating the family as a unit and assuming that income is shared equally among its members, a very dubious assumption. Women have remained far poorer than men, and this clearly shows up after divorce.

Women employment opportunities were also systematically restricted and between 1909 and 1912, in NSW alone, women were prohibited from taking apprenticeships in more than 20 trades, including baker, butcher, pastrycook, and bootmaker. Nor could they become signwriters, paperhangers, tilers, tuck-pointers or undertakers. Some bans were industry wide, as in the iron trade, while in gilding jewellery of the six levels women were allowed to work only at the lowest.

Other restrictions included the well-known ban on married women's employment, which was lifted in the Victorian public service only in the 1970s. There are many stories to be told here and even my own experiences span the decades. They include my mother's experience in the late 1920s when she had to give up a public service job she loved and was successful at. This rankled all her life, especially because my father, though a gentle, loving person, proud of his wife's abilities, retained the attitude of his time that it would shame him to have an employed wife. My mother eagerly took up teaching in her 50s when fortunately the family desperately needed the money.

Also in the 1950s, those days when students got summer jobs in factories, I remember my co-workers having to wear their wedding rings around their necks at work. Then in the 1960s I made the mistake of applying for a public service position, only to have my application returned as ineligible because of my marital status. In the 1970s my professor at Monash University, claimed to a colleague that he did not support my application for promotion, because I was married so didn't need the money and I could not leave and seek greener pastures. These were also the days when people constantly asked me when I was going to settle down and give up my job.

The restrictions protected men's work and deskilled, devalued and impoverished women and left many women unfulfilled and with few choices other than a partnership with a male breadwinner. Also what a huge loss of talent that could have contributed to the national development.

Since the Whitlam government of the 1970s women have worked through the state to undo these effects. The same talent for governmental solutions that was used for the innovative, though discriminatory, policies of the Australian settlement, was put to work. This was also a pioneering effort as a cadre of public servants, for whom Australians coined the term femocrats, took up the challenge of turning around the disadvantages women had suffered.

The employment regulation structures ultimately worked to women's advantage, and gains were quickly generalised across the workforce. This has not happened in countries where gains must be fought for on an individual workplace basis. This is slow and disadvantages those not strongly unionised. It is dismaying therefore that we are moving towards such a system with enterprise bargaining. Already the gap between women's and men's wages has widened and differences are greater between women in strongly and weakly organised sections of the workforce.

The nature of change has been influenced by economic imperatives and an expanding demand for women's labour. Some of this demand is for skilled labour, and the number of women with tertiary education has rapidly expanded. But women are also over-represented among workers in the new part-time jobs, requiring flexible hours, and with poor pay and conditions.

Social welfare policy

Change in Australian social welfare policy has also brought women's and men's situations closer together. Now men's role as carers and not just breadwinners is recognised and women are seen as workers as well as carers. Entitlements have been gender neutralised: entitlements for mothers are now available to parents and those for wives are available to spouses. Though this has eliminated most formal distinctions between women's and men's welfare states, as with employment, the forces of history mean there are still major differences in the claims men and women make.

In moving women towards the status of worker as well as carer, the national system of child care has been critical. But it bugs me that this is still often seen as a service to mothers rather than to parents. Efforts have also been made to move women out of the social security system and into the labour force, through more stringent definitions of caring, coupled with encouragement onto the labour market, involving training and other incentives as well as systematic pressure. While there are many problems with such policies, especially in times of high unemployment, they are part of a process that potentially can promote women's independence.

We need to keep an eye on this redefining process. During the term of the Howard government there has been some drift. Child care has become more expensive and a tax rebate is now provided, in virtually all cases to fathers in respect of a dependent wife providing child care at home.

Families

The family a central site for women, is also showing signs of change and there is great public interest in this. Over recent years, the age at marriage has risen, the number of children has fallen, the rate of divorce has increased, the proportions not marrying and not having children are predicted to reach 20 per cent soon, and living together without marriage is a well established pattern. All told, 28 per cent of children are born outside marriage, still lower than the 50 per cent for Scandinavian countries. While many worry about all this, the changes can liberate difference and allow diversity, rather than people being forced into a mould. However where options are not freely chosen but just the result of economic or other circumstances, they are cause for concern.

The capacity for women to survive economically without male economic support, has been a fundamental change. This has made not partnering and leaving an unsatisfactory marriage feasible, though this is still difficult because of women's lower earnings. The change has also been facilitated by the availability of reliable contraception which allows control of family size and the timing of births, something which renders very different the experience of the pre and post pill generations. I remember my mother wishing the contraceptive pill had been available to her. I also remember returning to the first GP who prescribed the pill for me, to ask for a change of brand because the one I had was making me ill. He told me if I wanted the benefits I had to accept the down side. Fortunately my trusty female chemist came to my rescue. But I am dismayed to find that such attitudes survive today. This was demonstrated by a young woman from western NSW, who is taking part in a research project, called the Women's Health Australia Study, in which I am involved. She told us this story:

My friends and I went to an all girls Catholic school and out of a graduation of 35 girls in 1993, we have 16 children and I'm only 19. This makes me very sad [We] are too scared to ask the family doctor [who] lectures the girls about going on the pill because he is old-fashioned - but the result is pregnancy.

Research shows women are less satisfied with their marriages than men and more likely to initiate divorce. And it is values about marriage and family that have changed most, but as with politics and employment, reality lags behind. There is most change among the young. For example there is almost universal acceptance that men and women should contribute equally to domestic work and caring, and that women have the right to fulfillment from employment and other opportunities. Yet the traditional pattern continues of women doing more in the home, and importantly, taking more responsibility for their families.

There is lots of talk about globalisation and the economy, but what is rarely considered is what it means for women. Yet the gender revolution is itself a main feature of the processes of globalisation. German sociologist Ulbrecht Beck sees globalisation as stemming from processes of individualisation and this is a key to women's liberation. Individualisation involves acting in terms of what one sees as one's own interests, rather than acting in a traditional fashion as for example, a daughter, wife and so on. Beck notes general movement towards a society based on what he calls reflexive modernisation. He uses the term reflexive to distinguish this from earlier industrial modernisation. The new form is reflexive because it involves individuals constantly reflecting on their lives and choices in an increasing range of areas and with an

expanding range of options. Conventional, taken for granted ways of behaving are thus challenged and people act more as individuals. Women have more to gain here, because their choices have been particularly constrained in the past by their family roles.

To the extent that people really have options, and the poor certainly have few, this opens up wider possibilities. But it also involves its own uncertainties, so much so that Beck also refers to contemporary wealthier societies as risk societies. In practice decision making is especially complex in areas such as sexual identity, work and family relationship. The new challenges and greater range of experiences lead to new differences between people and an increasing need for tolerance and to achieve unity through diversity.

Increasing individualisation has destabilised the traditional pattern for women of marrying and having children. I remember noting how taken for granted all this was, in the 1960s. Before I had my children, I decided to discuss with friends the pros and cons of such a move. I was met with blank looks and impatience by all but one, who, significantly was a social researcher. My question would come as less of a surprise today.

Given the new options, we need to ask what do women want? In the Women's Health Australia study we are tracing the health and well-being of three generations of women, young, mid-age and older, over a period of twenty years and all told about 40,000 women are involved. The 14,000 young women, whose ages then ranged from 18 to 23 years, were asked what they want to be doing at the age 35, and over the years we will watch whether they achieve these aspirations.

At 35, all but 4 per cent want to be partnered, and most chose the married option, though 11 per cent chose the less traditional category 'stable relationship'. Most want children, though 8 per cent indicated they do not. More than two-thirds want 1 or 2 children. Only about a quarter aspire to a larger family, whereas 42 per cent of their mothers' generation and 58 per cent of their grandmothers' generation in the study, have had 3 or more children. Almost all aspire to be employed at 35, with only 4 per cent aspiring to the traditional role of being at home full-time. Almost two-thirds indicated they would like to be working full-time and almost three-quarters indicated that they aspire to improving their educational qualifications before they are 35.

These findings are in line with other research which shows that women are not necessarily choosing radically new lifestyles, but both family and employment, which has become a normalised part of women's lives. No doubt necessity as well as choice enter into this, but then this has always been the case for men too, and represents a major element in the reduction of difference between men's and women's lives. The decisions that individuals make about whether or not to have children, and how many, eventually show up in national fertility statistics. And recently we have started to see the outcome of the trend to individualisation. This has caused much consternation in some countries, including Italy, Greece, Spain, and Singapore, where fertility rates have fallen dramatically. If the trend in Italy continues, 100 years hence the population will be 14 per cent of its current level. On the other hand in a group of countries including Australia, Finland and Denmark, levels have fallen, but not nearly so dramatically.

The evidence shows that most women in most countries still aspire to having children. Lower fertility levels seems to be the result of not being able to combine paid employment and motherhood. Where there are family friendly policies and crucially, access to child care, fertility rates are higher. Where there are no such policies it is employment that wins out.

While Australia's policies are not too bad, rather than improving access to child care for example it is getting worse. Also we have to watch for new differences emerging between those women who can through choice or necessity avail themselves of the new opportunities and those who through circumstances cannot or by choice do not. Women with more resources, good access to education and importantly in the 21st century, information, are better placed to seek advantageous employment. And they can more readily pursue their rights and importantly if they have family responsibilities they are better placed to afford services to substitute for their own efforts. Among the women in the Women's Health Australia study we see signs of pressure and disadvantage among those who have their children young. As more women postpone having children, pursue education and improve their employment prospects, those who have their children young, who are likely to have a less favourable socio-economic background, are likely to fall further behind.

Women and the new differences

Having taken a quick tour of some of the strands of change lets now take stock of what this means for the future. While the differences between women's and men's positions have certainly lessened, women still remain the main family carers, and are not equally represented in parliament. Nor do we have a fair share of powerful jobs, or earn as much as men and the gap is again widening. The significant gains that have been made are more than I can deal with. Women's issues that have at least partially been addressed that I have not even touched on, straddle arenas as disparate as domestic violence, the right to drink in bars and the right to defend Australia. There has been notable success in education, though some areas with a more masculine ethos, such as engineering and many classic blue collar occupations are proving pretty resistant. While much was gained over the 20th century, something women constantly talk about is the problem of dealing with home and paid work. Most women want a job because it is rewarding, apart from needing the money. But even the mid-age women in the Women's Health Australia study with older children at home showed signs of stress coping with both family and jobs, apart from the young women. But they like being employed and we find that this is associated with better health than not being employed. What is especially bad though is wanting a job and not being able to find one. And then there is the perennial issue of the division of household labour. This is one of the unfinished issues of the gender revolution. It is an explosive issue to discuss with mixed audiences and not one likely to promote unity. None the less there has been a surprisingly swift change in attitudes about equal sharing in the home over the past two or three decades. In principle most men seem prepared to do all aspects of domestic work. It is not long since it would have been unacceptable for many father to change a nappie, do the shopping and mopping, let alone tuck-shop duty. And there are still signs of generational differences. My nephew reports that when out with his young daughter, he has been accosted by older men and berated for doing what they said was his wife's job.

Equal pay for work of equal value also remains a crucial issue. We all know that nurses, for example, provide an essential service. So it is hard to accept that their pay should be so low compared with many other occupations. But the case to establish comparable worth against firefighters was lost in the 1990s. No one would deny that firemen do an important job, but surely nurses do too, and it is hardly good enough to say the case was lost for technical reasons. During the Hawke government, when retraining programs were being developed to deal with increasing unemployment among women clothing workers, it was found how close their skills were to those of metal machinists. Yet women machinists have very much worse employment conditions and are among the most poorly paid and exploited workers.

The under-valuing of women's skills and the inequality of income earning capacity remains an unacceptable difference between women and men. In many families this is an influential factor in decisions about who does how much paid and unpaid work. While men can generally earn more than women, then such decisions are unlikely to be made on the basis of equity and free choice for either women or men.

Value clearly remains defined from a male perspective, and this is not conducive to strengthening unity through diversity and valuing real social contributions. It is the classically male roles still offer more power, status and economic rewards. And virtually all of the long-established symbols and icons of Australian society are determinedly masculine and white: explorers, bushmen, bushrangers, sportsmen, Anzacs. But these are our historic symbols and icons and we must accept them as such. But, they should not remain the only symbols. The spectacular and moving opening ceremony at the Olympic Games showed us how these symbols can be used, along with others, in ways which more accurately represent both the unity and the diversity of Australia, and at the same time avoid excluding the majority of the population.

That we haven't moved far in reshaping masculine bias, is well illustrated by Australian parliaments. Although more women are there, in federal parliament at least (and this is the one most televised) we still find that so-called debates are aggressively adversarial in tone. And time that should be spent in improving the lives of Australians and promoting the common wealth is spent in ritualised interchanges, without purpose except to maintain or challenge the pecking order. And parliaments do not have child care centres, nor keep family friendly hours, and this is the case for an increasing number of other jobs.

It has to be faced that feminist activism has been most successful when women's demands have been in line with the growth of capitalism and least successful in changing cultural values away from the economic and the competitive, towards the more human scale, the supportive, caring and integrative. Essentially women have joined a workforce structured with men in mind. There are only some minor, though important modifications for the different responsibilities that women still have and their diversity. Even Tennyson observed that 'woman is not uncomplicated man, but diverse', a quote used by Louisa Lawson in *The Dawn*.

Change in the workplace that should be seen as promoting unity within diversity is often seen as 'just' women's issues, as with child care. But we now not only have maternity leave but also family leave for fathers. But both remain unpaid except for the more privileged workers, and this is likely to continue while the responsibility for substitute wages remains with employers rather than the income security system. Then there is the

very serious problem of superannuation which for many women will not deliver enough income in retirement, because their family role has led to interruptions to employment and part-time work. This will also exacerbate differences between poorer and richer women.

Given the environment in which women must make decisions about parenthood we can only expect wariness. The problems of choice are exacerbated by an increase in economic insecurity over recent decades and by the fact that men are not changing their behaviour in the home in line with their new equalitarian values.

The average age at which Australian women have their first child is now 29, among the highest in the world. Because women come closest to equality with men when they do not have family responsibilities, falling birth-rates, effectively represent a baby bust 'we had to have'. Perhaps this could be seen as promoting unity between women and men, but is it a unity based on choice, or an unwanted sameness based on necessity?

A by product of women moving into new roles has been to allow other differences between them to emerge instead of all women being treated as mothers and potential mothers. Other differences that were always there, and we now handle rather better as a nation, even if there is a long way to go include: those based on indigenous status, sexual preference and marital status.

And we need to be still more positive about embracing difference, and make it a lead element for enhancing unity and the common good. In a world with increasing international interaction multiculturalism is a great asset for diplomatic relations, the arts, the economy and more. Also with women making up over half the population, to not more fully utilise and recognise difference and talent doesn't make any sense at all. Generational differences also add to Australia's diversity today. This has been brought home to me very clearly through the Women's Health Australia study. We are finding that the lives the three generations of women have involved very different experiences and this means that they face many aspects of life in different ways. Among the generation of young women we find evidence of greater individualisation in, for example, their readiness to state their preferences in respect of the medical services they use. The older generation is the least critical, while the mid-age fall between. Also it rather surprised us that it is the young who experience most stress in their lives. Again the mid-age are in the middle and the older women are by far the least stressed, and indeed are generally active and contented with their lives, though their health is, not surprising, not as good, as the young and mid-[a]age women.

Social researcher Hugh MacKay also found significant generation differences in his study of the baby boom generation, their parents and their children. He sees the differences as being the product of three Australias, not one, and our evidence to date supports his conclusion. When contemplating the different experiences of women over the century, I was reminded of my grandmother who had her eight children during the first two decades after federation. One of her reflections was on how liberating she found not having to wear long skirts, especially for doing physical work, like milking cows and for sport - she was a keen tennis player. I wonder do young women ever contemplate playing tennis, or beach volley ball, aerobics or netball in a long skirt and petticoats, or for that matter, cleaning the bathroom or running around after children. Where to from here?

During the conventions in the lead up to federation the shape of the new nation was hammered out. It was an amazing effort even though some of the outcomes were

unjust. Think what we might do today to strengthen unity in Australia now that women's citizenship has formally been brought into line with men's, we have almost escaped from the shadow of Empire, we recognise diversity and are much more tolerant of it, though matters such as Reconciliation clearly marks this as work in progress. But similar broad ranging conversations to those at federation are needed now to rethink our vision for Australia and this lecture series can be seen as a contribution to this. We are also much better placed to make this inclusive, because of institutions such as the ABC, national newspapers, television and the internet.

Women's role as dependents of men, which we have just cast off, was essentially a hangover from patriarchal feudal times. So with women's lives being modernised, we may be well placed to take the leap into the future, into Beck's 'reflexive modernity', just because we have never become rusted on to the now passing industrial phase of modernity. The structure of paid work was developed largely to fit this industrial phase. Hence if we are now in a post-industrial, or information age then we need to consider how best to shape the working day, week, year and the working life. Already there are modifications in the proliferation of part-time, contract and intermittent work and early retirement.

This gives us the opportunity to also consider meeting human needs and taking the environment into account. While not necessarily what is best for the 21st century, the older concept of the six hour day, has merit because it allows time for home and community as well as for employment. Current family friendly policies are not likely to be sufficient for the 21st century, but maybe the concept could be radicalised. But it would need to be embraced and adopted by employers and responded to by fathers and men in couple relationships. If flexible employment options can be genuinely family friendly and if they do not seriously disadvantage with respect to economic, power and status rewards, and if partners actually take their half share and not just 'help', then this next phase of modernity could come close to fulfilling feminist dreams for change. But these are all big asks.

I believe though that if together we can muster the determination and ingenuity that was evident at federation, especially for collective solutions, we should be able to move towards a reality which more closely matches our aspirations for equity and unity through diversity. Then we will really be able to achieve the fair and just society that Australians mythologised in the 20th century.