

W

omen's
studies
journal

N ♦ Z ♦ W ♦ S ♦ A

Vol 5 ♦ No 1 ♦ September 1989

Prima donnas

Portraits

Policy



Women's Studies Journal

AL

Volume 5 Number 1

September 1989

- 3 Kate Sheppard: *Economic Independence of Married Women*
introduced by Tessa Malcolm
- 25 The Ideology of Family Life and the Transition to Work
Liz Gordon
- 37 The Impact of Social and Economic Policy on Women: The Royal Commission, Government Policy and Women's Lives
Prue Hyman
- 61 'New Zealand's Most Famous Daughter': A Profile of Frances Alda
Adrienne Simpson
- 74 Archives: A Portrait of Marjory Nicholls
Beryl Hughes and Jane Vial
- 81 Between the Capitalist Rock and the Patriarchal Hard Place: *Public & Private Worlds — Women in Contemporary New Zealand*
Linda Hill
- 89 *Feminism and Democracy — Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain, 1900-1918*
Barbara Brookes
- 91 Notes and Queries

Women's Studies Journal

is published by the Women's Studies Association (New Zealand) (Inc.). It appears twice yearly.

Subscriptions (*including GST*)

New Zealand:

Individual \$27 (hardship: \$20)

Institutions: \$36

Single copy: \$16

Overseas:

Individual \$40 (NZ)

Institutions: \$50 (NZ)

Single Copy: \$20 (NZ)

Send subscription enquiries and cheques/bank drafts to:
WSA (NZ), PO Box 5067, Auckland, New Zealand.

Contributions

Enquiries about the *Journal* and contributions ONLY should be sent to: Anne Else, Editor, 8 Woburn Road, Northland, Wellington 5.

Cover design by Barbara Gibb

Typing, typesetting and layout by Cheryl Mayne

Printed by Thames Printers, Wellington

WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION (NZ) (Inc.)

This Association is a feminist organisation formed to promote radical social change through the medium of women's studies. We believe that a feminist perspective necessarily acknowledges oppression on the grounds of race, sexuality and class as well as sex.

We acknowledge the Maori people as the *tangata whenua* of Aotearoa. This means we have a particular responsibility to address their oppression among our work and activities.

Full membership of the Association is open to all women. Other individuals may become associate members. Annual subscription: \$16.50 or hardship: \$5.50. (Both include GST.)

Enquiries to: PO Box 5067, Auckland, New Zealand.

Annual Conference: The Association holds an annual conference where members present the latest feminist research and discussion papers, and workshops explore issues important to women. The *Conference Papers* are published annually. Members receive a discount for the Conference and the *Conference Papers*.

Newsletter: A quarterly *Newsletter* containing local and overseas news, book reviews, conference reports etc. is sent to all members.

Kate Sheppard: *Economic Independence of Married Women*

Introduced by
Tessa Malcolm

We are human beings as well as women, and our humanity must take precedence of our womanhood. We are New Zealanders and therefore citizens....

Kate Sheppard¹

In 1893 New Zealand became the first British colony and the first national state to extend the electoral franchise to women.² After the Electoral Bill was signed by the Governor-General, Lord Glasgow, he made a symbolic gesture, reminiscent of great treaty signing; he presented the pen to the leader of the women's franchise movement, Kate Wilson Sheppard, Franchise Superintendent of the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

The victory was heralded by descriptions in military terms by Wellington and Christchurch newspapers: 'Women's right to vote had to be fought for inch by inch, and the tact, determination, courage, resourcefulness and persistence which lead to victory in a prolonged war have

been displayed in the campaign to an extent which, if exhibited by the officers and men of an army, would have won the applause of nations.'³ The poet, Jessie Mackay, wrote that Kate Wilson Sheppard was a name 'that rang like a trumpet call throughout New Zealand'.⁴ As the leader and organiser of a hard campaign of seven years duration, she and her co-workers had achieved a social reform of momentous import. Yet nearly 100 years later, I am often asked, 'Who is Kate Sheppard?' Her story, it seems, is still not included when he tells his story.

Born Catherine Wilson Malcolm, Kate Sheppard was Scots in origin and education. She emigrated to New Zealand with her family in her twenty-first year. Her family and friends described her variously as a woman of integrity, an aristocrat, independent, determined, highly intelligent with a clear, logical intellect, witty, elegant, charming and kind. Self-educated politically, she had all of the qualities necessary for leadership: Alfred Saunders, who, with Sir John Hall, was one of her two chief allies in the House, described her political abilities thus:

Mrs Sheppard was the author of the numerous petitions which in 1893 procured the passing of the Women's Franchise on the very eve of a general election, and by her remarkable assiduity and ability she completely counteracted the enemy's tactics by which they relied upon getting the Bill thrown out at its last stage in the Nominees' Council.⁵

Kate Sheppard was not, however, merely a pragmatic politician; she was a mature political thinker, and an articulate spokeswoman for a christian-socialist and feminist ideology which had succeeded in persuading the public and parliament of New Zealand that this reform was just and necessary.

The Electoral Bill of 1893 made a single, greatly significant change to the Electoral Bill of 1889: the word 'man' became 'person', and woman was recognised as a person equal to man, in that she was now eligible to vote. The realisation that both men and women were persons, and that between persons there is equity, has both social and legal significance. The law of persons is one of three key legal concepts that I explore more fully later in this paper.

What were the rights of women during Kate Sheppard's lifetime? In 1848, the year of her birth, the first Woman's Rights Convention was held at Seneca Falls. The Quaker, Lucretia Mott, and her friend Elizabeth Cady Stanton had conceived the brilliant idea of basing a declaration of women's rights on the American Constitution and Declaration of Independence, in which the word 'man' excluded woman. In their Declaration of Sentiments, they describe the feudal relationship of marriage:

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having indirect object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master, the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement. He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes, and in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of children should be given, as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of women, the law, in all cases, going upon a false supposition of the supremacy of man.⁶

By 1851 the third Woman's Rights Convention at Worcester, Massachusetts, had framed a practical definition of equality in marriage. It was resolved:

That since the economy of the household is generally as much the source of family wealth as the labour and enterprise of man therefore the wife should, during life, have the same control over the joint earnings as her husband, and the right to dispose at her death of the same proportion of it as he.⁷

Thus the principle of equal rights in marriage, or 'the economic equality of married women', was early recognised as central to the cause of feminism.

The year 1893, which saw realised in New Zealand the first item on the Woman's Rights charter, 'her inalienable right to the elective franchise', also introduced some changes in the laws governing marriage. The law presuming that if a woman committed an offence when her

husband was present, she had acted under his coercion, and that he, and not she, was responsible, was abolished. If she murdered her husband, however, she was guilty of both murder and 'Petty Treason', because she had acted against her 'Sovereign' master.

The Married Women's Property Act of 1884 gave a married woman a legal existence by making her a 'femme sole' in respect of property, capable of acquiring, holding and disposing of any property, and subject to the same laws as men governing this right. This law was based on the British model, as was the law governing divorce. The divorce law in New Zealand condoned adultery on the part of the husband, whereas the wife had to offend only once. Testamentary law contained no provision for widows or their children; that is, the wife did not have the right to any proportion of the couple's joint earnings on her husband's death. The 'Covenant of Marriage' was therefore changing, but slowly, and the changes were peripheral to the core concepts of coverture and status, as opposed to the law of persons.

Coverture, as defined by an eminent lawyer, Sir William Blackstone, reads:

By marriage the husband and the wife are one person in law; that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything, and is therefore called in our law-French a femme covert; is said to be covert baron, or under the protection and influence of her husband, her baron or lord; and her condition during her marriage is called coverture. Upon this principle of a union of person in husband and wife depend almost all the legal rights, duties, and disabilities that either of them acquire by the marriage.⁸

A contemporary analysis of marriage law, published in the *Westminster Review*, 1868, casts further illumination on the concepts of status and the law of persons. Marriage is:

...regarded by the law in all portions of the United Kingdom as a legal status, a relation, the nature and incidents of which are determined by the legislature and not as a contract, in which they would be left to the determination of the individual citizens concerned in it. The gradual evolution of the doctrine of contract from that of status, is the essential principle in the development of the law of persons. In ancient law the tendency was to treat every social relation as of status, in modern law the ten-

gency is to treat every social relation as of contract. In ancient law the relation of sovereign and subject, of master and servant, were of status; in modern law they are of contract; and in like manner the relation of husband and wife must pass, and is even now passing from one condition into the other.⁹

Kate Sheppard and Margaret Sievwright, the two Scots emigrants most closely involved with the issue of economic independence for married women, had come from a country where the laws governing marriage were changing, and where both women and men were in general more highly educated than the English. Divorce in Scotland was on equal grounds; on the death of the husband, law granted one third of the marriage estate to the widow, and one third to the children.

Both women were well conversant with the law: Catherine Malcolm (Sheppard) was the daughter of a lawyer, and Margaret Richardson (Siewwright) was married to a Scots lawyer. As pioneers coming to New Zealand, they brought with them an experience of a more liberal and egalitarian society; as feminists with experience of the nature of law, they could see the desirability of abolishing 'coverture' in all its forms. Both women were aware that the loss of name on marriage was a practice of 'coverture', indicating that the wife's identity and status became submerged in her husband's. Margaret Home Richardson retained her maiden name on the memorial card designed by her Scots husband when she died; Kate Wilson Malcolm retained her grandmother's name, Wilson, and advised the younger generation to retain their own names.

When Kate Sheppard first made a formal proposal concerning coverture and the economic independence of married women, the idea was not new to her immediate audience. As editor of the women's page in *The Prohibitionist*, prior to 1893, and from 1895 editor of *The White Ribbon*, she had published such articles as 'Asking for Money', 'Marriage and Divorce' and 'The Economic Independence of Married Women'. As Franchise Superintendent of WCTU she was also Superintendent of the Legal Department, and after women's franchise, Legal and Parliamentary Superintendent. She was experienced in formulating and working to procure legislation for the protection and general advantage of women and children.

The formal resolution 'That in all cases where a woman elects to superintend her own household and be the mother of children there shall be a law attaching a certain just share of the husband's earnings or income for her separate use, payable if she so desires it, into her own

account' was proposed by Kate Sheppard after her election as President at the first convention of the National Council of Women in Christchurch in 1896. It was seconded by Margaret Sievwright.¹⁰ This proposal did not linger in the minute book; under Kate Sheppard's guidance and experience, it quickly became a Bill to be introduced to the men's Parliament. It was intituled, 'An Act to Abolish Coverture, and to Equalise the Economic Relations of Husband and Wife'. The preamble reads as follows:

Whereas serious evils to society arise from the inequalities of the law in regard to the economic relations of husband and wife, by which the wife is often placed at a disadvantage and may be greatly injured and unfairly treated; and it is just and expedient, in the interests of society, that the law of coverture and all the incidents thereof should be abolished, and that complete equality between husband and wife in all their relations as such should be established.¹¹

Items 2 and 3 are sufficient to summarise the content of this Bill:

Item 2. Coverture both as to person and property, and all the incidents thereof, as known and established by law in the Colony of New Zealand, shall be and are hereby abolished; and all laws and customs in force, in the said colony, relating to coverture, are hereby repealed.

Item 3. From and after the passing of this Act, the wages or earnings during marriage of every wife, subject always to existing contracts of marriage relating thereto, shall form a common fund appropriated to the maintenance of their household and family expenses and to the education and outfit in life of the children of their marriage in such way and manner as the parents may see proper. And in like manner, when only the husband is in receipt of wages or earnings during marriage, that income shall always form a common fund appropriated as aforesaid. In either case the wife shall be entitled, if she sees proper to do so, to require one half of such wages or earning to be paid to herself, or to her credit in a bank, and the same shall be regarded in law as her own separate wages or earnings to be applied, however, equally with her husband's share, towards the support of the household.¹²

The public impact of this proposed reform can only be measured by the response of the local press. The *Lyttelton Times* printed it in full. The

Canterbury Women's Institute devoted several public meetings to its discussion. Again, this was well reported by the *Lyttelton Times*, with a full summary of the discussion which took place, and the Institute's resolution in support of the justice of the principle involved.

The issue of economic independence was kept alive in the columns of the *Lyttelton Times* from July to November 1896, when national elections took place. Two candidates supported by the Canterbury Women's Institute, T. Taylor and G. Russell, were elected, and subsequently introduced Bills on Divorce and Women's Political Disabilities. However, the Act to Abolish Coverture, and to Equalise the Economic Relations of Husband and Wife, is missing from the records in 'Parliamentary Bills Thrown Out', 1896-1905.

The 1896 letters to the editor in the *Lyttelton Times* make colourful reading. One writer, 'Ishmael', plays devil's advocate to eight correspondents arguing for the reform. Ishmael's accusations of 'nagging-tongued viragoes' and 'frenzied shrieks to Parliament' were countered with: 'It is high time we expostulated with him. It is only for want of any real, solid arguments against the economic independence of women that he takes refuge in abusive and illogical language....he tells us that he has ever been a supporter of woman's moral and political equality. Why then does he draw the line at economic equality?' Answers 'Ishmael', 'Goodbye to domestic happiness when the law is called in to enforce it. It is every woman's duty, and she has it in her power before marriage, to fully know her husband's temperament, and to make arrangements accordingly. ...certain N.Z. women are setting up an example of political coarseness which will tend to kill all ideals and in place thereof establish a loud-tongued and shamelessly-brazen standard of life.'¹³

Kate Sheppard's paper 'Economic Independence of Married Women', was delivered to the National Council of Women during its fourth Session, held in the Auckland City Council Chambers in April 1899. The National Council of Women (NZ) had been formed in 1896 to meet the need for a national political organisation, to be affiliated with the already established International Council of Women. The leading figures within the New Zealand Council were those who had been active in the Women's Christian Temperance Union and in the associated franchise organisations which had fought for women's suffrage so successfully.

Though women had obtained the vote, they had not obtained the right of election to Parliament. The National Council of Women was considered by its elective body and some members of the press as a Women's Parliament. Its sessions had been conducted in surroundings conducive to this image: the august Provincial Council Chambers,

Christchurch; Bellamy's, Wellington; and now the City Council Chambers, Auckland.

Full press coverage, in the manner of parliamentary reporting, was given to this fourth session by the two major Auckland newspapers, the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Auckland Star*. These papers devoted three or four full columns of small print to the day's proceedings, quoting nearly verbatim the words of some of the participants, summarising their papers, and reporting in full the resolutions passed. Any criticisms or snipings were reserved for the editor's leader, or the local gossip column.

Even the gossip column accords a certain respect. Of Kate Sheppard, the *Herald* had this to say, 'Its first leader is a woman of considerable intellectual ability and mental grasp. Though not now at the head of the movement, she is "the power behind the throne," and has justified the confidence of her sisterhood. A shepherd she has led them in green pastures, if not by "still" waters...' Of the National Council of Women, it said:

In one respect this miniature Parliament is far ahead of a body which legislates 'somewhere in Cook's Straits'. None of the members appear to have tarried at Bellamy's or to be suffering a recovery. In debating power the Southern women especially make a very creditable show, and their discussions of social problems are much superior to the inconsequential oratory of our City Fathers on an 'off' Council night. The aims preferred by the Council, that women should be represented on the Charitable Aid, Education, and Hospital Boards, must be listened to, and, I suppose, it is only a question of time when the men will concede it...¹⁴

The *Christchurch Press* summarised the proceedings in its editorial of Thursday, 20 April 1899, headed 'The Women in Parliament':

What may be termed an informal Parliament of Women has been held in Auckland. The fact that women are excluded from seats in the General Assembly is not consonant with the view of the National Council of Women. Before they attain that function, however, they have formulated a political platform. Five of the planks are: (1) Elective Upper House on the Hare System (Proportional Representation); (2) A Civil Service Board; (3) Elective Executive; (4) the Economic Independence of Women; (5) the Absolute Political Equality of the Sexes.

We may deal with the two last named proposals first. It is difficult to

ascertain exactly what is meant by the Economic Independence of Women. The bill proposed does not show how there can be independence if there is one bread winner....

If the editor had read the *Evening Star*, or received Kate Sheppard's speech in its pamphlet form, instead of the abbreviated Press Telegraph that the provincial papers received, he would have been better able to understand how Kate Sheppard proposed that economic independence be obtained.

To return to the crowded Council Chambers, on the evening of 14 April 1899. Kate Sheppard, Vice President, has already been warmly welcomed by the host and President, Amey Daldy, as the person most responsible for the women's franchise, and without whom the movement would still be in its infancy, women still ranked with minors, lunatics and criminals. She rises to deliver her paper:¹⁵

Economic Independence of Married Women

The idea of the partnership of husband and wife is not new, and, I am happy to say, the financial equality of the partnership is freely conceded by many husbands. Especially is this latter the case among our working classes, in which, more frequently than not, the wife is the purse-keeper.

But while the majority of men at their marriage solemnly declare that they endow their wives with all their worldly goods there is no legal recognition of the equal partnership of husband and wife in income or property. Both income and property are by law considered to be possessed by the husband alone. In the Municipal Reform Bill, passed last session, provision was made whereby husband and wife may vote by virtue of property held by either. This is a slight recognition of the principle of the economic equality of husband and wife, for which we are thankful. Our representatives have declared that men and women are partners in municipal matters, and having taken the first step, which is usually the hardest, we may hope that they will go on to a fuller declaration of the economic equality of married women. It may be added that in connection with the Government relief works it has been the rule that, when a man is working away from home, the half of his wages is paid to his wife, which is a distinct acknowledgement of the principle we are urging.

Colonel Higginson, in his book entitled "Common Sense About Women," under the heading of "A Co-partnership," says: "Marriage, considered merely in its financial and business relations, may be regarded as a permanent co-partnership. Now, in an ordinary co-partnership, there is very often a complete division of labour among the partners. If they manufacture locomotive engines, for instance, one partner perhaps superintends the works, another receives and pays out the money. The latter is not necessarily the head of the firm. Perhaps his place could be more easily filled than some of the other posts. Nevertheless, more money passes through his hands than through those of all the others put together. Now, should he at the year's end call together the inventor and the superintendent, and the traveller and the correspondent, and say to them, 'I have earned all this money this year, but I will generously give you some of it,' he would be considered simply impertinent, and would hardly have a chance to repeat the offence the year after. Yet precisely what would be called folly in this business partnership is constantly done by men in the co-partnership of marriage. For instance, a farmer works himself half to death in the hay-field, and his wife meanwhile is working herself wholly to death in the dairy. The neighbours come in to sympathise after her demise; and during the few months' interval before his second marriage they say approvingly, 'He was always a generous man to his folks! He was a good provider!' But where was the room for generosity any more than the member of any other firm is to be called generous when he keeps the books, receipts the bills, and divides the money? In the case of the farming business the share of the wife is so direct and unmistakable that it can hardly be evaded. If anything is earned by the farm she does her distinct and important share of the earning. But it is not necessary that she should do that to make her, by all the rules of justice, an equal partner, entitled to her full share of the financial proceeds. Let us suppose an ordinary case. Two young people are married, and begin life together. Let us suppose them equally poor, equally capable, equally conscientious, equally healthy. They have children. Those children must be supported by the earning of money abroad, by attendance and care at home. If it requires patience and labour to do the outside work, no less is required inside. The duties of the household are as hard as the duties of the shop or office. If the wife took her husband's work for a day, she would probably be glad to return to her own. So would the husband be if he undertook hers. Their duties are ordinarily as distinct and as equal as those of two partners in any other co-partnership. It so happens that the out-door partner has the handling of the money; but does that give him a right to claim it as his exclusive earnings? No more than in any other business

operation. He earned the money for the children and the household. She disburses it for the children and the household. The very laws of nature, by giving her the children to bear and rear, absolve her from the duty of their support, as long as he is alive who was left free by nature for the purpose."

In spite of writers like Colonel Higginson, however, we are still asked by those who are too indifferent to read books on the subject, and who have given the matter little or no thought, "Seeing that the husband earns the money, why should the wife desire economic independence?:

The answer is: 1st. *BECAUSE IT IS JUST*. When a woman consents to undertake the duties of wifehood and motherhood, she gives up her opportunities of earning money for her present need, and future comfort. She undertakes to share all the privations that may be brought about by her husband's blunders, weakness, and misfortune. By her maternal functions she imperils her life, and, in the majority of cases, finds it necessary to spend the greater part of her years in a ceaseless round of duties that involve far more toil and care than would be the case if she were earning her own living as a single woman. It is, therefore, only just that she should have at her disposal for her own needs, and for her share of the joint expenses of the household, a moiety of the family income.

2nd. *BECAUSE IT IS NECESSARY FOR HER OWN PROTECTION*. In entering into marital partnership a woman undertakes the most dangerous, arduous, and wearisome part of the partnership. If there should be financial disaster, it will fall more heavily on her than on her husband. By being fully aware of the source and amount of the income, and by having an equal voice in the joint expenditure she will, at least, have an opportunity of averting financial difficulties by prudent counsel. Further, she needs legal protection from the indignity suffered by many wives of having to sue for money for personal needs. Perhaps I may be pardoned if I again quote Higginson on this latter point. In his Chapter on "Asking for Money," page 114, he says: "One of the very best wives and mothers I have ever known once said to me, that whenever her daughters should be married, she should stipulate in their behalf with their husbands for a regular sum of money to be paid them at certain intervals for their personal expenditures. Whether this sum was to be large or small was a matter of secondary importance — that must depend on the income and the style of living, but the essential thing was, that it should come to the wife regularly, so that she should no more have to make a special request for it, than her husband would have to ask her for a dinner. This lady's own husband was, as I happened to know, of a most generous disposition, was devotedly attached to her, and denied

her nothing. She herself was a most accurate and careful manager. There was everything in the household to make her financial arrangements flow smoothly. Yet she said to me, 'I suppose no man can possibly understand how a sensitive woman shrinks from asking for money. If I can prevent it my daughters shall never have to ask for it. If they do their duty as wives and mothers they have a right to their share of the joint income within reasonable limits; for certainly no money could buy the services they render. Moreover they have a right to share in determining what those reasonable limits are.'

"It is unreasonable to say of such women, 'Too sensitive! Too fastidious!' For it is just this quality of finer sensitiveness which men affect to prize in a woman and wish to protect at all hazards. The very fact that a husband is generous; the very fact that his income is limited, these may bring in conscience and gratitude to increase the restraining influences of pride, and make the wife less willing to ask money of such a husband than if he were a rich man or a mean one. The only dignified position in which a man can place his wife is to treat her at least as well as he would treat a housekeeper, and give her the comfort of a perfectly clear and definite arrangement as to money matters. She will not then be under the necessity of nerving herself to solicit from him as a favour what she really needs, and has a right to spend. Nor will she be torturing herself, on the other side, with the secret fear lest she has asked too much, and more than they can really spare. She will, in short, be in the position of a woman and a wife, not of a child or a toy.

"I have carefully avoided using the word 'allowance' in what has been said, because the word seems to imply the untrue and mean assumption that the money is all the husband's, to give or withhold as he will. Yet I have heard this sort of phrase from men who were living on a wife's property or a wife's earnings; from men who nominally kept boarding-houses, working a little, while their wives worked hard; or from farmers, who worked hard and made their wives work harder. Even in cases where the wife has no direct part in the money making, the indirect part she performs if she takes faithful charge of her household, is so essential, so beyond all compensation in money, that it is an utter shame and impertinence in the husband when he speaks of 'giving' money to his wife as if it were an act of favour.

"It is no more an act of favour than when the business manager of a firm pays out money to the unseen partner who directs the indoor business or runs the machinery. Be the joint income more or less, the wife has a claim to her honourable share, and that as a matter of right, without the daily ignominy of sending in a petition for it."

I have quoted thus lengthily from Higginson's book because he puts

the case in a plain and common-sense manner, and also because it is written from a man's point of view.

While we know there are many husbands whose conduct towards their wives in money matters is all that could be desired, there are also many who practise so petty a tyranny as to make sensitive women stint themselves of necessities rather than suffer the humiliation of asking for money for personal requirements.

Again, a woman needs protection from the unjust whims and peculiarities that a husband may have regarding the disposal of the property after death. To illustrate this point let me give you a case that came under my own notice. The woman was strong, healthy, and in the prime of life. She was a thoroughly-trained and very clever cook, able to earn her £60 a year, as well as her board and lodging. In a weak moment she accepted the proposal of a struggling farmer. For many years she did, single-handed, the heavy work of a farm house and dairy, being the first up and the last to lie down.

The farmer became wealthy, but, being of a penurious bent, they lived in apparent poverty, and the wife not only found no relief, but found it difficult to preserve even an appearance of decency. For nearly forty years she, who before marriage had enough and to spare, did not know what "pin-money" meant, and her scanty clothes were bought by her husband with great reluctance and grumblings. At length the farmer died, and his wife found that he had bequeathed his many thousands to his own relatives, and that she, at 70 years of age, had been left the use of a leaky cottage and £20 a year. Had she not married she would have lived an easier life, and would have been able to make a suitable provision for her declining years. Had economic equality of married women been the law of the land, the whims of the husband could only have affected his moiety of their joint earnings and possessions.

3rd. *IT IS NECESSARY FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE CHILDREN.* Just as a man can, under the present law, bequeath his property away from his wife, so may he act in precisely the same manner towards his children.

In the last session of the New Zealand Parliament a Bill was introduced by Mr McNab, M.H.R., entitled the "Testator's Family Provision Out of Estate" Bill. This Bill provides that any person leaving a will, and failing to make due provision for wife (or husband) and children, the Supreme Court may, on application made to it by or on behalf of the said wife, husband, or children, order that due provision be made for the maintenance and support of the said applicants.

The very fact of such a Bill being considered necessary shows that the public mind is being exercised in this matter. I quote it to show how cruel

the present law allows a man to be, and to reiterate that the economic equality of husband and wife would prevent a man from bequeathing the whole of his estate away from his family. Again, if a man is sordid, he can prevent his wife from expending on the children what may in her view be necessary for their physical and mental education. This may be a real deprivation to the children, and one which may affect their whole life. There is also the fact to be deplored that children, often unconsciously, learn to respect their mother less through observing that she is obliged to accept a subject position when money, and indeed almost every other matter, is concerned. The purse necessarily dominates the positions, and the purse-holder thus acquires an artificial superiority in the eyes of the children, which is undoubtedly detrimental to them in many ways.

Instances of men who waste the greater part of their earnings or income in the indulgence of drunken or dissolute habits, while their families suffer want and privation, are known to all of you. In a recent number of the *Mercantile and Bankruptcy Gazette of New Zealand*, in connection with the Destitute Persons Act, the question was raised as to the advisability of preventing a man from squandering his estate by drinking, or by any other form of dissipation. The article in question states that such cases are none too isolated, and waxes indignant at the idea of the wife and children being imposed as a *burden on the community*. The sufferings of the unfortunate wife and children are not discussed, nor does the idea of giving the wife power to protect herself and her children seem to have entered into the mind of the writer of the article; and yet this latter method would, I am sure, go a long way towards solving the difficulty.

Cases are also well known where the death of the husband has deprived the family of the only individual in it possessed of any business knowledge, and poverty and distress have come through simple ignorance. He may have been most kind and affectionate, but in keeping his wife ignorant of money matters and business usages he has been in reality most cruel, and the children have to suffer the penalty of their father's reticence and their mother's ignorance.

4th. *IT IS NECESSARY TO PROTECT A MAN FROM HIMSELF.* When considering the necessity of economic equality for the protection of the children, I referred to the case of a man who wasted his substance on drunkenness and other vices. Surely anything that would prevent a man from following such a ruinous course would be a boon to himself as well as to his family.

There are also instances where men are imbued with the gambling spirit, and are prone to rush recklessly into mining or land speculations

far beyond their legitimate means. If economic independence were legalised a woman could at least protect her own share of the joint income or property, so that a portion of the disaster to the family could be averted, and she and her children would not be left helpless to face the world. But I believe that the financial discussions which would become imperative between husband and wife under such conditions would often lead to the abandonment of reckless plunging and the adoption of a more prudent course.

5th. *IT WOULD IMPROVE THE POSITION OF MARRIED WOMEN.* Mona Caird, in her essay on "Motherhood under Conditions of Dependence", makes what at first sight seems to be a strong and sweeping statement. She says:—"It is not a little remarkable that the present position of the married woman corresponds, in outward features, with that of a slave in early ages ... In return for maintenance and the sum paid for his possession, the bondsman surrenders himself with all his service for life, and gives up his liberty. He may be well-treated, well-lodged and fed, but his toil brings with it no right to self-direction or hope of respite, should the condition of his lot prove painful. This constitutes the real difference between freedom and slavery. To be maintained, however luxuriously, without earning anything over which there is undisputed control is to be, in so far, in the position of a slave.

"Other conditions may, indeed, be very unlike those of servitude, but such a situation presents its essential features. It will be seen that the married woman is exactly in this position, inasmuch as her work in the home does not procure her independence. She is the working partner in a firm in whose profits she has no share. Her share is only in the labour. Yet her husband imagines he is supporting her!"

"Whence has arisen among good men the state of conscience which approves this injustice? Many changes must take place before it can be entirely removed; but it is important to recognise the wrong and to work to eradicate the false ideals on which it rests."

This author goes on to say that "wives who have begun their married life without private means and acquired them afterwards, notice that a marked difference is discernible in the husband's attitude towards them. It is the unconscious "recognition of the new status" — that is to say, that the wife has, in the eyes of her husband, acquired a new dignity.

It is this recognition of the true dignity of women that we seek to bring about by law, for, as the Apostle truly says, "The law is our schoolmaster." While law is the visible expression of the highest thought of the majority, it is also a standard to which even the lowest may in time be levelled up. As soon as a certain number of citizens are strong enough and persistent enough to get their views focused into an

Act, the other members of the community, whether hostile or indifferent previously, accept what has been decided by Parliament as a matter of course. Thus the legal recognition of Economic Independence would give women a status not previously possessed, and which it is right and just they should possess.

6th. *IT IS A RACE QUESTION.* "Dependence, in short," says Mona Caird, "is the curse of our marriages, of our homes, and of our children who are born of women who are not free."

Those who are acquainted with the law as it now stands, know that all a married woman can claim is the barest shelter, food, and clothing. Everything that affects her mode of life, her home, and her children is decided according to her husband's code of justice and morality. If he is generous she fares well, if the opposite she has no redress. What a mortifying position in which to place a human being! Sensitive women must necessarily feel the depression of the situation, and this very depression must affect her children both before and after birth. Surely the mothers of the race should be free from all unnecessary care, from petty tyranny, from unjust conditions.

Economic Independence would raise women from their present position to one of dignity and freedom, while helping men to act justly. To sue as a favour for what belongs to one as a right is to create a subject on the one hand and a tyrant on the other. The subject condition is a degrading one, and must tend to enfeeble our women and retard their highest development.

Mary Woollstonecraft [sic], in her famous book, "Vindication of the Rights of Women," written over a hundred years ago, says: "The laws respecting women make an absurd unit of a man and his wife; and then by the easy transition of only considering him as responsible, she is reduced to a mere cypher. The being who discharges the duties of its station is independent; and, speaking of woman at large, their first duty is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next in point of importance as citizens is that which includes so many, of a mother. To render woman really virtuous and useful, she must not, if she discharge her civil duties, want, individually, the protection of civil laws, she must not be dependent on her husband's bounty for her subsistence after his death, for how can a being be generous who has nothing of its own? Or virtuous who is not free? It follows, then, I think, that from their infancy, women should either be shut up Eastern fashion, or educated in such a manner as to be able to think and act for themselves."

"We are mothers. Through us in our bondage,
Through us, with a brand in the face,
Be we fettered with gold or with iron,

Through us comes the race!

We were ignorant long, and our children
Were besotted, and brutish, and blind;
King-driven, priest-ridden! — Who were they?
Our children? — Mankind.

We were kept for our beauty, our softness,
Our sex; — What reward do ye find?
We transmit, must transmit, being mothers,
What we are to mankind!

At the meeting of our Council last year, when the motion, "That the legal recognition of the Economic independence of married women is desirable for the attainment of justice and for the furtherance of truer marriage relationship" was put, one of our members moved as an amendment, "That the Council endeavour to educate public opinion to the recognition of the money value of a woman's worth as wife and mother." I ask, Can such work be measured in money, or can it be replaced by money if lost? Higginson says, "If a business man loses his partner he can obtain another, and a man no doubt may take a second wife; but he cannot procure for his children a second mother. Indeed, it is a palpable insult to the whole relation of husband and wife when one compares it even in a financial light, to that of a business partner. It is only because a constant effort is made to degrade the practical position of woman below this standard of comparison that it becomes her to claim for herself at least as much as this."

And here I would state that in asking for Economic Independence we are not seeking privileges. The day of privilege is fast passing away, and the day of right and justice is dawning. We hold that if a woman shares in her husband's income, she shall also share in his financial and legal responsibility. And let it be clearly understood that in asking for Economic Equality we are doing so from the standpoint of Freedom and of the highest morality.

I should like, in conclusion, to answer some of the most frequent objections which have been urged against this reform. It is said that

IT WILL CAUSE HUSBAND AND WIFE TO QUARREL. This objection is an old friend. We met with it frequently during our Franchise campaign. Husbands and wives disagree now on money matters. They would be less likely to quarrel when the position of each is clearly defined by law.

Again, it is said that "A man may marry a woman who has no idea

of the value of money, and will squander her share, and leave him to maintain the family out of the income." That is true. But in that case legal relief may be obtained by a decision of the Magistrate, as provided in the draft Bill brought before the Council at its last annual meeting (see clause vi.). Moreover, mothers would be anxious to educate their daughters to financial responsibility. Even as the law now is, a man has to suffer if he marries a wasteful wife, just as a woman has to suffer if she marries a spendthrift man. With the economic partnership legally defined, both men and women will be much more protected than they are now.

To this reply the retort has been made, "You will have men and women constantly flying to the courts to settle money matters." I do not think that this would be so. As a rule, people object very much to airing their grievances in public. But such an Act would be a deterrent to those husbands or wives who were wasteful and careless; and the fact that it was in existence would prevent them from transgressing its behests, and incurring its penalties. Another objection that we hear is, that "*It is impossible in many instances for a man to say what his income is.*" The answer to that is, he can find out his income for his wife's information in the same way that he does it for the Income Tax Commissioner.

It has been urged that "*It is a woman's own fault if she doesn't get all the money she wants*" — a woman should be able to manage her husband.

If "managing" means using artifice and cunning to gain her ends, then no surer proof of the harm to character that results from present conditions can be urged. To obtain by artifice what one should be able to claim as a right, is a demoralising and humiliating method.

It is also urged against any change in this matter, that *some women are quite content with things as they are*. So were many slaves in the United States before their emancipation. Many thousands of people are content to live in slums, in a dirty, ragged condition today, without wishing for anything better. Some of the prisoners released from the Bastille, after many years of incarceration, begged to be allowed to return to their prison cells. Their eyes could not bear the light of the sun, and their freedom seemed a burden to them, as it brought with it responsibility of action.

Yet the fact that there were contented slaves and dwellers in slums and prisons was not accepted as a good reason for withholding freedom and healthy conditions from those who suffered from the want of these things. And so with regard to the proposed law for the economic equality of husbands and wives. It will not apply to the large number of men who already treat their wives with justice. It need not apply to those women who are content with things as they are. But if there should be, as there are now, women who are so unfortunate as to feel that for the

best interests of their children and for the preservation of their own self-respect an appeal to the law is necessary, it will be there for their protection.

"If you give economic independence," says another, "you will do away with the beautiful old ideal of marriage—the man to protect, the woman to lean and cling, ivy-like." I deny the beauty of this conception. A woman may cling like a loadstone round a man's neck until she drags him down to earth and crushes him, just as the tree is eventually killed by its parasite, the ivy.

"He for God," sang Milton, "She for God in him." It was Milton's ideal, doubtless, but we, knowing what harmful results have grown out of such artificial ideals, think that we have a higher and truer standard.

One of our modern poets has written—

"And so these twain upon the skirts of time
Sit side by side, full-summed in all their powers,
Dispensing harvest, sowing the To-be,
Self-reverent each, and reverencing each,
Distinct in individualities.
But like each other, e'en as those who love.
Then comes the statelier Eden back to men,
Then reign the world's great bridal, chaste and calm,
Then springs the crowning race of human kind.
May these things be."

I shall be sorry if anything I have said should give rise to the idea that we consider the interests of husbands and wives antagonistic. I firmly believe that they are one and the same. All good and thoughtful men and women recognise the importance of working together in the interests of the home. The home is the unit of the State, and whatever is for the elevation of the home must lead to a higher life for the community. To give due respect and dignity to the mistress of the home is for the true welfare of the State, for

"If *she* be small, slight-natured, miserable,
How shall *men* grow?"
... "let her make herself her own
To give or keep, to live and learn and be
All that not harms distinctive womanhood."

Mrs Sheppard moved, "That the legal recognition of the economic independence of married women is desirable for the attainment of justice, and for the furtherance of a truer marriage relationship."

Afterword

Why should every other service to the community be recognised as of money value save that of wife and mother? The oversight is simply a relic of slavery and an example of it.

Kate Sheppard, 1906.¹⁶

Despite the repeated efforts of the early National Council of Women, the principle of the economic independence of married women has still not been realised, and 'coverture' still exists in the ongoing marriage relationship. As monetary arrangements between husband and wife are not clearly defined by law, partners may individually contract according to their own personal needs. It is an arrangement still open to misuse and to the dominance of one partner by another.

In their 1981 survey on *Women and Money*, the Society for Research on Women derived from their sample survey of 741 households the following conclusions: 'We found that a quarter of the women in partnerships were mainly dependent on their husband for all items paid for, although younger women and women earning wages were less likely to be in this situation' (SROW 1981:2nd Sect). They also found that 5-10% of women in New Zealand were given virtually no say in any aspect of decision-making that involved spending money. 'With low status and no power they can only carry out the wishes of the others and lack control over areas of their own lives, even over what they eat and wear and how they spend their spare time. What this means is that in this country, approximately 56,000 married women aged 20-69 years have virtually no say over money matters in their household.' (SROW 1981:66)

The Matrimonial Property Act, 1976, gave equality of rights to marriage partners after the legal separation of both parties; that is, equality of rights to income and property are only recognised after the marriage has dissolved. This partial recognition of a principle gives rise to a curious kind of double-speak in legal textbooks. Ludbrook's *Family Law Practice*, under the heading 'Spousal Maintenance During Marriage', states: 'The general rule is that neither party to a marriage shall be liable to support the other party during the marriage'. He then goes on to contradict this statement by giving five exceptions to this general rule: (1) divisions of functions within the marriage; (2) custodial arrangements once parties have ceased to live together; (3) physical and mental disability; (4) inability of a party to obtain work; (5) re-education of a party designed to increase earning capacity or eliminate need for future maintenance (see Ludbrook 1989:8B).

The five exceptions that Ludbrook quotes are all illustrated by examples of cases where the marriage has dissolved. It would be interesting and presumably unprecedented, for a wife or husband to take a test case and sue their partner for maintenance during marriage.

Although there is nothing to prevent intended partners in marriage from creating their own terms of contract concerning the disbursement of joint income, this resort, as in Kate Sheppard's day, would be available only to the well-educated and prudent. Moreover, unless due recognition is given by civil law, income splitting will not be supported by tax laws. Under present tax law, a married couple cannot elect to split their income equally for tax purposes if only one partner is receiving wages or both partners are receiving different incomes.

The ramifications of coverture also extend from the marriage relationship ('the unit of the state') to an imperfect economic model. As the wife's contribution to the marriage partnership has not been given economic value, she is not fully accounted for in the computation of national accounts. Working under 'coverture', she is simply not counted as a full productive person. Place a monetary value on her by legally assigning her half the combined marriage income, and you may have a more accurate model on which to base economic forecasts.

As convenor of the Economics Department of the Canterbury Women's Institute, working towards the recognition of women's work as 'units of the industrial army', Kate Sheppard would have been one of the first to appreciate the irony of the present economic situation. As the discipline of economics has not been based on humane principles of social equality, its mathematics are quite simply incorrect.

Kate Sheppard's strength as an intellectual and leader lay in her grasp of the essential principles of social justice. In this, she still leads today. The solutions that she and the women of the National Council formulated were clear-sighted and direct: to abolish coverture in all its forms and to equalise the economic relations of husband and wife.

Notes

1. Presidential address, NCW second session, Christchurch, March 1897, *The White Ribbon* April 1897, p.2.
2. Other dates for female suffrage are USA 1920, England 1928, Switzerland 1970.
3. Christchurch Press, quoted by Berta S. Burns, 'The Political Emergence of New Zealand Women: Where History Went Wrong', *Woman's Viewpoint* series, n.d.
4. Jessie Mackay, 'Kate Wilson Sheppard, Leader and Pioneer', *The White*

Economic Independence of Married Women

Ribbon 13 August 1934.

5. Quoted in *The White Ribbon* 15 April 1904.
6. *Resolutions and Declarations of Sentiments Adopted at Seneca Falls Convention, July 18-19, 1848: How Long Will Women Wait for Liberty?* National Woman's Party, n.d.
7. *The Proceedings of the Woman's Rights Convention held at Worcester, Massachusetts, October 15th and 16th, 1851.* Fowlers and Wells for the Committee, Woman's Rights Convention, 1852.
8. Blackstone's *Commentaries* (Book I Chap.15), quoted in 'The Property of Married Women', *Westminster Review* Vol. 34, 1868.
9. Campbell Smith, 'The Marriage Laws of the United Kingdom', *Westminster Review* Vol. 34, 1868.
10. Minutes of the National Council of Women, Fourth Session, Auckland 1899, p.41.
11. *ibid.*
12. *ibid.*
13. Excerpts from letters, *Lyttelton Times*, July — October 1896.
14. *New Zealand Herald*, 15 April 1899.
15. The text of the paper was printed by the NCW printers, Anthony Smith & Sellars, in 1899.
16. Quoted in Chambers, 1979.

References

- Chambers, Enid. 1979. 'The National Council of Women.' In Corallyn Newman (ed.) *Canterbury Women Since 1893*. Regional Women's Decade Committee 1975-1985.
- Holt, Betty. 1980. *Women in Council — a History of the National Council of Women of New Zealand, 1896-1979*. NCW (NZ).
- Ludbrook, R. 1989. *Ludbrook's Family Law Practice*. Brooker and Friend.
- Records of the National Council of Women. H.K. Lovell-Smith Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
- Sutch, W.B. 1973. *Women With a Cause*. New Zealand University Press.

Tessa K. Malcolm is a great-great-niece of Kate Sheppard. She is currently working on a full-length biography of Kate Sheppard, and is based at the Stout Research Centre, Victoria University of Wellington. This paper was delivered at a Stout Centre seminar in August 1989.

The Ideology of Family Life and the Transition to Work

Liz Gordon

The 1980s have been a particularly difficult time for working-class young women growing up and leaving school in New Zealand. On the one hand they are besieged by messages of hope and promise: 'Girls can do anything', 'equal opportunities', 'non-traditional work'. On the other hand they face the reality of a bleak employment outlook, increasing gaps between rich and poor, and a society in which they have no clear place.

In 1984 I began an ethnographic study with a group of young Pakeha women attending the Manawatu Activity Centre, an alternative educational setting which catered largely for young people who had been expelled from city high schools. I wanted to find out how this group of young women negotiated their last years through schooling, given the changing social conditions in which they were growing up. What I found was a story of violence, sexual abuse, personal failure, depression and, surprisingly, a good deal of hope for the future. I gave up the idea of doing this research and switched to a 'safe' area — an analysis of state policies of 'transition'. I simply could not continue to be an observer of the lives of these young women and became, instead, in many ways a participant. But that is another story.

I did, however, receive a number of important insights into my

research question. For several years I put all this material aside; then, looking at it one day, I decided I wanted to share the insights I had received from working with these young women. This paper is a mini-ethnography; the discussions were conducted over two terms at the Centre and on the streets.

While the feminist movement of the past two decades has had some impact on the employment patterns and choices of some women, notably older, white, middle-class women, it remains stubbornly true that, for other groups, little has changed. The *Women's Studies Handbook* (Craven *et al.* 1985:43) shows that women are still concentrated very heavily in 'female' areas of employment. The rise in unemployment has had a particular impact on the retail and manufacturing sectors, which employ a large proportion of working-class women. Interventions such as the 'Women Can Do Anything' campaign (Vocational Training Council), seminars on non-traditional work, and real efforts by many careers and transition teachers in schools have had little effect on the employment aspirations of the majority of female school leavers, and in particular on working-class women.¹

This paper examines the 'problem' of traditional job choice amongst working-class Pakeha women, through the eyes of a group of adolescent girls who attend an alternative school setting — the 'Centre'. Research into the transition from school to work/non-work had traditionally spanned only the secondary school to first job (or training) period. In this study, however, schooling and paid work are seen as inevitably framed within the social relations of the family, with its associated class and gender positions (see Porter 1983). The family mediates the school experiences of the young women, and job or training possibilities are inexorably linked to their futures as wives and mothers. This process is, as I will show, very contradictory — the breakdown of their own families has itself provided the basis for the remaking of family roles.

In order to represent and discuss accurately the ideologies that underlie this process, this paper is divided into four parts. The first investigates the family experiences of the young women, as related by them. The second looks at their views of schooling, their expulsion from secondary school, and the perceived role of the Centre. The third part discusses work experience and job roles, and the final part investigates impulses towards the remaking of families.

Experiences of family life

The 'nuclear' family form of mother, father and children residing together is the dominant lifestyle in contemporary New Zealand, yet less than half the population live in such an arrangement. Only one of

the nine young women in this research lives with both biological parents. Of the rest, about half live with only their mother and siblings, others live with mother and 'stepfather' (and various siblings), and one young woman lives in a state foster home. This section examines some of the family experiences of the young women, as related in various taped discussions. In a later section the effects of these family experiences on the young women's own desires to reproduce family life will be examined.

Each of the young women has been a victim of male violence at some time during her life. The memories of this violence shadow their day-to-day lives, and frequently come up in group discussions. The emotional impact of those memories is enhanced by a series of anecdotes which focus on a particular moment:

Lonzy: Like one thing my old man did was — I was about 11 and my little sister had this chair that my Mum made — y'know just her size and everything. And it was really neat and then when Julie's kid came along — she was 2 — and she came along and crawled all over my little sister's chair and I told her to get off it and she just runs out and screams — I hadn't touched her or anything, I just told her. And then my old man just come up and beat me up.

But it is not just particular 'incidents' that are seen to lead to violence. The social and economic pressures surrounding family life are seen to provoke violence, too:

Lonzy: It's not mainly because they want to, it's because they've got problems of their own. And they can't take it out on older people — they don't mean to, but they take it out on their kids. Like my father he... frustration and everything.

The major incidents of violence occur when the father's authority as head of the household is undermined, whether this is caused by the victim or not. When Muppet's father became unemployed, the violent acts against both his wife and his child increased markedly. Violence against the young women seems to take place whenever they are perceived to be undermining the authority of the father as chief male:

Bucky: I've got a scar up there where my Dad — I wanted a piece of bread, y'know I'd just grabbed a hunk of bread. And I was sitting by the couch and there was a china cabinet about this high there. And he comes up to me and goes 'did you touch the bread', I went 'no'. He goes 'We've got bloody mice in here then' and he went to hit me like that an' I moved over to the china cabinet and it took a great big hunk out of there.

There is a direct connection between the patriarchal family structure and

the young women's responses to the High School.² In the home the central rule to avoid punishment is not to get caught doing anything that 'dad' would not approve of. This is a particularly isolating rule, as 'dad's' authority extends to every aspect of the family and his intervention is unpredictable. This isolation extends more to female than to male members of the family, as brothers were 'always allowed out' to visit their friends. Girls' options are more limited:

Bucky: When I used to live with mum and dad, dad used to drink quite a lot, and I used to get in a real shit with him so I used to just hide myself in my room and when I went to school I used to let it all out — I dunno — be real shitty at school and wanna talk to people.

Despite their experiences with their violent fathers, many of the young women held their mothers directly responsible for the breakdown of the family (see Thomas 1980). Mothers did not try hard enough to keep the family together, did not care enough, 'deserted' their husbands or spent too much money. The young women invariably hold their mothers up to some invisible ideal of motherhood and wifeness:

Sissy: Dad, 'e's really soft and he used to give her all his money and everything. She used to go down and spend it on rubbish and she only used to give us canned food an' everything. An' dad got sick of it so he left, and he felt sorry for us so he came back. She didn't care about us.

The young women stress the necessity for self-sacrifice on behalf of children and husbands, the importance of the domestic role (surprisingly, since most of their mothers work — see Griffin 1982, 1985), and total dedication to the family. In the final section I will describe how these ideals influence the young women themselves.

Schooling as a site for cultural production

An extract from a referral letter to the Centre included the following passage:

Gillian is a pert, incorrigibly rude little girl, who constantly defies school and classroom rules, deliberately and flagrantly entices other students with naughtiness and is appallingly rude to teachers, her parents and the police ... She appears to have no idea that her manner and manners are so unattractive and unacceptable, and I feel that all we are doing here is furnishing her with continuing opportunities to practise being a rude and nasty little girl. I believe she can only become unemployable and unacceptable in the outside world.

All of the young women have entered the Centre due to expulsion from a city high school. They each have a negative school record dating back to primary school, unlike the lads described by Willis (1977) who were mostly 'well-behaved' until the third form. As a result of their social behaviour, they are all unlikely to pass any School Certificate exams, mainly because they have not learned enough. Several have commenced classes this year, but there is an almost 100 percent drop out rate among the Centre pupils.

Placement in the Centre has changed the lives of the young women in several significant ways, yet in other ways has made little difference to them. For example, while many of the constraints of secondary school have been removed (uniforms, no smoking, timetables and compulsory subjects), the requirement to attend the Centre is rigorously enforced. If a person does not arrive by 9.15 a.m., the Director will go and get him/her from home or the streets. There is a great deal of confusion among the young women about the role of the Centre: 'We come here and there's nothing to do... play pool — we can do that anywhere'.

The removal of many of the restrictive school rules, plus the lack of hierarchy in the Centre, has had a profound effect on the young women's behaviour. At high school, most of them were violent, disruptive and impervious to any discipline (probably because they were so used to punishment):

Lonzy: ... an' she made me do all my typing, eh? And I wouldn't. So I stood up, and then all these other people stood up. I'd done about 2 pages and it took me ages.... So she sent two of us out, and that was stupid 'cos we went running round the school having great fun. We knocked on everybody's windows. We went round social studies — what we did is we threw everything out of the window

Liz: What did you throw out?

Lonzy: Pens, paper, all our work.

Liz: In front of the teacher?

Lonzy: Yea. He locked me in the cupboard, the creep. And I wrote over everything, eh? And I destructed everything — ripped up all the paper — test papers.

Liz: What happened to you?

Lonzy: Nothing.

In the Centre there is no point to such activities, so they are discarded. The young women concentrate less on their day-to-day lives and more on their futures. School, due mainly to the work experience scheme (one day per week), is perceived as a stepping stone to adult life — work, flatting and relationships with men — rather than an end in itself.

Despite efforts by the teachers to break down sex-role stereotypes, these young women are preparing themselves for traditional work roles and (later) traditional family roles. Indeed the latter are already well-developed: Roxy was recently beaten up by her boyfriend and decided to stay with him because 'he wants to change and I can help him'; Bucky actively fosters the romance of her relationship with Tim, by requesting secret radio messages and persuading me to drive her to visit him at work; Muppet stares wistfully at Sonny, who pretends he doesn't notice; Eve relies on her boyfriend to provide money and 'smokes'. They constantly create and recreate romance within and outside the Centre, all in practice for the 'real thing'. In their work aspirations, too, they aspire to 'women's roles'.

Working life ... short but happy?

The cultural style that characterises the social relations of romance extends from the school setting into the workplace. This is shown most clearly in the work experience placements chosen by the young women. With one exception these jobs are held in the narrow areas of traditional 'women's' work. This can in no sense be attributed to the teachers at the Centre, who strive hard to overcome stereotypes in relation to job choice. Nor can it be 'blamed' on potential employers, as the young women themselves state their preference and the teachers merely find them positions. No young woman at the Centre has *wanted* a placement in a non-traditional area. Five areas are chosen: child care assistant, shop assistant, office work, dressmaking, working with small animals. Job aspirations range from factory work to shop work to office work.

One young woman has aspirations beyond the boundaries of traditional women's work. She wants to be a journalist. After working as a shop assistant and a waitress, she now has a work experience position on a local weekly community newspaper. Objectively, her chances of succeeding are very slight. With no school qualifications at all, a school record including expulsion, and very limited 'general knowledge' skills, it is unlikely that she could reach journalism school. Her only chance is to be picked up by a newspaper and trained while she works. It is possible, then, that the placements and job aspirations of the young women are their only choices within the constraints of the labour market today. Yet all these jobs share secondary labour market characteristics. They are low-paid, often part-time, subject to high levels of redundancy, under-unionised and contain no training component. The skills required for such jobs parallel those required as homemaker and full-time mother, and lead to *no other secure future*.

The reasons for choosing jobs may differ markedly between men and

women. For men, the 'career', a job with a training component and the possibility of advancement over a period of time, is traditionally the most popular route. Working-class men have favoured the trades apprenticeship, and the severe reductions in such positions over the past decade have particularly threatened this group. For women, in particular the non-academic working class, the picture is rather different. The 'ideal' job has characteristics that emphasise the femininity and future domestic role of the worker rather than a career path. Other researchers have suggested various characteristics:

1. Looking 'good': Jobs that require a feminine image are popular, e.g. the secretary or receptionist. Make-up, nice clothes and a well-groomed appearance play a dual role — they are necessary for the job and they are attractive to men (see Griffin 1982, 1985). The young women in this study who aspired to office work were particularly interested in this aspect.
2. Domesticity: Many traditionally 'female' jobs demand skills that parallel those of the housewife. Competency in such skills not only earns praise from the boss; it simultaneously makes the woman a more attractive marriageable proposition.
3. Opportunity: The job should offer opportunity for meeting potential husbands. Jobs in legal, accountancy and other professional offices are popular. For these young women, such jobs thus provide a 'bridge' to the otherwise unattainable middle class.
4. Having a good time rather than getting 'on': Most office and factory jobs offer little or no opportunity for advancement, as the skills needed for such jobs differ from the skills of the dominant group in the workplace — for example, a receptionist to an accountant cannot become an accountant except by seeking qualifications (ACA) different from those already gained (typing).

Training in general tends to be eschewed in favour of leisure activities. For example, in a study of 46 male and 38 female school leavers, Cameron and Livingstone (1979) report:

It is significant that only 5 of the girls took up work requiring further 'off the job' training. Most of the others chose jobs of a clerical nature, being employed as typists, machinists, key-punch operators, clerical assistants or similar. Twenty-seven of the boys, on the other hand, embarked upon apprenticeships, or other positions involving some type of further training programme.

Work is seen clearly as an interlude, a time of freedom, between school and family. Trisha, who wants four children and to be a housewife,

intends to enjoy her working life:

Don't want a career. I want a job, but just to find a place to have a really good time. I wanna work, get some money and do whatever. Not be responsible. I'm going to hit this bloody town as hard as I can. I don't care what I do, as long as I enjoy it.

It is hardly surprising that romance and the reproduction of family life seem the most attractive options available. The limits of advancement through the type of work that the young women wish to do would be reached very quickly; within marriage, many other options are perceived to open up.

Towards marriage and family

The structural constraints of a working-class family background, school 'failure' and low-paid secondary sector employment do not inevitably bring about the reproduction of family life for young women. The process of such reproduction is mediated by ideologies of romance and heterosexual love. As well, the remaking of families requires a profound denial of the young women's early experiences. How can a family survive when their own families clearly did not?

The complex answer to this question requires the family to be viewed on an individual level as a 'contract' or 'relationship', rather than on a structural level as an economic, political and social unit. The responsibility for making the family work rests on the woman, in her role of holding the group together, rather than on the man as economic provider:

Lonzy: Usually, when kids are aware of it, that generation starts off new. Like, I'm aware of what my father did and I'm aware of what my mother did, and I feel different myself. I feel as if well ...I haven't done anything bad y'know — it's nothing bad or anything being like them, but I feel I don't want to be like them ...'cos I'm waiting for the right guy to come along, and I sort of want my family to be a family. OK my husband can go off to the pub, late from work, all of that — I mean I wouldn't mind, as long as we could spend the weekend together, y'know. 'Cos all you have to do is bargain, really — oh, you spend a weekend with me and the kids and you can have a couple of nights out during the week. It's just trust, really.

The central preoccupation of the young women is thus how to 'become' good wives and mothers. They have already internalised, to a large extent, a series of techniques for dealing with men. Lonzy's description, however, is notably constructed within a traditional patriarchal family structure, where the woman has power only to ensure that the man does

not completely neglect family commitments. The process of negotiation is to ensure that male freedom is modified, not that women's choices are increased. But the pitfalls of this kind of arrangement are recognised:

Karen: You can be aware of your parents' mistakes and not repeat them...but there's always the tendency to do what your parents did ... you must be aware of it all the time and try not to do it ...

There is a perceived need to reproduce the *material* relations of the family, but to avoid the forms of *social* relations experienced by the young women. Moreover, the one is seen as entirely discrete from the other; if such a distinction were not possible, the young women would (presumably) reject marriage completely.

Such a position requires an anti-feminist reaffirmation of women's traditional role in the family (McRobbie 1980). However, such a role seems contradictory, because it ignores the current economic realities of New Zealand life. In most working-class families the male wage does not provide enough to support the family, and a high proportion of working-class mothers are in paid work, usually in low-paid factory, cleaning or retail positions. But the ideals of wife and motherhood require a full-time commitment — 'When I have kids I want to spend heaps of time with them' (Trisha).

The choice of a husband is an important issue for the young women. For them, the patriarchal nature of the family does not reside in economic or cultural constraints, but in individual characteristics:

Liz: What does that (family violence) teach girls?

Sher: To let themselves be dominated.

Lonzy: Oh I reckon it's good in some ways. It's good at times 'cos it makes you more wary of what guys can do. Like some girls if their parents are super-duper — God, they may think that all guys are like that!

A particular aspect of their preoccupation with marriage is the detailed planning of motherhood — how many children, how they will be raised, etc. They take on this responsibility because they perceive that men do not:

Lonzy: The guys think 'oh wow, I've got a kid. When he gets older I can take him to the pub'.

Bucky: 'I'll teach him how to box'.

Lonzy: Yea. 'I'll teach him to play pool' and all this stuff.

Conclusion

The transition from school to work for these young women is constrained, but not totally determined, by the social and economic structures of New Zealand society. The major influence on their negotiation

of this transition seems to be a past, present and future preoccupation with the production and reproduction of family life. These young women clearly wish to reproduce the traditional nuclear family, even though, as has been shown, their own family lives have broken down. The family is viewed primarily at the social level; the economic level is secondary, if it is considered at all. It has been claimed here that the ideology of woman as housewife is maintained due to the perception of the family as an individual contract rather than as a social structure. There is an ignorance of the power relations of family life, shown most clearly in the total separation of social from economic factors. These young women have appropriated for themselves the task of constructing the family socially, and are unaware of how economic conditions can fundamentally alter these social relations. This construction of the family is aided by two factors. First, there is the ideology of romance, which pervades the media and most other institutions of civil society, and involves many aspects of the young women's lives, particularly those of schooling and job choice. Second, the process of family reproduction takes place within a temporal framework that masks the economic and power relations of the nuclear family. School and work (or unemployment) *mediate* this reproduction and give the appearance that each generation can 'start off new'. For some, the upwardly mobile working class or those women who reach their dream of marrying a 'rich and successful' middle-class man, this may indeed be true (class reproduction can be avoided, if not that of gender roles); but I would claim that the current economic conditions of New Zealand society severely constrain such mobility.

It seems clear that the reproduction of family life is perceived by the young women as the best 'choice' for the future. I have shown some of the ways in which they construct their lives in order to optimise the 'chances' of such reproduction, and have outlined the contradictions that pervade their cultural mediations.

The failure of feminist ideas about 'equality' and 'choice' to permeate the culture and practices of these young women has a direct bearing on their job aspirations. But I would argue that this is not merely a problem of education. The aspirations of feminism for free choice and equality are irrelevant to those in the position of these young women, and in particular under current economic conditions. Young women with no qualifications, unable to secure even the meanest job, understandably have little time for middle-class feminism. Marriage to a 'good man' is objectively the best economic 'choice' they can make at this time. The ideology of romance not only enlivens the drudgery of everyday life, but is also a rational strategy for the future.

Notes

1. The position of Maori and Pacific Island women is similar to that described here, but not exactly the same. This paper deals only with the Pakeha working class.
2. 'Patriarchy', as used here, is defined as the male system of domination and organisation that is perpetuated through the institutions of civil society. It includes not only domination of men over women, but also the power of senior over junior ('hierarchies'), older over younger, expert over novice (apprenticeship) etc. It is no accident that most women in most institutions are younger, junior, have less knowledge and fewer economic resources than men of comparable position and qualification.

References

- Abigail, Jill. 1982. *Secondary school influences on the training and career aspirations of girls*. Vocational Training Council research paper.
- Arnot, M. and Whitty, G. 1982. 'From reproduction to transformation: recent radical perspectives on the curriculum from the USA'. *British Journal of Social Education* 3:93-103.
- Craven, C. et al. 1985. *The Women's Studies Handbook*. New Woman's Press.
- Griffin, Chris. 1982. *The good, the bad and the ugly: images of young women in the labour market*. CCCS Occasional Paper.
- Griffin, Chris. 1985. *Typical Girls?* Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Jones, Alison. 1985. 'When is resistance resistance? Notes from my ethnography of girls in an Auckland secondary school'. *Sites* 10:7-21.
- McRobbie, Angela. 1978. 'Working class girls and the culture of femininity'. In *Women Take Issue*. Hutchinson and Co.
- McRobbie, Angela. 1980. *Feminism for Girls*. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Porter, Paige. 1983. 'The state, the family and education: ideology, reproduction and resistance in Western Australia 1900-1929'. *Australian Journal of Education* 27, 2:121-136.
- Sarsby, Jacqueline. 1980. *Romantic Love and Society*. Penguin Books.
- Thomas, Claire. 1980. *Girls and counter-school culture*. Melbourne working papers.
- Willis, Paul. 1977. *Learning to Labour*. Saxon House.

Liz Gordon is a mother, political activist and assistant lecturer in education at Massey University.

University of Canterbury Post-Doctoral Fellowship (Feminist Studies)

Applications are invited for a two-year University Grants Committee Post-Doctoral Fellowship to investigate the impact of legislative changes on women's involvement in paid work in New Zealand 1970-1990.

Applicants must be aged 35 years or less and have been awarded, or have qualified for the award of, the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, or a degree equivalent thereto, or have submitted a thesis for examination.

The emolument for a Fellowship shall be at a rate not exceeding the lowest step of the Lecturer Salary scale (\$35,000 per annum).

Enquiries may be made direct to:

Dr M.E. Montgomery, Co-ordinator, Feminist Studies Programme, University of Canterbury.

Applicants are requested to obtain Conditions of Appointment before submitting a formal written application.

Applications, quoting the Reference Code C89/03, close on 29 September 1989 and must be addressed to the Registrar, University of Canterbury, Private Bag, Christchurch.

The Impact of Social and Economic Policy on Women

The Royal Commission, Government Policy and Women's Lives

Prue Hyman

Introduction

This paper contrasts the philosophy and parts of the Royal Commission on Social Policy's April report with current government policies on the economic/social policy border. In particular, I discuss some implications of recent and potential policy changes for women. Later sections deal with the general approaches of the Royal Commission to women and social policy, the interrelationship of economic and social policy, work and income maintenance/taxation, and discuss some specifics in the latter two areas. Adequate discussion requires full consideration of the differing implications for Maori women compared with Pakeha women, and I acknowledge that this paper only skims the surface in this respect.

One major theme of the Royal Commission report is the necessity for the state to have a continuing leading role in helping all New Zealanders achieve social wellbeing, including a standard of living sufficient for participation and fulfilment in the community. Power differences and

structural inequalities in the community, with Maori and women particularly disadvantaged, are clearly recognised. The objectives of social policy and these realities require policies for tax/income maintenance and income redistribution which involve more than simply a safety net attitude to payment of benefits. While individual and group aspirations and responsibility are recognised (in the latter area particularly in the Maori community), equity objectives are seen to require strong state leadership with continued funding and provision of services in key areas.

This contrasts sharply with the current government philosophy, which emphasises individual choice and responsibility, a reduction of the role of the state, and the primacy of economic policy, market solutions and incentives. While state intervention has not always been beneficial to women, and emphasis on devolution and community roles has some attractions, I argue that the basic themes of the Commission's report should be well received by feminists.

During the Commission's deliberations, Penny Fenwick pointed out the need for locally based feminist analyses of women and social policy and for more women to be decision makers in systems where they form the bulk of both consumers and providers. Otherwise feminist values, goals, and understandings of institutional sexism and racism will be missing from the policy process. She hoped that the Royal Commission, while hardly likely to lead to a feminist utopia, might at least help achieve a more just and fair society for women (Fenwick, 1988). The opportunity provided by the Royal Commission was taken for feminist analysis, but a large and fair role in decision making is further away. It is somewhat sad and not coincidental that the input of women in general and Maori women in particular, many of them feminists, to the deliberations of the Commission — as members, staff and producers of submissions — was proportionately far more substantial than in the past or relative to their power in policy making; that the report admirably reflects that change in perspective; but that it is being neglected.

Women and social policy

The Royal Commission chapter on this topic has two parts. The first deals specifically with the concerns of Maori women. It points out the ways in which New Zealand fails to meet the standards of a fair society from the perspective of Maori women, with progress requiring significant improvement in the social and economic wellbeing of Maori people as a whole. Recognition of the partnership involved in the Treaty of Waitangi, resolution of land issues, acknowledgement of the spiritual dimension in social policy, the strengthening of whanau, hapu and iwi

structures, the resourcing of Maori women's initiatives based on kaupapa Maori, and full participation of Maori women at all levels of decision making are all part of the essential framework for change.

Part II outlines the situation of New Zealand women generally, analyses the causes of their lesser access to social wellbeing than men, and considers the implications for social policy. The five main (and overlapping) groups of issues relating to women raised in submissions to the Commission were lack of recognition for unpaid work, lack of financial independence, the high cost of caring work, the difficulty of combining paid and unpaid work, and a sense of powerlessness and lack of choice in women's lives (II, 192).¹ As they point out, this is hardly new! Women are responsible for more of the caring work, are more dependent on benefit income than men and, with the feminisation of poverty, are more likely to be on low incomes, particularly as solo parents. Many partnered women also report a lack of regular spending money, so the distribution of income and economic decision making within households is another matter needing attention.

The Commission recognises the constraints on women imposed by the lack of integration of waged and unwaged work and their heavy caring role. It stresses the need for more equal sharing of these responsibilities, the need for women's full participation in decision making and for continuing state involvement. It is the more specific policy issues in a number of these areas, relating particularly to economic wellbeing, which will be considered in this paper, although some, such as housing and childcare, will have to be omitted through lack of space.

The Commission also discusses aspects of personal wellbeing and the needs of particular disadvantaged groups of women. Important non- or semi-economic aspects of the problems inhibiting women's autonomy, equality, and control over their own lives include problems in the health system, male sexual abuse and violence, lack of access to information, and lack of full participation in decision making. Economic and other areas are of course closely linked through the power structures which give men control over women's lives. In addition to Maori women, groups of women whose particular concerns require action include other ethnic minority women, women with disabilities, and lesbians. Space does not permit adequate analysis, but in each case autonomy, self-determination, and a respect for difference are seen as critical.

The inter-relationship of social and economic policy

The absurdity of treating social and economic policy separately should hardly need stating. Boundaries between the two are blurred and

interactions inevitable. However, the Royal Commission reports a wide (and in my opinion, correct) perception that under the current government, economic policy has pre-empted social policy or concerns. The government attitude is that if 'correct' economic policies are followed, leading to growth and employment opportunity, the additional resources generated can then permit improved living standards for all. This approach essentially puts efficiency before equity, at least in a temporal sense. In fact, however, the distribution of national income and ways of increasing its level and growth rate must be considered together in planning policies, as the Commission points out. Some people would be prepared to settle for lower national income if it was more equally distributed, while there is no general agreement about whether more or less equal distributions of resources are likely to lead to higher growth (II, 287-289). Nor will the overall growth that could result if economic policies were successful necessarily 'trickle down' to many of those less well off.

The Commission develops a useful framework of four possible approaches to economic and social policy and examines how they could be applied to a number of case studies. The three which are rejected are for either economic or social policy to dominate, or for a reactive approach by which each dominates in turn to sort out problems created by the other. The preferred option is a co-ordinated approach, with the interactions fully considered and the relative costs and benefits of different policy options allowed for in a full economic/social framework which considers the way in which the final outcome is reached, as well as its nature.

Work

The Royal Commission sees the labour market as central to social policy, with full employment as an essential major goal of government, work as a key to wellbeing, and the decision of whether to work in the paid workforce or outside it, or combine both, as a choice which should be available to all. Thus it argues 'that to achieve a fairer society the primary instrument must be economic and social policies designed to provide wide employment opportunities' (III/2, 415). Recognising that waged and unwaged work depend on each other, it calls for adequate measurement of unpaid work, payment for some work currently unpaid (a carers' allowance, to be discussed later), and state assumption of responsibility for ensuring the labour market operates to allow combination of the two types of work, in an environment free of discrimination where individual potential can be developed.

The importance of paid employment is acknowledged as a source of

income for the worker and of goods and services for the community, an opportunity to develop and use abilities, talents, and skill, and a provider of a time framework, interest, and communication with other adults. However, it is recognised that dead-end work can be boring and unsatisfying, undertaken only as an essential provider of earnings. Unemployment is seen as a source of a variety of negative social consequences, falling unevenly on different socio-economic groups, with teenagers and Maori, many of them women, particularly badly affected.

Wages and employment policy

In the search for full employment, the Royal Commission sees active labour market policies as having a key role. Improved job information and placement services, job creation policies, training and mobility assistance are recommended, despite recognition of possible problems of job displacement or substitution rather than genuine creation, the permanence and productive value of subsidised jobs, and the fiscal cost. Other elements seen as critical to securing reduced unemployment and adequate growth are commitments to full employment and to avoiding use of high levels of unemployment as a policy weapon, together with a social contract whereby wage bargaining occurs in a structure permitting affordable settlements.

The Royal Commission may well be overly optimistic in seeing its policy mix as likely to be sufficient to achieve paid employment for all who seek it, particularly in conjunction with its views on wages. Admittedly, its approach to combining paid and unpaid work could lead to significant numbers of both men and women converting from full- to part-time work, as well as others, mainly women, entering part-time paid work from outside the workforce. With these factors producing opposite effects on the total demand for jobs, or supply of labour, and with extra jobs in the childcare field, the net effect of this element, which is only one of a number of proposals, is uncertain. However, any confidence that either current policies, discussed earlier, or those of the Commission will lead to full employment is based more on hope than on evidence.

More radical changes in attitude may be needed to achieve this. One key point made in a number of submissions was the amount of useful work that is either already being done, mainly by women, or needing to be done in the community. Reorganising systems so that this work can be paid for directly or indirectly, where it is not a direct economic proposition for a private sector employer, is a difficult challenge which may require a rethinking of the meaning of work. Past and present

policies and proposals on job training and creation have only nibbled at the edges of the problem.

Within current frameworks, ways of enabling paid and unpaid work to be combined more easily include greatly enhanced provision of state-funded quality childcare centres, shortening of the working week, improved conditions for part-time work, improved domestic, maternity and parental leave, greater flexibility of hours, and the carers' allowance.

Turning to wage levels, the Commission is generally opposed to the Treasury/employer line that lack of wage flexibility is evident in New Zealand and is impeding employment growth and a reduction in unemployment. Arguments that the New Zealand wage fixing system with annual wage rounds prevents adequate responses to market conditions are common. They form part of the rationale of government attempts to break down previous methods of pay settlement and replace them by decentralised bargaining systems. Such arguments, however, are unproven. The Commission mentions the Planning Council study (Economic Monitoring Group, 1986) which casts doubt on our supposed inflexibility relative to other countries, and points out that the spread of gross real incomes and wage and salary earnings has in fact increased since 1976, both pre- and post-tax. Wage flexibility, in theory meaning a situation where wages respond rapidly to supply and demand conditions and thus provide appropriate signals, in practice often means a shift in power from unions to employers and the ability to resist pay increases. The labour market is not, and cannot become, perfectly competitive, so that outcomes depend as much or more on historical, social and power considerations as on economic and productivity-related factors.

It is important also to distinguish relative and absolute levels of wages, and arguments about flexibility in each. It is relative wage flexibility which is said to be impeded by the wage round system, with claims that minimum wage legislation and inability to pay young people a youth 'training' wage prevent creation of new jobs. The Royal Commission rejected these claims. It points to studies which show only a weak link in the response of labour supply and demand to wage changes, with many other intervening factors, thus casting doubt on the simple inverse relationships claimed to exist between wages and employment. Concerned about the social effects of creating a market with even wider wage differences and a very low wage sector, the Commission argues for a minimum sustaining wage.

On the absolute level of wages the position of the Commission is less clear. The reference above to the desirability of a social contract and

affordable settlements has hints of the Australian tripartite 'Accord' or the concept of the 'social wage', both of which are receiving increasing attention here. Some claim that the absolute level of wages is too high, or has been rising too fast, from the point of view of international competitiveness, increased growth, and employment prospects. This claim, while not unchallengeable, has more to commend it than the attempts to change relative wage levels to the detriment of the low paid. If differentials could be narrowed, holding the levels of aggregate real wages might be a tolerable trade-off for higher employment levels. However, the results in Australia imply the need for caution. While employment growth has been strong, unemployment levels are similar to New Zealand's, at 10% plus, a level previously reached here only in the Depression. Real wages have fallen sharply, with comparatively little change in relativities. The changes that have occurred have not generally been to the advantage of the low paid and women. Despite flat-rate pay rises, which favour the low paid in percentage terms, access to additional increases based on actual or potential productivity gains is more available to highly organised, male dominated industries with restrictive practices able to be traded off. The female/male earnings ratio has thus failed to improve.

The idea of the social wage is to take account of various factors when considering real living standards and thus the need for further wage increases. Such factors include the effect of changes to the tax structure and provision of government services, in addition to gross earnings adjusted for price increases. In principle this is unobjectionable, provided it is fairly applied to different groups with varying incomes, although it is doubtful whether it is flexible enough to cope with different family structures which affect benefit entitlement. However, there is a natural suspicion that government initiatives of this type are designed to get agreement to unpalatable results. Whether the union side will be convinced of the benefits and in turn take full account of the interests of their lower paid members, especially women, is doubtful.

Discrimination in the labour market

The discussion above is particularly relevant to the position of women in the labour market, which does not and cannot behave like a vegetable auction market. Discrimination is one of the factors which largely confine women and Maori to a narrow range of occupations of below average pay and status. In the segmented labour market, women and Maori are often used as a reserve army of labour and are over-represented in areas with poor pay, conditions, and career prospects. This is changing only very slowly. Women's access to the relatively well

protected internal labour force of firms is slight. Part-time work is particularly prone to lack of security and exploitation. Repeated movement in and out of paid employment is more common for women than men, and goes largely unrecognised by policy makers. 'Skill' is a social construct defined by male managerial decision makers to favour their own and to a lesser extent other male-dominated jobs, so that equal pay for identical work is insufficient for genuine equity: it needs to be extended to equal pay for work of equal value. The Royal Commission supported new legislation to cover this area and to extend the coverage of equal opportunity legislation from the public sector to the private (initiatives supported also by the Social Equity Working Party on Equal Pay and Opportunity). Improved parental, domestic, tangihanga, and maternity leave, as well as a major boost to childcare funding and facilities, were also recommended.

The Human Rights Act of course formally prohibits discrimination in employment on the grounds of sex and race. This covers hiring, terms and conditions, promotion, dismissal, advertising, and training opportunities. While the act and associated complaints procedures do not in practice guarantee observance, they are at least a useful symbol, and the Royal Commission recommended, as have other bodies including the Human Rights Commission itself, the extension of such protection to people with disabilities, lesbians, gay men, and the aged.

It should be noted that income redistribution has a comparatively minor effect on inequality, which arises mainly from differentials in market income. An important implications of this for those who consider inequalities in living standards to be too great is that it is equally or more important to work on ways of equalising earnings than on subsequent redistribution. Focusing on low pay for women, this means removing some of the direct labour market disadvantages through measures such as those mentioned above. However, with the thrust of government policy towards labour market deregulation likely to lead to *wider* earnings differentials, such specific policies may fail to assist many of those who are on lower earnings and are defined as unskilled, with women, especially Maori women, over-represented. Specific policies may, in fact, be overwhelmed by the overall thrust of policy in the other direction.

Income maintenance and taxation

While inequality arises mainly from market incomes, the income maintenance system of superannuation and other benefits is of critical importance to those not available for or unable to find employment. Their adequacy is thus a vital concern. The general approach of the

Royal Commission is that collective responsibility implies government intervention through the tax/transfer system to ensure adequate income support for these groups. Its emphasis on the importance of paid employment implies a stress on income maintenance and taxation policies facilitating rather than impeding the functioning of the labour market and aiding the transition to paid employment for those of workforce age.

The three specific objectives of income redistribution policies are spelt out as provision of the opportunity of full participation for all, the alleviation of urgent need, and the wellbeing of children. Specific policies are seen to require the following principles — community responsibility, individual responsibility, dignity, equality of treatment, progressivity, cultural diversity, fiscal responsibility, flexibility and transparency, with equity, efficiency and simplicity guiding the whole system. The problem with this, as the report recognises, is that these principles may often be in conflict; for example, fiscal considerations can be put forward to argue for tight targeting of benefits. The consequent abatement of benefits as income increases, combined with taxation and other costs of paid work, including transport and child care, mean that there will be little or no financial advantage from moving into the paid workforce or increasing work hours, particularly for women. Thus the incentive to achieve financial independence is removed, and individual and fiscal responsibility are in conflict.

Some proposals of the Royal Commission in the income maintenance area are potentially of great significance to women. They acknowledge the social changes which make the assumptions and realities of financial dependence on a partner increasingly inappropriate, and recognise the importance of caring work.

Unit of assessment/carers' allowance

The individual is the unit for assessment of personal income tax, but most parts of the social security system assume adult financial dependency in de facto and marital relationships. Thus eligibility for unemployment, sickness and disability benefits is based on the individual qualifying in the relevant category; but the rate of benefit paid (if any) is based on the couple's income. This system is founded on the nuclear family, with a sole male full-time earner, and means that the income available to a two-earner household will decline sharply if either loses their job. It may be even more inappropriate in many Maori living situations than for Pakeha. The Royal Commission recommended that the basis for benefit entitlement should move in the direction of individual entitlement in two-adult families, with sole caregivers continuing to

be eligible for support based on the needs of the family as a whole.

Recognising the sharp increase in expenditure which would arise if this change was introduced immediately, proposals were made for interim steps, with the invalids' benefit being the first to be dealt with. Also suggested was an income test applied to individual earnings plus half of any income derived from assets of the couple, whether in one or both names. Another possibility raised was allowing individual benefit for a limited period, such as thirteen weeks, to tide over the immediate financial problem of losing one income.

The Royal Commission argues that too low a priority is currently placed on the needs of dependants and too little recognition given to the role of carers, so that the systems for income support in these areas need improvement. It recommends ultimate replacement of family support, guaranteed minimum family income (gmfi), and the domestic purposes and widows' benefits by a carers' allowance, available to those involved in unpaid care of children, the disabled and the elderly. A universal family benefit would be retained. Major responsibility for the wellbeing of children and the associated costs would remain with the parents, but the community benefit arising would be recognised with a basic payment to all, and additional assistance where parents' financial resources are insufficient.

The major difference from the current situation would be that in two-parent households a non-working parent would have eligibility for a payment which, if applied consistently with the recommendation of a move towards individual assessment, would be irrespective of spouse income. The effect would be similar to family support/gmfi, although possibly available irrespective of spouse income; but the approach is somewhat different, emphasising the caring role as socially valuable and as work. The carers' allowance would cover the period during which one spouse (or perhaps both in shared arrangements) was principally engaged in child care to the exclusion of paid work, suggested as being until the youngest child reached 5, 6, 8 or 10. The greater demands which child care places on sole parents could be recognised by retention of eligibility until the youngest child reaches a higher age. As with any change (and, for that matter, the current situation) these proposals raise issues of equity and comparability between sole and two-parent families and between single and two-income families at various income levels, as well as incentive issues for workforce participation (for fuller discussion see III/2, 533-568). The Commission recommends that the form, criteria, and level of allowance should be the subject of discussion and research with a view to implementation.

Both these proposals have highly attractive features in recognising

the concerns of many women. The Ministry of Women's Affairs has consistently supported individual assessment. The carers' allowance needs rather more thought and assessment of details before a judgement is made. It recalls older debates on wages for housework. There is a danger of women being *expected* to remain out of the workforce in return for a very low allowance, rather than simply receiving some financial support and recognition of the choice they make. However, the opposite danger exists of women caring for dependants being expected to be *in* the paid workforce rather than being given a real choice. Treasury emphasises 'incentives' to enter the paid workforce, which may in effect mean financial punishments for not doing so, backed up by an attitude that recipients of domestic purposes benefits are 'work avoiders' — an attitude strongly rejected by the Royal Commission. If jobs and child-care are not readily available, this is quite unfair. Availability of real choice, and adequate support of each option, seems the best solution.

A further problem is how to assess the priorities of these proposals against others at a time of fiscal restraint. Furthermore, there are dangers of unfortunate trade-offs — for example, the introduction of a low-level carers' allowance, with sole parent support leveled down to this.

Worse even than trade-offs is a general concern about the possible treatment of the Royal Commission recommendations, in a climate in which they have been coolly received within government. It would be possible for their cost-saving proposals to be introduced, but few or none of those which involve extra expenditure. The cost-saving category includes two seemingly acceptable proposals; the first is the replacement of the single/married rate distinction for benefits by a standard individual rate at half the present couple rate, combined with a living alone allowance of an extra 20%. Since the only apparent justification for the individual payment being higher than half the couple payment is that of increased costs due to lack of economies of scale, this appears reasonable, provided benefits are at an adequate level.

The second proposal is that widows and domestic purpose beneficiaries who cease to have the care of dependent children no longer retain entitlement to that benefit. Given the purpose of the benefit, this again seems reasonable in principle; it encourages women in this category to join or rejoin the paid workforce, or, if this is impossible, to move to another benefit, normally unemployment. However, given that many women in this category will have had little previous labour force experience, that labour market conditions are unfavourable and suitable training not necessarily available, and that there is a greater social stigma and a more stringent work test attached to the unemployment

benefit (at least compared to widows' benefit), the change is not as innocent as it first appears. In Australia a similar measure caused considerable problems. Nor would savings be all that great if women in this group, other than those who have already voluntarily returned to the labour force, cannot find employment. They would then be either on another benefit or in hardship.

Universality versus targetting

As mentioned above, the Royal Commission recommended that the family benefit continue to be paid, without income test, to all those with dependent children. As women will be well aware, it has remained at \$6 per week per child for many years. Pointing out that it would have reached \$20 if the real value has been maintained since it became universal, the Commission recommended a 'moderate increase' (III/2, 539) and regular indexation thereafter to some measure of after-tax average earnings. Several arguments were given for the continuation of universality in this area. These included the recognition of a community responsibility for children, of the valuable caring work involved, and of the costs of raising children, to which society in general and those without children in particular should contribute. In addition, family benefit is an independent source of income for women — often their only source. Also important to the Royal Commission's rationale was a more general argument for universality (also mentioned in recommending a non-income-tested element of national superannuation at age 68 — III/2, 626). This is the notion of social cohesion; taxation to allow income transfers is likely to command greater support if some parts of the system are universal, so that most people will gain at various points in their life cycle. A rights-based approach to income support also implies a degree of universality. In addition, too heavy an emphasis on targetting can lock households into the benefit system and set up a cycle of poverty through abatement regimes which make re-entry to the labour force not worthwhile. Australia has recently started income testing family benefit, with similar proposals floated in Great Britain and here, so there is a real chance of universal child support benefits being eroded, rather than enhanced.

However, fiscal constraints and support for individual responsibility where possible favour greater selectivity in income maintenance policies. Income targetting, in theory at least, allows greater support to those most in need. Clearly arguments over universality versus targetting cannot be resolved independently of the total sums to be allocated and social priorities, and the desirable balance between them will be a regular matter for debate.

Level of benefits

The requirement that all New Zealanders should belong to and participate in society was basic to the terms of reference of the Royal Commission. Such a requirement implies defining poverty and benefit levels in relative rather than absolute terms. It is not sufficient that minimum needs (for example for shelter and food) are met, but rather that everyone, including low wage earners and beneficiaries, should share in rising living standards, and by extension share losses if real income is falling.

The Royal Commission was firm in its view that the current level of base benefits relative to other incomes should not be eroded. At present the married benefit rate is about half the level of average weekly earnings. The Commission discussed the arguments that benefit rates might be 'too high' relative to wages (i.e. that 'replacement ratios', the ratios of after tax benefit to after tax earnings, are too large to provide an incentive for beneficiaries to seek paid work) and rejected them.

'We are committed to the objective of preventing poverty, and providing sufficient resources to allow all people the opportunity to develop their potential and find some fulfilment in life. If anything we are concerned that the benefit system frequently does not allow this' (III/2, 476).

Treasury research indicates that only about 5% of the workforce would have a replacement ratio above 70%, so that very few households would be better off on a benefit compared with their situation with one adult in full-time paid work. Deliberate choice of the benefit option is even rarer, although a subject for strident headlines. The Royal Commission argued that reducing benefits because of this issue would be misguided. Of the two incentive issues relating benefits to workforce rewards, the high effective marginal rates arising from abatement of targetted benefits is a far more serious deterrent and problem than the absolute levels of benefit relative to wages.

Nevertheless, the proposal for the augmented guaranteed minimum family income, announced in December 1987 and cancelled in February 1988, was based on the supposed need for a substantial gap between the benefit income of a household and the disposable income available if there was at least one full-time member of the workforce. Such 'incentives' for full-time work thus remain on the agenda, despite the problems mentioned earlier. Consequently threats to the level of benefits remain.

Benefit levels are highly significant in assessing the amount of poverty and its distribution by household type. But the general degree

of prevailing inequality of incomes or living standards is, as stated above, dependent on the extent of differentials in pre-tax earnings and incomes. The redistribution activities of government revenue and expenditure in fact modify these differentials less than might be expected from the resistance they encounter in some quarters and the overall attention paid to them. (See Snively, 1988, for a thorough account of the effects of government activity on inequality of income levels and between types of household, and the relative roles of the tax and income maintenance systems.)

Recent tax changes and flat income tax proposals

The Royal Commission published its income maintenance and taxation papers ahead of the remainder of its report because government decisions in this area were in danger of pre-empting their recommendations. The December 1987 and February 1988 economic packages (the latter cancelling some elements of the former) both included substantial flattening of personal income tax rates. Arguments for these changes included reduced scope and incentives for evasion and avoidance. The changes involved widening the tax base, by reduction or removal of many deductions, rebates, and other ways of avoiding tax, and considerable decreases in marginal rates (the amount payable on each extra dollar of income) on higher incomes. The former will increase the tax take and the latter will reduce it. Thus pursuing both together helps balance the budget compared with simply reducing rates, while the conjunction is more politically acceptable to higher income groups than widening the base without reducing rates. Those favouring greater redistribution from the better off to those on lower incomes might, of course, prefer to have seen the base widened and a capital gains or wealth tax introduced without rate reductions. This would yield higher levels of government revenue, permitting greater public expenditure and improvements in universal services. But such a view runs counter to the conventional wisdom that taxation and government expenditure are too high — a view that often seems to ignore the services provided.

Elimination or reduction of rebates and deductions covered superannuation and life insurance payments, school fees, and most employment-related expenses. It is correctly argued that the better off profited more from these deductions. However, those on higher incomes, mainly men, now have a higher after-tax income from which to absorb the effect, compared with those on low incomes who have also lost such deductions.

Details of the reductions in personal income tax rates are as follows: from 1 October 1988, the rate is 24% for incomes up to \$30,875 and 33%

on income above that level (compared with 15% to \$9,500, 30% from \$9,501 to \$30,000 and 48% above \$30,000 prior to that date). However, a low income earner rebate means that the rates are actually 15% to \$9,500, 28% from this figure to \$30,875, and 33% on higher levels of income. This is designed so that those eligible for the rebate pay the same tax as before. However, the benefit of the lower tax rates rises rapidly with increasing incomes and goes primarily to men.

Incentives to work, as well as to save, invest, and innovate, are additional arguments used to support reductions of marginal tax rates, as the individual keeps more of every extra dollar earned. However, evidence that low tax rates are necessary at high income levels to encourage effort is sparse. Instead, high income earners or self-employed people may have a target after-tax income; if the marginal rate is lowered so that this target is reached with less effort, they may in fact increase their leisure rather than their work. Motives other than money, including power and job satisfaction, are also relevant. The belief that low company tax rates and individual rates at high incomes will act as an incentive for the creation of new ventures with export and employment potential is again based more on hope than on reality. In practice the policies of deregulation, reduction of protection, and corporatisation in the search for increased efficiency have resulted in job losses unmatched by job creation, with a resulting large increase in under-employment and unemployment. The resulting depressed home market, combined with a high exchange rate which erodes competitiveness in the export market, have been deterrents to new investment and employment creation.

If incentives to work is the aim, it is more important to have low marginal tax rates on *lower* incomes, since it is for this group, primarily women, that the effective tax rate is above the stated rate. This occurs from the phasing out of family assistance (whether family support or guaranteed minimum family income) and, for some, accommodation benefit, as earnings rise. If these various benefits and rebates are reduced sharply, it may not pay some people to take paid work or to work longer hours (as mentioned above).

The fundamental argument for increasing rates of taxation is that those with higher incomes have a greater ability to pay and still maintain an adequate standard of living. Furthermore, it can be argued that this ability to pay increases more than proportionately with income level. Regardless of differing opinions on what needs are basic and what are luxuries, it is clear that discretionary income increases rapidly for incomes above those devoted entirely to paying for minimum needs. While ability to pay will be affected by a number of factors in addition

to income level, such as household structure, life cycle stage, and permanence of income level, income is still crucial.

The gradual flattening of tax rates and reduction in the take from direct taxation has been accompanied by an increase in the proportion of indirect tax from 22.5% to 33.2% of government income between 1985/6 and 1987/8 (Snively, 1988:15). This is mainly through the introduction of GST. It is a regressive tax, taking a larger proportion of the income of those at lower levels who have less opportunity to save than those higher up the scale.

With sharply reduced progression in the tax system, almost the full burden of redistribution is transferred to income maintenance and family support.

Social wellbeing, fairness, equity, justice, the role of the state

An explicit outline of the Royal Commission's discussions of basic concepts helps to clarify the differences between them and much government policy. The Commission saw its task as having two foci: the development of a coherent approach to identifying the goals, values, and principles underlying New Zealand society present and future (*Standards and Foundations*); and recognition of the basic nature of the Maori dimension and its implications for social policy (*Treaty of Waitangi: Dimensions for Social Policy*). Maxine Barrett undertook background work for the former and Manuka Henare for the latter. The Royal Commission recognised that the Treaty of Waitangi has implications for all aspects of its enquiry and government policy, and is central to an understanding of New Zealand society. It recommended its full constitutional recognition, as a background to active policies to redress justified grievances, for example over land, forestry, and fishing issues, and to rectify inequalities and reduce disparities in all economic and social indicators. True partnership, protection, and participation would also require a new approach to Maori autonomy and self-determination, with proper recognition of tribal structures and authority.

In the first area, the Royal Commission endorsed four conclusions of Barrett's background paper (II, 7, shortened).

1. The responsibility for basic needs in modern industrial societies must be collective rather than an individual matter.
2. Social policy, embracing interventions to promote the wellbeing of the individual and of society as a whole, gives rise to rights which every New Zealander can claim.
3. Wellbeing is concerned not so much with the treatment of problems or problem people as with identifying their causes in institutions and

social structures, and with attacking the problems at their presumed sources.

4. Taxing all members of the community to finance entitlement to the basic requirements for wellbeing cannot be considered coercion. It is simply the requirement to meet an obligation that all have by virtue of being members of the community.

Supporters of the minimalist view of social welfare will see the group responsibility advocated in the first point only in terms of a safety net for the 'deserving disadvantaged' unable to support themselves via market and family support. Others will locate disadvantage in a life cycle and structural setting, and thus support the other three principles.

Morris and Batten (1988), in a background paper for the Royal Commission, outlined four standard models of the role of the state within the context of a western, mixed economy society. These are what they term the minimal, instrumentalist, just, and maximal or ethical views of the state, which they associate respectively with the names of Nozick, Hayek, Rawls, and Hegel. Endorsement of the four principles outlined above places the Royal Commission well towards the maximalist end of the spectrum, in contrast to Treasury and other government advisors. For example, the 'taxation as coercion' view rejected by the Royal Commission was affirmed by Alan Gibbs at a Centre of Independent Studies seminar.

Treasury writing is less outspoken, but *Government Management* states that 'it seems likely that an appropriate role for the state in many areas is to define a clear set of rights for people and to permit individuals to voluntarily transact between one another in order to pursue their own well-being' (Treasury, 1987:124). This conclusion was based on individuals being best judges of their own self-interest, variation in needs and valuations, and inability of agencies to predict outcomes. Admittedly, it is softened by references to inequalities of opportunity and outcome, and a lack of equity in initial allocations and in processes. However, the overall tone of Treasury's argument is of the minimalist, or at most instrumentalist, tradition. A full treatment of the New Right swing towards 'less government', both in terms of deregulation and corporatisation/privatisation and of lower taxation/public expenditure, is beyond the scope of this paper. Provoked by economic stagnation, and rationalised by assertions of lack of accountability and inefficiency in the public sector, of distortions and lack of neutrality caused by intervention in the private sector, of government failure matching market failure, and of middle class capture, these views and the resulting policy prescriptions were well placed to hold sway following the exchange rate crisis which accompanied the 1984 election (see Jesson,

1987; and for an excellent critique of the concept of middle class capture, Bertram, 1988).

Five commentaries follow Morris and Batten's accounts of roles of the state, with Marilyn Waring's critique the most trenchant. She points out that all four models are those of Northern Hemisphere men, and ignore sexism, racism, and ageism, New Zealand conditions, and power considerations.

When Nozick argues that the only legitimate forced extraction of income from citizens through taxation is for protective purposes, he did not have in mind protection from hunger or homelessness, nor did he have in mind making sexual harassment a criminal offence or introducing compulsory self defence classes for girls throughout our secondary schools...it is clear that this model of the state is a description of liberties available for individual men inside the patriarchal power process (Waring, 1988(a): 6-7).

This analysis can be applied equally to criticise the Treasury position. By contrast, Waring's conception of the state involves rights to services and 'survival rights', individual entitlements, and a respect for differences — 'the role of the state is to mirror every fragment' (Waring, 1988(a): 29). It is as well to remember that even the concept of the maximal state, in which the good of all is meant to transcend the interests of the individual, may not be sex or race blind, but can be as patriarchal as concepts where the state role is less.

What position on fairness or equity follows from the Royal Commission's endorsement of Barrett's rights-based principles? The Commission argues in general terms that a fair and just society 'is one which allows people to have a voice in their future, choice in their lives and a sense of belonging that affirms their dignity and identity' (II, 12). Giving specificity to the aim of the maintenance for all of a standard of living sufficient for participation and belonging is more difficult. It argues, as mentioned earlier, for no erosion of benefit levels, but on the degree of income redistribution and equality which is desirable it is less clear. 'The distribution of the wealth and resources of the nation must be fair. It need not be equal so long as the inequalities are such as can be justified in a fair society' (II, 14). Equity is defined (II, 792) as 'the distribution of resources in accordance with *prevailing* conceptions of fairness and social justice' (my italics). In practice this means falling back onto government assessment, which politicians can, dubiously, claim to be justified through the political process. However, the Commission does point out the high degree of support for most income maintenance

policies revealed by its survey.

Also of importance is its discussion of justice. Again Barrett's paper, which takes account of how women's positions and concerns may differ from men's, is a good starting point. Justice is defined as 'to each according to their due' — but 'due' can be assessed in accordance with rights, deserts or needs. Deserts, if regarded as rewards for skill and effort, will be seen by free market advocates as best determined by competition in that context. However, Barrett points out that rewards are only partly due to personal qualities and effort. The results obtained by individual men are dependent also on external circumstances, the efforts of others in an interdependent modern economy, and the contribution of largely unrecognised and unrewarded domestic labour, usually by a spouse. Rewards according only to exchange value omit all domestic and voluntary work. In addition, she points out that:

a realistic view of modern society suggests that what in fact determines success in a competitive market is less likely to be due to those features of a person which have some claim to be morally significant, including ability or effort, but rather initial social status, race, gender or sheer luck (III/1, 53).

The selfish motives which are both assumed and rewarded in economic theory and models, and are argued in perfectly competitive, overly simple formulations to lead to desirable outcomes, are not usually regarded as morally praiseworthy. A possible exception is self-reliance. Inevitably the appropriate balance between self-reliance, group provision (such as family, whanau, community, iwi, and voluntary organisations), and state responsibility, is a matter of debate.

The submission of the Women's Studies Association to the Royal Commission is highly pertinent in these areas, pointing out that the free market economic model is not only individualistic, neglecting interdependence and community effort, but also relevant only to the traditional male career life cycle. It ignores the negative externalities and costs of the male monocultural model and the differences in resources and power that are integral to the system.

In addition the concentration on growth in some measure of national income, such as GDP, or even GDP per person, as the ultimate objective of policy is also open to considerable question, when it omits unpaid voluntary, household, and caring work, and includes the military machine, the creation of pollution and means of reducing it, and other 'bads' among the 'goods' (for a thorough critique, see Waring, 1988b). These points are taken on board by the Royal Commission (II, 284/309).

Concluding comments

Dealing in a brief paper with a few aspects of economic and social policy and the Royal Commission discussion has meant many omissions. One important one which needs at least a mention is the section on the funding of social provision, concerning the manner of delivery of social services. Convinced of the continuing validity of arguments about market failure and public and merit goods, particularly in the fields of education and health, which the market will not supply at all or to a desirable extent, the Commission argues for continued state provision in many of these areas. Income maintenance alone is not sufficient to give access to essential services. Funding in co-operation with community agencies is appropriate in some areas, and direct provision is essential in others.

Overall, the approach of the Royal Commission in this and other areas will probably be sympathetically received by many feminists as a guide to policy directions. However, its level of generality or caution on details and the lack of a clear set of recommendations make it easier for government to ignore it. Government's prompt response to the Picot report is a telling contrast. Devolution of power and responsibilities is an area discussed in both reports, and more simplistically in the one accepted for implementation. There are weighty arguments for devolution, particularly to Maori authorities, and for greater community involvement in decision making, particularly if accompanied by the provision of adequate resources. However, there are also problems for feminists in decentralisation and elimination of standardised practices, when those in decision making positions are likely to remain white middle class men. In addition, if adequate resources are not provided, 'community provision' can simply mean additional unpaid work by women. Paradoxically, despite the current project of the Ministry of Women's Affairs to measure voluntary and unpaid work with a view to greater recognition of its extent, value, and the predominance (or exploitation!) of women, current trends may only serve to extend such work without in fact sharing it more equally or giving it the economic recognition which the Royal Commission recommends. This is just one example of the divergence of policy trends from the Royal Commission's approach and from the realities of women's lives.

Afterword

The above article was completed in October 1988; this note is written after the July 1989 Budget, Roger Douglas returning to Cabinet, and Geoffrey Palmer becoming Prime Minister, with Helen Clark as his Deputy. Despite David Lange's pre-Budget remarks about the Budget

showing evidence of the work of the Royal Commission, few of the concerns expressed above have been allayed.

The childcare funding package and cervical cancer screening allocation are to be welcomed. The extension of accident compensation to include other types of incapacity should, on balance, favour women, who have fewer accidents, and lesser average eligibility for earnings-related compensation, than men. The extension of coverage to include non-earners will be of benefit; but until the trade-offs and details are known, in terms of elimination of lump sum payments, stand down periods and levels of benefits, final judgement must be reserved.

Maintenance of a national superannuation scheme (renamed guaranteed retirement income) close to its current form is a matter for some relief. The Ministry of Women's Affairs consultations indicated overwhelming support among women for this near universal scheme, with individual entitlement and dependence of tax surcharge on personal income. It is for some women their first major independent income. However, the level will gradually fall to that of other benefit income which in turn, through an altered indexation system, will gradually decline in value relative to the average ordinary time weekly wage, with price adjustment subject to a 65% floor/72.5% ceiling relativity to that wage. The change to the surcharge, whereby half of private superannuation and life insurance is exempt, benefits only those few women who can afford to save in that manner. The gradual increase in the age of eligibility to 65 is a blow to Maori women (and Maori men) unless Maori longevity increases very rapidly.

The advent of a generic or common benefit (called 'universal', although that is a misnomer) will, presumably, mean that the single unemployment benefit is raised to the level of other benefits. However, how will the concept of a common useful activity/work test be applied to sole parents? Will they be expected to be available for paid work before their youngest children reach 16? If so, will adequate retraining opportunities be made available, and suitable childcare be provided?

The increase in the family support income threshold and full payment of family support to the primary caregiver are useful changes, but the rise from \$16,000 to \$17,500 does not match the rise in prices since its introduction in October 1986. Nor has the maximum level of benefit been changed during that period. In Australia, the April 1989 budget announced increased levels and indexation of all family allowances and thresholds from July. This area is now the only one in the income maintenance area where Australian payments are more generous than those in New Zealand. Universal family benefit has been retained, albeit only at its old level of \$6 per week per child; but this may be only a

temporary reprieve, as further study of family support is in progress.

In February 1989 a Cabinet decision to introduce legislation on pay equity and equal employment opportunity was announced. However, the implementation committee was directed to take account of the principles and processes of wage fixing built into the Labour Relations Act and the State Sector Act. This includes ensuring that the new legislation preserves the flexibility and decentralisation of the wage fixing process, and avoids disruption to economic and labour market activity. No details of the legislation have yet been announced, although the then Deputy Prime Minister anticipated that the bill would be introduced in October 1989. Reconciling a system that will deliver a real equal pay for work of equal value outcome, with its necessity for third party arbitration or determination, with these directions is not an easy task. Introduction of legislation to amend the Human Rights Act is also awaited. Government action on Treaty of Waitangi issues and policy structures for Maori concerns appears at best faltering and at worst over-conscious of actual or presumed Pakeha backlash.

Area health boards and other government funded services have been subject to further income reductions in order to cut government expenditure. The credibility of claims that savings can continue to be made through increased efficiency and changes in service delivery, rather than actual service cuts, is at least doubtful. With or without Douglas in Cabinet, the welfare state appears to be under pressure and social policy still subsidiary to economic policy, whatever the contrary pronouncements from ministers. Feminists can certainly not relax vigilance or reduce their constant pressure in challenging the emphases of policy.

Note

- 1 References to the April Report of the Royal Commission on Social Policy in this paper are frequent so, where this is clearly the source, volume and page number only are given.

References

- Barrett, M. 1988. 'Standards and Foundations for Social Policy', in *The April Report*. III/1: 43-78. Royal Commission on Social Policy.
- Bertram, G. 1988. 'Middle Class Capture', in *The April Report*. III/2: 107-170. Royal Commission on Social Policy.
- Economic Monitoring Group 1986. *Labour Market Flexibility*. New Zealand Planning Council, Wellington.
- Fenwick, P. 1988. 'Royal Commissions Can Be Good For Women'. *NZ Women's Studies Journal* 3/2; March: 85-94.

- Jesson, B. 1987. *Behind the Mirror Glass*. Penguin.
- Morris, M. and Batten, D. 1988. 'Theories of the State: a Background Paper', in *The Role of the State: Five Perspectives*. Royal Commission on Social Policy.
- New Zealand Treasury. 1987. *Government Management*. The Treasury.
- Royal Commission on Social Policy. 1988. *The April Report*. Government Printing Office.
- Snively, S. 1988. *The Government Budget and Social Policy*. Royal Commission on Social Policy.
- Waring, M. 1988 (a). 'Discussion Paper on the Role of the State', in *The Role of the State: Five Perspectives*. Royal Commission on Social Policy.
- Waring, M. 1988 (b). *Counting for Nothing*. Allen & Unwin/Port Nicholson Press.

Prue Hyman is a senior lecturer in economics at Victoria University of Wellington, currently on secondment to the Ministry of Women's Affairs. The views expressed in this article are her own.



Francis H. La.

'New Zealand's Most Famous Daughter'

A Profile of Frances Alda (1879-1952)

Adrienne Simpson

On 31 March 1917, the journal *Musical America* announced the formation of a Musical Union of Women Artists. Modelled on the pioneering Unions des Femmes Artistes Musiciennes of France, the Union aimed to raise the status of women musicians — first, by discouraging mediocre talents from entering the profession; secondly, by ensuring well qualified women musicians were properly paid for their services. Among many evils the Union pledged itself to stamp out were two that were endemic among unscrupulous concert managers: the habit of denying young artists concert opportunities unless they would agree to perform gratis, and the equally sharp practice of taking large payments from performers to secure bookings. On a more positive note, the Union announced it would be willing to put forward funds so that needy women musicians could obtain proper management.¹

The advisory committee of the new Union provided a graphic illustration of the cosmopolitan nature of American society. The honorary president was Giulio Gatti-Casazza, an Italian who had been general manager of New York's Metropolitan Opera since 1908. His committee included the Belgian-born violin virtuoso Eugene Ysaÿe, and Walter

Damrosch, son of an immigrant German-Jewish family, who had established himself as a leading composer and critic. The most notable women on the advisory committee were two Metropolitan Opera prima donnas — Geraldine Farrar (the one true-blue American involved) and Frances Alda. In private life Alda was Mrs Gatti-Casazza, but she was not Italian. She had been born Fanny Jane Davis, in Christchurch, New Zealand, on 31 May 1879. The story of her journey from colonial Christchurch to international operatic stardom and a position of influence in the musical life of America is inspiring and entertaining by turns. It is also, remarkably, a story little known to most New Zealanders.

During the late 19th and 20th century — an era when women found it difficult to be taken seriously as composers, and when many orchestras refused to employ female instrumentalists — the operatic stage provided a very real opportunity for a gifted woman to reach the highest ranks of the musical profession. The difficulties to be overcome were enormous. For most, it meant the sacrifice of normal private and family life in single-minded pursuit of their goal. 'A woman's place is in the home,' declared the American politician, Grover Cleveland. To which Emma Eames, one of the earliest American prima donnas, retorted that while this might be very well for 80 per cent of women, it was no reason to stifle the other 20 per cent.²

The trappings of operatic stardom — applause, financial rewards, acceptance into the highest ranks of society, the indefinable aura of glamour — were sufficient to encourage dozens of would-be prima donnas. Few considered the profession's many disadvantages, such as the constant attention of gossip columnists and the physical strain of singing, day in, day out, in large and draughty opera houses with minimal backstage facilities. The worst hazard, as prevalent then as now, was the exploitation of immature young voices by unscrupulous managements, with total disregard for the damage that could be inflicted by injudicious use. When a voice showed signs of wear, its possessor could be discarded in favour of another young (and inexpensive) artist. Singers needed unusual strength of mind and patience to recognise that the promise of overnight fame was illusory. Shooting stars very quickly became operatic damp squibs.

It is hardly surprising that few women attained prima donna status during this period. The very title implied successful negotiation of all potential pitfalls. Luck played only a small part in the equation, while preferment through influential connections was not enough to establish a career. Those who made the grade tended to be both intelligent and forceful of character. Having scaled the heights, they guarded their positions jealously, staving off possible competition while endeavour-

ing to amass enough money to secure their old age. It may be wondered if being a prima donna brought happiness to those who achieved that goal. Yet aspirants to the title were plentiful. Among them were a goodly sprinkling of young Australians and New Zealanders, a few of whom survived the cut-throat competition to make successful singing careers, particularly in London. Only two, however, became major international figures: the incomparable Australian, Nellie Melba and, at a lower level of stardom but still indisputably in the front rank of world sopranos, the much younger New Zealander, Frances Alda.

Both reached the top through a combination of persistence, sheer hard work and natural talent. Whereas Melba's family were prosperous but lacked musical background, Alda came from an inpecunious home but had the advantage of being born into one of Australasia's pioneering operatic dynasties, the Simonsens. Her maternal grandparents, Fanny and Martin Simonsen, had arrived in Melbourne in 1865. He was a violinist and conductor, she a singer of great accomplishment who was later to make her mark as a teacher. Opera was their life, and they expended much money and effort, particularly during the 1870s and 1880s, in setting up companies to tour operatic productions throughout Australia and New Zealand.³ Several of their children, including Alda's mother, Leonore, became professional singers. One, under the name Frances Saville, had a successful career as a leading soprano with the Vienna Hofoper as well as making guest appearances at Covent Garden and at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.⁴

Alda's early life was peripatetic. Her parents divorced in 1880. The underlying reason was the conflict between her mother's desire to continue her professional singing career and her father's wish that she should be content with her position as the wife of a Christchurch businessman. In later life Alda was to recall her mother's image and actions in a romantic light. At the time, travelling round New Zealand, Australia and America with her brother as her mother tried to pursue her career, the reality must have been more stark. Leonore Davis never quite succeeded in her ambitions. She was constantly on the move, dogged by lack of money and contacts and handicapped by the need to provide for her two young children. When she succumbed to pneumonia, on 29 December 1884 in San Francisco, the five-year-old Fanny finally found a stable home with her Simonsen grandparents in the Melbourne suburb of St Kilda.

She soon showed evidence of musical talent. At an early age she began to study piano and violin but, as her autobiography reveals, her first love was for singing.⁵ The example of her grandmother and the frequent letters in which her aunt, Frances Saville, regaled the family

with news of her operatic successes, provided powerful inspiration. Early in 1897 Melbourne periodicals reported her engagement as a singer with the J.C. Williamson Company under the stage name 'Francie Adler'.⁶ She was 18 years old.

Starting in variety, she soon graduated to leading roles in Gilbert and Sullivan productions. But her ambitions were not confined to Australasia. In 1902 she set out to conquer Europe. It was probably at this time that she subtly amended her first names from plain Fanny Jane to the more elegant Frances Jeanne. She began, also, to falsify her age, shedding four years—presumably to make herself appear more youthfully promising to European operatic managements. This deception succeeded completely. In all the standard dictionaries of music her year of birth is given as 1883.

Once in Europe, Alda gravitated inevitably to her aunt's teacher, the redoubtable Mathilde Marchesi. Marchesi was the embodiment of a successful woman musician. She had become one of the most sought-after singing teachers of the day. Her speciality was the training of sopranos and the hallmarks of her style were purity of intonation, elegance of line and a bell-like upper register. All these characteristics were evident in the voice of her most famous pupil, Nellie Melba. They are also present in the gramophone recordings Alda made at the height of her career.

In ten months of lessons, Marchesi probably did not make fundamental alterations to Alda's technique. What she provided was the finishing. Few singers made their entry into opera by way of variety and musical comedy. For young women from the Antipodes there was little other opportunity for stage experience, but it left them sadly lacking in polish. Languages, repertoire, stage deportment, even the skills required to cope with a more formal, less egalitarian society—these were what colonial-born singers needed, and Marchesi was well able to impart them. She even gave her pupils suitable stage-names if necessary. So Nellie Mitchell became 'Melba' (after her birth-place) and 'Francie Adler' was transformed into 'Alda'. Above all, Marchesi opened doors. When Alda was ready, her teacher arranged her debut at the Paris Opéra Comique. The role was Manon, in Massenet's opera of the same name. She had been personally coached by the composer and the debut, on 14 April 1904, was a conspicuous success. Marchesi's training and influence had set her on the right path. Further progress was her own responsibility.

It was at this point that Alda showed typical shrewdness and resolve. The easy option was to continue at the Opéra Comique. However, it was unlikely she could ever supplant the quick-silver Scottish soprano,

Mary Garden, in Parisian favour. Alda, always a realist, decided it was better to move away and become a queen in her own right. She auditioned for the famous Brussels opera house of la Monnaie and sang there during three highly acclaimed seasons (1904/5 to 1906/7). In the 1906/7 season she also sang, by invitation, at Covent Garden and the Parma Verdi Festival. This brought her to the attention of the management at La Scala in Milan, where she made her house debut in 1908 in the title role of Charpentier's *Louise*, and then sang Margherita to Chaliapin's Mefistofele in Boito's opera of the same name.

In the first two decades of this century La Scala vied with New York's Metropolitan for the title of the world's greatest opera house. To sing at either was an accolade, but the richer financial rewards were undoubtedly at the Met. Alda's La Scala debut impressed both the conductor, Arturo Toscanini — who became a life-long friend — and the general manager, Giulio Gatti-Casazza, whom she later married. When Gatti and Toscanini took over the direction of the Metropolitan Opera in 1908, Alda was one of the artists they brought with them. Over the next few years she worked her way up to become a leading prima donna in the world's most star-studded company. Her debut in New York was, however, far from auspicious.

Few Met debutants had failed to feel the lash of the New York critics. Even the great Caruso had not been spared. In Alda's case, her known romantic involvement with Gatti, the Company's new general manager, made her a particularly vulnerable target. The role chosen for her debut, on 7 December 1908, was Gilda in Verdi's *Rigoletto*. It was not, perhaps, one of her best roles, but she had performed it successfully many times in Europe. Audience reaction that evening was favourable, but next morning....

I sat up in bed and went through one newspaper after another, caring for nothing but the reviews of *Rigoletto* at the Metropolitan... The reviews were all terrible. I had no voice... I showed myself too untrained for the Metropolitan... If I was a sample of what Signor Gatti-Casazza meant to introduce to New York, things were just too bad... And, finally: 'The young singer who made her debut last evening comes from the land of the sheep, and she bleated like one of them...' My heart ached and my throat was sore. I shivered all over. I hated America.⁷

Alda's first thought was to return at once to Europe, where her work was appreciated. That she did not was due in part to her own determination, and in part to encouragement from an unexpected quarter. The great American prima donna Lillian Nordica, then moving towards the

end of a distinguished career, sent her a basket of roses with a note which read: 'There was never a young singer who appeared at the Metropolitan who wasn't severely criticized on her debut. Melba, Sembrich, Farrar, myself... all of us have gone through what you are going through today. Have courage...' ⁸ It was a kindness Alda never forgot.

This baptism of fire certainly altered Alda's attitude towards her work. It seems clear she subsequently thought a great deal about the difficulties and responsibilities of being both a woman and a professional musician. She was in no doubt that the critical attacks which marked her debut had little to do with how she actually sang, and much to do with factions hostile to Gatti's appointment as the new general manager. She was incensed that, simply because she was a woman, a personal relationship could be used in this way. When she married Gatti on Easter Sunday, 1910, she insisted that Frances Alda and Madame Gatti-Casazza were two separate people. It was a distinction her husband found hard to accept. The two quickly clashed over his request that she should drop the name Alda and be known only as Madame Gatti-Casazza.

'I loved my work' she later declared in her autobiography. 'I was honestly proud of the career I had made for myself and which belonged to the name of ALDA ... as for suddenly letting Frances Alda fade out of existence... I am Frances Alda. I have made that name known to the public, and I am going to continue to be known by it.' ⁹ Her wishes prevailed, but nagging doubt remained. If her husband could not distinguish the separate facets of her life, could the critics make such a distinction? Thereafter, she always felt her career to be handicapped by her association with Gatti and, because she put her career first, it was not long before the couple began to lead amicably separate lives. They divorced in 1928, but remained on excellent terms.

Despite her unpromising debut, public and critics alike soon warmed to Frances Alda. She scored notable successes as Desdemona in Verdi's *Otello*, as Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust* and as Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*. Mimi, the doomed heroine of Puccini's popular *La Bohème*, became indelibly associated with her name. She sang the role a staggering 63 times at the Metropolitan alone, partnering all the leading tenors of the day, from Caruso to Gigli. Never averse to new music, she created the leading soprano roles in three shortlived American operas: *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Walter Damrosch (1913), *Madeleine* by Victor Herbert (1914) and Henry Hadley's *Cleopatra's Night* (1920), and took part in the American premieres of several other operas. When she eventually retired from the operatic stage, on 28 December 1929, she had sung 24 different roles and taken part in 266 performances at the

Metropolitan itself, plus a further 87 performances during the Company's regular touring seasons. It was her proud boast that, in 21 years with the company, she had never missed a performance for which she had been scheduled. No doubt she also reflected wryly that some of the critics who mourned her retirement, declaring her voice to be richer and finer than ever, were the same men who had savaged her on her debut.

Alda endeared herself to the American public in other ways. During World War I she threw herself into fund raising for the Navy. As chairman of the National Music Committee, she dragooned the finest international musicians and the most blue-blooded of society ladies into giving their services freely to the benefit concerts she organised. These raised thousands of dollars to buy instruments, and other musical items such as player pianos and gramophones, for the fleet. Her efforts made her a national celebrity. Photographers pictured her 'digging for victory' in the garden of her Long Island home; reporters beat a path to her door. But the accolade she treasured most was a personal letter of thanks for her efforts, signed by the then Acting Secretary of the Navy, Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Opera was not Alda's only sphere of musical activity. She also undertook lengthy recital tours, travelling throughout America with an occasional excursion to countries overseas. One year she gave 60 recitals over a period of seven months—an extremely heavy schedule when one considers that for several of those seven months she was also engaged in operatic performances.¹⁰ Another activity she enjoyed was her work with the Metropolitan Opera Quartet, touring operatic excerpts to small towns where full-scale operatic productions were unknown. A photograph taken in 1919 shows her with the other distinguished members of that quartet — pianist Gennaro Papi, tenor Giovanni Martinelli and baritone Giuseppe de Luca — travelling by car through the Rocky Mountains. Quite characteristically, Frances Alda is at the wheel.¹¹

Alda's secure vocal technique and excellent musicianship made her particularly suited to recording work. The purity and elegance of her voice was captured very satisfactorily by the primitive recording processes of the day, and she was in considerable demand to record not only operatic excerpts, but the popular ballads which were the staple fare of the Victor Recording company. Well over 100 Alda recordings survive, most of them solo items, but some showing her in ensemble with such famous artists as the tenor Enrico Caruso, or the violinist Mischa Elman.¹²

Another technological innovation she embraced wholeheartedly was radio. In 1925 she became one of the first singers to broadcast. Following her retirement from the operatic stage, she took part in a

pioneering series of radio productions of Puccini operas. Later, she had her own network programme. Although she ceased to perform, either in public or on radio, in the mid-1930s, she continued her musical involvement as a teacher—trying, not altogether successfully, to impart the Marchesi technique to a new generation of sopranos. In 1937 she showed her literary skill in an engagingly well-written and forthright volume of memoirs, *Men, Women and Tenors*. The book should not be taken too literally as a piece of operatic history, but it is very revealing about Alda's personal views on a number of topics — not least her feelings for the country of her birth, New Zealand.

In 1925 the Australian music critic, A.L. Kelly, made a tour of the world's leading opera houses. At the Metropolitan he interviewed Alda, later writing up his impressions of 'a shrewd, frank and kindly woman' for readers at home. He remembered her in the days when she was a mere supporting artist in a Sydney variety show, but 'strength of character, real ability as a singer, and a great ambition have raised her to a distinguished place amongst the great operatic sopranos of the day. Frances Alda is not an emotional singer or a stirring actress, but she knows the stage thoroughly, and uses her beautiful voice with fine taste and absolutely sound musicianship. Gramophone records by this singer in no way exaggerate her abilities...' ¹³ Two years later, audiences in Australia and New Zealand were given the chance to judge for themselves. In 1927 Frances Alda embarked on an Australasian tour, visiting Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne, Auckland, Wellington and, finally, her home town of Christchurch. ¹⁴

From a New Zealand perspective, the tour's greatest value lay not in Alda's undoubted artistry, but in her international stature. In operatic terms she was—as one tour advertisement billed her—'New Zealand's most famous daughter'. Even the harshest critics evidenced 'a sense of satisfaction that a New Zealander could rise to such vocal heights.' ¹⁵ For Alda, the tour had lasting consequences: it put her in touch with her roots. She was pleased to be feted by her Davis relatives. Some remembered her from childhood, and others (with the ready interchange between Australia and New Zealand) she had known or worked with in her early J.C. Williamson days. She was impressed by the prosperousness and importance of her father's family and regretted her estrangement from them. New Zealand delighted her. 'I loved it the minute I set foot on its shore', she wrote later. 'Christchurch, where I was born, had a river flowing through the centre of the town, bordered by huge willows, and a magnificent university. I felt a surge of pride that I was of the same blood as the men and women who had created this.' ¹⁶

Alda had never claimed to be anything other than a New Zealander.

American newspapers often captioned her portraits with phrases such as 'the beloved New Zealand soprano' or 'Frances Alda — a daughter of far-off New Zealand.' After 1927, however, references to her country of origin became more numerous. Whereas previously she could have called herself Australian by upbringing, or American by virtue of long residence, after the tour she consistently emphasised her allegiance to New Zealand. When the *S.S. Aorangi* docked in Vancouver, bringing her back from the Antipodes, North American reporters were treated to a display of the famous Alda temperament as she launched into a tirade about the inadequacies of Australia and the virtues of New Zealand. Her comments, she claimed, were absolutely impartial, despite the fact 'that New Zealand is my birthplace'.¹⁷

The highlight of her tour was a visit to Rotorua, where she experienced Maori choral singing for the first time. 'All my life has been lived amongst peoples whose civilisation is accounted very old and conventionalised' she wrote in her memoirs. 'I have never felt any appeal in crudities and unsophistication. But in those beautiful Maoris, the handsomest people on earth, flowed something so natural and untaught as to be truly primitive. And yet so balanced, so smooth, so gentle that it was perfect art.'¹⁸

What she heard was, almost certainly, westernised arrangements or songs written in pseudo-Maori idiom. The important factor was not the authenticity of the music, but the effect it had upon her. Back in America, she added a number of these songs to her recital programmes. She also persuaded the Victor Company to record two of her favourites for commercial release. Princess Te Rangi Pai's *Maori Slumber Song* (*Hine e Hine*) and Alfred Hill's *Waiata Maori* were scarcely part of the accepted ballad repertoire for an international recording star, but she duly recorded them both on 28 March 1928. They remain her most tangible tribute to the land in which she was born.

Frances Alda loved to travel. In later life, financially secure, she was able to include this passion to the full. It was in Venice, on holiday with her second husband (New York advertising executive Ray Vir Den, whom she married in 1941), that she suffered a cerebral haemorrhage. She died on 18 September 1952, aged 73. Brief notices of the event appeared in New Zealand's main metropolitan dailies. In America, the tributes were much more extensive. In addition to assessing her distinguished career, many of the obituary writers tried to pin down the essence of her flamboyant and often contradictory personality. An anonymous columnist in the *New York Herald* summed her up succinctly:

Mme. Alda, one of the most striking figures of an era that

ran to colorful prima donnas, said of herself that she 'had red hair and the temperament to go with it'. She was given to plain speaking and acquired both a reputation for wit and a number of enemies.¹⁹

It is undoubtedly true that Alda's personality polarised opinion. She had a truly colonial sensitivity to slights, real or imagined. She could be boisterous and unconventional. Her comments were often barbed and she seldom troubled to disguise her feelings about those she disliked. On the other hand, she never forgot a kindness. Many fellow artists had reason to consider her a warm and generous friend. In musical matters she was both shrewd and just, even when passing judgement upon those whom she personally detested.

There is no evidence that she used her position as Madame Gatti-Casazza to obtain special favours at the Met. She liked money, but was never greedy in negotiating fees, nor did she try to take plum roles from other artists. It was part of her carefully cultivated professionalism to know what suited her voice and acting abilities and stay within those parameters. But she also insisted that her professionalism should be met with equal professionalism from others. A noted accompanist, André Benoist, tried to break his contract with her during a concert tour in 1912, in order to tidy up some personal affairs. He was amazed when she refused. 'You've made an arrangement with me and you'll damn well stick to it', said Alda — whose colourful and blunt turn of speech had by then become a byword in musical circles. Benoist admired her as an artist but commented, 'She was an exacting and strict task mistress as well as completely ruthless in anything that concerned her "rights"'.²⁰ Today, her insistence on such rights would not be regarded with surprise. To Benoist, in 1912, it obviously came as a shock that a lady should hold him to the letter of his contract.

Perhaps because of her background and early experiences, Alda had considerable sympathy for those just setting out on musical careers. She knew what pitfalls and difficulties lay before them. This undoubtedly motivated her involvement in the Musical Union of Women Artists. Her autobiography, too, is full of cautionary words. She had strong views about the way singers should be trained, about professional attitudes and about the exploitation of gullible young artists — particularly women artists — by plausible managers. The Met did not escape her censure either. Certain problems were within her power to deal with. The world's greatest opera house also had possibly the world's worst backstage conditions. Gatti deplored them, but did nothing. Alda, true to her practical colonial upbringing, descended with bucket and mop and shamed the management into an orgy of painting and cleaning.

Other problems she could only deplore. The claque system — by which organised gangs of opera-goers demanded payment to applaud singers — she agreed was a curse, and worse at the Met than at any of the leading opera houses of Western Europe.²¹ She had no dealings with the claque herself, but to have attempted its destruction might well have brought her own career down in ruins.

What most roused her anger was to hear an immature singing voice wantonly ruined. In this, the Met was as guilty as any other institution. While she shared Gatti's interest in finding American artists to grace America's greatest opera house, she did not approve of them being cynically exploited for their novelty value. The Marion Talley affair she regarded as a dire warning to all aspiring prima donnas. Talley, an 18-year-old from Kansas City, with little training and less operatic background, was pitched into a leading role at the Met to satisfy public craving for an American-born 'star' to replace the retired Geraldine Farrar. Vilified by the critics and patently not up to the work, she was discarded within a couple of seasons, her potentially promising career in ruins. While Alda undoubtedly was not the only artist to believe that singers needed as well-grounded a technique as orchestral players, she was one of the few to put these views on record. The advice on building a career contained in her autobiography remains as apposite today as it was when first published.

Perhaps Alda's most endearing quality was her sheer zest for living, and her enthusiasm for the career she had carved out for herself. 'Why should I pretend I haven't always enjoyed being a prima donna, on the stage and off it?' she demanded of one interviewer:

Bouquets, telegrams, twenty-seven trunks, maids and secretaries, sable capes, pearls, diamond bracelets, men kissing your hand — of course I enjoyed it... I'd rather dance all night with three men who were crazy about me than sew on buttons for any one of them by daylight. I've never felt the necessity for pretending not to enjoy all the fun life has to give me.²²

Frances Alda's lively and indomitable spirit took her to the very top of the operatic profession during a richly endowed era which has subsequently become known as 'the golden age'.²³ Apart from Kiri te Kanawa, no other New Zealand-born woman has ever risen to a position of such eminence in the musical world. In some ways Alda's achievement was the greater, since she was born into an era in which there were no scholarships or Arts Council grants to underpin that combination of talent, determination and sheer hard work which any singer must have to succeed. She loved her work and approached it in a thoroughly

professional fashion. Having attained success, she made some attempt to improve the prospects for future generations of women musicians.

Throughout her career, but more particularly after her 1927 Australasian tour, Alda consistently acknowledged herself to be a New Zealander. It is as 'New Zealand soprano' that she appears in all international biographical dictionaries. Her career added much lustre to the cultural image of this country; yet, ironically, it is Australia — to which she felt no allegiance — that has made the greatest attempt to claim her.²⁴ In New Zealand her achievements are either forgotten or discounted. It is more than time this country acknowledged her existence and gave her credit as the first, and undoubtedly one of the finest, of our international operatic stars.

Notes

1. For more on the formation of the union see Kenneth S. Clark, 'Seek "protection for woman against malignant evils of the musical world"', *Musical America* xxv/22, 31 March 1917, p.38.
2. Quoted in Rupert Christiansen, *Prima Donna*, Penguin 1984, p.10. The difficulties facing women in the music profession during the late 19th and early 20th centuries are well described by the English composer Ethel Smyth. A selection from her volumes of autobiography has been edited by Ronald Crichton as *The Memoirs of Ethyl Smyth*, Viking 1987.
3. See Adrienne Simpson, 'On Tour with the Simonsens' in *Facets of New Zealand Opera — Studies in Honour of the 35th Anniversary of the New Zealand Opera Society*, forthcoming.
4. Her career is outlined in Nathan B. Davis, 'Frances Saville', *The Record Collector* Vol 32 Nos 6/7, June 1987, pp.124-138.
5. Frances Alda, *Men, Women and Tenors*, Houghton Mifflin 1937, *passim*.
6. The surname Adler was that of a young American her mother precipitately married a few weeks before her death. Frances Alda barely knew him, and never met him again.
7. *Men, Women and Tenors* p.13.
8. *ibid*.
9. *Men, Women and Tenors* p.151.
10. Interview with Alda in *Musical Courier*, 11 August 1918, held in the New York Public Library, Music Department, Clipping File.
11. Photograph from the *Musical Courier*, 26 June 1919, held in the New York Public Library, Music Department, Clipping File.
12. The best available listing of Alda's recordings is by Aida Favia-Artsay in *The Record Collector* VI/10, October 1951, pp.221-233.
13. A.L. Kelly, 'A Music Critic Circles the Earth', *The Triad*, 1 June 1926, pp.11-12.
14. The tour is discussed more fully in Adrienne Simpson, "'This Country May Well be Proud of Her" — Frances Alda's 1927 Tour of New Zealand', *Music*

- in *New Zealand*, September 1989, forthcoming.
15. *The Dominion*, 7 October 1927.
 16. *Men, Women and Tenors* p.274.
 17. Reported in the *Melbourne Argus*, 14 November 1927.
 18. *Men, Women and Tenors* p.275.
 19. *New York Herald*, 19 September 1952.
 20. John Anthony Maltese (ed.), *The Accompanist: An Autobiography of Andre Benoist*, Paginiana, 1978, p.174.
 21. Kelly, op. cit.
 22. William G. King, 'Frances Alda Writes Her Autobiography — Let the Ears Burn Where They May.' 1937 interview in the *New York Sun*, held in the New York Public Library, Music Department, Clipping File.
 23. See Robert Tuggle, *The Golden Age of Opera*, Holt Rinehart Winston 1983.
 24. For example, see Barbara and Findlay Mackenzie, *Singers of Australia*, Lansdowne Press 1967.

Adrienne Simpson is a freelance writer and broadcaster on musical topics. She is currently President of the New Zealand Opera Society, and chairs the New Zealand Opera Conference.

Archives:

A Portrait of Marjory Nicholls

The Woman

Beryl Hughes

Women are said to be hidden from history. One reason for this obscurity is that a woman's identity is frequently hidden by a change of name at marriage. For a long time I failed, because of the change of the subject's name, to connect a portrait labelled 'Mrs John Hannah', which I had seen in Victoria University of Wellington, with Marjory Nicholls, an early student of Victoria College. I had read of Marjory Nicholls in Olga Harding's history of Wellington Girls' College, where she was called one of the most outstanding pupils of her time, and in J.C. Beaglehole's *Victoria University College: an essay towards a history*, but I knew nothing of her later life. It was not until I recently made contact (as a result of some work for the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*) with Marjory Nicholls's niece, Miss Margaret Nicholls of Hamilton, that I learned that Marjory Nicholls and Mrs John Hannah were the same person.

I turned at once with fresh interest to the portrait. It differs from the other portraits in Victoria's collection in that it is the only one of a woman, and the only one of a person not connected in some official capacity with the University. Perhaps it was for this reason that while the other portraits — of Chancellors, Vice-Chancellors and a few professors — hang in the room where the Professorial Board and the Faculties hold their meetings, there seemed to be no obvious place for this more

domestic and human portrait of a woman in a brown dress and a long string of amber beads, seated at a table with a bowl of flowers beside her. I suggested to Dr T.H. Beaglehole, who is mainly responsible for Victoria's large collection of pictures, that the portrait might be offered to Women's Studies, which had recently moved into new and more attractive premises. There in Kate Edger House it now hangs.

Marjory Lydia Nicholls was born in 1890, the younger daughter of Harry Nicholls, secretary to the Wellington Harbour Board, and Susan Nicholls. After attending the Terrace School, she became a pupil at Wellington Girls' College, where she was a prefect and editor of the school magazine, *The Reporter*.

At Victoria College, she was the first woman ever to enter for the Plunket Medal for oratory, at that time a very prestigious award. Her topic was Joan of Arc, which can perhaps be seen as a feminist statement. The College Debating Society, according to J.C. Beaglehole, 'encouraged its ladies, or women, on its own platform, or on theirs; notwithstanding which it experienced a curious feeling, when in 1913, Marjory Nicholls, the gifted and radiant one, carried off the Plunket Medal.'¹ Women, it seems, were to be welcomed gallantly as competitors, but were not expected to win. (Few women have won the award — only six in the first sixty years.)

While at Victoria, Marjory Nicholls produced two plays for the Drama Society, began a play-reading group and was active in a number of societies. She did not complete a degree. There was nothing remarkable in this; at the time people often took the classes that were useful to them or which interested them, and no more. Marjory Nicholls had presumably acquired the units she needed for teaching and eventually taught at Miss Baber's School, which later became Samuel Marsden Collegiate, at Chilton House School, Wellington, and at Chilton St James School, Lower Hutt.

In 1920, she married John Hannah, a Scotsman who worked in Ceylon. He died soon afterwards, and she returned to New Zealand. Her own life was short, since she was killed in a street accident in Wellington in October 1930 at the age of forty, on her way home from a recital given by a visiting Czech violinist. Obituaries appeared in a number of papers. Eileen Duggan, the Wellington poet, wrote an article for *Spike*, the University magazine for which Marjory Nicholls had written as a student. The article is sentimental in the manner of the day, and not very enlightening, apart from one comment, 'Too many fairies came to her cradle.'

There is something in this. Marjory Nicholls certainly had many talents and wide interests. She published three volumes of poetry, was

closely involved in amateur theatre (as her father had been) and studied stage production in England under Edith Craig, the daughter of Ellen Terry, and in the United States. She was also interested in painting and studied under Dorothy Richmond, a leading artist of the time. In addition, she lectured for the WEA, taught elocution and travelled several times overseas.

Yet I doubt if 'too many fairies' is the main reason for what appears to be a distinct gap between her gifts and her achievements. There can be no doubt that she made a strong impression on her contemporaries. Olga Harding called her 'one of the best known and best loved girls in the school' and wrote of her 'great penetration of mind and shrewdness of judgement, with which went rare breadth of outlook and generosity of spirit.'² According to a friend writing to her in 1924, Peter Fraser (later Prime Minister) said 'that of all women speakers they [Fraser and his wife] have ever heard you very easily are placed first both in oratory and sentiment.' Her Plunket Medal was a great distinction.

With all this, Marjory Nicholls had no real career. There were in fact hardly any careers available in New Zealand at the time to a woman of her interests. Professional theatre, which might attract a woman of her gifts today, did not exist here then. Medicine was attracting women and nursing was an occupation for women only, but these were not where her interests lay. The male winners of the Plunket Medal often had distinguished careers; many became lawyers, a few became MPs. The legal profession had been opened to women in 1897 by Act of Parliament, but the difficulties faced by the first woman lawyer, Ethel Benjamin, were immense and were discouraging to others. There was no woman MP here until Elizabeth McCombs was elected in 1933. It would have been not only difficult for Marjory Nicholls to have a career but difficult even to think of having a career apart from teaching. As for that, a serious career in teaching was made unlikely by the several overseas trips she made, and her brief marriage. For a very bright and articulate young woman of that time, opportunities were very limited.

In her will, Marjory Nicholls left £200 to be spent on pictures by New Zealand artists, which were to be given to the Women's Common Room at Victoria College. Her trustees decided to spend some of the money in commissioning a portrait of her by M.E.R. Tripe, who may well have known her.³ In this portrait, as in the photographs of her that I have seen, Marjory Nicholls has a markedly benevolent expression. It seems to me to be appropriate that this portrait of a woman who, according to Olga Harding, was always interested in opportunities for women, should hang today in Kate Edger House and look down on women students who enjoy much greater opportunities than hers.

Notes

- 1 J.C. Beaglehole, *Victoria University College: an essay towards a history*. New Zealand University Press, 1949:122.
- 2 Olga E. Harding, *One Hundred Years: a history of Wellington Girls' College*, Wellington Girls' College Centennial Committee, 1982:62.
- 3 The portrait hung in the Women's Common Room until the 1950s.

Beryl Hughes is retired from lecturing in the History Department at Victoria. She is convenor of the Wellington Regional Working Party of the *Dictionary of Biography* and is researching women's history in early twentieth century New Zealand.

The Portrait Jane Vial

The painter of Marjory Nicholls' portrait was Mary Elizabeth Tripe, née Richardson (1867-1939), who specialised in portraiture. This genre of painting, with its system of commission, was traditionally a male preserve and was much coveted by artists. It reached its height of popularity in New Zealand during the 1920s and 30s. From about 1900 until her death in 1939, Tripe attained the distinction of being not only the leading portrait painter in Wellington, but also the artist commissioned to paint portraits of national figures such as Sir Robert Stout, Truby King and W.E. Sanders VC.

With fellow Christchurch artist Elizabeth Kelly, she shared a significant portion of the New Zealand portrait market and was one of several able woman portraitists working here. Unlike their counterparts in Europe and America, women art students in New Zealand were not excluded from life drawing tuition, where the essentials of portraiture, including anatomy, were taught. An important reason for this was the comparatively few male students attending art schools in New Zealand when these women trained in the late nineteenth century. Indeed Mary Elizabeth Tripe's career is an example of the success a woman artist could attain. She was one of the first students admitted to the Wellington School of Design, later renamed the Technical School, in 1886; she graduated in 1890 as Art Master, the first New Zealander to do so. This qualification entitled her to take charge of an art school, and from 1889 she was the Drawing Instructor, and later became Head of the Art Department, at the Technical School. She held this position until her marriage in 1900, when she set up her own art school based at her home in Selwyn Terrace. She ran this school until her death.

In addition to official commissions, Tripe painted several portraits of prominent women in Wellington's cultural circles¹. These included the sculptor Margaret Butler and socialite Alison Kirkcaldie (both in the National Art Gallery collection), the painter and actress Sybil Johnson, and several portraits of her former art teacher Dorothy Kate Richmond (all whereabouts unknown). It is likely that Tripe and Nicholls would have met each other, as they were both involved with groups such as the Academy of Fine Arts, and Tripe at one time painted a portrait of Marjory Nicholls' father.

Since the portrait of Marjory Nicholls had to be painted posthumously, Tripe was supplied with a photo-portrait by photographer Mary Elizabeth Greenwood (1873-1961).² Greenwood ran her own photography studio in Woodward Street, Wellington, from about 1900. She exhibited at both the 1906 International Exhibition in Christchurch and the 1925-6 South Seas Exhibition in Dunedin. At the latter she was awarded the first order of merit for her portraits.

Typically, Greenwood's studio portraits were photographed in soft artificial light and were taken from a low viewpoint. In the painting Tripe also adopted a low viewpoint and obviously drew from the photograph for the facial features. But the composition of women at tables laid with flowers in a domestic setting was one Tripe was using frequently at this time. The mannered pose, and especially the elongated fingers, are characteristic of her portraits of women. A former model reports that Tripe substituted the hands of her model, which better resembled the mannered ideal, for those of her sitter.³ The inclusion of books on the table can be seen as an allusion to Nicholls' literary success, and seem appropriate in a portrait of a former student which was destined to hang at the University. A contemporary reviewer admired the portrait for its 'striking likeness of a fanciful personality... Mrs Tripe succeeds with a touch of brilliance in surmounting the vast difficulties of posthumous portraiture, and presents with rich harmony of line and colour a work which will claim admiration and attention.'⁴

A Portrait of Marjory Nicholls

Notes

- 1 See New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts catalogues, 1900-1939.
- 2 Information supplied by Miss Margaret Nicholls, niece of Marjory Nicholls. This photograph was most likely the same as the one credited to Greenwood which illustrated Marjory Nicholls' obituary — *Evening Post* 2 October 1930.
- 3 Mrs Phyllis Robertson (née Leighton) in conversation with the writer / June 1989. Mrs Robertson modelled for Tripe from late 1931, just after she painted the Nicholls portrait, until about 1936. Mrs Robertson, who is endowed with long slender fingers, recalls Tripe substituting her hands for those of Mrs Falla in the portrait of Mrs Falla now in the National Art Gallery collection.
- 4 Unsourced, undated newspaper clipping in Miss Margaret Nicholls' possession.

Jane Vial is a research officer at the National Art Gallery, Wellington.

Between the Capitalist Rock and the Patriarchal Hard Place

A Review Essay

*Public & Private Worlds: Women in
Contemporary New Zealand*

Edited by Shelagh Cox

Allen & Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, 1987

Linda Hill

This excellent anthology draws together the current work and thinking of ten New Zealand feminists on a range of subjects. Each of the chapters is itself a substantial and interesting essay, providing depth of understanding of the particular situation of groups of women in New Zealand society. The introductory chapter by Shelagh Cox and Bev James aims to give a theoretical background by which the works may be considered as a whole, both criticising and drawing on the concept of the public

world as the male sphere and the private world of the home as the female sphere.

The range of the contributions is broad. Rosemary Novitz provides a comprehensive and detailed study of New Zealand women's past and current situation in paid and unpaid work. Bev James's research on women in the single industry town of Kawerau illustrates very clearly the way the male public world impinges on the women who are excluded from it. Katherine Saville-Smith discusses the contradictions in the way the state supports solo mothers to keep them in the home, yet punishes them for their non-conformity to coupledom. Marilyn Waring writes of the active exclusion from the official economy and national and international statistics of women and their labour. Jan Robinson compares Victorian and present prostitution and its policing, to reveal the ideologies which constrain women. Cathy Benland discusses the exclusion of women, the mainstay of congregations, from the 'sacred places' of the churches. Anne Kirker traces the 1970s Women's Art Movement, by which women re-included themselves in and redefined the New Zealand art scene. Aorewa McLeod examines the way New Zealand women's fiction has explored and reflected women's private world, and discusses the innovation of two outstanding new writers. Rangimarie Rose Pere speaks of the traditional more integrated Maori tribal world and Maori spiritual concepts.

Through these essays the book offers an informative and stimulating view of New Zealand women. Yet I was disappointed that the introductory section did not go as far as it might have in providing an analytical framework for a better understanding of the material contributed.

'The Theoretical Background' discusses at length the origins of the concept of public and private worlds in western philosophy, and points out inadequacies in major criticisms of this concept by Frederik Engels and John Stuart Mill. Cox and James recognise that the relegation of men and women to separate spheres is an artificial, social arrangement which we accept as 'natural' under the hegemony of patriarchal ideology; the public and private worlds are social constructs. However, their background chapter focuses largely on the philosophical concept of public and private worlds — that is, the ideology — rather than the actual gender-specific processes and social structures experienced by women. The chapter provides more of an ideological than a theoretical background and does not provide a re-examination and re-analysis of this patriarchal ideology which might better equip us to rethink the factual material contained in the essays on New Zealand women's lives.

Cox and James say they are wary of formulating theory which might help such analysis, for fear of 'establishing a premature orthodoxy'; yet

they themselves criticise cultural feminism for the very reason that 'a retreat into the private sphere can entail a retreat from rational thought'. Their fear seems unfounded, since little in feminism remains set in concrete for long. Our theory develops along with our political campaigns and our personal experience. Theories are analytical tools which may be set aside when they are no longer useful. But the rational thinking Cox and James recommend requires such tools and methods. Feminist thinking requires careful analysis of the social structures and processes which constrain women's lives, and of the gaps between women's reality and the ideology which Cox and James have examined. Only with such analysis, with the best tools currently available, can we understand our society and ourselves and choose the most effective strategies for change.

In wishing to avoid premature theorising, Cox and James skirt around such analysis, and consequently leave the reader to understand the essays largely within the framework of the patriarchal ideology which they have criticised. They have offered no alternative. They simply go on to identify four strategies to deal with the public and the private at a practical political level, and discuss these at some length. These political strategies, outlined below, can be seen to correspond roughly with Alison Jagger's liberal feminist, radical feminist, traditional marxist and socialist feminist categories of social theory.

1 **Allowing women to enter the public sphere.** What Charlotte Bunch has described as the 'add-women-and-stir' approach: a necessary but insufficient strategy.

2 **Rethinking and remaking the private sphere.** Giving status to qualities traditionally designated feminine, and to women's socially essential work in the home and in raising the next generation; uncovering our herstory; developing a 'women's culture'. Cox and James point out the dangers that Segal (1987) also warns of: a regressive drift, as current cultural feminism sees women's valued qualities as biologically rather than socially derived, and favours retreat to a private women's world. This appears to come full circle from early feminist rejection of biological determinism and the early feminist challenge to change the whole world, public and private.

3 **Abolition of the private sphere.** Based on recognition of capitalism's vested interest in women's free domestic labour, this is the traditional marxist solution, which draws women and women's unpaid domestic work into the cash economy, rather than expecting men to share responsibility in the private sphere. Soviet herstory tends to raise serious questions about the viability of this solution.

4 **Challenging the divisions between the public and the private.** This is the strategy Cox and James favour. 'The private and public cannot be separated in this matter. The private is in thrall to the public sphere.'

Cox and James have recognised the separation of 'public' and 'private', and the consequent normative allocation of men and women to these spheres, as a major part of the patriarchal ideology which controls women, restricts our lives and shapes our perceptions. Their assumption seems to be that, since the worlds are easily shown to be not as separate as the ideology would like to have us believe, they are not separate at all. The ideology is therefore wholly untrue.

However, the chapter's opening remarks draw on the writers' personal experience of separate working life and home life, with different, conflicting demands. The ideology of public and private is effective, and internalised by women, because it appears to correspond with the reality of our lives. Effective ideology consists not of lies, but of half truths: a subtly distorting explanation of reality. If the ideology can be shown, as feminists have shown it, not quite to fit our reality, more is to be learned by reanalysing the actual social circumstances which make up women's reality than from continuing to explore the ideology itself. It is the distorting effects of patriarchal ideology and the lack of a clear theoretical analysis which, as Cox and James point out, leads many women to fear feminism and equate a threat to the patriarchal family with a threat to warmth, love and intimate relations. The future of feminism depends on a fresh, clear and widespread understanding among women of what goes on, and why, in our public and private worlds: who wins, who loses, and the benefits to us of feminist change.

In their concluding paragraphs Cox and James suggest that the private sphere needs to be examined as rigorously as the public world has been, and that since their interaction is basic they should be considered together, so that the points of contradiction can be revealed. Although they seem to be referring principally to inconsistencies between 'public' and 'private' as defined by the ideology, these comments begin to point towards the available feminist theoretical work which I feel their discussion has omitted: the analysis of the concrete reality for women of public and private; the examination of the contradictions between the ideological concept and women's reality; and the replacement of the patriarchal ideological explanation of our social world with explanations developed from feminist theory.

Examining inconsistencies between the dominant ideology of 'women's place' in the world and women's actual experience is surely what feminism has been doing for the past fifteen years, and socialism

for much longer, in the case of the public world at least. Contradictions between ideology and reality have pointed the way for theorising. 'The personal is political' is the formula which has enabled women to extend their analysis of personal and painful experiences within the private world to feminist theories regarding the social systems, in particular marriage and the family, through which men as a group oppress and exploit women as a group: patriarchy. In the same way, marxist analysis of the public world has revealed a class-based social system of oppression and exploitation: capitalism.

In the late 1970s, the persistence of socialist feminists and male socialists in ignoring the valid concerns of most radical feminists and in subordinating genre oppression to class oppression led to a rejection of marxist ideas and methods by radical feminists. This resulted in an issue-based rather than analysis-based feminism, contributing to the cultural feminist directions which now concern Cox and James. More recently, however, socialist feminists have shaken the dead hand of their menfolk off their thinking and have been applying marxist materialist method to the analysis of patriarchy, with promising results. These ideas should be of interest to radical feminists who recognise that neither the comfort of women's culture nor training up individual men to acceptable standards has radically changed what is a fundamental social structure, unlikely to be overcome simply by reforming sexist attitudes or reclaiming our sexuality.

Socialist feminist theory is still very much in the course of development, and these ideas are part of an ongoing debate among feminist writers, some of whom may not fit easily into the category of 'socialist feminist'. Socialist feminism refers to the use of marxist method to provide feminist answers to feminist questions as well as marxist questions, and sees the analysis and overturn of the parallel systems of capitalism and patriarchy as being of equal priority. There is still some debate as to whether capitalism and patriarchy are in fact one social system; but generally speaking they are seen as two closely woven, reinforcing systems, whose nonetheless separate nature and origins can be best seen and studied in areas of contradiction and change.

From the socialist feminist perspective, the insights of radical feminism and methods of marxism can be used to reconceptualise our social world. The private and public worlds of patriarchal ideology are re-examined by analysing them in terms of the social relations affecting women under the twin oppressions of patriarchy and capitalism.

In taking women's subordination as its central concern, 'second wave' feminism has revealed what many earlier political theorists had rendered invisible as 'natural' or of only 'private' concern: male power

over women, exercised and reinforced through such 'private world' institutions as childrearing, housework, love, marriage and heterosexual practices. Feminism made public the private world and found a fundamental and seemingly universal oppression of women by men whose power, gained through control of women's reproduction and sexuality, enforced by violence and sexual abuse, flowed over to underpin the public world as well. This radical feminist view, while bearing a truth instantly recognisable to many women, has a universality and timelessness which does not adequately account for its origins, for changes over time, or for cultural and class differences among women.

Socialist feminist use of the marxist theory of historical materialism can, it is hoped, develop historically and culturally specific analyses of the position of particular groups of women studied. This can be done by analysing in each context the different social relations which apply and under which the women are oppressed, and considering the way in which gender, class and race oppressions cut across or reinforce each other. An analysis which more closely fits the lives of a wider range of women will, it is hoped, enable them to see the relevance to them of feminist goals.

Socialist feminism shares the general marxist view of humanity as creating its social world through work, but rejects the narrow male 'economistic' view of work as comprising only profit producing work in the cash economy. Women's work is paid, unpaid, low paid, productive, unproductive, reproductive, material, cultural, psychological — and of course it is never done. Because of women's subordination to men, women are marginal in the cash economy, but central to the political economy of the family.

In materialist terms, woman's work in the traditional (and even the trendy) nuclear family can be seen as a division of labour under unequal social relations, where the benefit of the woman's housework, childcare, ego support and various other services accrue to the man in return for basic subsistence. These unequal traditional social relations may be held in place by occasional domestic violence, by the ideological conventions of femininity and motherhood, or simply by financial necessity, given women's disadvantaged position in the public (capitalist) world which utilises and helps perpetrate the gender inequality originating in the patriarchal family.

A wider understanding of work and of the economy to take in all socially beneficial activity enables analysis of the private world to explain more than just the indirect benefits to capitalism of women's unpaid housework. It can go beyond earlier radical feminist focuses on male control of production, sexuality and personal power to look at the

direct economic and non-economic benefits to men of both personal services and what would be 'work' if it were done in the paid economy.

The private and public worlds can be reassessed and the exploitation and oppression of women re-analysed under private and public modes of production, with their separate but interrelated social relations and their sometimes conflicting, sometimes reinforcing interest. Again, marxism is drawn on to look not just at what women do, but at the social relations between women and men, and between women and capital. The narrow traditional marxist question of the appropriation of surplus value defined in money terms becomes the simpler, yet wider question: who benefits? Not who consumes — it may be children or old people or the community — but who benefits from women's work, and from the fact that it is always women who perform it, so that in the public sphere 'women's work' earns 78% of the average male wage. This question applied to women's activities reveals one or both, in different ways, of two beneficiaries: men in general, and a particular class of (very largely) men. Some benefits will be direct, acquired through direct exploitation. Other benefits will be indirect and perhaps smaller — such as maintenance of advantageous position and solidarity in the continuance of a social system.

The same question applied to women of varying race or culture may reveal different direct and indirect beneficiaries. But by separating out activities and considering the social relations involved in each in terms of gender, class and race, it may well be shown that in a particular situation the advantages under one are outweighed by the disadvantages of being divided and ruled under another.

While the overall theoretical understanding gained will be much more complex, it is likely to fit our individual experiences between and be consequently more convincing to a wider range of women. By giving a clearer understanding of all that is going on in a complex social world, it will enable much more effective strategising for change.

Such an understanding of parallel modes of production and social relations can throw a different light on some of the changes we have experienced in New Zealand over the past fifteen years. Consider, for example, in terms of each system's interests the following: women seeking non-traditional jobs; women seeking positions of power within the system; women as a cheap, temporary workforce and Pacific Islander immigration; the two-income family and consumer durables; the two-income family and falling real wages; and the material dealt with in the contributing essays to *Public & Private Worlds*. In each case, which system stands to benefit, where will opposition come from, what shifts and changes will result in which system from feminist pressure?

How should we assess our gains and plan our next moves in relation to each of the interlocking social systems which oppress us?

What I have just outlined is not so much theory as strategy for theorising, and the last word, even on that, is by no means in. But these ideas are in public feminist debate; and it is important to use what theoretical tools we so far have, and apply them as best we can to what factual material we can gather on New Zealand women's situations. Theorising, fact gathering, strategising and political action are all threads in the web which must expand, in different directions but together, as we grow. We may have to risk a few I-told-you-sos and leave the finer adjustments and repairs until after we have caught a few more small successes.

References

- Delphy, C. 1984. *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*. Hutchinson.
- Eisenstein, Z. 1979. 'Developing a theory of capitalist patriarchy and socialist feminism'. In *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*. Monthly Review Press.
- Hartmann, H. 1981. 'The unhappy marriage of marxism and feminism: towards a more progressive union'. In Sargent (ed.), *Women and Revolution: A discussion of the unhappy marriage of marxism and feminism*. Southend Press.
- Jagger, A. 1983. *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Rowan and Allenheld.
- Segal, L. 1987. *Is the Future Female? Troubled thoughts on contemporary feminism*. Virago.

Linda Hill is a socialist feminist from Auckland, currently working on a master's degree in sociology at the University of Canterbury.

***Feminism and Democracy:
Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain,
1900-1918***

Sandra Stanley Holton

Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1896

Reviewed by Barbara Brookes

This book is not a guide for the uninitiated into the activities of the British women's suffrage movement. Rather it is a meticulously researched and finely argued analysis of that movement and its role in the realignment of party politics in Britain in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Sandra Stanley Holton challenges the assumption of some feminist historians about the remoteness of politics from women's everyday lives and her book makes clear the inseparability of feminists' lived experience from their political action. Agitation for women's suffrage was, she claims, 'the well-reasoned response of a wide variety of women to the connections they perceived between the problems and concerns of their everyday lives and the broader social and political issues of their society'. (p.3)

The book demonstrates the difficulty of making a clear distinction between the Constitutionalists (Suffragists) and the Militants (Suffragettes) as many women supported both groups. It also makes clear the shifting political stances of both groups in response to the changing political scene. While it is possible to admire the daring and dangerous exploits of some of the militants, the jingoistic stance taken by the Women's Social and Political Union on the outbreak of World War I contrasts sharply with the more measured response of the Constitutionalists. The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies was kept

intact throughout the war by its relief work organisation and it continued to maintain a watch over the social, industrial and economic concerns of women.

Holton's most insightful contribution comes in her teasing out of the relationships between the suffrage and the labour movements and the attempt by 'democratic suffragists' to lessen the boundaries of class by a commitment to full adult suffrage. Here she is sensitive to links forged by a younger generation of women in the National Union with the fledgling Labour Party.

Although *Feminism and Democracy* will appeal most to historians wishing to deepen their understanding of both the women's movement and British Party politics at a time of crucial realignments, it also holds much of interest to feminists who wish to know how their foremothers formulated political strategy and how, when disagreements surfaced, the disputes were resolved.

Notes and Queries

Sandra Wallace is working on a PhD on 'Women in Central Government 1919-59'. As well as the women Members of Parliament of the period, she is particularly interested in those women who offered themselves for selection, or stood as candidates, but were not successful. She would like any relevant information any reader may have. Her address is:

Sandra Wallace
53 Duncan Terrace
Kilbirnie
Wellington 3.

Refractory Girl:

A Feminist Journal

Refractory Girl publishes material on all matters of concern to women. Recent issues have included articles on women in the bureaucracy, feminist theory, sexual harassment, women and prisons, protective legislation, women's health centres. Plus reviews of academic and popular texts and fiction and poetry.

Forthcoming Issues: RG No. 31 — EEO, pay equity, sexual harassment, chamberlain case, social security, sole parents.

RG No. 32 — from Western Australia.

RG 33 — Tax, Industry Restructuring, National health policy, refugee women.

RG welcomes contributions. Please forward two typed copies with S.A.E. to address below.

Subscriptions:

Individuals \$20 for four issues. Institutions \$30 for four issues. (Overseas mailings add \$8.) Back copies available.

Refractory Girl

P.O. Box 696, Petersham, NSW 2049

Special Offer

Back copies of the *Women's Studies Journal* still available — but be quick! Prices include postage.

- Vol 2 No 1 — Race, Religion, Reformers
- Vol 2 No 2 — Scouting, Socialism, Separatism
- Vol 3 No 1 — Distort, Demystify, Domesticate
- Vol 3 No 2 — Pregnancy, Policy-making,
Pre-school
- Bargain price: \$10 for all four!
-

- Vol 4 No 1 — Spirituality, Schooling, Scribes
- Vol 4 No 2 — Katherine Mansfield
- \$20 for the set

Special Special: \$25 for Vols 2, 3, 4!

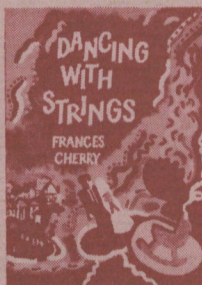
Send name, address and cheque with order to:

Journal Back Copies. WSA,
PO Box 5067, Auckland



NEW WOMEN'S PRESS

A selection of 1989 titles



DANCING WITH STRINGS

Frances Cherry

First novel — 'an important contribution to our literature.' *Heather Roberts*

ONE PLAIN ONE PURL

Stories of a Girlhood

Carin Svensson

Beautifully observed . . . near horizons of childhood.

NEW WOMEN'S PRESS FICTION



WEDNESDAY'S CHILDREN

Robin Hyde

A fantasy, set in 1930s Auckland, exploring women's identity and potential.

NEW WOMEN'S CLASSICS

PREMENSTRUAL SYNDROME

Your Options

Helen Duckworth

Wide range of possible self-help treatments and approaches.

NO BODY'S PERFECT

Jasbindar Singh

& Pat Rosier

Self help for food and body image problems.

NEW WOMEN'S PRESS HANDBOOK SERIES

ORDER NOW FROM

The Women's Bookshop, 228 Dominion Rd, Auckland. Ph 09-607-162

. . . DANCING WITH STRINGS \$19.95 p + p free

. . . ONE PLAIN ONE PURL \$16.95

. . . WEDNESDAY'S CHILDREN \$21.95

. . . PREMENSTRUAL SYNDROME \$14.95

. . . NO BODY'S PERFECT \$15.95

. . . . TOTAL

☐ Enclosed cheque ☐ Bankcard ☐ Visa ☐ Amex ☐ Diners

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

..... expiry date

..... signature