



Working Women's Information Service

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"THE EFFECTS OF RAZOR GANG PROPOSALS ON WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT"

In our last bulletin we showed a rather depressing picture of women's advance towards equal pay. Since then the Federal Government has announced an economic policy which is likely to put a damper on women's employment prospects for years.

The Review of Government Functions (more commonly known as the Razor Gang Report) makes it clear that the Government intends to curtail drastically its financial involvement in services to the community by selling anything which is profitable to private enterprise and handing other services over to the states.

The introduction to the Review says clearly: *"Its immediate aims are to streamline and fine down government operations."*(1) The government has not spelt out how the recommendations of the Review Committee will be implemented. Nor has it detailed the services which will be lost to the community or how many jobs will disappear. The exact effects of the recommendations and of the wider economic directions being followed by the government will not be known until specific reviews announced in the report have been completed and the states have announced how they intend to cope with their new responsibilities. However the Review does give an indication of the government's overall intentions when it states:

"strong and efficient government must not grow into big and bureaucratic government . . . Fortunately Australia's experience of big government has been comparatively slight. We had a taste of it between 1972 and 1975 . . . Since the 1975 elections the government has been making an historic turnaround".(2)

The Government is obviously saying that it intends to return the involvement of government in the economy to pre-Labor government levels.

The Review of Commonwealth Functions cannot be looked at in isolation. It is clearly not the end of the matter, for the Prime Minister said, when presenting the Review:

"We have worked for a turnaround. And I realize that the Review of Commonwealth Functions will contribute to a momentum that is building up in support of that turnaround."(3)

Neither is the Review the beginning. The Fraser Government has been dismantling community services established by the Labor Government ever since it assumed office in 1975. This review is simply the most comprehensive document produced by the present government indicating its general direction and immediate plans. The implementation of these plans is likely to have a disastrous effect on female employment and employment opportunities if allowed to continue unchecked.

The Government has stated that it will turn around the direction and initiatives of the Labor Government. We can therefore assume that it wishes to return to the situation inherited by the Whitlam Government in 1975.

GROWTH IN WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

In the last nine years the number of employed women in Australia has grown by 24 per cent. In May 1971 there were 1,819,400 employed women and by May 1980 that figure had risen to 2,256,600.

We have already seen large cuts in spending on education and health, staff ceilings placed on government departments and a reduction in the financial allocations to various services such as child care. The two areas most likely to be affected by the latest decisions will be Community Services and government departments.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

The industry group which employs the most women is Community Services. This is also the area which has shown the most job growth during the last nine years. It includes all health services, education, fire brigade, libraries and social services. In 1971 Community Services provided 20 per cent of all jobs for women and by 1981 it provided 29 per cent. Most jobs in this industry are affected, either directly or indirectly, by government expenditure. The present government's economic policy is directed towards trimming its expenditure in this area and we must therefore expect a significant retraction of women's employment to result.

Table I shows that 365,400 women were employed in community services in June 1971 and by 1976 the number had risen to 515,400. Many of the Labor Government initiatives which contributed to this growth were not fully implemented until after 1976 and the growth trend has continued despite the current government's gradual tightening of financial assistance. By April 1981 615,000 women were employed in community services.⁽⁵⁾ However the government has now reached a point where it is ready to carry out the intention it has always had: to trim those services back to pre-Labor government levels. If it is successful in doing this nearly 250,000 women's jobs will disappear in this area alone. The Government has now passed legislation which will enable many services to be dismantled within the next twelve months.

Two of the major community services are Health and Education.

HEALTH

Between 1971 and 1976⁽⁶⁾ 46,028 new jobs were created for women in hospitals and another 14,978 in other areas of health.⁽⁷⁾ When cuts in staff are made they usually start at the bottom of the hierarchy. In the health area the jobs most likely to be affected are occupied by women. They include cleaners, kitchen hands, laundry staff, nursing aides, typists and junior nurses. Already several large hospitals have tried to rationalize and we can expect that further funding cuts will lead to more of the same. The Western Australian Government has already refused to cover costs to hospitals of a wage increase granted to nurses by the Western Australian Industrial Commission, which must result sooner or later in a decrease in nursing staff.

There will also be a decrease in the paid medical services provided by the government and cuts to the funding of services provided through other community structures will almost certainly mean a loss of both professional and non-professional jobs for women. The government has shown strong adversity to health and welfare services which require direct contact with the public. Most of these services - for instance the National Acoustic Laboratories - are to be transferred to the private sector which, in order to make the services profitable, will either reduce staff levels or increase the cost of the services. If they choose the latter method it will almost certainly result in less use of the services with a consequent further reduction of staff.

Table I: CIVILIAN EMPLOYEES IN SELECTED INDUSTRIES - FEMALES

	June 1971	June 1976	Increase 1971-76	June 1979	Increase 1976-79	Increase 1971-79
Communications	26,200	29,400	3,200	30,200	800	4,000
Public Admin. & Defence	58,600	89,500	30,900	98,500	9,000	39,900
Community Services:	<u>365,400</u>	<u>515,400</u>	150,000	<u>564,600</u>	49,200	199,200
Health	193,200	270,900		296,300		
Education	133,900	195,100		217,700		
Welfare	18,900	21,500		19,600		
Other	19,400	27,800		31,000		
	450,200	634,300	184,100	693,300	59,000	243,100

Source: ABS Civilian Employees Australia, June 1966 to June 1979. Cat.No. 6214.0.

EDUCATION

In the area of education 26,645 jobs were created for women between 1971 and 1976. Indications are that many of these will go.

The New South Wales Minister for Education has already announced that the Razor Gang cuts will mean a loss of 3,000 teachers and 3,000 ancillary staff and we can expect the same in other states.

Already cuts in supplementary grant funding have severely affected the number of teacher aides employed and staff ceilings have restricted any growth in the number of teachers.

TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

The policies regarding tertiary institutions will also mean a decrease in women's employment. The lecturers and tutors who will lose their jobs as a result of amalgamations will be those working on contracts which will not be renewed on expiration. A large proportion of those on contract are women. The 'safe' tenured jobs with a particular college or university are mostly held by men. The amalgamation of colleges of advanced education will also decrease the number of support staff. The report says:

"The consolidation of institutions is to result in a genuine amalgamation with one governing body and a real saving of resources." (9)

Typists, clerical assistants, technical assistants, clerical staff, social workers, student advisers etc. must all come under review to accommodate these instructions. Most of these are women.

The abolition of the Curriculum Development Centre, the scaling down of the Schools Commission, international education activities and research activities also forecast job losses for women.



Many of the employees in the paramedical area are women. They include pathologists, speech therapists, audio technicians and occupational therapists.

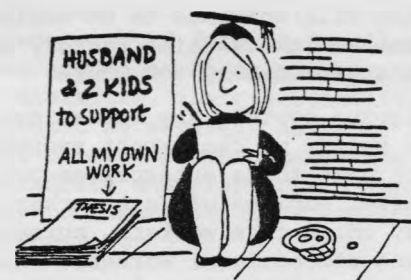
Other services such as the school dental scheme and pathology laboratories will be handed over to the states. The states have limited financial resources and there is no indication that the Federal Government will adequately compensate them for their increased responsibilities. Therefore all services handed over to the states are in jeopardy of reduction, elimination or further transfer to the private sector. Women employed by the pathology laboratories as technical assistants stand to lose their jobs because the states tend to employ only qualified professionals. All of the nonprofessional jobs in the health area will be heavily hit and most of these are held by women.

The Government's report is explicit when it says:

"Staffing levels in areas dealing with environmental health, toxicology, food standards, preventative medicine, nutrition and epidemiology are to be rationalized." (8)

Social workers, who are predominantly female, will be critically affected. It is feared that the number employed by government could be halved in the next few years.

Another group which will be particularly badly affected are psychologists. Their numbers will be cut as vocational counselling and therapy groups are reduced. This will even affect the Department of Foreign Affairs which employs a number of psychologists - many of them women.



PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

During the seventies another major growth area of employment for women was the public service. In 1971 there were only 68,935 women employed in the industry category of Public Administration and Defence. By 1980 the number had risen to 100,600. The Australian Public Service currently employs 45,925 women of whom 30,986 are in the fourth division.

The Review has promised a staff reduction in government departments in the order of 16,000 to 17,000 and has warned that there may be some retrenchments. The Australian Public Service has already been reduced by a two-year freeze on all new positions and promotions. The latest announcements will have a profound effect on the employment of women by the government - particularly in the fourth division which has already been severely affected by staff ceilings. This division covers typists, stenographers, clerical assistants, canteen staff etc.

The Victorian Minister for Employment and Training has also announced that some government services will be rationalized and some handed over to private enterprise.

Cost rationalization will lead to an acceleration in the introduction of technological equipment which will lead, in turn, to a further decrease in the number of women employed as typists and clerical assistants.

As the amalgamation of educational institutions will deplete the numbers of women employed as typists and clerical support staff by those institutions, so will amalgamation of administrative offices affect women employed in government departments. For example, we can expect the amalgamation of the TAB, the Liquor Licensing Board and the Poker Machine Licensing Board to bring about a reduction in support staff such as typists, receptionists and secretaries.

RESEARCH

One of the worst blows to women's employment likely to result from the Razor Gang cuts is the restriction of money available for research. This is one of the few areas of comparatively well-paid and interesting jobs in which women are well represented. Data collection by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Commonwealth Employment Service and other government departments

has already been restricted and many research projects undertaken by universities and other bodies will have to be abandoned. The latter bodies employ a large proportion of women - almost all on a contract basis. There will be no alternative employment for them and the money invested by the government in the university courses essential to equip them for the work they have been doing will be wasted.

TRANSFERS TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Many of the enterprises which are to be offered for sale to the private sector employ large numbers of women and no guarantees are being sought from the new owners that they will continue to be employed. The Commonwealth Clothing Factory alone employs approximately 500 women.

If migrant hostels are handed over to the private sector we can expect reductions in staff to make these enterprises profitable. Each hostel employs welfare workers, interpreters, child care workers, nurses and youth and recreational workers. Almost all are women and it is hard to imagine that the services would be maintained by private management seeking to make a profit from low-cost accommodation.



DETERIORATION OF CONDITIONS

The contracting out of several areas of government responsibility to the private sector and the sale of government enterprises also foreshadow a decline in equal opportunities for women. In the public sector women have fared far better than in the private sector. The Government employs a greater percentage of professional women than the private sector - particularly in the area of computer science, much of which will be transferred out to the private sector.

Employment conditions generally are of a higher standard in government bodies than in private firms - particularly for lower-paid workers such as cleaners and catering staff, most of whom are women. No government department tries to deny its employees such rights as maternity leave, holiday pay loadings, sick pay etc. whereas the private sector is notorious for the poor pay and conditions accorded to lower-category workers, many of whom are employed on a casual basis with no security whatsoever.

COMMUNICATIONS

"In the area of telecommunications a technological explosion is now occurring and exciting opportunities for private activity to introduce diversity and innovation are expanding rapidly."(11)

So says the Review Committee's report. It goes on to explain that Telecom, which employs 19,431 women, can no longer have a monopoly on this area and that some of its services will be handed over to the private sector. As yet it is not clear just how this will be accomplished or to what extent services will become privately owned but we cannot expect that the transfer of services will be beneficial to women's employment.

* * *

Our WIS No. 80/2 (Technological Change and Women's Job Displacement) showed that the 'technological explosion' in the private sector had been implemented without any regard for the people whose jobs had been displaced. In fact the introduction of new technology tends to displace women workers at a greater rate than men and to increase the sex segregation of the workforce by relegating women to the mundane tasks of feeding the technology whilst it provides work for men in analysis and maintenance. There is no reason to expect that these trends will not continue since the report offers no promise of safeguards against job displacement through the technological explosion which it heralds in the private sector.

DECLINE IN OPPORTUNITIES

Staff reductions in community services and government departments not only affect those whose jobs are actually lost but will also restrict accessibility of employment. Women will suffer from this general loss of accessibility and will also suffer through the withdrawal of services which have helped them to enter the workforce.

The introduction of fees for second degrees will discriminate against those whose only qualifications are for jobs which are fast disappearing. Women form a large part of this group because discrimination in education has steered them away from expanding areas such as science and technology. Any woman wanting to redress this imbalance by retraining will find herself severely handicapped by the introduction of fees and the restricted eligibility for adult secondary allowances.

The introduction of fees for second courses is likely to be just the beginning of more general fee introduction. A survey conducted by Gwynnyth Evans at Monash University found that 46 per cent of men and 58 per cent of women would defer or not re-enrol if fees were introduced. Families are less inclined to find fees for daughters than for sons and thus women would fare less well than men under a loan scheme. Their ability to repay loans and, therefore, their eligibility to receive them would be severely hampered as they could expect a lower postgraduate wage and higher postgraduate unemployment. Women are also likely to interrupt their employment for child-bearing.

The proposed amalgamation of tertiary colleges - which are mostly teacher-training colleges - will inevitably result in a decline in the number of places available. Women

will be particularly badly hit because teaching is the largest female-employing profession. At present 70 per cent of trainee teachers are women.

Cuts in the CES will also fall more heavily on women. In March of this year, for the first time - at least in recent years - women outnumbered men in actual numbers of unemployed. Some of the services which will be disbanded are of special use to women. Far more women than men seek temporary work and the discontinuance of Templine, which provided help in finding temporary jobs, will be a great loss to them. The CES Professional Service too was of benefit to women graduates who lack the resources of the 'old boy' network. The demise of the Occupational Information Service will also disadvantage women who are less likely than men to have a clear perspective of their talents and who are also less likely to have the kind of training which leads directly into one specific employment area.

Many of the changes to translation services and migrant English teaching will disadvantage migrant women wishing to find employment. If the education allowances paid to migrant English students are transferred to the care of the Department of Social Security they will, presumably, become means-tested. This will prohibit many married migrant women from participating in the courses for they will be excluded by a husband's wage which, however, will not be sufficient to enable them to pursue the course.

As we said before, if the migrant hostels are sold to private enterprise the chances of services such as child care and English classes being maintained are slight. The likelihood of migrant women obtaining employment will then be greatly decreased. Already they suffer enormous disadvantages on the job market because of their lack of English language skills. The new government proposals can only worsen the situation.

The deregulation of shopping hours in the ACT sets a precedent for shops all over Australia. Deregulated shopping hours encourage employers to exploit part-time casual labour and to whittle away the job conditions won by the shop assistants' union. There are no guarantees accompanying the deregulation of hours that employees in shops will have any job security or compensation for working odd hours. We can only assume the worst.

It is clear that the policies laid down by the Commonwealth Review of Government Functions, if implemented, will deal a mighty blow to women's employment prospects.

Women's employment has increased dramatically in the last 15 years and this has largely been the result of government involvement.

It is therefore of the utmost importance that women, through their unions, make it clear to the government that they are not prepared to accept these cuts.

REFERENCES

- (1) Ministerial Statement. Review of Commonwealth Functions. AGPS. Canberra. 1981. p.1.
- (2) *Ibid*, p.3.
- (3) *Ibid*, p.5.
- (4) Australian Bureau of Statistics. The Labour Force, Australia. Cat. Nos. 6203.0 and 6204.0.
- (5) ABS. The Labour Force, Australia. May 1980. Cat. No. 6203.0
- (6) Figures for these years were used because the census taken in each year provided a fine breakdown of industry groups which is not available in other years. The 1981 census figures will not be available until 1982. However 1971 and 1976 - the years of census - serve this subject very well for they represent the situation immediately before and after the Labor government's term of office.
- (7) ABS. Census by Industry. 1971 & 1976.
- (8) *Op. cit.* Ministerial Statement, p.21.
- (9) *Ibid*, p.13.
- (10) Australian Public Service Board. Annual Report. 1980.
- (11) *Op. cit.* Ministerial Statement, p.8.
- (12) ACTU Working Women's Centre. Working Women's Information Service Bulletin No. 80/2: Technology & Employment - Part I: Women's Job Displacement. Melbourne. 1980.