

**SUBMISSION TO PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION ON THE INQUIRY
INTO MATERNITY. PATERNITY AND PARENTAL LEAVE from
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF TASMANIA INC.**

NCWT appreciated the opportunity to appear before the Productivity Commissioners during the Hobart hearings, and indicate that much of the material in that presentation will be included in the following written submission.

National Council of Women of Tasmania Inc. was established in 1899 and has as a core objective the welfare of women and families. (see attached brochure). It consists of affiliated organisations and associate members and thus draws on a wide range of opinions on issues. The NCWT members who met to consider the Productivity Paper are all mothers who have been in the paid workforce both before and after the births of their children. It is considered that their experiences and professional expertise constitute a sound basis for a considered response.

PROPOSALS.

- 1. Maternity Payment available to all mothers, whether in the paid or unpaid) workforce based on the minimum wage for a period of SIX months to be paid from Federal Government funds. (On the grounds of equity and social inclusion all mothers should be recognized.*
- 2. A period of unpaid leave up to three years to be available to all mothers attracting a payment equal to the amount paid by the Federal Government to fund a child care place. (This is the situation in Norway where the cost of a child care place is approximately \$6000 American dollars - information supplied by Janne Matlary, former minister in the Norwegian Parliament and author of "For a New Feminism ".*
- 3. Paternity Leave/Parental leave for a period of two weeks each. (Paternity leave to be taken around about the time of the birth of the baby and parental leave when appropriate). These costs to be met by the Federal government and again be paid with minimum wage as the basis.*
- 3. If an employer wishes to pay over and above the government subsidised Payment that is a matter for negotiation.*

- 4. Costs for the above either to met by a "Maternity Fund" similar to the Funds already established OR by a slight increase in the Medicare levy and quarantined for that purpose.*
- 5. The above provisions should be available but it would be the free choice of each mother/father/family to avail themselves of the full benefits or part thereof.*

NCWT ACCEPTS THAT THE COST OF THE ABOVE PROPOSALS WOULD BE HIGH BUT AS THE MAJORITY OF MATERNITY LEAVE PAYMENTS ARE ALREADY TAKEN FROM TAX PAYERS MONEY AT FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL THEN THE EXTENSION FROM PAYING ABOUT ONE THIRD OF THE PRESENT MATERNITY LEAVE PAYMENTS WOULD BE SIGNIFICANTLY LESS AS THEY ARE BASED ON CURRENT SALARIES AS WE PROPOSE THAT THE MINIMUM WAGE SHOULD BE THE BASIS.

WE ALSO PROPOSE THAT THE BABY BONUS AND A PROPORTION OF FAMILY TAX B BE INCORPORATED IN THE NEW PAYMENT.

THE PAYMENT FOR THE PERIOD OF LEAVE IN THE SECOND PROPOSAL SHOULD BE COST NEUTRAL - AND MAY EVEN SAVE MONEY AS THE GOVERNMENT WOULD **BE SPARED THE HIGH COST** OF BUILDING, FURNISHING, MAINTAINING THE FLAGGED INCREASE IN CHILD CARE CENTRES.

IN countries where PROPOSAL 2 was instituted, the majority of mothers opted for looking after their own children - a great result for the children, the mothers and of course the community.

As indicated at the Hobart hearings, NCWT wishes to express serious misgivings about the paper issued by the Productivity Commission, even acknowledging that the terms of reference were set down by the Federal Government.

- 1. NCWT assumed that the Productivity Commission would address the TOTAL productivity of the nation - not just the section easily measured. No attempt was made to include the economic value of unpaid labour - despite the analysis done by Professor Duncan Ironmonger with his estimate that 45% of a nation's productivity was performed in the "non-paid" sector. One could refer to the Satellite Accounts in Canada and the work done in Germany.**

The assumption that only those in the paid workforce perform work is impertinent and discriminatory to say the least - the paper even referred to those at home as "NON-WORKING" (p.9).

- 2. Little or no attention is given to child development except for breast feeding and even then two reference sources for that are from the "Economic Journal". WHO and ILO are quoted in one place as suggesting a minimum of four months as suitable and in another place WHO suggests 6 months.**
- 3. The thrust of the paper is to imply and express an under-valuing of of a mother's work or work done in the home. Mothering is not seen as a stand-alone career. There is specific reference to the need to establish "attachment" to the market place but total failure to suggest the need for "attachment" for the essential and unique job of mothering.**

WE INTEND THAT MOTHER/FATHER SHOULD BE IMPLIED WHENEVER MOTHER IS WRITTEN.

NEED FOR EARLY BONDING AND NURTURING. Information which NCWT has obtained supports its proposal for six months Maternity Payment and the availability of up to three years unpaid leave if women were in paid employment prior to the birth of the baby.

We will concentrate only on the needs of baby and mother as the arithmetic is easily worked out should the principle be accepted.

The hard wiring of a baby's brain in the first two years is critical. How are we to ensure that children are raised to be interested in life, in others and happy. Research is showing very clearly that empathy is learned. Each new baby learns to empathise very strongly with the emotional field around it. It actually steps into the shoes of its mother, or principle carer, and identifies with the emotions of that person, but particularly the birth mother, whom it has listened to before it was born, and whose voice it recognises. If she is anxious, the baby will be anxious, if she is depressed she will be depressed, if she is angry, her baby will be an angry baby. And the effect lasts. The way a mother creates empathy, the way she looks at her baby, the way she smells, talks, touches her baby are so important. What happens in the first year is critical to the way the baby feels about everyone, and life, thereafter.

Research has shown that the baby will mirror with its face, the emotions it sees on its mother's face. If the mother mirrors back what she sees, it validates what the baby is feeling and builds feelings of communication, of being understood, of bonding.

There are beautiful stories around the fact that the first face a baby sees is that of its mother. If we are to create huge child-care centres as indicated, then the baby had better have a long, hard look at its mother since that face will be replaced by a rapid succession of the faces of child care workers!

It has been stated that children are more resilient if they have been in child care, however, theories of resilience building have to be balanced against all the other ill effects e.g. loss of bonding, loss of language training, failure to learn empathy, sound handling of emotions, etc.

It is noted that after they had studied the long-term, effects of full day care on many thousands of children, including failure in personal relationships as teenagers, the French, Israeli and some ex-Communist governments paid mothers to stay at home for the first three years of each child's life - now adopted in the Scandinavian countries.

Today, by giving priority to adults' quest for personal fulfilment, society has changed the whole experience of childhood. More children than ever before grow up in households without fathers, more are left in non-parental care at younger and younger ages. The changing experience of childhood has had an adverse effect on the ability of many young people to have trust in others, and even on their ability to have hope for the future. Anna Halpine a remarkable young activist who founded the World Youth Alliance in Europe eight years ago stated "Many young people I work with have experienced this loss of respect for the inviolable dignity of every member of the human family. Our own families are broken, our own relatives are lonely and many do not see a meaning in life" but she said that some are now working for the emergence of a change. Her generation she said has "experienced the ideologies of the second half of the 20th century put into legislation - and we are not happy with them".

It seems as though some of the social engineering trialed in Europe and found wanting could be repeated in Australia.

This generation is the first to have grown up with the personal computer - the first computers for homes, offices and schools were introduced by IBM in 1981 but as Michael Carr-Greg (well know Australia child psychologist) warns about the "virtual life" lived by some adolescents who are addicted to

the internet etc. and create a whole set of friends both real and imaginary through their computers. If bonding is denied a child at the beginning of its life then how much more vulnerable would such a child to losing touch with reality,

Janne Matlary warns against the impact on mothers of "double work". It was interesting to read of the research done by Associate Professor Tony LaMontagne from Melbourne University entitled "Job Strain" which examined the incidence of job-related depression. He said "there is a substantial under recognition and under compensation of job strainattributable depression. He claims that in a demanding job and that is not recognised then many women and to a lesser extent men become depressed. Women who can exercise more control of their working environment and partake in decision making (and receive high pay) are less likely to experience depression. However, the majority of both men and women are in jobs that attract do not attract high pay rates. These depressed women then come home to influence the moods and attitudes of their children with poor results all round. (Research released in early June 2008).

The desperate efforts of governments to get women back into the paid workforce may create mote social problems that it solves.

Governments would be better advised to look to the underemployed youth job market and call on men age 56 up *(many ol'these are out of work and find employment opportunities disappearing) - rather than raid nurseries to fill skill shortages.