From: Greg Byrne Sent: Thursday, 24 March 2005 1:12 PM To: Committee, FHS (REPS) Subject: Submission on balancing work and family

Balancing work and family

In writing a submission on balancing work and family I am tempted to become an economist and write a great dissertation. However being that I am not an economist I think it would be wiser for me to stick to desired outcomes and leave the economics to the economists.

I live in the suburb of Rowville which is one of the "nappy wash" suburbs with many young mothers and babies at the local shopping centre. Within a five hundred-metre radius of my home in Lambourne Avenue there are four childcare centres that I know about. But there is only one milk bar. So that in this era child care centres outstrip milk bars four to one.

The other thing is that I am semi retired and in our street during the working week there are few mothers at home during the week. In fact **Control of the second during** is deserted during the working week. In one bizarre incident I was stopped by the police as a potential burgular.

Both of those facts tell us much about family life in the 21st century. It's normal for mothers to work. That wasn't the case when I was a kid in the 1950s.

I grew up in Surrey Hills in the 1950s. Childcare centres as we now know them were unknown but there were plenty of milk bars in Surrey Hills and, during the working week, many mother were home with their families (if not at school).

My main friend was unusual in that both his parents always worked and he was responsible for his younger brother during the school holidays. There was the danger that these boys could get up to mischief during school holidays without supervision. That is a common pattern these days with neither parent at home for the school holidays.

Let us go fast forward now to my time in St Kilda 1976 - 1996. In 1986 there was a girl over the other side of Moodie Place who was about 22 of Greek origin. Her father brought a guy out from Greece to marry her. I told the mother that if I got married I would need about 600 dollars a week to provide for all my obligations. The mother laughed in my face as if I were an idiot.

But three weeks later her attitude had changed very greatly. Her confidence in the future of her daughter and son in law had been shaken by the massive mortgage repayments for a basic house in Clayton for the young couple. Her husband was probably Labour but not for much longer. He was angry at the predicament in which he found his daughter. A repayment of \$800 dollars per month was absurd in 1986 when incomes were much lower.

So that Effe, the daughter, had to continue working and being a mother. She worked in the city and dropped her daughters at her mother's place on the way to the city. That went on for many years. Michael (the husband) worked for the Melbourne City Council 38 hours week and 20 hours per week at night cleaning offices. Effe worked 38 hours and Michael 58 hours. That is a bit of a hard grind for anyone surely. How much of their income went out in taxes is anyone's guess but judging by articles on family taxation it would have been almost half.

I think that the foregoing shows that the situation in the 1950s was better for families. Technological change, investment and so on should have produced a situation in the 1970s where it was easier for families to survive on one income than in the 1950s and easier still in the 1990s.

And yet the various articles show that life is getting tougher for families and these families are smaller by the way. Large families were not uncommon in the 1950s but they are uncommon today.

Conclusions

The conclusions one draws from the foregoing depend upon one's point of view. Some would say that things are better now and that childcare centres are great for working mums and the fact that some need to work isn't necessarily a bad thing. Others might say that people want more things today such as expensive motor cars, holidays, swimming pools and so on and that childcare makes all these possible and that life is much richer.

However I do believe that any society which professes to respect all points of view and believes in diversity and so on could to do a lot more to accommodate those who believe in large families and full time mothers.

Taxation per person is about 12,000 dollars. Taxes take half the average family's income. A mortgage today is about 300 dollars per week and rising. How does anyone on a metal trades award provide for a family on one income? It's impossible and everyone knows it. The obvious response is to say that families need two pay packets and that is a fact of life and there is nothing anyone can do about it.

Such a response is sheer poppycock. It can be changed but not on the basis of massive spending on health, education and welfare.

Maybe the Australians are too stupid to realise that they are working their tails off to pay for political pork barrelling. Maybe they deserve all that they get. But they still have the right to vote this government out in a landslide and they don't have to be logical or consistent about it.

Finally at 63 years of age I can see that Australian democracy has failed Australians. Neither side of politics has the public interest at heart or the interest of ordinary Australians. Noblesse obligee is dead in Australia.

Many years ago Bill Hayden asked the late Sir William McMahon what politics was all about. Sir William said, "getting into office". Bill Hayden replied "that is a pretty poor attitude to politics". Doesn't that say it all? Politics is about "getting into office".

Recommendations

There is no doubt that Australia is drifting into a serious crisis in regard to it's treatment of families which has led to a decline in fertility and ageing of the population.

I believe that there is an urgent need to drastically improve the situation of large single income families with a view to increasing fertility and providing a young workforce for the future.

Greg Byrne Vic