

WOMEN AND ECONOMIC CRISES: THE 1930's DEPRESSION AND THE PRESENT CRISIS

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Today there is not sufficient employment for all workers; consequently, in order to avert mass risings and demonstrations, the more strongly organised sections must be pacified at the expense of those less able to defend their rights. Sex antagonisms are stimulated, and a flood of sentimental propaganda about women and the home is let loose to obscure the real issues and divide the workers. (Muriel Heagney, Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?, 1935)

In prosperous periods women's unemployment normally exceeds men's unemployment. Even in the post-war period of 'full employment' all women who wanted paid jobs could not find them, but women's unemployment was not regarded as an authentic social problem. In periods of high unemployment, however, negative attitudes toward women's paid work become more pronounced. Thus in the present crisis, and in the 1930's Depression, antagonism toward female employment implicitly assumes that women don't have the right to paid work, that female unemployment is not 'real' unemployment and that when work is short married women should devote themselves to household work and child care. This paper examines the impact of the 1930's Depression and the present crisis on women's paid work and suggests that, because of labour market segmentation based on sex, women workers will not simply be ejected from the labour market during a period of contraction. Some groups of women, black women and other working class women, may lose their jobs in economic crises. But an analysis which asserts that all women constitute a reserve labour force — an industrial reserve army — which can be moved in and out of the labour market as the needs of the labour market change¹ is too simple. Feminists are now trying to reformulate this simplified version of the Marxian thesis to explain women's employment and unemployment.²

THE DEPRESSION OF THE 1930's

(1) The nature of the crisis. The 1930's Depression was the worst economic contraction Australia has experienced so far this century. That the depression in Australia was especially severe — unemployment reached a peak of 30% in 1931-32 — was largely due to our imperial links with Britain. The 1920's was a period of optimism and a period of economic expansion, but women did not share equally with men in the economic growth of the twenties; for women, the 1920's were a prelude to the 1930's and in many ways the depression came early for women.

The number of women in paid employment expanded in the 1920's but this expansion did not represent a qualitative change in women's working habits. In the period 1921 to 1933 the labour force participation rate for women increased only from 24.4% to 25.1%.³ Moreover, women were still concentrated in traditional jobs.

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The leading women's occupations showed little change. Domestic service remained the major occupation of women, followed by industrial work in clothing and textiles. The increased employment of women in office work reflected changes in the structure of the economy rather than the opening of new opportunities to women. Moreover, in most jobs women did, their employment was not secure. Jobs were seasonal or marginal, as in domestic and personal service, or subject to technological unemployment, for example, laundry work. So that even in the relatively prosperous times before the crash there was much irregularity of employment for women; this irregularity increased as the depression grew and for very large numbers of women, especially those in textile and clothing industries, unemployment developed early and was very pronounced before the peak of total unemployment.

Yet the prevalent stereotype of women in the 1920's was of free and independent women — the flapper — who represented a challenge to the status quo. But the flapper's independence was social and sexual, not economic. Moreover, for working class women, it meant no objective change in their situation; they had neither the time nor the money to engage in the flapper's pursuits. In all, the stereotype of the flapper had limited relevance, yet in this stereotype we can see the seeds for the profound anti-feminism which was to develop in the thirties.

(2) Unemployment. At the time of the 1933 Census the recorded unemployment of men was 26% and of women was 15%. Yet the real gap in unemployment levels between women and men was probably considerably overstated by these official statistics. Female unemployment was probably more severe a few years earlier; the textile industry which had contracted in 1927 was already recovering strongly by 1931-32, in response to devaluation and increased tariff protection. Moreover, undercounting of female unemployment was probably extensive. The low unemployment rate of married women (compared to single young women) suggests that many of these women redefined themselves as housewives. Further evidence of undercounting is that even when women and men worked in the same industry, the recorded rate of female unemployment was lower. Keating⁴ estimated that in addition to the 15% of women recorded as unemployed at the time of the 1933 Census, another 4%-5% of women dropped out of the labour force and were not counted as unemployed. And many women who in normal times would have entered the labour force, did not manage to find work during the depression. These women, too, were not counted in the official unemployment statistics.

A serious limitation of the unemployment data is that it includes only those persons without a job; it does not include the extensive underemployment that occurred during the depression. At the time of the 1933 Census the Statistician reported that 8% of workers had only part-time or rationed employment.⁵ There is no way of knowing the full extent of part-time or rationed employment, but a judgement of the New South Wales Industrial Commission suggests it was more extensive than this.⁶ Rationing of work was widespread in many female occupations — in domestic service, clerical work, and retail trade. In sum, then, although official data exaggerate the difference between unemployment of women and men, unemployment for women was less severe and less prolonged than for men. The female labour force continued to grow slowly during the depression and the labour force participation rate rose.⁷ In contrast, the male labour force actually declined in 1930 and 1931 and participation rates of men fell.⁸

Why were women less severely affected by the depression than men? When an economy contracts, industrial groups vary in the severity with which they are affected and hence unemployment rates vary between industries. For example, in many service industries, output is reduced and incomes fall in periods of recession but unemployment may be relatively low; wages may be cut, commission workers may earn less, and shorter hours may be worked. In manufacturing and mining, on the other hand, a reduction in sales leads to reduced output and widespread dismissals of workers.

During the Depression, the highest rates of unemployment were experienced in building and construction industries and in heavy manufacturing industries, such as

those working in metal and wood.⁹ Indeed, building, construction and manufacturing account for the bulk of recorded unemployment. These were almost exclusively male industries. In 1933 the degree of occupational segregation of women and men was extreme: 41% of women worked in occupations where 90% and more of the workers were women; 68% of women workers were in occupations where 50% and more of the workers were female.¹⁰ Thus the sex-typing of occupations is crucial to the explanation of why the depression had less impact on female employment than on male employment. Women workers were excluded from all those industries and occupations most subject to unemployment and thus, in this instance, sex-typing gave women a measure of employment protection.

Most women workers were clustered in the service industries and in industries manufacturing light consumer goods. Unemployment was not so severe for domestic servants, shop assistants and clerical workers¹¹; though many women worked only part-time or at reduced wages. Women teachers and nurses experienced very little unemployment.¹² Women factory workers were very concentrated in only a few light industries: 86% of women were employed in textiles, clothing, food, drink, tobacco, paper, stationery, printing and book-binding.¹³ These industries suffered much less unemployment than the industries that employed males.¹⁴ In some sections of the female labour force, however, unemployment was severe. Dressmakers, tailors, milliners, machinists (knitted and hosiery) were all engaged in activities which were vulnerable in a recession and large numbers of women were expelled from these occupations.¹⁵

It is clear then that the concept of the 'industrial reserve army' has limited applicability to the Depression experience of women. The theory postulates that women are drawn in to the labour market in good times and expelled in recessions, i.e. women are 'last hired and first fired'. But in the 1930's, the opposite was true; women kept their jobs and men were dismissed. Labour market behaviour is, in fact, much more complex than the simplified view of women as an 'industrial reserve army' suggests. The theory could only apply if female and male labour was substitutable and, as we have seen, this was not the case. The 'reserve army' concept can, however, be used to explain the expansion and contraction of the female labour force *within* female industries and occupations, for example, in dressmaking and millinery.

(3) Ideological attack on women. Perhaps one reason that the 'reserve army' theory has seldom been questioned is that on the ideological level it was in fact the case that women were being urged to return to the home during the 1930's. The contemporary explanation for the fact that fewer women were out of work than men was that the high rate of unemployment of men was due to the fact that women were taking men's jobs, and thus the employment of women was thought to be a contributory cause of the unemployment of men. Women, the less organized sections of the labour force, were the obvious scapegoats in this period of great economic hardship.

Anti-feminism was rampant in the columns of the Sydney Morning Herald. The correspondence columns reflected the view that unemployment of women was less serious. The hostility of correspondents to married women workers (who had an employed husband or father) was intense. The articles and editorials in the Herald sentimentalized marriage and maternity and, at the same time, contained warnings to women who would work, or otherwise transcend traditional roles. As the depression continued, however, the tone of articles and editorials in the Herald became overtly anti-feminist and more sinister. The editorial columns denounced paid work by married women as an 'evil'. Andree Wright's¹⁶ analysis of the content of the Women's Weekly showed that it, too, reflected and strengthened conventional attitudes.

(4) Women's response. This tirade of hostility was answered by Sydney feminists Linda Littlejohn, Jessie Street and Mildred Muscio, but they were like voices in the wilderness. They pointed out, for those who would listen, that unemployment would not be cured by shifting the burden of unemployment to women: 'There would

be just as many unemployed, except that they would be women instead of men'.¹⁷ They welcomed equal pay proposals, regarding this as a right for women, and pointing out the need to rationalize wages paid since they did not reflect either family responsibilities or work contributions of men and women. More perceptive was the analysis of Muriel Heagney whose book Are Women Taking Men's Jobs? was published in 1935. Heagney was a socialist feminist who was active in trade union affairs in Victoria. She argued, correctly, that women were less affected by unemployment because they worked in occupations where the rate of unemployment was lowest. An academic economist, E. Ronald Walker, also made this point in his Unemployment Policy, also published in 1935, but with the qualification that, because women's wages were lower than men's, employers would substitute women for men where this was technically possible. Walker thus failed to grasp the fundamental point that the sexual division of labour is *socially* rather than technically ordained, and to that extent, substitution of female labour for male labour is severely constrained. Heagney, of course, was well aware of this fact.

(5) Restrictions on women's work. Women thus acted as scapegoats in the Depression. Widespread hostility toward women as the 'cause' of unemployment distracted attention from an analysis which would find the source of the crisis in the economic system, in the imperatives of profit. Thus women served a valuable function in de-fusing discontent and maintaining social order in a period of great economic distress. Hostility toward women was not limited only to attitudes. Hostility was institutionalised in the practices of trade unions and government officials. Trade union opposition to women workers mainly took the form of demands for equal pay. During the Depression trade unions discussed 'equal pay for the sexes and the many interrelated problems arising from the cheap labour of women in competition with men in industry' and in 1938 the first Australian interstate conference on equal pay was held.¹⁸ In Queensland the trade unions campaigned against married women wage earners. But an exception was to be made for unhappily married women. When the Shop Assistants Union employed sandwich-board men in Brisbane to carry notices saying 'Hundred of married women whose husbands are in good positions are employed in the city', the secretary of the union said that 'there was no desire to prevent unhappily married from seeking economic independence'.¹⁹ However, when the trade unions asked the Labor government in Queensland to legislate against married women wage earners, the government refused on the grounds that equality of opportunity was the policy of the Australian Labor movement.²⁰

(6) Government repression of women. The only deliberate institutional restriction on women's work was the dismissal of married women from State teaching services. But in Victoria a Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly was instructed to inquire into 'the effect of the increasing ratio of femininity in industry on male employment, and whether equal pay should not be introduced in many industries'.²¹ And in New South Wales, Government officials, acting on the belief that women had no 'right' to work, discriminated against women when granting unemployment relief. Unemployment relief in the Depression was haphazard. The Commonwealth government had been reluctant to take on this responsibility, arguing that unemployment was a State responsibility, although the Commonwealth did give some financial assistance, especially after 1934. Despite the fact that contribution to the special unemployment funds was compulsory for all workers — men and women — this did not entitle everyone to unemployment benefits.

Many unemployed got no benefit at all — and this applied particularly to women. Heagney wrote that in Victoria in June 1933, although about 28% of unemployed men were receiving government sustenance, only about 3% of unemployed women received sustenance payments.²² Heagney also points out that at the municipal level where relief was dispensed (in Victoria), many government sustenance officers did not give sustenance to eligible women on the grounds that sustenance funds were inadequate²³ or because they were under the impression that provision for unemployed women was not their function. Indeed, most municipalities did not even provide facilities to register the unemployment of women. The condition of women without

families was tragic. In any case, government sustenance payments were not adequate — nor were they *meant* to be adequate — to keep individuals or families permanently, even at subsistence level. Men on relief work could just manage. But for women practically no relief work was available; limited work was provided in 'sewing depots' (in Western Australia, Victoria and New South Wales) where women made clothes that were given to children's homes and to needy charity cases. In Victoria, women who were receiving government relief were often forced into domestic service for low wages.

However, despite the intense social pressure on women to withdraw from paid work, they kept working. Economic necessity ensured that they stayed in employment. Women did not ease the crisis by being expelled from the labour market; women contributed to social stability, however, in that they were blamed for the severity of the crisis.

THE PRESENT CRISIS

(1) Nature of the crisis. The present crisis is the worst economic contraction since the 1930's. Unemployment in February 1978 was officially 7.3% and all the evidence points to the fact that total unemployment will continue to rise and that some groups in the labour force (women, migrants, blacks and youths) will continue to bear the brunt of unemployment. The present crisis is only partly a short-run problem. Its severity is due to the fact that the recession has been superimposed upon an economy which, in an international context, has serious structural maladjustments. Tariff protection has left its legacy in inefficient production, and large-scale immigration has enabled technologically backward industries to remain in existence because there was a ready supply of labour available to do the 'dirty jobs' at low wages.

As manufacturing industry grew in the post-war period, the service industries expanded to 'service' the large manufacturing sector (wholesale and retail trade, finance). And new service industries developed in response to the rise in income per head (health, education, entertainment). Because most jobs in the services sector were already established as 'female' jobs the number of women in paid employment expanded and the labour force participation rate of women increased dramatically. Despite these major structural changes in the economy, the labour market remains segmented, jobs remain sex-typed, women remain concentrated in usually menial jobs with the most unpleasant jobs of all allocated to migrant women and black women.²⁴ Compared to the 1920's and 1930's, women have come to play a much more important role in the sphere of paid labour. Women now account for 35% of the total labour force. Yet, as in the 1930's, paid labour continues to be ideologically defined as 'male' and no one really takes women's participation in paid labour seriously. A recent poll, conducted by ANOP,²⁵ showed that Australians of both sexes still believe in a society in which women are housewives and childminders. Attitudes in the seventies, that women don't have a right to paid work, as men do, have not advanced much since the thirties. Yet the increased need for the paid labour of women now, compared to the thirties, has sharpened the contradiction between their roles in paid and unpaid labour.

(2) Unemployment. Unemployment, as measured by the official statistics, has been rising steadily since the middle of 1974 and reached a peak of 7.3% in February. In February the female unemployment rate was 10.4% compared to the male unemployment rate of 6%. From this data, and from scattered information on hidden unemployment, it looks as though women have been affected more than men by the recession, but these recession unemployment figures should be compared with the 'normal' rates of unemployment of women and men. Throughout the post-war period female unemployment rates have been consistently higher than male rates, sometimes more than twice as high. But in the present crisis male unemployment has risen much faster than female unemployment and the female share of total unemployment fell from over 50% in the late sixties to 43% in November 1976, despite the increased

female component of the labour force.²⁶ So in the present crisis, as in the 1930's Depression, male unemployment has risen more rapidly. But today, unlike the 1930's, the incidence of unemployment has been greater among women and especially among young women whose unemployment rate in February was 23.6%.

The differential impact of the crisis on women's and men's unemployment has come about through men's jobs contracting more than women's jobs in the recession. As in the 1930's, heavy industrial jobs have been the ones most severely affected by the recession. Since these jobs - in metal industries, transport equipment, machinery and equipment, and in construction - are predominantly men's jobs, the recession has had a proportionately heavier effect on male unemployment.

(3) Employment. It is clear from this unemployment data that the view that, in a crisis, women can be ejected from jobs they obtained in periods of rapid capital accumulation, will not explain women's unemployment in the present crisis. Unemployment data are, however, of limited value because of serious problems of underestimation and this is especially true of female unemployment. When we look at data on employment of women and men the differential impact of the recession on women and men is confirmed: women's employment continued to grow in the recession while men's employment has fallen.²⁷ Structural changes in the economy in the post-war period have led to a long-term decline in male labour force participation rates and an increase in female labour force participation rates. Because of sex-typing of jobs, the development of the post-war service economy increased job opportunities for women, especially in clerical work and in expanding services like health and education. The recession has accelerated the shift in employment even further toward female labour. During the recession female employment has grown nearly twice as fast as male employment. Between 1971 and 1976 female employment increased by 15% compared to only 8% for male employment and, as a result, the female share of the total labour force increased from 33% to 35%.²⁸ Most of the growth in employment has been in part-time work. Between May 1972 and May 1977 only 30% of the growth in jobs was in full-time jobs; 70% was in part-time jobs.²⁹ It is not surprising that part-time work is the most rapidly expanding area of employment in the recession since employers use part-time work to reduce labour costs. This cheapening of the labour process will be greater if women part-time workers are employed. And, because of the sexual division of labour in household work and in paid work, part-time work is mainly done by married women. Part-time work is regarded as an ideal job opportunity by many married women whose domestic commitments preclude their taking a full-time job. But, for many women, part-time work amounts to involuntary unemployment; these women are officially counted as fully employed yet over 30,000 of them say they work part-time because of the shortage of work.³⁰

Women have also been able to find full-time jobs in the recession more readily than have men. Employment has expanded in health, education and public administration, and, because of the sex-typing of jobs, these additional jobs have gone mainly to women. Thus, as in the 1930's Depression, occupation segmentation, and the use of women to cheapen the labour process, has given women relative job protection in the recession.

(4) Structure of female unemployment. How can increasing female employment be reconciled with high and rising female unemployment? The new jobs opening up in the recession are mainly in service industries while the jobs disappearing are in manufacturing. Moreover, this changing pattern of jobs has altered the types of training and education needed by female job seekers. And because of established patterns of segmentation within the female labour market, the women getting jobs during the recession are a different group from the women losing jobs. For better educated and experienced Australian-born women job opportunities have continued to grow but semi-skilled and unskilled women are losing their jobs. And teenage women cannot get jobs. To explain this we must look at cyclical factors and also at the changes in structural factors which determine the extent and type of women's employment: the rapid growth of part-time work; the continued expansion of services in the reces-

sion; technological change within the female labour market; and moves offshore by multinationals. The expansion of part-time work has occurred especially in the business services sector. Since these are jobs usually done by white Australian-born women this growth can account for the differential unemployment experience of Australian and migrant women and black women. Employment has also continued to expand in community services: health industries have grown and employment in the State and local bureaucracies has grown (offsetting the fall in the Federal bureaucracy since the Fraser government began its term of office). Again, these occupations are dominated by white Australian-born women, and they have benefited from the growth in demand for labour in these areas.

During the recession which has been accompanied by high and rising female wages, many companies have introduced labour-displacing technology to cut costs. The impact of technological change has been worst on migrant women and on young women. To some extent technological improvement replaces women workers altogether; in some areas it may change the composition of the female labour force. Many Australian industries using out-of-date technology could only be sustained by using cheap migrant female labour. Automation has displaced many of these women. In some factories a handful of migrant women work on a production line which has displaced hundreds of migrant women workers. Although this type of migrant unemployment clearly has a technological basis, the ideological basis is also apparent. Unemployment of migrant women is more acceptable politically and thus efforts to retrain migrant women to perform these new jobs, to learn English and so on, are not made. But to do nothing is just as much an act of policy as to do something. Thus government inertia with respect to migrant training must be viewed as a deliberate act of discrimination in a labour market which is changing technologically. And employers' indifference also is consistent with a thorough-going exploitative policy: to use labour that is cheapest and already trained.

Other dynamic forces in the economy which have been accelerated in the recession are responsible for the higher unemployment of migrant and black women compared to Australian women. Since migrant and black women have the fewest employment opportunities they are forced to take jobs cast off by other workers: these include those jobs with problems of cyclical unemployment and declining jobs. Thus the industries with serious structural problems — textiles, clothing, and footwear — have all been dominated by migrant women, and the collapse of these industries has been responsible for extensive unemployment of migrant women. The textile industry has lost 18,000 jobs (32.9%) between June 1971 and June 1977, clothing and footwear have lost 32,000 jobs (28.7%).³¹ Some of these jobs have disappeared altogether as firms have collapsed and this is especially true in the footwear industry which is dominated by small firms. But in other cases, multinational companies, in their search for profitability, have moved their production base to Southeast Asian countries. This can perhaps be regarded as the ultimate in labour market segmentation. Modern transnationals are free to roam the world and find ways to cheapen the labour process. In Australia where the long-term decline in profitability of manufacturing has been accelerated by the recession, the moves offshore by transnationals have gained momentum. Now here is the dilemma for migrant women, thousands of who have been displaced by such moves. Their cheap labour and their economic need to work has, till now, enabled technologically backward, inefficient industries to survive in Australia, but now their labour is being substituted by even cheaper labour of their Asian sisters.

Unemployment is concentrated among young women; their share of total female unemployment increased dramatically between 1954 and 1966, and since 1966 teenage female unemployment has comprised about 40% of total female unemployment. Of course, the unemployment is even further concentrated amongst young women with lower educational qualifications. In the past twenty years, mass education in Australia has expanded dramatically: school retention rates and enrolments at tertiary institutions have been increased very rapidly. Because of the increased supply of young people with higher educational qualifications, employers have increased the educational requirements for jobs. People who leave school at an early age are,

therefore, increasingly disadvantages in their search for jobs. People who had their School Certificate would have been able to get a job two or three years ago, but this is no longer true. And unemployment rates for young men and women without educational credentials have risen alarmingly: the unemployment rate of people who left school aged fourteen between 1971 and 1976 was 24% in May 1976.³²

Employers' demands for educational credentials and experience has disadvantaged both young men and women. But young women have suffered more because their educational experience is more limited than that of young men. All studies show that girls drop out of school at an earlier age than boys and for working class and migrant girls this educational disadvantage is much greater. The segregation of male and female jobs further disadvantages young women since their vocational training and career guidance channels them towards a few typically 'feminine' occupations. Thus a massive two-thirds of unemployed teenage women are looking for jobs in clerical and sales work (including work as clerks, typists, office machinists, tram and bus conductors and saleswomen). This is the area of greatest unemployment for females. And for young women there are practically no job vacancies at all: in May 1977 there were thirty-five young women registered for employment for every job vacancy available in clerical and administrative work.³³ Even for adult women the ratio of job seekers to vacancies in these female occupations is fourteen to one.³⁴

The main growth area of female employment during the recession, community services, contains jobs in which young women workers are under-represented compared to adult women. Young women are over-represented in wholesale and retail trade and in finance and entertainment, but employment in these industries is stagnant or growing only slowly in the recession. Thus it is clear that young women are taking the brunt of unemployment with migrant women and black workers.

(5) Ideological attacks on women. Not only do these workers — migrant women and young women — have to pay the price of the crisis in terms of their unemployment, an ideology has emerged in which they are also *blamed* for causing the crisis. This is merely a variant of the ideology which was promoted in the 1930's, but, because we have more detailed employment data now, the arguments are more complex, if no more relevant. Most explanations of the crisis make two points: things are not as bad as they seem, the evidence is unreliable and the problem of unemployment is exaggerated; and, in any case, the married women and young people are themselves to blame for the high level of unemployment — the married women because they don't 'need' to work and the young people because they don't 'want' to work anyway. Thus married women and youth have become the scapegoats in the current crisis and attention has been distracted from the fact the economy cannot provide permanent jobs for all people who want to work. Moreover, because scapegoats could be found, the government has not been forced to devise policies to reduce unemployment and increase growth so that the growing labour force could be employed.

The ideological attack on women was launched by the media. The campaign began gently in 1977 when there were a few stirrings about the unemployment of men and employment of women but for the most part the media campaign in 1977 reinforced women's domestic role, promoted traditional female virtues, and focussed on the visits by a series of 'experts' who proclaimed the joys of motherhood. But by January 1978 the tone had altered — a tirade of anti-feminist propaganda was launched at the national level with the most vicious attacks on married women workers appearing in the national daily The Australian. The ideological attack on married women has proclaimed that women take the jobs of men and youth, that married women have no right to work, and that equal pay causes inflation. Correspondence columns reflect support for these sentiments and some people have proposed paying married women a homemaker's allowance so that they can 'choose' to stay at home. The executive director of the Victorian Chamber of Manufactures proposed discriminatory taxes on married women workers.

(6) Women's response. In the 1930's Depression a tiny band of brave women tried to counter similar anti-feminist propaganda. But in the present crisis,

because of the strength of the women's movement there is much more political resistance to this ideology that 'women's place is in the home'. Many individual women have replied to newspaper attacks on working women and national bodies like the Council of Social Service have spoken on behalf of women. The women's movement launched the Women's Employment Rights Campaign which organized national demonstrations on behalf of unemployed women, and printed multi-lingual pamphlets showing the facts of unemployment. The women's unit of the Australian Broadcasting Commission produced a programme on unemployment. Yet the media have declined to give publicity to such resistance to the anti-feminist ideology. And indeed in some ways the media attack on women is more virulent than were the attacks on women in the thirties, because of the existence of the women's movement. Thus The Australian dismissed replies to their attacks on women as 'emotionalism', and used the headline 'Hell hath no fury like a Woman whose job is questioned' and attacked married women with jobs because 'They have fallen for the pressure of their peers, who say that being tied to a kitchen sink is tantamount to bludging'. Ideological attacks on women in the present crisis must be placed in the context of new family patterns: the greater need for two-income families, the increase in the number of women who have established single-person households, the increase in the number of families headed by women and the incidence of poverty in these families. In this context the current attacks on women's right to work are perhaps even more vicious and ignorant than were the attacks during the 1930's.

(7) Government repression of women. In the thirties, women did not receive welfare benefits on equal terms with men. Despite, or perhaps because of, the Welfare State, this is still true in the seventies. The modern Welfare State supports the family and thus perpetuates traditional relations of male dominance and female subservience and dependence. Unemployed married women (and de facto wives and girlfriends) whose husbands are working are denied the right to receive unemployment benefit. Although the legislation on unemployment benefit specifies only that if one spouse is working the other is denied benefits, because labour force participation of husbands exceeds that of wives and because unemployment among women exceeds that among men, it is almost always married women who are denied unemployment benefit. Similarly, unemployed married women whose husbands are also unemployed are denied unemployment benefit. The unemployed men are paid the dole at the family rate, with allowances for their spouse and children. Not only are married women denied the dole but, because of their dependent status, their earnings from paid work are taxed (if their husbands are on the dole) at 100% plus the marginal tax rate. Thus women with unemployed husbands cannot really afford to take paid work. Again the denial of the dole to married women and the harshness of the dole means test must be put in context: in our contemporary economy the combination of high unemployment and high inflation has made the two-income family a necessity and, indeed, in contemporary Australia the two-income family has become the norm. Thus the institutional devices of the Welfare State based on a mythical family with a male breadwinner are completely inappropriate.

¹ For example, Anne Summers, Damned Whores and God's Police, Penguin, 1975, p. 466; Bettina Cass, 'Women's Place in the Class Structure', in Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism, eds. E.L. Wheelwright and Ken Buckley, vol. 3, ANZ Book Company, Sydney, 1978, p. 25.

² See especially the articles by Ruth Milkman, 'Women's Work and Economic Crisis: Some Lessons of the Great Depression', Review of Radical Political Economics, vol. 8, no. 1, Spring 1976; Veronica Beechey, 'Some Notes on Female Wage Labour in Capitalist Production', Capital and Class, no. 2, Autumn 1977.

³ Data from 1921 and 1933 Censuses.

- ⁴ M. Keating, The Australian Workforce 1910-11 to 1960-61, Progress Press, Canberra, 1973, p. 333.
- ⁵ Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 30 June 1933, Statistician's Report, p. 304.
- ⁶ Industrial Commission of New South Wales, Judgement of the Commission, New South Wales Industrial Gazette, 31 August 1932, p. 263, quoted by Phyllis G. Peter, Social Aspects of the Depression in New South Wales, 1930-1934, Ph. D. thesis, Australian National University, 1964. The Statistician's Report on the 1933 Census, op. cit., also stated that 8% would be an underestimate of the extent of part-time or rationed work.
- ⁷ M. Keating, op. cit., Table 18.9, p. 343, and Figure 18.2, p. 341.
- ⁸ Ibid., Table 18.10, p. 344, and Figure 18.1, p. 340.
- ⁹ Census, 30 June 1933, pp. 1226ff.
- ¹⁰ M. Power, 'Woman's Work is Never Done - By Men: A Socio-economic Model of Sex-typing in Occupations', Journal of Industrial Relations, September 1975, p. 228.
- ¹¹ Census, 30 June 1933, vol. II, pp. 1600-1617.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ E.R. Walker, Unemployment Policy, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1936, p. 125.
- ¹⁴ Census, 30 June 1933, vol. II, pp. 1226ff.
- ¹⁵ Census, 30 June 1933, vol. II, pp. 1600-1617.
- ¹⁶ Andree Wright, 'The Australian Women's Weekly in Depression and War', Refractory Girl, 3, Winter 1973.
- ¹⁷ Jessie Street, SMH, 4 October 1933.
- ¹⁸ Equal Pay for the Sexes, Council of Action for Equal Pay, Sydney, 1943, p. 17.
- ¹⁹ SMH, 1 February 1935.
- ²⁰ M. Heagney, Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?, Hilton and Veitch, Melbourne, 1935, p. 189.
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 111.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 115.
- ²⁴ M. Power, 'Cast-off Jobs: Women, Migrants, Blacks May Apply', Refractory Girl, no. 11, June 1976.
- ²⁵ National Times, 3 October-8 October 1977, p. 10.
- ²⁶ ABS.
- ²⁷ ABS 6213.0.
- ²⁸ ABS 6.61.
- ²⁹ Australian Bulletin of Labour, September 1977, p. 16.
- ³⁰ ABS 6.61.
- ³¹ Australian Bulletin of Labour, September 1977, p. 17.
- ³² ABS, Persons Aged 15-64 Years, Employment Status and Period Since Leaving School, May 1976, Table 4.
- ³³ Unpublished data collected by Department of Employment and Industrial Relations.
- ³⁴ Ibid.

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