

Reproducing Law's Worker: Regulatory Tensions in the Pursuit of "Population, Participation and Productivity"

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"Population, Participation and Productivity"

At the beginning of the 20th century the establishment of the conciliation and arbitration system to set fair wages and conditions at work, the implementation of the "White Australia" immigration policy, and a program for the protection for goods produced by Australian industry comprised the three pillars of the social settlement for the new Australian Commonwealth. Under this settlement the national income was redistributed first and foremost amongst white men and through them to their families. Work relations were gendered: men engaged in the marketplace in productive labour on a full-time basis and for a lifetime, whereas women were excluded from it and relegated to the home where they were responsible for reproductive labour.

A century later the social and economic policy focus of Australia is depicted by the alliterative phrase, "population, participation and productivity".¹ The context in which this has developed is Australia's integration into the "new economy" of the global era. Since the 1980s there has been a gradual lowering of tariff barriers, accompanied by on-going demands for increased productivity, greater flexibility and "de-regulation" of industry and the labour market. As a consequence work in the marketplace has changed dramatically. Industry's market-focus on results and output, and the growth of the service sector have challenged the old industrial standards of working time and employment patterns.

The labour market has been transformed especially by a dramatic increase in the number of women in paid employment. However, the gendered distribution of responsibility for reproductive labour has changed little,² and a lack of alignment between the demands of the

1 See The Hon Peter Costello MP Treasurer, "The Paths to Increasing Australia's Prosperity" (Address to the Australian Financial Review Leaders' Luncheon, Sydney, 7 August 2002, <www.treasurer.gov.au/tsr/content/speeches/>).

2 Bittman M and Pixley J, *The Double Life of the Family: Myth, Hope and Experience* (Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1997).

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