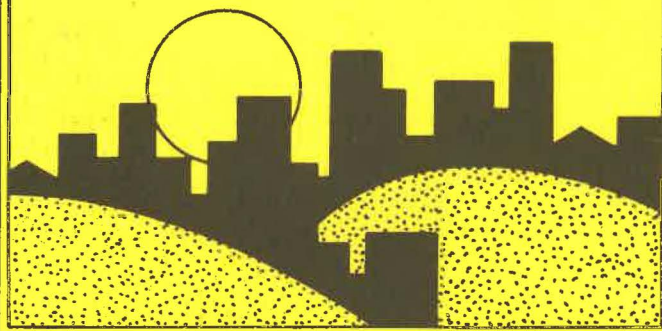




**THE BATTLE FOR THE FAMILY:
Family Policy in Australian Electoral Politics
in the 1980s**

Marian Sawyer

URU Working Paper No. 15
August 1989



AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
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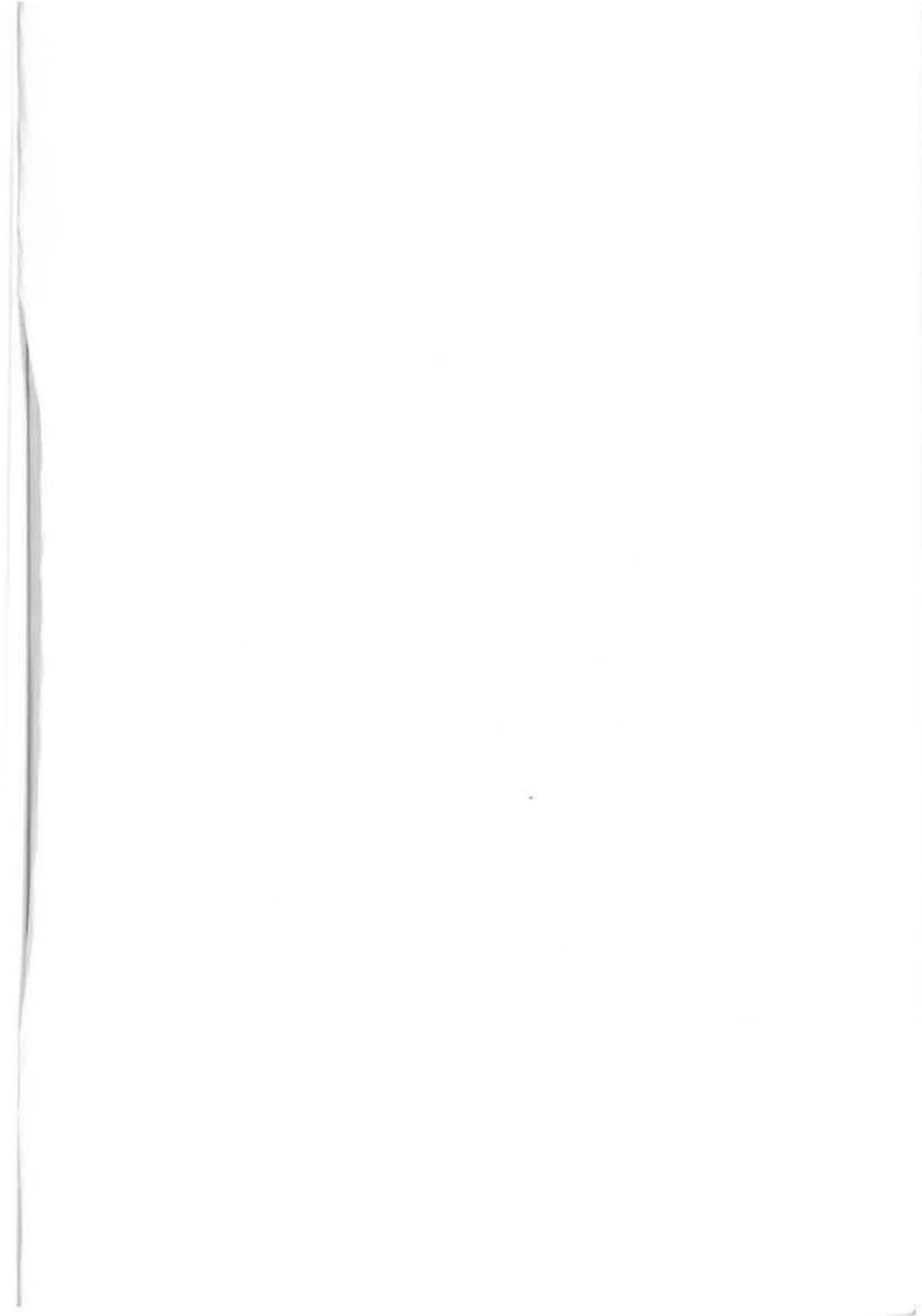
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INTRODUCTION—FROM HOUSEHOLD TO FAMILY

Marian Sawer's paper presents a comprehensive, and stimulating, account of the widespread use of family themes in Australian election campaigning and public policy during the 1980s. These brief comments are designed to supplement some aspects of her chronicle of this family phenomenon in Australian election campaigning. They represent a shortened version of comments prepared to open discussion when the paper was presented to a seminar organised in May 1989 by the Politics Department of the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University.

The sustained emphasis of Australian political parties and policy makers on filial security, values and policies is very much a product of the widespread use of qualitative research since the mid-1970s. Based on the identification and interview of swinging voters in marginal electorates, the qualitative research of all major political parties detected a consuming interest in family living standards and patterns. In itself, this was not a startling phenomenon. It would be reasonable to assume that intensive interviewing of such voters would disclose a pecuniary rather than an altruistic attitude to political preference and choice. What was illuminating for political strategists was the intensity of the familial preoccupation, and its pervasiveness in political judgment and assessment.

As Sawer notes, the first proposals for an election campaign based overwhelmingly on a family strategy were put to the then Leader Of the Federal Opposition, Gough Whitlam, for the 1977 Federal Elections. Whitlam rejected the rationale of a family strategy, preferring to appeal to the electoral altruism of the Australian people with a policy directed to creating more jobs by re-distributing payroll tax collections. Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser won the election convincingly with a package of tax cuts and benefits aimed at swinging voters which was dramatised in campaign advertisements showing a fistful of dollars. Although Fraser's campaign was not based on a family strategy as such, it was firmly directed at the pecuniary perceptions of Australian households. In 1980, as Sawer records, Whitlam's successor, Bill Hayden, adopted a family strategy with considerable success, although failing to win the election.

Although the family strategy in electoral politics may be dated from the 1980 Federal Election campaign, the exploitation of the household in electoral politics goes back much further. The household as defined for electoral purposes was virtually the same as the household concept utilised

by economists, statisticians and other social scientists. It was an abstract formulation encompassing family units, but also other dwellers in a standard residential unit. Thus, it was possible to campaign on the basis of perceived threats or benefits to the household in the abstract rather than to personify it in vivid emotional terms as the family. In contemporary merchandising jargon, family is more 'user-friendly' than household.

The household theme can be traced back through the as yet little-explored history of Australian election campaigning. At the federal level, the first deliberate exploitation of threats to household was probably the vigorous assault by Free Trade Leader, George Reid, on the dangers of Socialism in the 1904 election campaign. An important element in Andrew Fisher's successful campaign as leader of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in 1910 was a collection of proposed benefits for households. During the 1914-18 war, both major political parties exploited the security of Australian households with varying degrees of subtlety, Prime Minister William Morris Hughes using potential threats to households from the denudation of Australia's volunteer army quite blatantly in the conscription referenda. In the immediate post-war years, the stability and security of the household was an important theme in an uncertain economic climate. In 1925, the National Party's master election strategist, Archdale Parkhill, based the most virulent of all election scare campaigns on the threat to households and incomes from the spread of international Bolshevism.

The Depression offered abundant opportunities for all parties to exploit the prospective erosion of household standards and the threat to household survival. The initial beneficiary in federal election campaigning was the ALP which gained from the backwash of the Wall Street panic in its electoral victory of October 1929. The more sustained benefits, however, flowed to the coalition of the United Australia Party (UAP) and Country Party during the 1930s, following the failure of the Scullin Government to contain deteriorating household living standards and the gradual recovery of employment and incomes under his predecessors. This pattern of the non-Labor parties reaping electoral benefits from endangered household security was largely replicated in State politics. The UAP Prime Minister, Joseph Aloysius Lyons, was the epitome of family values in electoral politics although he campaigned mainly on broad household themes, not seeking to exploit his own large family in a family strategy. Indeed, Lyons did not need a family strategy. It was sufficient for him to be photographed flanked by his 11 young children on the lawns of the Prime Minister's Lodge, or to make only a passing reference to babies in a campaign speech, to make the point that he supported family values.

The threat to households was less obtrusive during World War II but nonetheless overt. Campaign material prepared for Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, sought to link the UAP Leader and his party with Winston Churchill as successful protectors of Australian households. Although John Curtin declined to similarly involve General Douglas Macarthur in campaign material, he skilfully presented the superiority of the ALP as defender of Australian households and possessor of all the talents necessary to restore household standards after a long war.

The household theme was implicit in Robert Menzies' 1949 Election Campaign which restored a Coalition Government headed by the Liberal Party. Menzies' principal themes of dismantling the remaining war-time controls and 'putting value back into the pound' were directed at household aspirations for greater freedom and flexibility, and for the revival of living standards diminished by years of restraint and denial. The threat to household security was explicit in a series of highly-successful Coalition election campaigns which exploited fears of Communism swamping Australia by a combination of internal subversion and external invasion. The ALP broke the pattern only once, in 1961 when a severe credit squeeze enabled it to take advantage of household hardship and hurt. Menzies countered at the 1963 elections with a campaign whose appeal to household interests has never been surpassed. The election platform was crafted around three specific policies selected to take advantage of household concerns: a housing grants scheme; direct assistance for school science blocks, including non-state schools; and direct assistance for nursing homes for the elderly. The campaign was carefully organised to focus the attention of the electorate on these three specific pledges, by contrast with the ALP whose campaign effort was diffused over a ragbag of policies. This should have been Australia's first family campaign but Menzies' austerity in presenting policy, as opposed to expounding threats, ensured that it remained within the framework of the household genre. Another decade elapsed before the electoral attractiveness of family strategies began to dawn on political parties.

This somewhat breathless interpretation of Australian electoral campaigning is not intended to suggest that household and family themes have been the only ones presented to the electorate. There have been many others, and the evolution of Australian election campaigning could be analysed in quite different ways. The point is that household and family issues and values have been consistent motifs threading through 90 years of federal election campaigning. Doubtless, the same patterns could be traced through the even longer history of State election campaigning in Australia. The household has been predominant until recent years, but now the focus is

on the family which personifies the household, giving it flesh and blood and emotional vitality.

Another important aspect of the general adoption of family political strategies has been the potential demands it imposes on political leaders. In theory, not all political leaders would have the family background, or commitment, to conduct a plausible family campaign. Looking to history, it is conceivable that Abraham Lincoln could have directed a successful family campaign because he had young children in the White House. On the other hand, a noted philanderer like Lloyd George would certainly have encountered electoral resistance if he had sought to campaign on a family strategy. In the Australian context, the patrician, avuncular Stanley Melbourne Bruce was hardly malleable material for the political pollster or strategist seeking to mould a family strategy. Ben Chifley, with no children and an ailing wife, would also have lacked credentials for such a campaign. As Sawyer observes, Bill Hayden was able to run a successful 'family' campaign without directly involving his young family. Other politicians, such as the New South Wales Premier Nick Greiner, have managed to involve attractive families into the pizzazz of contemporary election campaigning without sacrifice of dignity. The thrice-married West Australian Premier, Peter Dowding, has been associated with family strategies for elections and also in the development of public policy. As Federal Opposition Leader, John Howard in 1988-89 put an immense effort into devising and implementing a family-based strategy which included restrained use of his own young family. He was replaced as Leader by Andrew Peacock, a political leader with two failed marriages and a grown-up family, who largely scrapped Howard's carefully-contrived strategy although retaining part of its rhetoric.

How should this contradictory experience be interpreted? It is by no means axiomatic that the successful promoter of a family strategy should be relatively young, have a young and attractive family, and possess a demonstrable commitment to family stability and values. There is some evidence that what count are the adroitness of the strategy and the quality of the message and its merchandising. Nor is it any impediment to a successful family strategy for a political leader to have all the accoutrements of a successful family life. It is probably also true that there are patterns of family history, commitment and configuration that would be difficult to correlate with successful application of family strategies, both on the hustings and in the successful development of public policy.

The absurd side of family strategies was neatly conveyed by the cartoonist Patrick Cook at the height of the 1980 election campaign when it

seemed fleetingly that the ALP's single-minded concentration on the family as an election issue might win it a famous victory. Cook depicted two military types in a bunker, the senior saying to his subordinate: "Get me a new defence policy and make sure it's got something in it about the family". Despite the frequent crudeness of family strategies, and the opportunities they raise for manipulation of the electorate, there are also subtleties in the strategic and public policy issues that they present. Marian Sawer teases out and analyses many of these conundrums and contradictions in this admirably lucid paper.

Clem Lloyd
Urban Research Unit,
September, 1989.

ABSTRACT

This paper is a preliminary look at the recent emergence of the family as a major theme of electoral politics in Australia. It will appear that while the Liberal and Labor Parties are both attempting to make political capital out of the family, there are significant differences in their approach. Finally, the paper attempts to clarify some of the implications of using the family as a focus for social policy.

THE BATTLE FOR THE FAMILY: Family Policy in Australian Electoral Politics in the 1980s¹

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Introduction

Much of the rhetoric about the family which we have heard in Australia in the 1980s has been imported directly from the United Kingdom and the United States. In the 1979 general election, the British Conservatives billed themselves as the 'party of the family' and proposed Family Impact Statements (Coote and Campbell, 1982: 84-87). In the same election, James Callaghan, the Labour Prime Minister, floated the idea of a Ministry of Marriage. In the US, the 1986 Bauer Report prepared for President Reagan, *The Family, Preserving America's Future*, blamed two decades of an 'anti-family agenda' for taking America in the direction of totalitarian social policy in which the power of the state is substituted for the 'rights, responsibilities and authority of the family'. According to the Report, the 'anti-family agenda' had been replaced by a new consensus on the value of the traditional family. Nonetheless, Congress failed to approve Reagan's Family Protection Bill.

This kind of overseas rhetoric is reproduced in Australian publications such as *Quadrant* and the *IPA Review*. In 1980 the Australian Family Association was founded "to formulate policies and take action to defend and strengthen the institutions of marriage and the family". Patrons included Mr B.A.Santamaria, Professor Lauchlan Chipman and Dr Rupert Goodman of Queensland University (later also President of the Australian National Flag Association). By 1989 the Conservative Action and Victory Fund was listing 22 'pro-family' organisations in its *Directory of the Australian Right* (January 1989) including some such as the Australian Family Association and the Festival of Light with branches in each State.

The Liberal Party was a little slow to climb aboard the family bandwagon, being hampered, in particular by its Victorian and South Australian divisions which contained relatively large numbers of Liberals who believed in the individual rather than the family, and in equal opportunities for women. According to Katharine West, a one-time staffer for Andrew Peacock during his first period as Opposition Leader,:

... the influence of small l Liberal policy perspectives encouraged the Liberal Party to abandon the social obligation it once acknowledged to protect and promote the stability and security of the married two-parent family as the preferred social unit for raising Australian children. Under small l influence there was no convincing attempt to build on the electorally successful pro-family tradition of Menzies Liberalism . [West, 1984: 31]

In fact, as Judith Brett has pointed out, Menzies never talked about 'strengthening' the family. Rather he used the appeal to the home and home-based values as a means of defusing Labor's class-based appeal which relied on people identifying as workers rather than as home-owners (Brett, 1989: 12).

Emergence of the Family Theme

In the 1980 federal election, the ALP became the first Australian political party to use the family theme extensively in a campaign. According to Rod Cameron of ANOP (Australian National Opinion Polls), this came about as a result of a personal decision by Bill Hayden in 1979:

We had dinner one night and he said: 'Look, I've been wrestling with an idea. I want to turn the family into Labor Party territory. It really does belong to the Labor Party and we've been seen to be distant from it. Go out and develop me a marketing program around that. [Times on Sunday, 13 March 1988]

The 1980 ALP campaign included the Family Health Care Plan, the Family Housing Policy, the Family Assistance Plan and the Family Energy Policy. Contrary to rumours, the ALP did not produce a Family Tariff Policy.

While Hayden used the family theme as an organising principle for his campaign, he did not involve his own family in the campaign at all, unlike subsequent conservative politicians.

The ALP decision to lay claim to the family was accompanied by a decision to lay claim to another emotive political symbol, the flag. In 1979 the party adopted a logo which juxtaposed a waving Australian flag with the name of the party. Giant versions of this were used as the backdrop for campaign launches and national conferences. Because of the use of the flag, the colour blue, previously associated with the Liberals, became the predominant colour in ALP campaign materials. The Liberals followed promptly with a logo which incorporated the flag as the cornerstone of an L made up of three blocks.

The Australian Country Party had been the first of the major Australian political parties to adopt a modern logo—a stylized map of Australia in green within a yellow circle—which was used for the first national conference of the National Country Party of Australia in May 1975. The logo was retained when the party's name changed again to the National Party of Australia in 1982. The National Party, viewing itself as the custodian of the existing Australian flag,³ looked somewhat askance at its appropriation by other parties. The decision was taken, in time for 1984 federal election, to superimpose the flag on its existing logo. The green Australia of the old Country Party logo turned red, white and blue.⁴

During the 1984 election, the Federal President of the National Party (and Victorian Senate candidate), Shirley McKerrow, appeared in campaign advertisements literally draped in the Australian flag. Even the Nuclear Disarmament Party campaigned under the Australian flag, leaving the Australian Democrats as the exception to party flag-waving (the Democrats used the stars from the Australian flag in their logo, but not the Union Jack and stayed green and yellow).

The stress on the family in ALP campaigns in the 1980s appears to have been partly influenced by the increased targeting of the marginal outer

suburban electorates which were the key to victory in four States and nationally. It is these outer suburban electorates which have the highest level of 'familism' in Australia—meaning the degree to which people live in conventional husband/wife/dependent children households. Earlier qualitative research had already shown that the family would be a popular campaign theme, but Whitlam had refused to stoop to this in the 1977 federal election.

In 1983 the Liberal Party joined the fray by declaring itself the 'family party' for the election. Apparently their research had come up with the proposition that as 'women tend to think in terms of their family, men in terms of themselves, a way to woo women voters without alienating men is to pitch messages to the family'. According to a Liberal Party spokesman: "A good child-care or anti-discrimination policy might get women voters at the margin. But fundamentally, women are not going to choose between us and them on the basis of who has the best child-care policy" (*National Times*, 27 Feb-5 March, 1983).

Despite the big swing in women's votes to the ALP in 1983, and Nick Greiner's call for the Liberal Party to win back their support by "persuading them that we see men and women as individuals . . . with individual claims to be considered" (*Canberra Times*, 17 April 1983), the Liberal party continued to pursue this strategy.

As Liberal Leader, Andrew Peacock tried to please both feminists and antifeminists within the party by embracing both equal opportunity and traditional family life (for example, Speech to the Women's Section of the Victorian Liberal Party, *Age*, 29 October 1983). In 1984 the Liberal Party campaigned on the theme 'Stand up for your family' and promised income splitting to benefit traditional families.

John Howard brought a more resolute commitment to traditional family life with him when he took over as Opposition Leader in 1985. Three days after the leadership change, Liberal front-bencher Ian Macphie expressed concern over Howard's ideological commitment to the traditional family

and protested that "individuals can be suffocated by family structures" (*Age* 27 September 1985).

Western Australia

But it is really the Western Australian Liberal Party (watched carefully by the federal Liberal Party) which has led the way in the battle for the family. It campaigned heavily on this theme in the 1986 and 1989 State elections. In the 1986 election the Liberal Leader, Bill Hassell, claimed that the traditional family unit, which the Liberal Party had been dedicated to preserving, was under constant pressure from Labor (Liberal Party of Western Australia, 1986: 3). In response, the Labor government made Kay Hallahan Minister for the Family—and was to boast that "[t]he Western Australian Government is the first in Australia to give family life the status of its own Ministry".

The Western Australian Liberal Party made it quite clear that it was only the 'traditional' family that was the focus of its policies: "W.A. Liberals make no judgment on people's individual choices. However, having made that choice, they should not expect to be treated equally with the traditional family on which so much of Liberalism is based" (Liberal Party of Western Australia, 1986: 3).

In 1987 the Liberal Shadow Minister for the Family, Phillip Pandal, attacked Kay Hallahan for defining the family as "any social grouping of one or more individuals who have responsibility and/or care of one or more children or other dependents". Pandal was outraged that this definition could encompass a homosexual couple living with the children of one partner. He called on the Premier, Brian Burke, to respond. Burke supported his Minister for the Family by arguing that the children or elderly dependents of homosexuals should be treated no differently from those of heterosexuals and that discrimination on the basis of the sexual preference of the carer had no place in a decent society (*Times on Sunday*, 5 April 1987).

For the 1989 State election, Pental, produced the policy paper released under the title *The Family: A Premier Responsibility* and adorned with a picture of the Liberal Leader, Barry McKinnon and his family. Commitments included legislation to "advance the concept of the family as the fundamental unit in society", the establishment of a Western Australian Family Affairs Commission and preparation of family impact statements.

Among the more alarming functions of the Family Affairs Commission was to be the review of "curricula content in State schools from pre-primary to year 12, to ensure that the positive role of the family is emphasised". Less alarming was its brief to fund Western Australian Family Week. The same picture was used on the cover of the Liberal Party's women's policy paper where the words '*Barry MacKinnon. Our Next Liberal Premier. And his Family.*' appeared in considerably larger type face than the words '*Women's Policy Initiatives*'.

These graphic images underline another difference between Liberal and Labor approaches to the political use of the family. Despite the statement that family policy was a means of wooing women's votes, quoted above, Liberal family policy always appears to be targeted to male family heads, and is accompanied by images of male-headed families, or sometimes a father on his own, worried about his family (as in the full-page ads for *Future Directions*, described below). By contrast, the image chosen for the front cover of WA Labor's *Putting Families First* was an image of a woman playing with a small child.

The Liberal campaign included the mail-out of a letter from Pam McKinnon, the Liberal Leader's wife, describing family life in the McKinnon household: "Barry has just come home from campaigning all day, and the kids, Michael, Stuart and Philippa, are rushing to tell Dad of the day's events. Amidst kisses and hugs, they've decided to go for a game of cricket in the park".

The Western Australian Labor Party was determined to hold onto this political terrain. In 1988 Peter Dowding, released his policy paper *Putting*

Families First: A Social Strategy for Western Australia. The policy announced a new Office of the Family to monitor policy for family impact and a Western Australian Family Foundation which would have an initial allocation of \$12 million. "The role of the family is pivotal in this strategy. Priority will be given to policies and projects which strengthen and support its role".

During the 1989 election campaign, Labor released two family policy papers, *Support for the Family* and *Families and Job Security*. Commitments included the construction of 25 new Family Centres over a two-year period to bring the total number to 44.

The Hawke Government's Family Package

The Hawke government's mini-Budget in May 1987 involved significant cuts in expenditure on families, including the income-testing of family allowances and the cessation of supporting parents benefits and widows pensions once children turned 16. The means-testing of Family Allowances, previously paid to all mothers with dependent children, was reported in the *Age* under the headline "Death of the legacy of family aid" (*Age*, 19 May 1987). This did not become a partisan issue, however, in so far as the President of the Liberal Party, John Elliott, had been one of those calling most loudly for income-testing to be imposed.

In the 1987 federal election the Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, announced the Government's 'Family Package' including the new Family Allowance Supplement and Child Disability Allowance. The policy speech was presented as a promise of what could be achieved by:

- *A people who want a fair go for themselves and their families...*
- *For their own children, their own families—but for all Australian children, all Australian families*
- *For all members of this great Australian family*

Following the election, the Social Policy Committee of Cabinet became the Social and Family Policy Committee. The Family Allowance Supplement,

introduced in the September 1987 Budget, was a payment for low-income families, payable to the primary carer. While an important transfer to families disadvantaged by low market incomes, because it was stringently means-tested on family income it posed a significant disincentive to secondary earners.

In April 1989 the government delivered its April Statement and the 'wage tax family package' to alleviate falling living standards, which had particularly hit those with dependent children. Family allowances for first and second children were restored to their 1983 level and indexed, and the rates of Family Allowance Supplement and Additional Pension/Benefit for older children were also increased for older children. For traditional families, the dependent spouse rebate was also increased and indexed.

The Coalition's Future Directions

Meanwhile, Liberal Leader John Howard had been staking his claim on the traditional family and in April 1987 created a specific portfolio responsibility for the family in his shadow cabinet, under the rubric 'Family and Community Services'. The portfolio disappeared again after the election. Howard's 1987 policy speech ended with a reminder of the "unexpected chance to get in front again. Seize it. For yourself, your family and our nation". The speech included the commitment to a Child Care Allowance which would discriminate in favour of 'traditional families' with one parent at home.

The Coalition also released a policy paper entitled *Your Family: The Liberal/National Party Approach* which promised "Family-oriented policy development and evaluation in government". The paper began with the statement "The Liberal and National Parties value the family above all other social units...". This statement of Liberal philosophy might be compared with John Stuart Mill's nineteenth-century view that:

... the feudal family, the last historical form of patriarchal life, has long perished, and the unit of society is not now the family or clan...

but the individual; or at most a pair of individuals with their unemancipated children . [Mill, 1848; 1970: 372]

In 1988, in the run up to the launch of the new Coalition manifesto, *Future Directions*, John Howard, then Opposition Leader, told Queenslanders that:

I believe very strongly that the erosion of the influence of the family and of family values has been one of the major contributions to the social and economic problems that this country has experienced ... Policies [will] be put to three tests: that they offer more incentives to individuals, strengthen the family, and that they prefer private enterprise over public enterprise [Age, 18 November 1988]

Future Directions continued this theme—the family was under attack and families were breaking up. Government was largely responsible. The weakening of the traditional family unit was 'the setting which leads young people to the treadmill of drug abuse and crime'. Action was needed on two levels: 'reversal of modern anti-family attitudes and positive incentives to reinforce the family' (LNP,1988: 15).

Following the launch of *Future Directions*, the *Australian* newspaper ran a 'Public Opinion Hotline', with John Howard as the guest speaker on the topic 'Time for Plain Thinking on Government for the Family'. The *Australian* reported that 63 per cent of callers were in favour of Howard's family policy, although some of the responses were clearly extremely negative. One of those printed described the phrases 'family unit' and 'traditional values' as code words for extreme conservatism, ignoring contradictions between the importance of the individual and the supremacy of the family and ignoring the small virulent strain of Fascism appearing in Australia (*Australian* 16 December 1988).

At the beginning of March 1989, full-page advertisements were taken out in the press by the Liberal party to promote *Future Directions* under the headline "Nothing is more important to me than keeping my family happy and together. Why am I being penalised for it?". The advertisements included a photo of the victimised family man in a business suit and with a furrowed brow. At the bottom, adjacent to the word Liberal (in very large

type), appeared the happy blonde family in front of the picket fence of their home from the cover of *Future Directions*.

The (male) target audience for *Future Directions* was underlined in the song which accompanied it, *Son You're Australian* ⁵ which appealed to 'plain-thinking men' to 'cleanse the muddied waters' and restore the old Australia which had been changed when the 'fancy dancers got to have their say'. The nostalgia for a time before feminism, gay liberation, multiculturalism or Aboriginal land rights conveyed by these lyrics and by *Future Directions* itself was much commented on in the media. The direction appeared to be backwards to the 1950s, when Australia was a man's country, when immigrants 'Australianised' their names, homosexuals were still in the closet, Aboriginal Australians were rarely mentioned and women knew their place. The document received considerable promotion by the Conservative Action and Victory Fund, for example in its bi-monthly *Family Protection Report*.

In April when full-page *Future Directions* advertisements appeared in the *Australian Women's Weekly* some attempt was made to render it more gender-inclusive. The worried family man had changed out of his business suit and had been joined by an open-mouthed, wide-eyed woman (looking aghast?). The text had changed to "nothing is more important to us than keeping our family happy and together".

In June 1989, despite the replacement of Howard by Andrew Peacock as Liberal Leader, attitudes towards the family were still being described as a vital element in Liberal pre-selections. At a meeting of the 'Doer's Club' a week before the preselection for the federal seat of Deakin, front-bencher Ian Macphee made heretical comments including that: "It was impossible to pretend that various acts of violence—such as incest and wife-bashing—were not also now a fact of family life in Australia" (*Weekend Australian* 17-18 June 1989). Preselection delegates disapproved and Macphee was subsequently narrowly defeated:

Had Mr Macphee not made what members of the Doer's Club have called his 'unfortunate' comments on the family, he might now be

planning his re-election campaign rather than pondering his future.
[Weekend Australian 17-18 June 1989]

At the beginning of August 1989 Andrew Peacock embarked on a 'mock' election campaign around Australia. Associated with this were two television advertisements on family themes. In one, a tearful mother reminded her husband that they could not afford to have another child, because they needed her salary. Peacock then loomed up to say: "It's not right, is it?". One viewer was moved to write an open letter in response asking whether Mr Peacock's concern for families would actually translate into increased childcare funding, better pay for childcare workers, better maternity and paternity leave and an adequate support structure for parents at home with children:

No, Andrew, I don't think that's what you're on about. Here's what I think: I reckon you want to make a tax deduction out of me. So my nice, hard-working husband (stiff bickies if I haven't got one) can claim me on his income tax Think Andrew. It's not right. Is it?
[Age, 25 August 1989: 18]

The National Party

Among the mainstream political parties, the family has featured most consistently among the 'traditional values' upheld by the National Party. The National Party has frequently proclaimed the need to rescue the family from attacks upon it by 'feminist dictators' who through equal opportunity legislation denigrate those women who choose to be full-time homemakers:

They [women] should be encouraged to stay at home and look after their families. That is what the National Party is on about; we are on about supporting the family and giving women incentives to stay at home and look after the family and bring up young Australians as they ought to be brought up, not in some socialised, ratbag, Russianised-type childminding centre set up at the factory door [Ian Cameron, House of Representatives, 10 April 1986: 2045]

The National Party articulates concerns about changes to the 'traditional structure of the family' caused by the entry of married women into the paid

workforce and believes that priority should be given to preserving the increasingly rare single-income (two-parent) family.

The National Party flier for the 1984 federal election urged voters to vote national 'for your nation and your family' and suggested that the Labor government had undermined the 'traditional family unit' by, for example, extending travel allowances to *de facto* partners of federal politicians, extending the dependent spouse rebate to *de facto* partners and supporting the ABC's move to provide benefits for homosexual partners.

During the campaign the National Party Leader, Ian Sinclair, tried to link Labor's 'erosion of family values' with AIDS and the death of three babies in Queensland:

If it wasn't for the promotion of homosexuality as a norm by Labor, I am quite confident that the deaths of these three poor babies would not have occurred There is no doubt that the lack of concern by the Hawke Government for traditional family relationships is encouraging the extent to which the community regards homosexual relationships as normal. As far as we are concerned the traditional family is not only the family which will be good for the health of the nation. It will also be good for the health of the individuals of the nation. [Age, 17 November 1984]

Great stress was placed on the family credentials of candidates. The campaign flier for one National Party candidate in the 1984 election, Bob Chapman, simply read: "Bob is a family man. He and his wife Marilyn have two children: Brie aged eight and Joel aged six. For the past eight years Bob has served as a Minister of Religion in the Kelmscott Division of the Canning Electorate".

In 1989 the NSW National Party launched a pre-election campaign to promote the new federal National Party leader, Charles Blunt, under the slogan 'The Family First'. The campaign poster, which dwarfed the new leader at the NSW annual conference, was a heroic, standing image of a male-headed Anglo-Australian family, depicted in a style reminiscent of 1930s social realism.

Other Manifestations of the Family as Political Theme

It should be noted that of all the States and Territories, it is Queensland and Tasmania which have the highest proportion of 'traditional' families—that is, the lowest workforce participation rates by married women with dependent children (ABS, 1988: 6-7).

In 1987 the Bjelke-Petersen National Party government in Queensland took the symbolic step of introducing a Ministry of Family Services. When Craig Sherrin was appointed to this portfolio in 1989, his wife saw it as an opportunity for him to "put his Christian and strong family values into practice" (*Courier Mail*, 20 January 1989).

In October 1988, Mr Neil Batt, then Tasmanian Labor Leader, said that the family was central to Labor's vision for Tasmania:

My government will be a family government and I will be a family Premier [Canberra Times, 9 October 1988].

Under Michael Field, the new Labor Leader, the ALP released a 'Family Package' paper for the 1989 election announcing the Labor Party's commitment to the family and family values. A policy paper on crime was also released, subtitled 'Making Tasmania a Safer Place for your Family'. The terms of the 1989 Accord with the Green Independents, under which the new minority Labor government in Tasmania was committed to homosexual law reform, was used by the Opposition to suggest that under Labor Tasmania would in fact become less safe for the family.

By contrast with Queensland and Tasmania, the ACT has the highest workforce participation rate by married women with dependents. When the ACT self-government election was held on 4 March 1989 the ACT Liberal Party adopted elements of the federal family campaign but the ACT ALP was dissuaded from issuing a family policy of its own.

Table 1: Creation of Family Portfolios in the 1980s

	<i>Party in Govt</i>	<i>Cabinet</i>	<i>Shadow Cabinet</i>
Federal	ALP	—	Family & Community Services 87
NSW	Coalition	Family & Community Services 88	Family & Community Services 88
Vic.	ALP	—	—
Qld	National	Family Services 87	—
WA	ALP	The Family 86	The Family 86
SA	ALP	—	—
Tas	ALP	—	—
NT	CLP	—	—
ACT	ALP	—	The Family (part of Opposition Leader's portfolio responsibilities)

As seen above, Victoria and South Australia have largely resisted the trend towards campaigning around the family theme or the creation of family portfolio responsibilities.

Reasons for the Political Emergence of the Family

As can be seen from this account, there are a number of reasons for the emergence of the family as a campaign theme in the 1980s. The shift in the political climate has brought calls for the cutting of public expenditure and for private rather than collective provision of welfare. There are close linkages between conservative think tanks and organisations in Australia and those in the UK and the USA where the need to strengthen the family as an alternative to big government and wasteful social expenditure was first elaborated. Once the Right had raised the political saliency of the family it became important not to surrender this terrain by default and be tainted as 'anti-family'.

In addition, there has been a conservative backlash against the social changes of the 1960s and 1970s. The 1988 Clemenger Report, *Present Tense: The Plight of Australians Today*, suggested that because of widespread anxiety among Australians about change, advertisements which evoked a simpler, more manageable past were likely to work well. Judith Brett has argued that "*Future Directions*' presentation of the family under threat aims to tap this mood of widespread and amorphous anxiety" (Brett, 1989: 13).

The increased use of qualitative research and close targeting of electoral campaigns on swinging voters in marginal electorates characterised by high levels of familism was also likely to throw up the family as a useful electoral theme. Another contributing factor was the universal use of advertising agencies for campaign purposes, which brought with it greater reliance on the marketing of images. The exploitation of the flag and the family fitted well into this new era of image politics.

However the meaning of the family and of family policy has differed considerably across the political spectrum in accordance with the degree of feminist influence and equal opportunity commitment within parties, as well as the influence of liberal individualism or of collectivist approaches to social welfare. These meanings tend to be deliberately blurred for campaign purposes to maximise the political return. Tensions, such as those between individual freedom of choice and the strengthening of the family, remain unresolved. I shall now look at the implications for social policy of the varying political meanings of the family.

Family Policy and Social Policy

At the social policy level, the increased interest in the family dates from 1977. The Royal Commission on Human Relationships argued in its Final Report that "Australia has never had a unified family policy and, as a result, services tend to be fragmented, overlapping and inconsistent. Families are frequently confused by this partitioning of responsibility, and do not know the range of available services or how to apply for them" (RCHR, 1977, Vol. 1, p. 65). It suggested that the aim of a family policy should be "an equitable

distribution of services and resources to allow all families to achieve common social goals—adequate income, housing, education, health, recreation and legal protection" (RCHR, 1977). The Report canvassed the use of family impact statements to ensure that 'family interests are not neglected'.

Interest in family policy was reflected in the 1977 meeting of the Council of Social Welfare Ministers and the subsequent holding of the conference 'Towards a National Family Policy' in 1980. Non-government organisations such as the Australian Family Association (AFA) have pushed heavily for family impact statements and a family impact unit in Prime Minister and Cabinet. Lauchlan Chipman was the keynote speaker at the AFA Conference on 'Family Policy in Australia' held in 1981, and used the occasion to promote his own anti-feminist view that vulnerable members of society could be looked after most effectively and cheaply by family members if only those family members did not pursue careers:

... it is thought by many that the mere fact that it is inconvenient for them to provide such care themselves (e.g. because it interferes with the career of one of the members of a two career family) generates a public obligation to provide or at least contribute substantially to the costs of such care. [Chipman, 1981: 10]

Family policies rest on values and assumptions that are rarely made as explicit as by Chipman. As already noted, the political gains from association with 'the family' may be forfeited by more explicit enunciation of the values and objectives involved. There is no consensus over the definition of the family. The Labor Party has been more inclined to accept diversity in the forms of the family while the Coalition parties, despite internal differences, have been more wedded to the 'traditional' family. Whereas the Labor Party, in its family policy papers asserts its commitment to strengthen the family, whatever its composition, the Coalition has been more concerned to strengthen the traditional family. However, there have been serious tensions within the Coalition between those who believe that individual rights and freedoms inhere primarily in male family heads and

those who believe that these rights and freedoms should have a more universal application.

A number of competing objectives may be encompassed by family policy, or between family policy as an aspect of social justice strategy and as a means of reducing public expenditure. I shall examine some of these here. In general, the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), established in 1980 under the *Family Law Act 1975*, has supported the concept of the family (broadly defined) as the recipient of services and income redistribution and has supported equity within and between families rather than the concept of the family as an alternative to the welfare state. Following are some of questions and value positions proposed by the AIFS for family impact analysis:

- how will this support families in their dual productive roles at home and in the paid labour force? (both men and women should be supported in their economic and nurturing roles)
- will it harm family stability?
- will it benefit or discriminate against:
 - particular types of families? (there should be no discrimination on the basis of marital status or family type)
 - particular individuals within families? (the income transfer system must be careful not to discriminate against the rights of women and to enhance the rights of children)
- will it preserve or damage rights of families to freedom of choice to pursue their own values and way of life?
- will it move society towards a more equitable and just position for every family and its individual members? (universal transfers and provision of services for families, rather than selectivist programs which restrict incentives, restrict choices and increase dependency) (AIFS, 1985: 2-3).

Family Policy as a Principle of Redistribution

Family policy can serve as means of redistribution from women to men—this was the case in Australia between 1907 and the early 1970s when the concept of the 'family wage' justified paying men more than women doing the same work, on the grounds that the man needed to support a family. The question of intrafamily transfers will be considered below.

Family policy can also mean lifecycle redistribution so that adults contribute to the support of young and old—this kind of redistribution is basic to the welfare state as found in English-speaking countries.

Related, though conceptually distinct, is the principle of horizontal redistribution between those with and without dependent family members. In relation to tax, this recognises that those with dependent family members have a lesser ability to pay tax than those without. This principle was embedded in the Australian system of family allowances between 1976 and 1987 and in the prior system of child-related tax deductions and rebates. As we have seen, in 1987 universal family allowances were replaced by income-tested allowances, thus moving away from the principle of horizontal equity.

Family policy can also mean redistribution between families with greater or fewer resources to ensure equality of opportunity for children and to minimise the transmission of inequality through families. This kind of income redistribution is not highly developed in Australia. Another form of redistribution between families would be that entailed by the Government's Child Support Scheme, which redistributes income from a non-custodial parent (and his new family) to his old family.

Family Policy as Provision of Services to Families

Family policy can mean providing support to unpaid family carers, through, for example, providing access to leisure, recreation and developmental opportunities. Care within the family is generally regarded

as the cheapest way to ensure care to vulnerable members of society, but it can often be at great cost to the caregivers—in terms of mental and physical health as well as in financial terms.

A series of reports commissioned by State and Commonwealth governments have detailed the problems such as isolation, low self-esteem, poor health status and lack of access to sport and recreation of those providing full-time care in the home. Such isolation may be particularly acute for immigrant women from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

The Victorian government responded to the 1987 Report by the Victorian Women's Consultative Council (*Women in the Home*) by greatly increasing resources available to neighbourhood houses, which provide support networks, courses and childcare. Other means of supporting family carers are through the provision of community services such as occasional care for children, daycare for the aged, and accessible public transport. Occupational health and safety in the home is another area now being taken up by the Victorian government. All States and Territories also provide women's information services which particularly address the issue of the isolation and lack of self-esteem of family carers, and in addition to provision of information and support provide a range of services such as assertion training.

Community services described above also supplement the caring work of women in the paid workforce—the majority of whom are also primary carers for family members. Despite the increase in community services to assist with the care of young, old and disabled family members, the 1987 pilot time-use survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that married women in the paid workforce spent over twice as much time caring for children, the sick and disabled as did married men, and over four times as much time on housework (ABS, 1987: 37).

Family Policy as a Means of Reducing Public Expenditure

Since the mid-1970s there has been a growth in influence in Australia, as in other English-speaking countries, of small government ideology. This ideology has claimed that a high level of public expenditure and collective provision was a major source of economic problems. Pruning back public expenditure, freeing up market forces and restoring responsibility to the 'family' for welfare services was seen as the solution. This ideology was articulated by Senator Chaney in his role as Minister for Social Security in the Fraser government. Chaney frequently expressed the belief that the functions of his own department in relation to childcare, youth services and the care of the aged could be performed better by the family:

... it is not the proper function of government to involve itself in activities that can be accommodated within traditional family and community networks of caring and support. [Chaney, 1981: 3]

The family was to be 'strengthened' as an alternative to community services rather than as a recipient of them. As we have seen, in 1981 Lauchlan Chipman was contesting the view that there was a public obligation towards those who could be looked after within the family were it not that such care would 'interfere with the career of one of the members of a two-career family.' Such care should be provided in the home ('lower capital costs') from relatives ('lower labour costs') in accordance with the principle of mutual affection rather than of public obligation (Chipman, 1981:10).

The new 1982 Liberal Party Platform followed this drift to de-emphasising community obligations and highlighting the responsibility of families and was in marked contrast to the 1974 Liberal document *The Way Ahead* (drafted by Macphee). There was also a renewed emphasis on the value of full-time care by a 'parent' during the early years of childhood (but no corresponding emphasis on the need for paid or unpaid parental leave, support services or retraining and confidence-building for 'parents' re-entering the workforce).

Where policies of restoring responsibility to the family for welfare services are enunciated, it is invariably understood that it is women who will provide these services and who will be the 'parent' who provides full-time care. Through the cutting back of community services and the accompanying loss of women's jobs, women will become available for full-time unpaid welfare work within 'traditional networks of caring and support'.

Such policies also draw support from moves to deinstitutionalise those with physical and mental disabilities. However, the prime movers behind 'deinstitutionalisation' did not intend that those with disabilities be returned to the 'community' without the provision of adequate community services. Instead deinstitutionalisation has again been treated as a way of reducing public expenditure and abrogating collective responsibility.

The small government arguments for strengthening the traditional family have been summarised by B. A. Santamaria:

Social services, most of which were once delivered to their main recipient by the family, for nothing, are now inevitably thrust on the shoulders of the State. Because the cohesion of the family has been disrupted by social pressures (predominantly the absorption of married women into the workforce), political pressures (most recently, militant feminism), legal pressures (pre-eminently the Family Law Act), it can no longer function as the social mechanism for primary care, which it once was ...

But if you press on to the shoulders of government the cost of all the services once carried out for nothing by the family, you cannot avoid a calamitous increase in public expenditure and in taxation, the all-consuming growth of the public sector of the bureaucracy, and of inflation, which may be reduced but is far from conquered.
[Santamaria, 1985: 26]

Family Policy and Work Incentives

Particular family structures have often been associated with the need to reinforce male work incentives. There is a strong statement of this in George Gilder's *Wealth and Poverty*—a book that was 'required reading' in

Reagan's White House and in Australia has been excerpted in *Quadrant* (June 1981). Gilder suggests that it is married men who are the source of capitalist productivity. In the male-headed single income family, the natural aggression of the male is channeled into providing for his dependents. Where women have access to employment or welfare rights this undermines male confidence, authority, respect from wife and children and sexual potency and removes his motivation for hard work (Gilder, 1982: 118). According to this model, it is work incentives for men which are all-important, women 'don't work as hard' as men, are distracted by the needs of the family and are not so single-minded in the pursuit of money. The role of women is to motivate market men in their pursuit of wealth. As we have seen, the Liberal Party under John Howard linked strengthening the family with incentives for (male) individuals. In the UK, the Thatcher government has criticised child benefit for its possible effects on men's incentives to provide for their families.

Family Policy and Aged Care Policy

The development of community services such as the Home and Community Care Program have been important in enabling the elderly to remain independent and in their own homes. Under the rubric of 'family policy' small government proponents wish to return responsibility for aged care to the family. This means increasing the dependence of the aged on their direct family. Overseas studies have shown that the aged prefer the provision of non-stigmatising public services and a more reciprocal relationship with family members over the increased dependence suggested by this model of family policy (Waerness, 1987: 226).

The other issue to be considered in relation to care of the aged by the family is who is to do the caring? Most care for the ageing falls to women—once children are grown up, responsibility for elderly parents and parents-in-law takes its place. The needs of family carers for support services, for equal opportunity to participate in the wider community, and for access to leisure and recreation have already been noted. The 1926 Soviet Marriage Code, which made care for biological parents and grandparents as well as children

and grandchildren a statutory responsibility, was hotly contested by feminists such as Alexandra Kollontai who foresaw the implications of downplaying collective provision in reimposing women's enslavement to the family.

Family Policy as a Pronatalist Measure

Some countries have promoted family policy as a means of reversing falling birth-rates. This has been true of countries such as France, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union. Emphasis here is on measures such as relatively generous family allowances, rights to extended periods of paid leave after the birth of each child and/or reduced working hours after childbirth. France also uses the 'quotient' system for calculating tax liability, whereby family income is divided by a coefficient made up of 1.0 for each adult and 0.5 for each child, with an additional 0.5 for families with three or more children. An alternative approach adopted in Romania was to ban abortion and ensure no forms of contraception were available.

In Australia, pronatalist concerns were central to such elements of family policy which emerged in the early years of the twentieth century and were reflected in the Ministry for Public Health and Motherhood held by J.J.G. McGirr in NSW in 1920-22. When McGirr introduced his Motherhood Endowment Bill in 1921, he announced that "motherhood endowment is based on the fact that we want to populate Australia" (Legislative Assembly, 20 October 1921).

Similarly, post-war reconstruction policies were guided by the need identified by the National Health and Medical Research Council (1944) to stimulate fertility through the provision of a range of subsidised services, including a health policy and a housing policy which would give preference to larger families. Child endowment payments peaked in 1950 when endowment for two children was equivalent to 11 per cent of the basic wage. In recent years, payments to mothers have generally been eroded in value and in 1977 the Commonwealth maternity allowance, first introduced by the Fisher government in 1912, was finally abolished. As Minister for

Social Security in the Fraser government, Senator Chaney described the family allowance system as 'wasteful' and, as we have seen, income-testing was introduced by the Hawke government in 1987.

In Australia, no current official family policy has adopted a pronatalist approach, although some correspondents to the *Australian* have argued that 'the best immigrants are Australian babies' and that more should be done to encourage Australian families to have children. The National Party has also expressed its concern that "Australia's population growth is almost totally dependent on immigration. There is a danger that Australia will lose its traditional character if natural population growth is not increased" (National Party of Australia, 1989: 27). This usually amounts to demands for fiscal welfare for male breadwinners (see below) rather than the kinds of direct inducements to mothers offered in Europe. The Conservative Action for Victory Fund, however, has been promoting the work of Ben Wattenberg of the American Enterprise Institute *The Birth Dearth: What Happens When People (sic) in Free Countries Don't Have Enough Babies*. Wattenberg's solutions to the birth dearth are on the European model of providing more childcare and substantial financial incentives for women to have children.

Australian pronatalism is also selective. The 'best immigrants' are not the children of single mothers. Many Queenslanders were sympathetic to the suggestion in 1986 of the then Queensland Minister for Welfare Services, Yvonne Chapman, that sole parent benefit be stopped for unmarried mothers with more than one child. In 1987 Chapman became Minister for Family Services.

Encouragement of Intact Families

One aspect of family policy comprises measures to encourage intact families and prevent the social consequences (and costs) of family breakdown. This may mean 'preparation for family life' as part of school curriculum or an emphasis on family or marriage guidance counselling. The Western Australian Liberal family policy has large sections on these services and

Future Directions includes them under a section entitled 'Supporting the Responsibilities of Marriage'. Increasing stress on the user pays principle for such services funded by the Commonwealth represents a contradiction within the movement to strengthen the family as a substitute for the welfare state. The Western Australian Liberals included commitments in their policy to increase State funding for marriage guidance or family counselling; to try to persuade the Commonwealth government to make such fees tax deductible and to try to persuade private health funds to treat such fees as eligible for medical benefits.

Family Reunion

Those who support strengthening family responsibility for welfare do not necessarily support family reunion migration. While a major concern of Australia's ethnic communities, some conservative commentators such as Geoffrey Blainey see family reunion as being contrary to Australia's economic or social interests.

Inequalities Within Families

One of the major problems of family policy is that the family tends to be treated as an undifferentiated unit. Using the 'family' framework, it may be difficult to analyse the inequalities of power and resources within families. This may lead to 'pro-family' policies which do not actually enhance family welfare because they are based on the false assumption of the pooling of family resources (Edwards, 1984; 1985). This is true wherever the family is used as the unit of account in the tax or social security systems. Thus, measures to assist families may in fact perpetuate intra-family inequity, including intra-family poverty (for example tax benefits for the primary earner which disadvantage secondary earners).

On the other hand, the assumption that adults involved in a heterosexual relationship share their income discriminates against those in such relationships (whether married or *de facto*) relative to other people who live together. Social security benefits are means tested on 'family' income,

meaning the aggregate income of those in marital or de facto relationships. A brother and sister living together or a homosexual couple do not have their income aggregated in the same way. Similarly, a heterosexual couple will only be eligible for the married rate of social security payment, while any other couple will be eligible for the higher level of payment based on single rates. These anomalies were highlighted by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal in *Re Stoilkovic and Secretary to the Department of Social Security* (Australia. AAT, 1985).

In Australia, the increasing popularity of family policy which treats the family as an undifferentiated unit has gone hand in hand with social policies based on the recognition of gender inequalities within families. Hence, social policy reflected in State and Commonwealth programs has dealt with domestic violence, sexual assault and incest as arising from inequalities of power between men and women within families. By contrast, the 1989 Western Australian Liberal Family Policy raised the issue of domestic violence, but promised to look only at factors external to the family such as alcohol or videos.

Similarly, while some tax and most social security policy is based on the family unit *per se*, other policy tacitly recognises the issue of intra-family equity and poverty by directing payments (such as family allowance or family allowance supplement) to the primary carer. In addition to ensuring that family assistance benefits children, payment to the primary carer is a form of recognition of the value of the work performed by carers and a means of alleviating their financial dependency.

Family Policy and Equal Opportunity Policy

In terms of legislation, Victoria is the only jurisdiction which prohibits discrimination in employment on the ground of parental status (*Equal Opportunity Act, 1984*). The Western Australian Labor party followed with a 1989 election commitment to amend the WA Equal Opportunity Act to "protect parents discriminated against on the basis of their family commitments and responsibilities".

ILO Convention 156 concerns equal opportunities and equal treatment for workers with family responsibilities. The Australian government has been committed since 1983 to the ratification of this Convention but has yet to do so, due to failure to obtain agreement from all States (such agreement is not essential for the purpose of ratification).

Work patterns and career structures in Australia have still not been adapted to accommodate unpaid caring responsibilities of workers, particularly the 40 per cent of the workforce who are women. Paid maternity leave is still not available in Australia outside a few areas of the public sector, let alone other forms of paid parenting leave (for example to care for sick children) or provision for shorter hours when family responsibilities are most demanding.

Access to good quality and affordable childcare is of vital importance if workers with family responsibilities are to have equal opportunity in the paid workforce. While Australia has made greater progress than, for example, the UK, and there has been a significant increase in the number of government subsidised childcare places under the Hawke government, we are far behind comparable European countries in the provision of childcare.

Some progress has been made in the NSW teaching service in ensuring that time spent in raising children can be credited for seniority purposes rather than having a negative effect on career seniority, but this is unusual. Retraining opportunities for family carers who are trying to re-enter the workforce have been increasing, but in most cases time spent out of the workforce in caring for family members has a negative effect on earnings and career opportunities on return to the workforce. Australian superannuation schemes also discriminate against those with broken work patterns.

Another crucial element in ensuring equal opportunity to workers with family responsibilities is the more equal distribution of work in the home.

In the early days of the Hawke government, the Joe Average poster was produced by the Office of the Status of Women:

I'm Joe Average. My family means more to me than anything else ... that's why I share the responsibility for the housework and caring for the kids.

(Note the contrast to the man in *Future Directions* whose family means more to him than anything else and that's why he wants tax cuts).

On the other hand, family policy may be conceptualised as an alternative to equal opportunity for women. Patrick Jenkin, when Shadow Minister for Social Services in the UK stated that there was now "an elaborate machinery to ensure her equal opportunity, equal pay and equal rights but I think we ought to stop and ask: where does this leave the family"? According to Jenkin, the existence of equal opportunity encouraged young women to go to work rather than performing the vital functions of motherhood and care for the elderly (Coote and Campbell, 1982: 84-85). In Australia, John Howard while Leader of the Opposition, said that the existence of paid maternity leave for federal public servants was 'plainly ridiculous' and that he would consider scrapping it (*Canberra Times*, 4 September 1986).

Family Policy and Family Unit Taxation

Since 1980 there has been a big push among Liberal 'dries' for 'family unit taxation' or income splitting. This is also a longstanding policy of conservative groups such as the Australian Family Association and official policy of the National Party. Family unit taxation is not only regressive (benefiting high income earners most) but also directly penalises secondary earners as their income when aggregated with their partners' attracts a higher rate of taxation. This acts as a disincentive for married women to enter the paid workforce, or to increase their participation. Women's workforce participation has been shown to be more sensitive than men's to changes in rates of taxation (Apps *et al.*, 1981; Apps, 1987). The concept is also based on the assumption of 'pooling' discussed above.

Income splitting is at odds with the incentives for individuals promised by the Coalition, unless it is assumed that, as in the early liberalism of John Locke, individuals are only male family heads. It is certainly at odds with equal opportunity. It is a means of encouraging a return to the 'traditional family' where women subordinated their own needs to those of husbands, children and parents. Income splitting was the centre-piece of Opposition tax policy in 1984, and has been strongly supported by John Howard. The contradiction between the traditional family and equal opportunity has often been pointed out by Liberals who have had portfolio responsibility for the Status of Women, such as Ian Macphie. The use of the tax system for social engineering is also controversial and runs counter to the principle that taxation should be neutral in regard to social choices—that is, that it not affect decisions about economic behaviour such as the level of labour force participation.

While income splitting has not yet been adopted, one aspect of family unit taxation, the Dependent Spouse Rebate (DSR) which benefits those who have a spouse providing full-time services in the home, regardless of the presence of children, was increased significantly during the Fraser period, due to strong advocacy from the Treasurer, John Howard, and peaked in value relative to earnings in 1981. In April this year, the Hawke government also announced significant increases to the DSR and its indexation. The DSR distorts the tax system in favour of 'traditional' families. While providing a workforce disincentive to secondary earners, its effectiveness as a form of family assistance is problematic—not only because the majority of families with children are ineligible but because many primary carers are unaware of whether or not it is received by their spouse or what its value is (OSW, 1985).

Family Policy and Female Headed Families

Despite lip-service to the different kinds of families now found in Australia, the slogan of 'strengthening the family' definitely does not apply to female-headed families. Sole parents are not perceived as performing valuable work like that performed by women within 'traditional' families. As

referred to above, Mrs Chapman in Queensland believes that single parents should give up their children for adoption or place them in orphanages. In the last election, the Coalition policy was that sole parents should be forced to transfer to unemployment benefit when their children were over 10 (a view also propounded by the Department of Finance).

Among conservative writers, there have been frequent attempts to link juvenile delinquency with the increase in female-headed households. The absence of male authority is seen as leading to social disorder. The strengthening of the patriarchal family in Stalin's 1936 family legislation was described by Trotsky in the following terms:

... the most compelling motive of the present cult of the family is undoubtedly the need of the bureaucracy for a stable hierarchy of relations and for the disciplining of youth by means of 40 million points of support for authority and power. [Trotsky, 1937: 41]

Conclusion

A focus on the family can be part of a progressive and reformist approach to social policy, encompassing redistribution and provision of services to those with dependent family members and goals of equity between families and within families. However, such policy must be grounded in the clear understanding of the changing nature of families and of the tendency of families to perpetuate gender inequalities. The danger of using the family as the focus for policy is that it diverts attention away from the differing roles played by men and women within families and the consequences of these differing roles in terms of equal opportunity.

The dangers of a family approach to policy are seen most clearly in its adoption by advocates of 'small government', who emphasise the reduction of State provision of welfare at the expense of increasing the dependence of women and other family members on male family heads. Those who sing the praises of the 'traditional family unit' seek to reverse the greater autonomy and freedom to choose achieved by women in recent decades.

While lip-service is paid to the value of women's work as full-time homemakers, there is resistance to calculating the value of such work to the economy or to the provision of adequate infrastructure for it.⁶ Emphasis on the traditional family unit also tends to be associated with authoritarianism and intolerance of alternative social arrangements.

Perhaps the greatest danger involved in the increasing political emphasis on the family is that it means moving away from a political discourse based on rationality and individual rights and towards a highly charged emotional discourse based on the manipulation of political symbols such as the family, the flag and the nation.

Endnotes

1 Acknowledgements: This paper has benefited from comments by Dr Clem Lloyd, Dr Meredith Edwards, Senator Bob McMullan and Shelley Schreiner.

2 Marian Sawyer is a former member of the Urban Research Unit.

3 In 1989 this rôle was expressed as support for policies "to promote loyalty to the Crown and pride in the National Anthem and God Save the Queen. and in the existing Australian flag" (National Party of Australia, *Draft Policy Position Papers*, 1989: 1).

4 The old logo was retained by State National Parties and was being used in 1989 for the NSW 'The Family First' campaign.

5 The text of this song is as follows:

*When I was young my mother told me
As I sat upon her knee
Son you're Australian
That's enough for anyone to be*

*It's enough to be a good man
Plain-thinking men stay honest and stay true
Don't heed the fast talker or the con man
Australia needs plain-thinking men like you*

*Never mind the fancy dancers
Plain-thinking men know their right from wrong
Don't deal with silver tongues and chancers
Keep your vision clear and and hold it strong*

*I hear the echo in the ranges
And across the sunlit sea
Son you're Australian
That's enough for anyone to be*

*And I grew to be a proud man
Proud to do what my country asked of me
I like to think I'm a good man
Fighting for the things that have to be*

*But its funny how the promises are broken
And things just don't work out the way they say
Still we try to hold it all together
Still we wait to find a better day
I hear the echo in the cities
And across this great country
Son you're Australian
That's enough for anyone to be*

*I watched as things began to change around
me
The fancy dancers got to have their say
They changed the vision, spurned the
wisdom
And made Australia change to suit their way*

*Its time we cleansed the muddy waters
And do the things we know must be done
So that we teach our sons and daughters
What it means to be a true Australian*

*Plain-thinking men and women rise, we
need you
There's so very much that must be done
Let's get back the things that made you
Proud to call yourselves Australian*

*And the feeling never leaves me
Anywhere I chance to be
Son, you're Australian
That's enough
That's enough for anyone to be*

6 In 1986 a Liberal MHR, Mr John Hodges, attacked the funding of a study of housework under the Australian Research Grants Scheme, describing it as a 'worthless, pointless exercise' (*Age*, 16 January 1986)

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