

**‘A New Work and Care Settlement:
Can Australia’s Institutions Catch Up With Australians?’**

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2004 TR Ashworth Lecture in Sociology,

6-7pm, Wednesday 13th October, 2004,

Public Policy Lecture Theatre 2nd Floor, 234 Queensberry Street, Carlton,

The University of Melbourne.

When Thomas Ramsden Ashworth died in 1935 leaving his bequest to the University of Melbourne – the one that brings me here tonight - he said that it should be used for scholarship ‘on some subject of subjects in connection with sociology but excluding economics’¹.

This wish reflects the intellectual flux of his time, which saw a rise in the influence of economics in the inter-war years and faltering progress for sociology². Ashworth’s favoring of sociology over economics reflected his view that society could not be understood through material life alone, that social analysis was essential, and that larger ethical and political issues existed, demanding an integrating sociological analysis³. While some saw sociology as the ‘queen’ of social sciences, with the capacity to integrate the social sciences, economics was emergent as its ‘king’. It must now be seen, in 2004 and four days after the election of a fourth term Coalition Government where economics dominated, as its emperor.

And the brand of economics that takes this regal title is one that would be barely recognisable to Ashworth. The dominant economic strain of his times weighed various interests and considered ‘historical and geographical dimensions as well as an appreciation of the political possibility of action’. In contrast, the dominant strain of neo-classical, neo-liberal economics today welcomes the triumph of the market and the dominance of the material, most obvious in a federal election fought out almost entirely around money and individual economic comfort (all the while in the shadow of very significant ethical, political, international and non-economic issues). This is a long way from the economic thinking of the interwar period, when economics made up one of several significant social sciences contribution to thinking about the ‘problem of society’.

¹ Michael Crozier ‘Society Economised. T. R. Ashworth and the History of the Social Sciences in Australia’, *Australian Historical Studies*, 119, 2002, p. 125-142.

² Crozier sets Ashworth’s intellectual position, and his bequest, within the intellectual flows of his time, Crozier, 2002, p. 127.

³ See Crozier’s description of Ashworth’s intellectual position: 2002.

I hope Ashworth would not be alarmed to find that the person lecturing in his name tonight spent four years of her life studying economics and has never formally studied sociology. I went to university after a few years experience at work, motivated to discover why some people are rich and others poor. My undergraduate study of economics proved something of a detour on my way towards the answers. For a start, neoclassical economics as it evolved in the forty years after Ashworth's death, had defined the question of inequality out of contention: a particular income and wealth distribution is taken as a given in neo-classical economic theory, with its focus on markets, production and distribution.

In the twenty-five years since that first lecture in Economics 1, I have been intent, one way or another, on trying to understand the social location of significant economic and social problems, and the political processes by which better solutions might not only be crafted, but won. For me this has meant an extended sojourn studying the world of work and the labour market, with a significant detour through the fields and intellectual fruit of feminism, and an occasional skirmish into the public political world. I hope this journey makes me an appropriate heir tonight, despite the limits of my formal sociological education.

The Place of Work and Labour Markets In Australia

Tonight I want to talk about work, its place in our social world, and the challenge of adapting institutions to its changing shape – in scholarship, policy and political life.

In the opening decade of a new century, Australian public life is seeing an active discussion about public working life and its intersections with private life. This is often spoken of by policy makers, politicians and business leaders and managers – rather inadequately - as the issue of 'work and family balance' (though in my experience most people speaking about their lives don't use these terms, and 'balance' is far from their minds).

What is more, many citizens who are talking about work and life issues don't live in a traditional family – but in increasingly diverse household forms, many without children. They are not without caring responsibilities over their lives and they want to live lives that are bigger than jobs. Issues around the intersection of paid work with larger life are important to them.

This conversation is about how we live and work and what our families are. It is about how we best approach the problem of working and of caring, of living the kind of lives we can afford, working and sustaining ourselves, our communities and our households. It is about our public norms and private settlements.

Public discussion about how we work and live is mirrored by a lively and widespread private discussion about work and its effects upon how we live and care privately. This sphere of scholarship requires a multi-disciplinary approach⁴. It also requires a stronger

⁴ Sociologists and social sciences more broadly have much to contribute on these important public and private issues, which cut across all the boundaries of social science, including sociology, economics, demography, political science, history, geography, industrial relations and feminism. They also require the attention of those beyond the boundaries of social science, not least in the health sciences.

scholarly contribution, a new policy approach, and a new politics. I want to address some of elements in my lecture tonight.

The 2004 Election: A 'Work and Family' Bonanza?

If anyone needed any convincing about the need for a new and better conversation and response to 'work and family' issues, surely they do not after the economic election campaign of 2004. At times it seemed that families themselves were for sale:

However, it must be said that this election was something of an improvement on that of 2001 in terms of the discussion about the 'work and family' problem. The 2001 election, and the years 2001-2004, saw much talk but little action on the issue which the Prime Minister had named as a pressing priority for Australian society. Having said it in 2001, he did little.

But three years later, the 2004 election saw nothing short of an astonishing big spend on so-called 'family' issues by both parties, with particular focus on family payments, taxes, childcare, education and health. On the Coalition side, in terms of tax and family payments, much of this went to remedying the mistakes of previous policies – a remediation that is positive and necessary.

The 2004 election continues a slow and reluctant thaw of the Howard government towards the dual earning family. Their policy stance continues its traditional favoritism of sole earner families, but it is tempered by some remediation of the strong disincentives in the form of very high effective marginal tax rates applying to second earners as they take up paid jobs. However, their policy stance confirms their traditional reluctance to fund a public system of quality childcare, in favour of family day care and out of school hours care. They choose to fund the 'choice' of parents while leaving provision to the private market, which undersupplies places (especially higher cost places), misallocates them to high margin 'products', and is careless of quality⁵.

The conservative policy stance towards the Australian family remains saturated with a preference for particular family form: that is, for John and Janette's male-breadwinner/female-carer family form with their daughter influentially in the shadows, for heterosexuality, for market based solutions, for the location of 'work and family' problems as primarily in the hip pocket. All cloaked in a rubric of 'choice'. Beneath this rubric lie some stark realities that constrain practical choice. They include widening inequality, deteriorating public provision, limited options that constrain practical choice, and privatized guilt especially for women, as individuals attempt to find and make their own solutions amidst fraying, decayed or outmoded institutions.

Nonetheless this election saw some chinks in the Liberal's traditional picket fence - which in fact seems to have been replaced by the six foot high cast iron fence - but still the chink is there.

The gate has swung open just a little to admit the 'one-and-a-half' earner family, to reduce the high effective financial penalties on second earners, and to give greater support for commodified and parental childcare.

⁵ See for example, 'Childcare Profits', ABC Radio National, Background Briefing, 3 October 2004.

On the Labor side the 2004 election saw work and family issues strongly asserted, which pushed the Coalition to greater action. Labor defined the terrain and mobilised a conservative response. But the Labor conception of the family is also essentially traditional: that is, like Mark Latham's – he may have had a few highly publicized glitches on the way to life behind the picket (sorry, six foot high cast iron) fence - but the family form is discursively traditional, heterosexual, suburban and the bulk of the solutions are *financially* focused at the *private* household level especially in relation to tax and family payments.

There are important differences beyond this, however, with Labor promoting more egalitarian values (for the most part) in its families and tax policy, a greater preference for public provision of childcare, a better national system of pre-school provision, and stronger public health and education policies.

The Triumph of Economism

My purpose here, however, is not to evaluate the detail and differences of their 'family' offerings, but to draw attention to their narrow economism. By and large, both parties deal with the difficult conflict that now exists in our society around issues of households, work and care as if they are simply a matter of economics, and even more narrowly, more private money for individuals.

This is the great lie that the rise of neo-classical economics leaves us to confront in the sphere of work and care – and beyond. The tendencies that motivated Ashworth to draft his legacy in terms that favoured the sociological over the triumphant economic, have taken deep and successful root. They have borne profuse political fruit as many people increasingly evaluate their happiness and political preferences through a lens of private economic gain, loss and insurance. Ashworth's enthusiasm to shift the focus to the social and away from narrow materiality was right, but to date such impulses have proved weakly inadequate.

What is the nature of work and care conflict? And why is this economic lens inadequate to its challenges? I consider these questions, before turning to the pressing need for a stronger scholarly sociological contribution, and a new policy approach.

Conceptual housework: defining the work and care crisis

I have argued elsewhere that 'work and family' issues are better conceived of as in conflict, than in balance⁶. The origins of this conflict are multiple. They lie in the changing patterns of work and employment (not the same thing, as Guy Standing has argued) including in relation to employment participation, hours, security and intensity; unpaid work; and changing patterns of households (causing growing time-poverty in dual-earner and sole-parent households which are both increasing in number).

These changes also affect the traditional breadwinner household, as the sole earner (usually the father) increasingly works long hours to keep the household financially afloat, intensifying the care work of his partner, and confounding any desire for a more active parent/father. In other families, the traditional notion of the breadwinner is

⁶ Barbara Pocock 2003 *The Work/Life Collision. What Work is Doing to Australians and What to Do About it*, Federation Press, Sydney, 2003.

disrupted by the growing reach of precarious jobs (actually under-employment for many) as many male 'breadwinners' find themselves in part-time casual jobs; this is a long way from their en-culturated expectation of breadwinning and masculine identity consolidated through full-time work.

These two spheres of change in work and in households are colliding with unchanging institutions and cultures. These cultures include the powerful norms of the ideal worker, the ideal mother, the ideal father, and the gendered mal-distribution of unpaid work and care to women. Relevant unchanging institutions include labour law, part-time work and the so-called 'mummy-track', workplaces, the Australian leave regime, childcare, schools, preschools and aged and disability care services.

The implications of this collision are multiple. They show up in the focus groups, polling and barbecues that our politicians attend. They are consistent across different studies⁷ with international resonance in many industrialised countries⁸. They affect the perceived quality of life and create concerns about carers, young people and children. They remake the fabric of community, reconstituting many of its strands in the workplace, and weakening its threads around the home. These changes stimulate high levels of parental and carer guilt especially amongst women. In some cases they erode the formation of relationships as well as their long term continuity and they shift care burdens to those carers without paid work, including mothers at home and grandparents, while shifting work burdens in some cases to those workers without caring responsibilities causing resentment amongst some individuals without dependents. They also stimulate the commodification of time and care, as working carers try to buy relief from the market, generating a 'work/spend' cycle of the kind diagnosed by Juliet Schor in the US⁹.

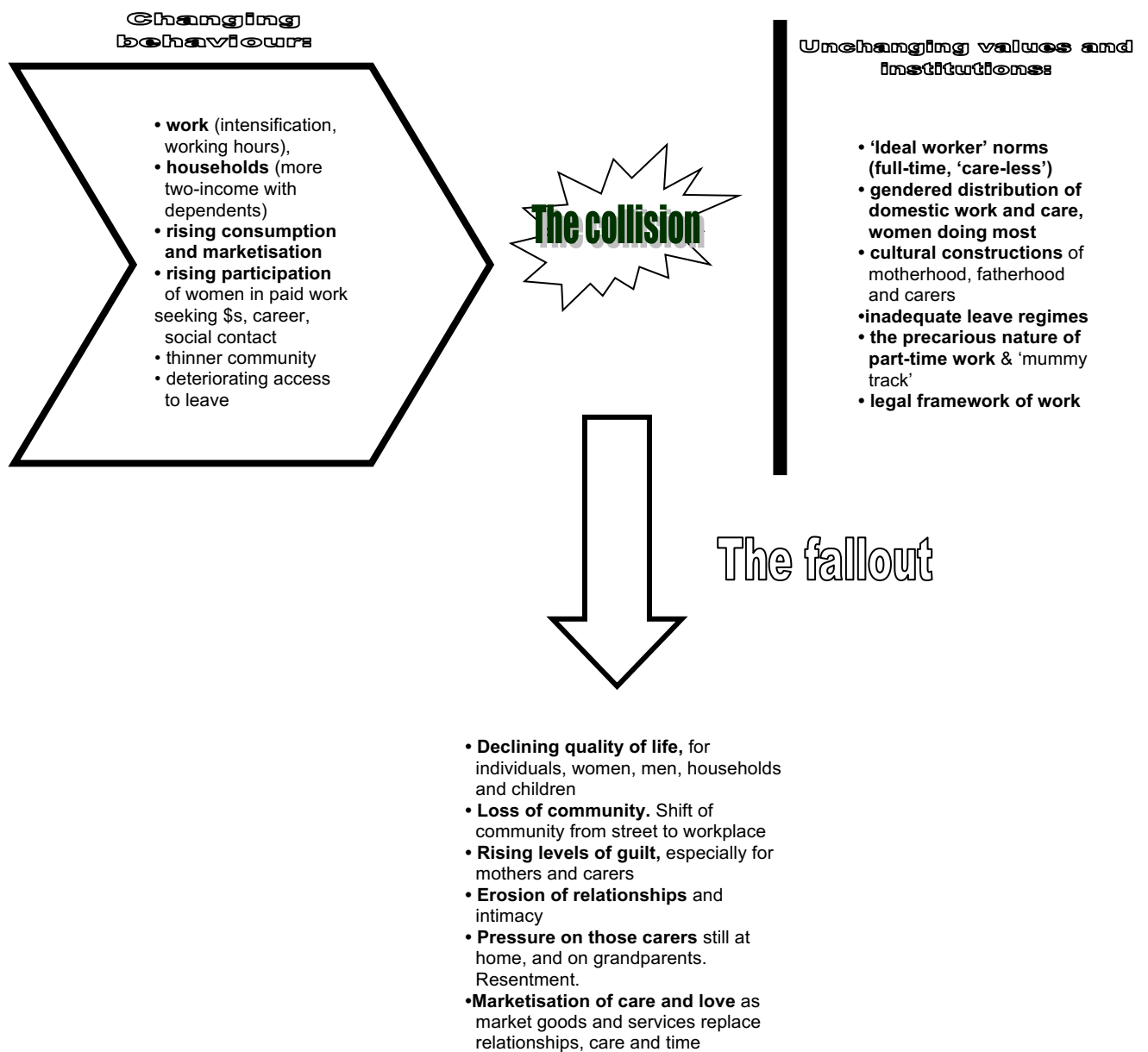
Visually, we can represent these as follows :

⁷ Pocock (2003); Summers, A. (2003). *The End of Equality. Work, babies and Women's Choices in 21st century Australia*. Sydney, Random House.

⁸ OECD (2002). *Babies and Bosses. Reconciling Work and Family Life. Volume 1. Australia, Denmark and the Netherlands*. Paris, OECD. OECD (2003). *Babies and Bosses: Reconciling work and family life in Austria, Ireland and Japan, Volume 2*. Paris, OECD.

⁹ Schor, J. (1992). *The Overworked American: The Unexpected Decline of Leisure*. New York, Basic Books.

Figure 4 The Collision: A Model



We can see from this collision that many elements go well beyond the economic. The economic lens is inadequate to the challenge of work and care conflict. It cannot be

redressed through a public auction, especially one conducted in the distorting heat of an election campaign.

The elements of this collision are not just about families not having enough money, through poorly framed family payments, or too much tax – though these issues are *not* immaterial. They go the structure and nature of identity, work, jobs, the labour market and the many cultural and institutional arrangements within which they are embedded. And they go beyond these to our conception of work itself. This is an issue that many social scientists have considered, generating much rich and useful social science scholarship, but all too little policy help.

The Decline of the Australian Breadwinner, the Rise of the Casual

The decline of 20th century labouring man and the ‘dense institutional framework’ he occupied has been mapped by many social scientists both in Australia and internationally. The sidelining of his partner, caring woman, has long been remarked, along with the preoccupation with measuring and valourising only some forms of labour: those that enter the market and are commodified.¹⁰

The fetishisation of labour in the 19th and 20th centuries has had several legacies. It has powerfully connected personal identity to the labouring identity. It has focused on ‘labour’ (which Standing defines as raw effort and toil), especially on ‘employment’ (a waged relationship) and it has failed to attend to broader definitions of ‘work’ which include both waged, self-employed, caring, unpaid, artistic, contemplative and citizenship work). It has shaped the social and public infrastructure that at its heart extols the virtue of paid employment in defining the self and the citizen.

Writers like Ulrich Beck mock the centrality of work to the modernist sense of self: ‘Everything is work, or else it is nothing’¹¹. In similar vein, describing the corroding effects of ‘status anxiety’, De Botton observes: ‘work is the chief determinant of the amount of respect and care we will be granted. It is according to how we can answer the question of what we do – normally the first enquiry we will field in a new encounter – that the quality of our reception is likely to be decided’¹². So the narrow focus on labour and employment has led us away from understanding ‘work’ more broadly, the ways in which care work underpins and makes possible employment, its gender misallocations, its over-developed role in constructing identity, as well as its function as the basis of citizenship and economic fortunes - or ‘making a living’ as we quaintly express it.

¹⁰ Standing, G. (2002). *Beyond Paternalism: Basic Security as Equality*. New York, Verso.

¹¹ Beck says: ‘Everything is work, or else it is nothing...a chasm of irresponsibility seems to open up with the end of paid work. Along which coordinates can people’s lives be structured if there is no longer the discipline of paid job?...How can people’s basic existence and social status be assured if these no longer rest upon performance at work?...How is democracy possible if it is not based upon participation in paid employment?...having lost their faith in God, they believe instead in the godlike powers of work to provide everything sacred to them: prosperity, social position, personality, meaning in life, democracy, political cohesion. Just name any value of modernity, and I will show that it assumes the very thing about which it is silent: participation in paid work’. Ulrich Beck, *The Brave new World of Work*. Oxford, Polity Press, p. 63.

¹² Alain De Botton (2004) *Status Anxiety*, Hamish Hamilton, Melbourne, p. 108.

What is more, and social scientists have been much less attentive to this aspect, the focus on labour and especially waged labour has driven a focus upon the economic and upon money income as the source of happiness, self and a good future.

In the last 30 years ‘the century of labouring man’ has unraveled. Risk has been shifted to the shoulders of workers. Where previously an employer took the risk of an annual, monthly, or weekly downturn and underwrote the wages of employees through economic and production cycles, now an hourly contract (or the absence of any contract at all) shifts the economic costs to the employee. The use of independent contractors (which the new Government has promised to expand) shifts the risks of injury, income, and time management to the ‘contractor’. While some are happy to shoulder such risks, its outcomes are very variable depending upon skills, market niche, personal relationships between contractor and contractee, and the existence of voice – whether through the capacity to exit a relationship which is exploitative, or by means of collective action and resistance.

This new world of risk is also one of dynamic movement over the life course for many citizens as they move between jobs, in and out of employment, into other forms of unpaid work, care, education and perhaps even rest. Such movements are highly risky if they lack a safety net of income preservation or employment continuity. Paid maternity leave is one example of a significant ‘risk modifier’: like other forms of paid leave, it crafts a small safety net under the 0-12 months of a new mothers’ absence from paid work, facilitating her transition into motherhood and perhaps her transition back into a new identity of worker/mother. Similarly paid sick leave takes some of the risk out of being sick, and education leave takes some of the risk out of skill development away from the workplace.

In the new more risky world of labour, these safety nets are vitally important. The institutional failure to keep up with the growing levels of risk for workers, and – in particular – with the changing caring responsibilities of a more feminised labour force, means they are dangerously scant. They underpin *some* life transitions, but leave long spans of the life course and many key events like birth or family illness without a safety net to facilitate transition. The worker must shoulder risk and consequences. This holds workers back from taking risks, and limits labour force mobility, skill development, and easy movement into and out of care work.

What is more, if certain risks are moderated by sticking with a particular job, (to increase the chances of keeping a long term job or having a promotion through long job tenure – academic promotion is a clear example) then it holds workers back from taking rest, or using parenting leave.

The unraveling of the 19th and 20th century system of ‘labour’ has powerful consequences where new risk modifiers are not constructed.

An Australian Example

Many elements of the work/life collision grow out of the decline of the ‘worker-citizen/female carer’ model. They are linked to the increasing commodification of citizen’s time through paid employment. This increasing allocation of time to paid work occurs through women’s increasing employment and self-employment, through growth in

the hours of work of full-time workers, growth in unpaid overtime, and through growth in the paid employment of young people while at school and studying. There is both a *squeeze on time* (at the individual and household level) and a *struggle for control* of one's own time.

We can illustrate this with a practical example. In Australia the traditional male breadwinner's work trajectory is more transitory, and his carer partner increasingly holds a part-time, casual job alongside more intensive and lengthy hours of unpaid care. The fraying of the practical reality of breadwinning has important economic costs, as well as penalties that reach into the private and social worlds. I recently interviewed a highly skilled man who had been employed casually at a high hourly rate for more than a decade. George said:

Sometimes I feel like a dirty dishrag where I've just been wiped. It's downgrading. It's depressing... There's times where I just sit there and just put my hands in my chin and think what the hell does this all mean? You just have a feeling of not belonging, no sense of belonging anywhere. You're just in limbo... It reflects on your family life as well... Being the breadwinner, I'm the first one that gets down. It was my anniversary yesterday and because of [my shifts] being cancelled, I couldn't afford to buy my wife an anniversary present or take her out for tea somewhere and make her feel special. And that got me down.

George has never had a proper holiday with his 13 year old daughter because for over a decade he has worked on short notice whenever work was offered. This man has lost his foothold and voice amongst his colleagues at work (who refer to him as 'only a contractor'), as well as in his home where he is ashamed of his failings to provide for this wife and children. He has also lost voice as a workplace citizen because his union fails to effectively represent him and he is different from 'real workers'. Like other middle-aged and older men recently interviewed, George is dealing with a multiple loss as result of the decline of his breadwinner status: status as a citizen, as a unionist, and identity as a husband, father and man¹³.

George's story is an argument against over-dependence upon the sources of masculine identity through a job. But George's situation tells us about more than his identity: it also raises two other significant social questions, firstly about the relationship between household-types and labour market standards, and secondly about consumption.

The 19th century Australian social settlement built the breadwinning wage around a family type and paid the wage to all men as an approximate way of getting the money to this family. Specifically, in Higgin's famous Harvester decision, a living wage to support life in frugal comfort was settled on men who were assumed to have dependent partner and three children. Women were paid much less and still have not caught up.

The practice of building a wage system around *an assumed household form* was gradually eroded over the twentieth century as women entered work and the practice of

¹³ Pocock, Prosser and Bridge (2004) 'Only a Casual... Only a Casual...How casual Work Affects Employees, Households and Communities in Australia', Labour Studies, University of Adelaide, (www.barbarapocock.com.au)

backing men's wages, assuming they were breadwinners, was gradually surrendered by men and institutions.

However, the recent growth in casual work (now 27 per cent of all employment in Australia¹⁴) reinstates in some ways assumptions about family formation and household wage sharing practices. In a recent study of casual work¹⁵, I found that the minority of casual workers who were positive about their casual terms of employment lived in particular circumstances: they were not exclusively dependent on their earnings. Invariably they had significant income back up: a parent, a partner or a pension¹⁶.

The majority of casual workers like George in our study have no back up income. Not only are they dependent upon the food and shelter that their wages buy, but so are their wives and children. The loss of the breadwinning boost in George's pay packet exposes him in a labour market that is populated by many casual workers *who are living with the support of other sources of income*. Their positive acceptance of casual terms is conditional upon this circumstance. Aspects of the casual work standard imply a secondary source of income. In this way, casual work is a form of labour built – like the harvester breadwinning wage – around certain implicit assumptions about household circumstances, like the presence of an earning (and sharing!) partner, parent or pension. This sets a new and very low floor of pay and rights. For those without such support – the sole-earners and dual earners employed casually whose pay packets are essential to household sustenance - this implicit assumption about household income does not apply and makes their casual terms frighteningly unpredictable. What is more, their workplace voice and capacity to exit is very constrained. They cannot argue their terms.

Far from giving up a wages system built around certain household forms and income arrangements, we have elements of a new version, with serious hazards for those without back up income and high levels of wage-dependence like George (and the many other women and men like him).

George's employment conditions allow his employer to match his labouring time and skills very precisely to production demands in a highly profitable multinational operation. The risks that his employer faces, in terms of demanding clients and just-in-time production, are passed on to George in the form of an hourly-hire contract, insecure earnings on a daily, weekly and annual basis, loss of control of his own time, loss of representational security, and insecurity in his relationships – at home and at work. Not so long ago, George's workmates were given the opportunity to vote on which of the casuals should be offered the new permanent job. George's work relationships are saturated with his inferior work status and like many casual workers this loss of respect is the sharpest sting.

¹⁴ ABS, (2001) *Forms of Employment*, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, Cat. No. 6359.0.

¹⁵ Pocock, Prosser and Bridge (2004) 'Only a Casual...How Casual Work Affects Employees, Households and Communities in Australia', Labour Studies, University of Adelaide, (www.barbarapocock.com.au)

¹⁶ They also had, in almost all cases, a second essential condition that underpinned their relative positiveness: a reciprocal negotiating relationship with their employer, so that they could negotiate working time without threatening future work or incurring other penalties.

The Driving Power of Consumption Norms

George's story illuminates another element of the work/life collision. His children go to a private school, and last year he was forced to sell his boat to keep his household financially afloat, as his contracted hours were unexpectedly cut. The prospect of changing his children's school and the loss of his boat were devastating to him. But they also raise the issue of norms of consumption and their relationship with work.

Of course these norms are not relevant only in relation to the low or middle income earners like George (who earns an annual wage that fluctuates around \$40,000): they are even more relevant to high earners and those with great wealth whose consumption norms are much higher. However, the uncomfortable question of the relationship between consumption, time and work is barely addressed in social science scholarship at present¹⁷, despite its very real relevance to the work/life collision. Expectations of high levels of consumption – by adults and young people – drive longer hours of work and these in turn drive more spending for relief from time-poverty.

This link between work and consumption has been a rich vein for markets: time poverty and parental guilt are powerful spending stimulants, as workers (especially mothers) try to buy help which is more easily found on supermarket shelves, in childcare centres and from cleaning and gardening services than from children (who need training) and partners (who need retraining). They also contribute to guilt-induced spending as parents use purchases to make up for absence or disappointment – with limited success in the eyes of children.¹⁸

Policy Roads Forward

Much significant social science research contributes to a clearer analysis of where we are located in terms of work and life. Writers like Nancy Folbre, Joan Williams, Ulrich Beck and Guy Standing¹⁹, for example, are pointing over the horizon and urging a response to this new conception of work and the collision of work with life. With the collapse of full employment, the decline of the worker citizen and the rise in movement between states of work, care, training and rest, we need what Beck describes as 'a new foundation for social existence'.²⁰

¹⁷ Clive Hamilton's 2003 book, *Growth Fetish* is a significant exception (Allen & Unwin, Sydney).

¹⁸ For some discussion of this see Pocock and Clarke (2004) *Can't Buy me Love; Young Australians' View on Parental Work, Time, Guilt and Their Own Consumption*, The Australia Institute, Discussion Paper No. 61, Canberra. This 'work-spend cycle' is also very relevant to the future of the next generation of citizens many of whom are actively entered upon a youthful 'work-spend' cycle well before they leave high school. While the benefits of earning and work for young people can be profoundly positive, they also embed consumerist identities and provide a rich vein for markets to mine over coming decades and a fine consumer training ground.

¹⁹ Folbre, N. (2001a). *The Invisible Heart. Economics and Family Values*. New York, The New Press; Williams, J. (2000). *Unbending gender. Why family and work conflict and what to do about it*. New York, OUP; Beck (2002); Standing (2001).

²⁰ Beck (2002), p. 91.

If George is the new worker of the future, then new institutions are necessary to underpin this new citizen - and the many equivalent female variants - who face high risks, hyper-flexibility on the employer's terms, and new forms of work.

There is no shortage of work: many work analysts see no shortage of 'work', broadly defined – paid and unpaid, employed or self-employed, artistic, civic, caring. However, it must be funded if it is to be 'a living' – and probably significantly out of a benevolent state exercising a significant redistributive function. While social scientists have mapped well the decline of 'worker-citizen/female carers' and the thick institutions in which they were embedded, analysis repetitively stalls at detailed description of what can replace them.

Beck and Standing, for example, head towards a notion of a guaranteed minimum income. In my view this is utopian given the rise of conservative discourses of the 'worthy-working-poor' increasingly expected to live in a reciprocal and beholden relationship with the state. While the conservative state will finance *some* forms of, for example, care work (providing some support for carers, especially in attractive lumps just before they vote), we are a long way from finding support for most of it. Instead the state seeks to shift some forms of care back into the home and increasingly likes to hold back its largess until election time, and then dole it out in targeted ways to win crucial votes. We are a long way from an Australian state that might countenance a guaranteed minimum income to act as a comprehensive safety net beneath citizens, to facilitate work mobility and labour market efficiency. And we are a long way from a state willing to fund active critical citizenship work ('civic labour') of the kind advocated by Beck – indeed recent research documents the severe strictures that increasingly constrain the active citizenship of a critical community sector.²¹

These ideas in the Australian context at present at least are utopian. We need to aim lower.

Four kinds of measures will assist:

- firstly, those that reduce individual risk in transition by constructing partial safety nets beneath key and predicable moments of transition (like parental, training, long service and other forms of leave from work along with unemployment benefits);
- secondly, measures that facilitate the combination of work and care (like secure part-time work without loss of benefits; quality accessible childcare);
- thirdly measures that moderate the downside of flexibility by ensuring that minimum standards underpin flexibility (like minimum wages, representational rights, training, rights to security, group work schemes which spread employment risks, statutory rights to leave);
- fourthly avoiding measures that impede transitions (like family payment systems built to accommodate different states which usually make the marginal cost of movement between them high).

²¹ Maddison, S., Deniss, R. and Hamilton, C. (2004) *Silencing Dissent: Non-government organisations and Australian democracy*, Discussion Paper No. 65, The Australia Institute, Canberra.

Some necessary changes are well beyond the easy reach of public policy – notable amongst these are the cultures around normative mothering, fathering and the ideal worker, the norms of consumption, and the gendered mal-distribution of unpaid work and care. Workplace cultures may be open to some effect from public policy levers but these are generally weak in relation to powerfully established cultures unless they have wide public support, the penalties are serious and the chance of enforcement real – as in the example of anti-discrimination legislation which has certainly affected workplace cultures.

A critical question remains open around support for the work of carers. How is this support to be provided? Conservatives favour (and feminists are wary of) paying carers a wage and keeping care decommodified within the family. However, many individuals favour this in relation to the early years of children's lives, and extended paid parental leave is one step towards it, while maintaining labour market attachment. Can this be done without locking women (who do most of it) involuntarily into domestic work and without long-term penalty for their labour market fortunes? Only if four conditions hold: firstly, it is shared (on a 'use it or lose it basis' between men and women); secondly, if such work is revalued for the skills and experience it imparts and the contribution it makes; thirdly, if labour market penalties consequent on a career break, are reduced; and finally only where other choices (ie the use of quality, affordable accessible care) are practically possible.

On the other hand, turning care over to the market and commodifying it on inferior terms (with patchy availability, variable quality, high costs and low wages for the feminised workforce) – as we do at present - is a second-best solution. We need a national scheme that supports quality, affordable provision in relation to children 0-2 years old, and developmentally rich programs for children 3-5²², as well as out of school hours care. A new national approach to the care of dependents, especially children, is essential and overdue to remediate the work/care collision.

Extended parental leave is also an essential and overdue remedial policy. Prior to the last election, various proposals for paid maternity leave were advocated. A publicly funded scheme of 14 weeks paid leave at minimum wages replacing various other payments was costed at \$213 million²³. If this were extended to a year for parents to share on the birth of a child it would cost around \$1.5 billion. This would be a significant advance for working carers. Given that more and more Australian women are in work when they have a baby, that many men want to actively share in parenting with long term benefits for parents and children, and the need to adapt to the growing proportion of working carers in our workforce, this would have wide benefits. More ambitiously such leave might be extended to workers with other forms of caring responsibilities or educational needs with a given quantum available to all workers over a period of work tenure. Making such rights available to mobile workers is important; they already exists for some construction workers who can accumulate long service leave on an industry basis.

²² See for example, the French system of maternal school described by Folbre (2001) p. 133.

²³ HREOC, 2003, *A Time To Value, Proposal for a National Paid Maternity Leave Scheme*, HREOC, Sydney.

Finally a reduction in general working hours and especially in long and dangerous hours of paid work is an essential long term workplace change that will assist working men, working women, young people and the unemployed and under-employed.

We cannot afford to allow our institutional forms to lag so seriously behind how we live.

Finally, what is the role of scholars? There is a place for a stronger scholarly sociological contribution, and for better more socially located economics, especially Australian research which focuses upon practical solutions and options. The paucity of debate around practical work and family options in the recent election, and the weak contribution of social scientists to such a significant area of public policy, should give us all pause. As scholars, in my view we need to concentrate more upon Australian solutions and positive proposals, on drawing on international experience modified and reshaped for Australian circumstances, and upon taking the existing body of relevant scholarly research into the practical sphere of political policy making. It is grubby out there, but it is our social responsibility and ethical obligation.