

All Australian babies have a right to be cared for by their own mothers unless there are compelling reasons for the mother to be absent.

After the fall of Singapore in 1942 one might have said that the government had a right to get mothers into the workforce to prevent the fall of Australia to Japan.

Unless the country is in immediate danger of invasion there would seem to be no justification for any encouragement for mothers to join the workforce.

The mother's first responsibility is to her baby. Any inducements to work when she is needed by her baby are counterproductive or not in the baby's best interests. And if this is happening on a wide scale due to government policy then that government policy is not in the public interest. The public interest is that all babies and toddlers enjoy their mother's presence and attention at least until the child is at school.

I will not respond to every aspect of the legislation but rather state a position. That position is that no mother should be expected to work to meet the family's needs. It's one thing to work because a second income is wanted but quite another because a second income is needed.

This varies from family to family. But if there is a large class of families that needs two pay packets then that is an unsatisfactory situation. Such a situation should be considered extraordinary and not an accepted fact of life.

Politicians have a bad habit of responding to what suits most people and ignoring what is right or wrong or just or unjust. That may well be reality as far as democratic government is concerned but if politicians fail to respect the legitimate needs of some mothers and their babies in dire straits then the legitimacy of democratic government is called into question.

Let us not forget what Sir Winston Churchill said about democracy—"It is the worst form of government except for all the rest". I think that we need to be aware of the fact that democratic government has some very serious flaws and that there is a need to consider all aspects of a question and recognise that some people do have legitimate rights even if they do not have much political clout.

Yours truly  
Greg Byrne