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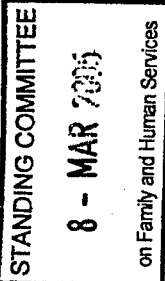
From: Tracey Huxtable [REDACTED]  
Date: Tue 8/03/2005 6:23 PM  
SUBJECT: Work & Family Inquiry

I am writing in response to the article "Australia's great pregnant pause" in The Sunday Telegraph, March 6, 2005.

I am a senior executive in a large global company in my mid 30's and am childless. The majority of staff in our organisation have children. Most of the staff had enrolled their unborn babies into child care when they found out they were pregnant and the child was placed onto a waiting list. Child care was to commence when they returned from maternity leave, some 18 - 20 months down the track (12 months maternity leave plus the duration of pregnancy). At this time there were still no vacancies for full time day care. When the time came for them to return to work they analysed the figures and ascertained that they would be financially better off working 2 days a week instead of full time due to the cost of day care. Unfortunately this is the case with most people that earn between \$45,000 and \$60,000. I have seen this with many of my friends, colleagues and staff in recent times.

I believe that child care, whether it be a child care centre, family day care facility or a private nanny should be a tax deduction for people that are employed on a full time or part time basis. I don't believe it should be a tax deduction for those mothers or stay at home Dads that are not employed for paid work. I do know of some people that send their child to child care so that they can play tennis, go to the gym or have a restful day. I don't have a problem if people want to do this and pay full price for the benefit, however I don't believe this should be a tax deduction or be subsidised by the government. Forget about the housework or gardening as mentioned in your article, these are not high costs to incur in comparison to the costs of fulltime child care.

There are other issues with child care. As soon as a child has a temperature or a sniffle they are not allowed to attend, therefore one of the parents, normally the mother is forced to take sick leave to care for the child at home, however they are still charged for the days care by the centre, no one seems to consider what effect this has on their employer. There is a shortage of child care workers. For the important role that these people play



with caring for our future generation they are not remunerated accordingly. It hardly correlates with the cost per day for a child to be cared for in one of the various day care centres. The rate of pay is extremely poor and therefore is not an attractive career for school leavers to pursue.

The general consensus between my colleagues and friends is that we have all spent considerable time and effort on tertiary education and establishing our careers, most of us are not really fussed whether we have children or not, especially if it means giving up our career. In addition to this none of us are in positions that could be left vacant or temporarily filled for a 12 month period to allow for maternity leave. However, if child care was a tax deduction I am sure many of us would consider having children as a day time nanny would be much more affordable and enable us to return to work much sooner than 12 months.

From an employers perspective, especially smaller companies, maternity leave is an issue at times. Maternity leave is generally taken for 12 months. It is normally difficult to replace a skilled worker temporarily however employers do work around this simply because they have to. The law presently states that workers must provide notification to the employer of their intention regarding return to work 4 weeks prior to the end of their maternity leave. On many occasions the worker resigns at this time, surely they would have known prior to this point in time of their intention to either recommence or cease employment. Again it is the Australian mentality of exercising a statutory right. Recently the laws have been changed to enforce organisations to offer part time employment to workers on return from maternity leave regardless of whether the original position was part time or full time. With the present skills shortage it is difficult enough to find one person with the ability to do the job let alone two. When the replacement is of a temporary nature it also involves time in training and often the temporary staff member leaves mid term for a permanent job or better offer.

This issue is full of contradiction. We have a skills shortage. Australian's are being encouraged to work until they are 70, partly because of the skills shortage but also to self fund retirement and avoid having to rely upon the pension (don't even start me on the NSW Government taxes such as land tax or investment properties that apply to people trying to work towards

self funded retirement!). Women are being encouraged to return to work after having a family, but how can they return to the work force if child care is not available? What is the point in many of these women returning to the workforce if they are effectively working for nothing after the costs associated with childcare and working erode all earnings, this is taking "love of the job" to the extreme. Interest rates increase so starting a family gets put on hold for another year or indefinitely. John Howard was quoted stating that interest rates are still at an historic low. Honestly the general public are not completely stupid. The interest percentage might still be at an historic low, however the value of mortgages is substantially higher than it was during the late 80's therefore the interest payments in dollar terms are probably not that different.

In addition to this I believe our legal and social system has a lot to answer for. Many of the laws are too soft when it comes to punishment for crimes committed, its little wonder that our youths today have no respect for our laws and other socially unacceptable behaviour when there is little repercussion for their actions. Teachers in schools are powerless to reprimand unruly students and this generates the lack of respect now shown to them. This is similar with the role of a parent, if they have a child that is completely out of control there is no support network or anywhere to turn to for help, the police don't want to know either as they are relatively powerless too. It is little wonder that the population isn't growing.

The recent topic of debate has been the events in Macquarie Fields and Redfern. The media made an absolute field day of the events which has only exacerbated the issue. It was sad that people died, however it does not alter the fact that all parties involved were breaking the law and if they had no reason to run from the police then they would still be alive today. The police simply do not pursue innocent people driving along the road or riding their bikes! Where are our social values heading? Longer jail sentences are handed out for robbing a bank or stealing property than murdering or raping someone?

Finally there is the separate abortion debate. Honestly can someone please tell me what right a bunch of middle aged men have to debate this issue? Do they go through pregnancy, childbirth, breast feeding etc? Do they put their career on hold or give it up all together? Most of the men I know do not really give up anything when a baby is born, its normally the female whose life completely

changes. Just because adoption was the option for Mr Abbott, although it was probably not his option in any case, it was the mother of the child, it doesn't mean he has the right to push his opinions onto the nation. I have a few friends that were adopted, unfortunately their birth parents don't want to meet them or be part of their lives, hence there is a constant feeling of rejection. I can tell you that they all don't end up with the happy story that has been portrayed by the media.

I am grateful and proud to be an Australian. I am thankful for the freedom of speech, the opportunities, the ability to dress in my choice of clothing, to vote and for the choices available to me as a female.

I hope this correspondence provides some constructive feedback in relation to the present situation.

Regards

Tracey Huxtable

