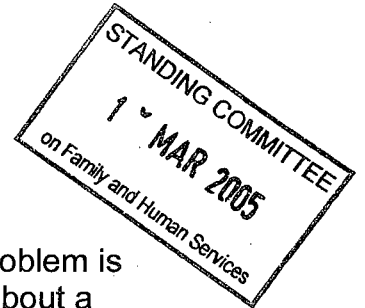


From: barry [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, 26 February 2005 4:01 PM
To: Committee, FHS (REPS)

Subject: Birth Dearth

House of Rep's Standing C'tee on Family and Human Services

Submission: To the memmbers of the C'tee.



I'm glad to see that at long last the so called ageing population problem is being recognized for what it is - a birth dearth problem, bringing about a massive imbalance between the working age and retirement age populations. A situation that is obviously going to get worse before hopefully getting better. It's interesting that something that has its root cause in a decades long moral decline is ignored until it becomes a threat to the nation's economic well being.

It bears out the truism that 'moral failure has practical consequences'. Solutions such as family friendly work environments, in house child minding facilities, more flexible working hours for parents, more child minding centres and the many other band aid solutions being proposed are just that, temporary efforts to hide a problem rather than solve it.

A major factor in what has become a world wide problem has been the 'sexual revolution' with its origins in the revolutionary 'beat generation' of the 60's and the advent of the pill. People didn't stop doing what comes naturally but they certainly embraced the anti nature chemical sterilisation of the pill to avoid the consequences. The consequence of this has been the eventual craven capitulation by governments to the demands of the abortion lobby and the present day scandal of 90+ thousand tax payer funded abortions per year through Medicare. It has taken 40 years for the birth rate to shrink from 3.6 per woman to 1.7, well below the replacement rate of 2.1, but warnings long ignored are now a reality. Quite apart from the morality involved, the massive abortion rate over 4 decades represents a huge number of wealth creators and taxpayers lost to the nation. The question is what to do about it.

The c'tee asks for submissions under three subheadings.

The first relates to financial disencentives to families.

Young people programmed from baby hood by the box to a life of consumerism, surrounded by endless incentives to part with their money are suddenly expected in early adulthood to become savers for their future. Its a big ask that too many fail. Its not in the least surprising that increasing numbers of young people are loath to accept the responsibilities of marriage and family. A generation raised in a culture of extraordinary permissiveness, a majority of them faced with large HECS debts, a massive morgtage if they get married, skyrocketing costs of raising children and 60+% divorce rate are hardly likely to see marriage as a pathway to happiness, something we all seek. Consciously or subconsciously they look at the odds and opt for

'partnership', a condition someone once described as serial monogomy. Those without tertiary qualifications and few negotiable skills are even less likely to have the confidence to think about marriage and a long term future. Also the new era of economic rationalism with its substitution of a large part of Australia's manufacturing base with cheap overseas imports is not only skewing Australia's balance of payments, but has seen the disappearance of a huge number of low skill jobs that used to provide security of employment, an opportunity no longer existing for today's unemployed. I presume you have seen the p1 article in Thurs' 24/02 Australian on the effect unemployment is having on men and fertility. I imagine part time casual employment would similarly effect men's self image and sense of being good providers. The casualisation of work might make industry and bureaucrats happy but it doesn't make those adversely affected happy and will come back to bite us. The nonsense of 'alternative' social arrangements usually prefaced by the euphemism of partner, is a farce and should be actively discouraged, not so much by punitive discrimination as by positive discrimination in favour of the family, and by family I mean that union of a man and a woman in marriage and their children by birth or adoption, and ideally extending to grandparents. It is parents who are best qualified by commitment, emotional bonds and experience to rear their children, not 'professional' child minders, no matter how well qualified.

One of the greatest strains on families is the economic pressure of the cost of domestic housing and the huge mortgages involved, requiring both husband and wife to work to finance repayments. Ever expanding capital cities and little or no effort by governments to decentralise industry and population is a major factor in this phenomenon. One effect of long term policies to decentralise the nation's population would be to reduce the pressure on house prices, and consequently give families greater economic flexibility.

A compulsory savings scheme for young people as soon as they start work would provide the basis for a housing deposit and could possibly be part of the national superannuation scheme. Considering the importance stability and confidence in the future plays in family fertility I can't see why compulsory savings for the family home can't also be compulsory. If it's good enough to compel people to contribute to superannuation it should be good enough to compel people to save for their home. Coupled with the first home owners grant and possibly integrated into superannuation, such a scheme would surely encourage a family friendly environment.

The second point relates to making it easier for parents, who want to, to return to work.

I don't even want to respond to this proposition because implicit within it is the idea of discriminating in favour of getting married women back into the workforce. The heading is no more than a gender neutral euphemism that we all know means in reality that with the exception of a tiny minority those being coerced back to work will be married women, mostly mothers of children. It is common sense backed by reputable studies that the vast majority of mothers want to be home with their children, not at work to cover mortgage repayments and to pay a stranger to be a surrogate to their own flesh and blood.

If some parents, for whatever reason, want to work and put their children in child care, that's their decision, but it defies logic to argue that the taxpayer should subsidise them abrogating their responsibilities. If it's good enough to argue for surrogate child care funding, how much more logical is it to fund the mother, or father if that be their choice, to care for their own children.

The third point - impact of taxation etc on family choices.

It is claimed that Australia's personal tax regime is quite low by world standards. That may or may not be true, but I suspect it is another one of those carefully crafted statements designed to hide the reality, that when the innumerable number of extra taxes outside the personal tax system, imposed by both federal and state governments, are taken into account we are a highly taxed society. I well recall when searching the 'net' for hire car prices discovering a surprisingly low quote for a car. However when I typed in Australia the quote suddenly shot up with a proliferation of extra gov't taxes and charges. The much vaunted GST has done little if anything to reduce the tax burden, somehow all those nasty state taxes it was supposed to replace have reappeared in another guise or the cost of gov't utilities and services has dramatically risen. The GST, stamp duties, the increased cost of gov't services, increases through the subterfuge of surrogate bodies such as increased airport landing charges to airlines, whatever the device our pockets are plundered, in many cases indiscriminately whether the person is a high income single or low income parents struggling to raise their family.

When will governments return to the outlook of gov'ts of the first half of the 20th century and acknowledge that the family unit is the bedrock of civil society and as such deserves special protection; that marriage is not just another option among many and parents deserve recognition and support in raising the next generation, that in an irreplaceable way they are partners with the state in producing, nurturing and developing the coming generation of workers for the good of the country. It is a role that no one but a parent can adequately fill, not child minders, not social workers, or any other substitute and the small minority of natural parents who fail in their role are miniscule to the often tragic outcomes of the many alternatives that social engineers have foisted upon society in recent decades.

A gov't that espouses reward for effort, lauds entrepreneurial risk takers for their contribution to the common good and goes out of its way to foster that spirit, risks the charge of hypocrisy if it ignores the enormous effort and risk involved in raising the next generation, surely just as big a contribution to the common good. There needs to be positive discrimination in favour of families through mechanisms such as splitting the single income to reduce taxation, recognizing the cost of child rearing and education as a tax deduction, a special fund or bank to provide low interest loans for the first family home to low income earners, decentralisation of industry and towns to spread the population and reduce the rising cost of real estate in the major cities. Increased migration. I'm sure there would be thousands of people in countries like Russia and the Baltic states, S Africa and other dysfunctional African states that would love the chance to start a new life in Australia. Stronger families, positive pro family taxation initiatives, cessation of Medicare funding of abortion, new major infrastructure projects providing work for the

new arrivals and current inhabitants and the future needs of coming generations, revival of Australian manufacturing industry for the same reasons are all urgently needed. It was just such a visionary outlook that rocketed Australia from a semi colonial backwater to mature national prominence in the 'great leap forward' of the 40's, 50's and 60's, that on a proportional scale made Chairman Mao's effort look like a step backwards.

An objective assessment of so called family policies from the disaster of Whitlam to very recent times could only conclude they have fluctuated between open hostility to not very benign neglect. Recent initiatives raise faint optimism but have in the main been little more than tentative nibbling around the edges. The government will shortly have control of both houses of Parliament. It will no longer be able to blame Upper House obstruction to its agenda. We will shortly see how dinkum the gov't is with its rhetoric about the family. Defence of the family is not an issue where one has the luxury of 50c each way. It is an issue a sizeable minority of the population feel very strongly about and are not prepared to compromise on. The appearance of the Christian Democrats and Family First are testament to that and unlike One Nation appear to be in for the long haul. The ball is in the gov'ts court and I strongly urge the c'tee recommend that the gov't adopt unequivocal pro family policies.

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25 Feb 2005