Permanent Part-Time Work: Rewriting the Family Wage Settlement?

Anne Junor
School of Management and Policy, University of Canberra

Despite women’s increased participation in Australian labour markets, the gender norms of the twentieth century family wage settlement have still not been superseded. The gender wage differentials of full-time employment, and the allocation of social welfare, have shifted a little from the male breadwinner/female caregiver model. Nevertheless, full-time hours remain a sticking-point. A gendered full-time/part-time work divide is emerging, in a context where labour markets and their regulation have fragmented. Bargaining models based on “individual choice” allow accommodations, rather than solutions, to the time/income bind. In this context, permanent part-time work, like the earlier family wage, seems to offer the best achievable resolution of the conflicting time demands of work and family life, together with a measure of income security. Whilst still locked in the gender norms of the family wage era, permanent part-time work can only be one of a coordinated range of strategies for working towards a successor settlement.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past fifteen years in Australia, permanent part-time employment has emerged as a growing and highly gendered phenomenon, remaining 87 per cent female over the decade to 1997. A policy consensus appears to be emerging that permanent part-time work offers the best achievable solution to at least three separate labour market problems. The first is the growth of casual jobs, many of which, although regular and ongoing, remain low paid and contractually insecure. The second problem, the difficulty of reconciling paid work and family commitments, has increased in scale and urgency with the recent growth of mature-aged women’s paid employment. The third problem is the paradox that, despite high unemployment, the hours and intensity of full-time jobs are increasing (Buchanan and Bearfield 1997; Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business 1998; Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Teaching 1999; Australian Council of Trade Unions 2000). The purpose of this article is not empirical but conceptual. It is to identify criteria by which to evaluate whether permanent part-time work is the best short-term strategy for alleviating the impact on family and social life of overloaded full-time jobs and labour market insecurity,
whilst also helping to achieve the longer term feminist goals of pay equity and time equity.

The best strategy is one that offers achievable improvements, with a minimum of tension between short-term and long-term benefits, and between individual needs and collective or social goals. For example, converting casual to permanent part-time positions would be a clear improvement, which might be achievable if long-term employer benefits could be demonstrated. The advantages of permanent part-time work over unemployment are also clear, with the possible exception of low-paid versions designed to undermine carers’ social welfare access. Conceptually less clear-cut is the question of whether permanent part-time work offers the best solution, both at the immediate individual level and at a longer-term social level, to the tension between family responsibilities, and the growing time demands of full-time paid work. This question will therefore be our main focus.

Whilst culturally, the male breadwinner era may have passed, institutionally labour markets and household work arrangements still bear its residue in gender pay and time inequity. Because of the highly gendered nature of permanent part-time work, the issue to resolve is whether it can be a vehicle for transcending these residual inequities. The article argues that used as an often much-needed individual option, permanent part-time work is unlikely to lead to social change. Labour market arrangements are part of an interlocking network of gendered social institutions, including unpaid work patterns inside families and welfare state types. These institutions mediate patterns of social relations which some writers have called “gender contracts” (Fagan and O'Reilly 1998). The term “gender settlements”, however, conveys a better sense of the complex patterns of political/class compromise through which social institutions are established, maintained and replaced.

A “settlement” is a balance of partially convergent, partially divergent interests which endures so long as alternatives are unachievable. Settlements generate institutions which create behavioural norms enabling and constraining individual choices. For example, the early twentieth-century Anglo-Australian family wage settlement created the gender norms governing the social division of labour between public and private, market and unpaid work (Gatens 1998).

The article explores the possible role of permanent part-time work in a transition to a successor to the family wage settlement – one that might challenge gendered work and family norms, rather than simply alleviating their impact (cf. Gatens 1998). The first step is to outline the early twentieth century family wage settlement, and subsequent modifications to it in the directions of both gender income equity, and gender time equity. The second step is to examine the growth and incidence of various models of permanent part-time work, and their relationships to full-time hours, casual work and work/family relations. The third step is to arrive at a more precise definition of the existing varieties of permanent part-time work, and to analyse their potential for
enhancing both pay and time equity. The fourth step is to explore whether social change is achievable through the exercise of individual choice. This leads to an exploration of the possibility for collective strategy, in the present climate of individual contractualism and social polarisation. The article concludes that permanent part-time work, whilst an important decasualisation strategy, cannot, in itself, transcend the gendered pay/time relations of the family wage era. It will need to be just one of a range of strategies in the collectively coordinated pursuit of a long-overdue successor settlement to the family wage.

THE FAMILY WAGE SETTLEMENT

In November 1999, 54.4 per cent of Australian women were in the paid workforce. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reported the increased workforce participation of women aged 25—54 as a sign of “… the pervasive abandonment of the traditional cultural norm that viewed a man’s role primarily as ‘bread winner’ and a woman’s as ‘home maker’” (ABS 2000). Whilst the cultural norms of the family wage era may have been superseded, its institutional norms governing the allocation of pay, careers, and unpaid work responsibilities have not. As a result of this clash between cultural and institutional norms, Australian women are under what has been aptly called “pressure from all sides” (Probert et al. 2000b).

The twentieth century Australian family wage, like that in other industrialising countries, reflected the fact that industrial time had become increasingly irreconcilable with family work, particularly caring work (Everingham 1999). Employers enhanced profitability by shifting workers’ reproduction costs to unpaid work outside the wage system (Brenner and Ramas 1984). It is too simple, however, to see the male breadwinner settlement as an imposition on unwilling women (Walby 1990). Although it was certainly contested from the outset, some Anglo women welcomed the new opportunities for maternal citizenship and state support in moulding men as family providers. Arguably, too, it offered some protection against the insecurity, work intensification and immiserisation likely to result if all family members were competing in the labour market (Humphries 1977). Thus it found initial acceptance as an achievable least-bad strategic choice, albeit one with serious and lingering consequences for gender equity (Lake 1992; Baxter 1998; Mackinnon 1998).

In Australia, the male breadwinner wage was formally enshrined within the system of arbitrated industrial awards through the 1907 Harvester judgment, which awarded an unskilled male worker sufficient to maintain a wife and three children in “frugal comfort” (2 CAR 1). Initially, individual women’s rates were set at 54 per cent of men’s. The gender differential was protected by segregating men’s and women’s jobs, although in occupations where women worked alongside men, equal rates were introduced as early as
1912, as a strategy for discouraging women’s employment (6 CAR 60—83). Relativities were increased to 75 per cent in 1950. In 1966 the family wage was subsumed into the male total wage. In 1969—1974, after several arbitrations tending to define women’s jobs as lower-skilled than men’s, equal pay was formally introduced (Short 1986). The centralised award system flowed this improvement in gender pay equity through the Australian labour market rapidly, in comparison with overseas trends. Yet pay equity continued to be hampered by a legacy of horizontal skill-based segregation, and by the vertical segregation of career barriers created by job continuity requirements which women could not meet because of their caring role (Campbell and Brosnan 1999). Women’s earnings tended to remain secondary, legitimating their continuing primary contribution to unpaid work. The inequitable distribution of unpaid work was exacerbated by the even greater difficulty of achieving equitable paid work time. The five-day 40-hour week was instituted in 1948, and not till the 1980s was it reduced marginally in some industries to 37.5 to 38 hours (Donaldson 1996).

At no time did the welfare state provide sufficient income protection or community-based care to allow men and women to move equally between paid and family work (Mitchell 1998). The strong wage-earner welfare form taken by the Australian welfare state in the first half of the twentieth century was modified somewhat after World War II. In the last quarter of the century, a hybrid system emerged, based on both breadwinner and individual rights (Castles 1994; Mitchell 1998; O’Connor et al. 1999). Caution is needed in viewing the state as the agent of an overarching “gender contract” (Pfau-Effinger 1998). Again, the term “settlement” better reflects the more complex balance of gender compromises which produced the Australian breadwinner state. For example, from its inception it allowed women a level of education which ultimately proved disruptive to the family wage (Nolan 1997; Fagan and O’Reilly 1998). Nor, even now, would a complete transition from a family-based to an individual rights welfare model be to all women’s advantage, as long as the labour market continues to be structured on a residue of the family wage system (Mitchell 1998).

By the late 1990s in Australia, the family wage had become a social and cultural anachronism. Yet, as we shall see, of the 54 per cent of women who had entered the labour market, only half were able to take full-time jobs. In examining whether permanent part-time work is a residue of the family wage, or the basis of a successor settlement, the first step is to establish its current incidence, and its relationship both to permanent full-time work, and to casual part-time work.
PERMANENT PART-TIME WORK, CASUAL WORK AND FULL-TIME OVERLOAD – STATISTICAL EVIDENCE

The best sources of information about the incidence and growth of employment modes are ABS household and employer surveys. Unfortunately, figures on the various employment modes need to be assembled from different Bureau data sets, some of which include managers and self-employed, others of which do not: hence the unavoidable jumps between “employees” and “employed persons” in the tables below.

For Australian women in the decade to August 1997, standard full-time hours were the norm, but only just. Women picked up most of the net growth in permanent full-time jobs. Nevertheless, the percentage of women employed on a permanent full-time basis fell from 57.6 to 50.0 per cent over the decade, because of the more rapid growth of part-time and casual jobs. The most significant gender difference was in the higher rate of permanency amongst female part-time employees than amongst male part-timers. By 1997, 18 per cent of all female employees were working on a permanent part-time basis, compared with 2 per cent of men. Forty per cent of female part-timers were in permanent jobs, compared with 17 per cent of male part-timers (Table 1). If permanent part-time work was emerging as an alternative model of standard employment, why did it remain 87 per cent female over the decade?

Casual employment accounted for 60 per cent of female part-time jobs. The greatest concentrations of casually employed men were amongst teenagers and older workers, but for women, casual employment was spread across all age groups from 25—54 (ABS 1999a, 1999c). Moreover, other forms of segmentation were apparent. Appendix 1 shows that women had much greater access to permanent part-time work in the skilled and feminised industries of health and community services, and education (27.7 per cent and 17.6 per cent respectively) than they had elsewhere.

Full-time work remains the social norm, but its hours have been increasing. By 1998, the average weekly hours of full-timers working for one or more hours a week were 45.7 for men and 41.3 for women (Figure 1). Over 50 per cent of men and a third of women were working 40 hours a week or more, and over a third of men were working 45 hours a week or more.

Overload involves not only long hours but also the intensity of work within each hour and the “spill-over” of uncompleted work into unpaid overtime. In reporting on the 1995 Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS 95), Morehead et al. (1997, 568—9) found that 50 per cent of men and 53 per cent of women claimed to have experienced moderate to high work intensification in the previous year.² Intensification was experienced less by part-timers and least by casuals.

This suggests that the on-going gendering of the full-time/part-time divide, and the declining proportion of the female workforce in full-time jobs, may be related to the gender distribution of unpaid work. This relationship is
Table 1: Employees by Gender, Hours and Tenure, Australia, August 1987-97

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>August 1987</th>
<th>August 1997</th>
<th>Change</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
<td>1391.9</td>
<td>1567.0</td>
<td>175.1</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent part-time</td>
<td>351.8</td>
<td>573.4</td>
<td>221.6</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual full-time</td>
<td>114.6</td>
<td>155.1</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual part-time</td>
<td>560.1</td>
<td>838.9</td>
<td>278.8</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2418.4</td>
<td>3134.4</td>
<td>716.0</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
<td>2955.8</td>
<td>2950.4</td>
<td>-5.4</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent part-time</td>
<td>53.9</td>
<td>85.9</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>59.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual full-time</td>
<td>216.4</td>
<td>383.4</td>
<td>167.0</td>
<td>77.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual part-time</td>
<td>173.1</td>
<td>418.1</td>
<td>245.0</td>
<td>141.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>3399.2</td>
<td>3837.7</td>
<td>438.5</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persons</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent full-time</td>
<td>4347.7</td>
<td>4517.4</td>
<td>169.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent part-time</td>
<td>405.7</td>
<td>659.3</td>
<td>253.6</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual full-time</td>
<td>331.0</td>
<td>538.5</td>
<td>207.5</td>
<td>62.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual part-time</td>
<td>733.2</td>
<td>1257.0</td>
<td>523.8</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>5817.6</td>
<td>6972.1</td>
<td>1154.5</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Iain Campbell; ABS Cat. No. 6334.0 1987; Prod. No. 6310.40.001, 1997a.
Note: Does not include self-employed.

likely to be one of both cause and effect. Baxter provides evidence from a large 1996—97 Australian lifecourse survey, indicating that in households with children, men spent an average of 22—23 hours per week on childcare to their partners’ 50—58. Overall, housework took 5—8 hours for men and 21—24 hours per week for women (Baxter 1998, 63; Baxter 2000). Russell and Bowman (2000) provide survey evidence suggesting that significant numbers of men with young children wish to spend more time on care-work than their full-time paid work hours permit. If permanent part-time work is a new form of standard employment, what barriers of time and pay equity prevent these men from taking it up?
PERMANENT PART-TIME WORK, PAY EQUITY AND TIME EQUITY

To determine whether permanent part-time work can resolve the imbalance between family work and overloaded full-time work, and overcome the insecurity of casual employment, while enhancing pay equity and time equity, we need a systematic conceptualisation of the relationship between pay and time. In the British and European context, Harvey (1999) clarifies this relationship by showing that pay systems give employers control over aspects of an employee’s time – both work and private. This occurs in different ways, depending on whether time is undifferentiated, differentiated or salaried.

Undifferentiated time is the basis of piecework and block shift systems. Piecework pay controls both work time and private time by rewarding the volume of output. Block shift arrangements coerce workplace attendance by transferring to employees the risks and penalties associated with all non-work time, whether caused by environmental, work-based, employee or family contingencies. Unlike the family wage, which contained a transfer payment to the carer attending to family matters whilst the employee worked, block pay assumes caring support without subsidising it.

Whilst undifferentiated time systems pay for work done, differentiated time characterises a real employment relationship, based on contractual undertakings that the employer will provide work and the employee will
undertake it. Differentiated pay not only controls but also pays some non-work time. Work is sliced into uniform hours and paid at a given rate multiplied by a fixed or agreed number of hours in a week/month. The regulatory framework defines a certain number of such hours as constituting full-time work. Importantly, the full-time hourly rate covers, and divides up, normal working time, abnormal working time, and non-working time. In some coefficient of this hourly rate, employees are paid for holidays, sick leave, training time, time after injury, and carers’ leave, and even time beyond the duration of the contract, such as severance pay and the employer’s contribution to retirement pay. Alternatively, the social welfare system may cover some of these items. The full-time hourly rate may also be loaded with penalty rates, to compensate employees for working hours recognised as encroaching on family time and on other aspects of a worker’s private and social life. In professional work, where the salary is annual, the time commitment by contrast is theoretically unlimited, and employers like to claim that work is a role which spills over into the whole of life, making private hours hard to cordon off (Harvey 1999).

Under the differentiated-time system, the employee is paid both to work for the employer and not to work for other employers. The old family wage, by indirectly paying women to do household work, implicitly paid men not to do it. This allowed and encouraged a strict gender division of household labour. Because the hours of full-time work were not changed when equal pay was introduced, time equity was neglected. Who now does the household work that breadwinners were once paid to transfer to women, and who pays for it? The household members working part-time tend to pick up more of the unpaid work. Since the hourly rate component of the gender pay gap has narrowed, neither the employers of household members working full-time, nor the employers of those working part-time, are obliged to cover much of the cost of unpaid household work. This may explain employers’ resistance to a shorter working week across the board, and a preference for a gendered division of work into part-time and full-time modes.

The next task is to conceptualise circumstances under which employers are likely to prefer permanent, rather than casual, part-time work. Industrial agreements tend to define permanent part-time jobs as continuing jobs whose hours are anything less, on a weekly, monthly or annual basis, than those of the corresponding full-time job. Individual contracts may specify part-time jobs as defined fractions of comparable full-time jobs.

Permanent part-time jobs are defined as providing access, on a pro rata basis, to all or most of the conditions of permanent full-time jobs, and as being continuing appointments. By contrast, casual jobs, whether full-time or part-time, are defined as being paid a loading in lieu of the leave and other entitlements attached to continuing jobs, and as being subject to short termination notice (ABS 1997b; Smith and Ewer 1999). Their hourly rate assumes that all the work done is divisible and able to be contained within hourly blocks of time. In fact, however, considerably more than an hour's
work may need to be done to support each paid hour. Casuals, particularly
Casual professionals, are cheap to employ because this “spill-over” time is
unpaid. Whilst the education and health industries have the highest density of
female professionals and of permanent part-timers, pockets of casualisation
have arisen. Here the struggle for conversion to permanency has been
particularly intense, because of casual employees’ resentment at contributing
these unpaid hours, and management’s reluctance to forgo the use of them
(Junor 1998b).

Although permanent part-time contracts provide pay, leave and
retirement income on a pro rata basis, this is not quite as equitable as it seems.
Employer and employee superannuation contributions take proportionally
longer to accumulate, and as salary increments accumulate more slowly,
pensions calculated on exit salary will be lower. This is because part-time
employees do not age more slowly in proportion to the slower rate at which
their entitlements accumulate. Thus permanent part-time employment may not
guarantee financial security, either during or after the working period.

Insecurity is not simply an issue of tenure (Heery and Salmon 2000).
Whilst over 60 per cent of women classed as “casual” have been with the same
employer for over a year, the precariousness of their situation does not diminish
over time (Smith and Ewer 1999). Casual work creates short-term and long-
term financial insecurity. It tends to be low-paid, even in professional areas.
Loadings tend to under-compensate for forgone benefits such as leave,
superannuation and termination compensation (Smith and Ewer 1999, 27—31).
Casual employees have a restricted capacity to save, borrow or plan. Those
who are on call to work at any time, lose control over their own family time.
They may need to pay for “just-in-case” childcare. These are forms of both pay
and time insecurity. Casuals’ insecurity in part results from their
marginalisation, a result of low status as well as part-time attendance, in
information networks, skill assessments and training. Whilst permanent part-
time work addresses tenure, it does not address these other aspects of pay
insecurity.

Time insecurity, too can characterise some permanent part-time work.
There are at least two different types of permanent part-time work – the
“retention” and the “flexibility” models (Romeyn 1992; Junor 1998a).
“Retention” part-time work is clearly not marginal, in that it usually takes the
form of an employee-initiated temporary and reversible reduction in permanent
full-time hours for life-cycle reasons such as child-care, elder-care or study. Its
availability in conjunction with parental leave is now enshrined industrially,
legislatively and legally. Recent case law establishes that it is unlawful
discrimination to offer permanent part-time work only at a level lower than the
worker’s former full-time grade (Australian Industrial Relations Commission
Equal Opportunity Commission of Western Australia 2000). Retention part-
time employment is also increasingly being used as a pre-retirement option. In
the health industry, this model extends beyond the parental leave or pre-retirement contexts. In a unionised and short-staffed shift-work environment, part-time nurses can earn a living income from a shorter than normal working week, without forgoing the career choice of a later conversion to full-time work.

By contrast, the “flexibility” model of permanent part-time work exhibits some characteristics of marginal employment (Probert 1995; Boreham et al. 1996; Probert et al. 2000a). Primarily a managerial initiative, it tends to use permanency as a basis for flexible rostering, often monthly or annualised. Rosters may be non-negotiable, and may not be family-friendly. “Flexibility” part-timers tend to be confined to low-paid classifications and to have limited mobility into career grades or full-time work (Junor 1998a, 1998b).

Over the past ten years, under the influence of the flexibility provisions of collective and individual contracts, the distinction between flexible part-time hours and full-time hours is tending to narrow. “Averaging” over periods longer than a week can mean that permanent part-timers may spend part of the month or year working full-time hours. Given the difficulties of measuring service industry and professional “overtime”, part-timers’ hours, as opposed to their pay, can in any case be longer than the full-time norm of 38 or 40 per week (Junor 1998a, 1998b). Moreover, the short-notice addition of paid hours can also blur the distinction between permanent and casual part-time jobs (Probert et al. 2000a). Some variable-hours part-time contracts require employees to be on-call during unpaid hours.

This analysis has demonstrated pay and time inequities in permanent part-time work. Yet like the family wage, it is chosen by women. This raises questions of whether positive structural change can be achieved through individual choice.

CHOICE VERSUS STRATEGY

The conservative view that work/family arrangements are a matter of individual negotiation between employer and employee is enshrined in the Principle Object of the federal Workplace Relations Act 1996. This Object includes “… assisting employees to balance their work and family responsibilities effectively through the development of mutually beneficial work practices with employers.” Employers and employees are to “…sit down and decide what terms and conditions suit them best … [without] being dictated to by third parties such as unions” (Reith and Newman 1999).

Choice, however, “comes at the end of a whole lot of givens.” It can be seen as ranging from free, through restricted (by the limited options available) and constrained (by contextual factors) to forced. In an ABS survey of non-standard employment, interviewees’ main explanations for working in part-time, casual or temporary positions were classified as either “employment reasons,” “personal reasons” or “family reasons” (ABS 1997b). “Work
Reasons” were given by 27.5 per cent of women but 42.9 per cent of men, an explanation reflecting restricted or forced choices (“only type of work available”; “normal hours for type of job”). Family reasons were given by a quarter of women but a negligible proportion of men, reflecting an unknown mix of free and constrained choice. “Personal reasons,” which may or may not reflect free private choice, were the main explanation given by 37.1 per cent of men and 43.7 per cent of women.

These figures suggest that for most people, choice is not entirely free. Gender differences in the use of part-time, temporary and casual work, resulting in part from restricted, constrained and even forced choices, suggest that something more than individual choice will be needed to remove the institutional residues of the family wage.

Figure 2 provides a schema interpreting this evidence conceptually, by determining the possible role of individual choice in moving from an old to a new gender settlement. Acting within an international context, the players in the family wage settlement, in attempts to modify and renegotiate it, have been political parties, employer bodies, unions, and feminist groups. This settlement impacted on individuals, but in order to attempt to change it, they have needed to work through policy communities, unions or employer bodies. The only alternative has been to negotiate individual accommodations within their

![Figure 2 The Australian Family Wage Settlement and the Struggle towards a Successor](image-url)
Permanent Part-Time Work

The initial family wage settlement can be seen as arising from a broad consensus over the role of families in providing a secure base for labour and consumer markets. By allowing employers to transfer most of the cost of labour force reproduction to women in families, it created a space in which unions gained some power to regulate the intensity and hours of work. The cost to all parties was a rigid gender segregation of jobs, using skill as a demarcation strategy. This was needed to prevent employers from using lower-paid women to undercut the family-loaded male rate. The only alternative, as we have already seen, was equal pay which if applied too widely would have ended the family wage system.

Women’s post-war resistance to the income inequity of the family wage system and to pay inequity within waged work coalesced with employers’ growing need for a more flexible labour force. This had to be achieved whilst still shifting reproduction costs – a growing necessity in the profit-squeezed turbulence that began with the monetary crises of the 1970s. Thus began the fragmented contest between employers’ pursuit of accommodations to the family wage system, and feminist attempts to supersede it, with partial and gradual support from unions and fitful support from governments.

The period from the 1970s to the 1990s can be characterised as one in which attempts to renegotiate the family wage settlement gradually gave way to piecemeal alleviation of its impact. In the 1980s and early 1990s feminism reached its high point of influence through state-supported employment equity practices and family services funding. During the 1990s, with the decentralising and decollectivising of employment relations and the fragmentation of employment modes, the feminisation of employment occurred within the institutional residue of the family wage system.

At the onset of the flexibility decade, employer organisations were still fairly unguarded in declaring their attachment to old gender norms. During the 1990 Parental Leave Test Case, an employer advocate opposed the extension of parental leave to men as “…social engineering and attempting to influence private life through manipulation of terms and conditions of employment” (Australian Industrial Relations Commission 1990, 1080). This comment is startling because of the comparative recency of its naturalisation of gender relations based on male breadwinner norms.

In the course of the 1990s, employers became more adept at using discourses of family-friendliness, without being too explicit about the type of family to which they were offering friendship. The term “flexibility” promised individually-negotiated concessions which, whilst very important in themselves, were rather easily assimilated to provisions reinforcing old divisions of labour such as the reduction of penalty rates on unsociable hours, increased shiftwork, and 12 hour shifts in male employment areas. Moreover, casual and contract employment were significantly deregulated.

These comments are not meant to take away from a decade of admirable
policy work within government departments, business and unions, under the “family friendly workplace” banner. This work was designed to generate a clearly-needed change in workplace culture. 1990’s policies on “workers with family responsibilities” correctly used gender-neutral language in an attempt to include men as carers. Unfortunately, the extension and intensification of the full-time day created institutional barriers to achieving this cultural change. 1990s discourses of choice and diversity were based on a recognition that existing full-time hours and career paths are male-normed (Hakim 1996). Creating a space for individuals to opt out of such normal expectations, however, was different from addressing their inequity. Carers’ responsibilities were institutional imperatives of a different order from cultural issues of lifestyle choice (Russell and Bowman 2000). The rhetoric of choice provided too flimsy a lever to effect structural change. By the end of a decade of moral suasion, employers had not closed the gap between the rhetoric and the reality of family-friendliness (Biggs 1998; Whitehouse and Zetlin 1999). Whilst pay equity is one of the most basic sources of family welfare, it was rarely included in lists of family-friendly measures (Burgess and Strachan 1999).

It is clear that the models of individualised workplace negotiation which prevailed during the 1990s favoured accommodations to the status quo. It is hard, however, to know what other strategies could have been adopted by people working in policy departments, in the context of a decentralising and partly decollectivised industrial relations system and the rise of a neo-conservative welfare state (Ostenfeld and Strachan 1999; Macintyre 1999; Baker 2000). In a climate of productivity crisis, with employers clawing back surpluses by calling for reduced state spending and by extending/intensifying employees’ work time, there was no easy way for women to shift part of the time or cost burden of unpaid work. During the 1990s, the union movement was rather slow to develop a coherent pay/time strategy. Individual unions, their peak body, and some sympathetic academic researchers are now starting to attempt this task (Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Teaching 1999; Campbell et al. 2000; Probert et al. 1999, 2000a, 2000b). There is, however, an urgent need for a more integrated approach to pay, work-time and work/family campaigns, in which permanent part-time work, rather than being an individual option, takes its place as one of a coordinated range of transition strategies.

CONCLUSION

In the short to medium term, there appears to be no possibility of a successor to the centralised determinations which established and subsequently modified the gendered pay and time relations of the twentieth century. There are other alternatives, however, to leaving individuals to make their own accommodations. This conclusion begins the process of sketching an alternative form of strategy for working towards a successor settlement – one in
A gender-equitable solution to the problem of work overload cannot be achieved by setting up an alternative arrangement for women which leaves the cause of the problem untouched. The first element of a settlement then, is a reduction in the hours of full-time work. In 1997, the union movement recognised that it had been slow to address the work/time/life issue, but since then, it has been working on an industry-by-industry basis to identify and address key sources of overload. A 35-hour week campaign, which has European precedents, may not only make full-time work accessible to more women, but also to release men to engage more actively in family care and housework.

A gender-equitable solution to the problem of job security would certainly need to address the issue of casualisation. A Casual Employees Test Case was commenced in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in 1999. By June 2000, some industrial agreements provided for casual conversion after three months’ service, and for casuals’ access to long service leave. The current Queensland industrial relations legislation extends maternity leave to casuals with two years’ service, and an ACTU Test Case has been initiated on this issue. More broadly, innovative strategies for the recruitment of casual employees must become a higher union priority.

One way of addressing the rise in intra-occupational segregation, resulting in the growth of casual and part-time jobs, would be a casual and part-time pay equity inquiry, such as suggested in the report on the findings of the New South Wales Pay Equity Inquiry. Issues identified for investigation in such an inquiry include the adequacy of casual loadings; access to paid overtime, employment benefits, career paths and career breaks; and the impact of high part-time/casual densities on work value assessments (NSW Industrial Relations Commission 1998, 1: 78; 2: 270—71). If cost incentives to reliance on casual and part-time employment were removed, casual conversions would be easier to achieve, and free mobility between full-time and part-time work would be enhanced.

Casual conversion strategies meet resistance when the ongoing viability of positions is uncertain. This problem could be addressed through workforce planning strategies involving the flexible deployment of staff across jobs and workplaces. Imaginative scheduling strategies could utilise arrangements such as purchased-leave entitlements, short-term employee-initiated permanent part-time work, and retraining, to coincide with projected workflow variations. Small organisations might enter into such initiatives on a group basis, perhaps integrating them with labour market programs backed by government support (Buchanan et al. 1999).

Even where feasible, ongoing permanent part-time employment has been shown to be a gendered form of employment. It falls short of a new universal norm of paid work, from which no one would be debarred involuntarily through family commitments. Ongoing permanent part-time
employment provides a supplementary family income, or needs to be supplemented by state-provided family assistance. A stronger integration of the social security and wages systems would be a way around this dilemma. One possible model is the French legislative introduction, across all industries and employment modes, of the same tripartite division among normal working time, abnormal working time and unpaid time. This involves a tripartite agreement for a 169-hour normal working month, which includes a 35-hour week, abnormal working time, and sickness and unemployment pay, and is said to have virtually eliminated overtime. French agency temporary workers are indemnified by the state for periods of unemployment between contracts (Harvey 1999). Whatever the practical merits and drawbacks of this system, its underlying principle is relevant. Periods of permanent part-time work could be undertaken without jeopardising income security over the life-cycle, through a system of employer, state and employee funded whole-of-life income guarantee. A step in this direction would be employee-purchased leave arrangements, or some combination of employer- and state-funded short-hours arrangements for parents. Such a sharing of employer, employee and state responsibility for income security and time use, at any point in time, and over time, would need to include infrastructure supports, such as children’s services, services for older people, and affordable housing.

Permanent part-time work can thus be an element of a new gender settlement, but it cannot be its basis. It is a useful inclusion within a more comprehensive program for moving towards gender equity in pay, work time and work/family balance. Over-reliance on this one element will, however, result in a slight amelioration, but not a transcendence, of the strong institutional residues of the family wage settlement. The conclusion has suggested some concrete immediate strategies. What is important is not their detail, but the underlying principle that coordination must replace centralisation. Every policy initiative will need to be examined for its pay and time equity implications, and to ensure that it includes elements that have the capacity to contribute to a successor settlement to the family wage. Such an approach may be piecemeal, but its power will come from the fact that it is decentralised without being fragmented. In the new climate, it is a road through diversity to equity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Total Persons</th>
<th>Male PPT</th>
<th>Female PPT</th>
<th>Male Cas FT</th>
<th>Female Cas FT</th>
<th>Male Cas PT</th>
<th>Female Cas PT</th>
<th>Density %</th>
<th>PT Density %</th>
<th>Casual Density %</th>
<th>PPT Density %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, forestry &amp; fishing</td>
<td>156136</td>
<td>1203</td>
<td>3444</td>
<td>32646</td>
<td>8944</td>
<td>18516</td>
<td>18886</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail trade</td>
<td>997839</td>
<td>22849</td>
<td>95075</td>
<td>38882</td>
<td>22258</td>
<td>139410</td>
<td>263144</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation, cafes &amp; restaurants</td>
<td>345390</td>
<td>6214</td>
<td>15651</td>
<td>15553</td>
<td>16563</td>
<td>51600</td>
<td>114193</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property &amp; business services</td>
<td>723654</td>
<td>9620</td>
<td>45975</td>
<td>71689</td>
<td>26952</td>
<td>41616</td>
<td>72028</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government administration &amp; Defence</td>
<td>334447</td>
<td>1767</td>
<td>20997</td>
<td>3307</td>
<td>6427</td>
<td>5342</td>
<td>16479</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>574618</td>
<td>11108</td>
<td>89997</td>
<td>4238</td>
<td>6462</td>
<td>19935</td>
<td>70196</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; community Services</td>
<td>718807</td>
<td>10304</td>
<td>188616</td>
<td>12348</td>
<td>14650</td>
<td>13706</td>
<td>105220</td>
<td>79.0</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural &amp; recreational services</td>
<td>158966</td>
<td>3621</td>
<td>8693</td>
<td>6545</td>
<td>4449</td>
<td>17552</td>
<td>32486</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal &amp; other Services</td>
<td>253013</td>
<td>1505</td>
<td>15551</td>
<td>7044</td>
<td>6661</td>
<td>13352</td>
<td>34394</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All industries</td>
<td>6972144</td>
<td>85864</td>
<td>573431</td>
<td>383366</td>
<td>155071</td>
<td>418122</td>
<td>838941</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*Note:* Figures of less than 5000 have a relative standard error of over 25 per cent.
NOTES

1 This paper was drafted whilst the author was a visitor in the Sociology Program of the Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University. Thanks are due to Professor Frank Jones, to Elizabeth Swann, and to the two anonymous referees.

2 They conceptualised work intensification in terms of increases in job effort, stress and pace over the previous twelve months.

3 McCallum (1999) argues that employer control over private life is increasing.

4 Call centres are one location for this model.

5 R. Ballantyne, interview.

WORKS CITED


Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Teaching. 1999. Australia At Work: Just Managing. Sydney: ACIRRT.


casual and permanent part-time employment in retail and hospitality. Paper presented at the Australian Sociological Association Annual Conference, University of Tasmania, December.


Ex Parte H V Mckay (The Harvester Judgment) (1907) 2 CAR 1.


National Research Project Exploring the Context of Women Teachers’ Work in the Late 1990s. Melbourne: Australian Education Union.


Rural Workers’ Case. 1912. 6 CAR 61—83.


