PARTICIPATION, EQUITY AND OUTCOMES: ENTERPRISE BARGAINING IN THREE FEMALE-DOMINATED WORKPLACES IN NEWCASTLE

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Abstract
Equity aspects of enterprise bargaining are examined through an analysis of case studies in three female-dominated workplaces in Newcastle, New South Wales. The extent to which female employees participated in the bargaining process, the extent to which outcomes differed from national standards and enterprise bargaining outcomes in male-dominated workplaces, and the extent to which female work issues such as training, flexible working arrangements and parental leave arrangements were addressed, are analysed. The findings, though not uniform, highlight the general exclusion of female employees from the process of bargaining, relatively favourable wage outcomes in terms of industry norms, yet an apparent decline in real wages, and a general neglect of the employment aspirations of women.

The shift from a largely centralised wage fixation system towards enterprise bargaining has proceeded through successive stages since 1988 when the first steps were taken to relate wage increases to changes in productivity. While an element of enterprise bargaining has always been present in Australia, particularly in over-award bargaining, this has occurred against a backdrop of centralised wage determination which included the majority of the workforce. Enterprise bargaining poses a threat for many women workers who are relatively low paid, have low rates of trade union membership and are employed on a part-time and/or casual basis. They risk falling behind because of lack of organisation and bargaining power, and through the elimination of national wage cases together with the end of national standards. One difficulty confronting researchers and
government agencies under an enterprise bargaining framework is the lack of information about outcomes, participation and equity. As a consequence the need for case study based research has increased.

An extensive literature has developed in Australia with respect to gender aspects of enterprise bargaining (for example, Henry & Franzway 1993; Hall & Fruin 1994; Pocock 1995; Smith & Ewer 1995). Concern has been expressed that the earnings and employment conditions of women, relative to men, could be eroded within an enterprise bargaining framework (Bennett 1994). Disquiet has been voiced over the ability of women to organise and participate in bargaining, especially given their occupational segregation and low trade union density, and in their ability to realise earnings gains, especially given the linkage of wage and non-wage benefit increases to productivity improvements. The service sector concentration of female employment in Australia suggests that many women workers will have difficulty in securing wage/conditions improvements in return for demonstrable and measurable productivity gains (Rimmer 1994, ch. 4). Finally, the issue of 'flexibility' is of particular interest and concern for women (Smith & Ewer 1995, 12). On the one hand functional flexibility (the broadening of the skills and task base) and inter-temporal flexibility (the spread of working hours) has the potential to advantage many female workers who are occupationally segregated, have no career path, are tied to minimum skills based employment and have a need for flexible working-time arrangements. On the other hand, the flexibility agenda could see many women working fewer hours than they desire, working unsociable hours and having their employment conditions casualised.

THE RESEARCH METHOD

Three case studies were undertaken in late 1995 and early 1996 as part of a wider project funded by the federal Department of Industrial Relations (DIR). The project focused on the use of case study material on enterprise bargaining in order to establish whether female-dominated workplaces were able to participate effectively in the bargaining process and to assess the outcomes in comparison with those in male-dominated workplaces. For each designated workplace the researchers gathered information from formal and published sources such as company reports, trade union news bulletins and the enterprise agreement. Informal, largely qualitative, data was gathered through a process of successive interviews with representatives from management, trade unions, workplace delegates and employees. The informal methods were important for obtaining information that is rarely published and is difficult to quantify, including who participated in the bargaining process, the degree of workplace consultation and with whom it took place, and the outcomes from the process in terms of morale, work intensity and career prospects. This research process is largely qualitative.
Table 1: Industry and management structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Clothing Co.</th>
<th>Community Co.</th>
<th>Supermarket Co.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sector</td>
<td>private</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>manufacturing</td>
<td>community services</td>
<td>retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head office</td>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional workplaces</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>44 (NSW) 120 (Australia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>public sector</td>
<td>Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers association</td>
<td>Chamber of Manufacturers</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>Retail Traders Association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and is open to conflicting evidence from the interviewees. Where differences of interpretation or fact existed the researchers conducted follow up interviews in order to either harmonise or rationalise the differences. Despite its limitations, the procedure expands the scope of the inquiry and generates greater detail on enterprise bargaining than is available from an assessment of the formal agreements. While the focus of the case studies was the workplace, the agreements in two of the case studies (Supermarket Co. and Community Co.) encompassed many workplaces as they were enterprise based. In these cases, only one of many workplaces in an enterprise agreement and its impact on the bargaining process are analysed.

The findings reported here are not representative and should be carefully interpreted. Workplace case studies suffer from a range of limitations including their bias and their time specificity (Burgess, Green, Macdonald & Ryan 1994). While the case studies reported here cannot represent the breadth of women workers' experience under enterprise bargaining, the workplaces possess, to different degrees, those characteristics which are generally conducive towards an equitable outcome for female employees. These characteristics include relatively large numbers of employees (all workplaces), public sector ownership (Community Co.), high trade union density (Clothing Co. & Supermarket Co.) and female trade union delegates (all workplaces). These characteristics should be conducive to female participation in the enterprise bargaining process, to equitable wage outcomes and to explicit incorporation of female employment aspirations into the enterprise agreement. If participation, equity and workplace
issues relevant to women workers are absent from these three agreements, then it is unlikely that participation, equity and female workplace issues will be present in the vast majority of enterprise bargains at female-dominated workplaces.

BACKGROUND TO THE CASE STUDIES

Industry, organisation and management

The three workplaces are all located in the Newcastle City Council area of the Hunter Valley. Clothing Co. is a Newcastle based clothing manufacturer. The workforce is predominantly female, full-time and semi-skilled and the workplace and the enterprise are virtually the same. Community Co. is a state government statutory authority providing home based and personalised health care services with a large number of workplaces throughout New South Wales. The workforce is predominantly female, semi-skilled and part-time and employment is located outside the workplace. Supermarket Co. is a national supermarket chain with over 120 workplaces throughout Australia whose workforce is predominantly female, semi-skilled and part-time.

The industry, organisational and management characteristics of each workplace are set out in Table 1. Only one of the workplaces has its head office in Newcastle and this is the only one which is Newcastle managed. Community Co. is different from the other workplaces in that employees are assigned to an office but spend their time with clients at locations external to the workplace. In this context the Community Co. workers have less direct supervision and more job autonomy than do the other workers. All three industries are subject to severe competitive and/or cost-cutting pressures. Fiscal restraints have meant that Community Co. has to reduce its operating costs. Extended retail trading hours and flat consumer confidence over a long period has forced cost cutting pressures on Supermarket Co. In the case of Clothing Co. the effect of successive and prospective tariff cuts has meant that the pressures for cost cutting are continuous. Management and employees at all three enterprises are under constant pressure to generate cost savings. One of the prime reasons for enterprise bargaining in all three cases is that it provides a framework for reducing labour costs, the single largest cost faced by all three enterprises.

Workforce characteristics

The outstanding feature of the three workplaces is their high proportion of female employees (over 80 per cent) (see Table 2). At Clothing Co. there is obvious gender segregation, with managerial positions dominated by men. In the other
organisations women fill the management positions at the workplaces studied but most management positions are external to the local workplace. At Supermarket Co. the external managerial hierarchy, both in the state and national head office, is dominated by men. An obvious feature of employment at Community Co. is the very high proportion of casual and part-time workers which reaches almost 90 per cent. All workplaces report low labour turnover but this is not surprising as the Hunter Region has a much higher level of unemployment than the national average and there are very few employment opportunities for women. In the main, the occupations filled by women at each workplace are classified as unskilled or semi-skilled, with few formal credentials required and an emphasis on in-house training for skill acquisition.

The trade unions

Both Clothing Co. and Supermarket Co. have 100 per cent trade union coverage (see Table 3) with automatic payroll fees deduction. The fragmented workforce at Community Co. made it difficult to ascertain exact trade union membership and the evidence suggested that it was relatively low at approximately 30 per cent of the workforce. At all three workplaces industrial relations has been relatively harmonious, the only exception being Clothing Co. which experienced a strike in 1994 over redundancy conditions and payments.
THE PROCESS AND OUTCOMES OF ENTERPRISE BARGAINING

The bargaining process

The bargaining process at Community Co. and Supermarket Co. took over 12 months to complete, with negotiations held outside Newcastle. In both organisations the bargaining process was centralised, with minimal input from the managers or employees at the surveyed workplaces. This is not surprising given that the enterprise agreement is identical across all workplaces within both organisations. Nevertheless, it was apparent that there was minimal information or feedback obtained from the workplaces during the bargaining process. In contrast, the bargaining process at Clothing Co. took only four months to complete and involved the direct participation of workplace managers and employees.

In a single workplace enterprise such as Clothing Co. employees can expect greater participation in the bargaining process, while in multiple workplace enterprises, such as Supermarket Co. and Community Co., the scope for employee participation appears to be limited. Enterprise bargaining does not translate into participation or even consultation in large, multi workplace enterprises. While logistics dictate that it is difficult for all employees to participate directly in the bargaining process for an enterprise like Supermarket Co. with over 120 workplaces nationally, there is the expectation that there would at least be some process of consultation. There was no evidence of any workplace consultation process being carried out in either Supermarket Co. or Community Co.

Many women work part-time, are more likely to have family responsibilities, and as a consequence are less likely to be part of committees considering workplace changes in their enterprises. They are liable to have less access to information because they are more likely to work part-time and on a casual basis in lower status jobs. Evidence on women’s involvement in bargaining structures is hard to locate and while the Department of Industrial Relations (1995, 190–1) reported that there appeared to be little difference between the consultation of male and female employees, there were some workplaces where women were not represented in consultative mechanisms.

Experiences in the implementation of earlier wage fixing principles provide an indication of how women may fare under enterprise bargaining. A number of case studies have shown that women were not well represented in the structures and committees which implemented award restructuring in individual workplaces. The outcomes of award restructuring were not centralised and depended on implementation at enterprise level. For example, there was minimal representation of women on joint consultative committees and working parties in the Queensland Public Service during the implementation stages. Where this was coupled with lack of EEO [equal employment opportunity] committees and officers, and without the personnel systems to identify equity problems, there is a reasonable
Table 3: Trade union characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Clothing Co.</th>
<th>Community Co.</th>
<th>Supermarket Co.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trade union</td>
<td>TCFUA*</td>
<td>LHMU**</td>
<td>SDAEU***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head office</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>Newcastle/Melbourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female delegates/total</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female organisers/total</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>2/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint consultative committee</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strikes last 3 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia  
** Australian Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union  
*** Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Union. The trade union responsible for Supermarket Co. is the northern division of the SDAEU which is an independently registered trade union representing mainly retail workers in the Hunter and Central Coast regions of NSW.

In the translation to the new scale of jobs under the new award in local government in Queensland women were usually under-represented on the committees examining jobs (Strachan & Winter 1995, 104–5).

In addition to these issues, the 1994 Workplace Bargaining Survey (DIR 1995, 66) concluded that managers were driving most of the restructuring and that most agreements were settled centrally at head office between senior corporate managers and full-time union officials with little input from workplace managers and union delegates, precisely the experience at Community Co. and Supermarket Co. Centralised and external bargaining has the potential to exclude and alienate...
employees from a process labelled as enterprise bargaining. It is not surprising that the new enterprise agreements in such workplaces are viewed with suspicion and scepticism, and are difficult to implement since those responsible for implementation and those affected by implementation have been excluded from the bargaining process.

The bargaining issues

Inter-temporal flexibility was the common focus of bargaining across all three workplaces. Managers in particular were keen to deploy labour more effectively over the day (Supermarket Co.), the week (Community Co. and Supermarket Co.) and the year (Clothing Co.). Improved inter-temporal deployment of the workforce was seen as a means of overcoming an array of problems including over-time payments, work roster disputes and a changing competitive environment. At Community Co. the enterprise agreement was also seen as a way of providing for multiskilling. Clothing Co. used the agreement to introduce acceptable redundancy mechanisms while Supermarket Co. increased the permanent share of part-time workers.

The changes in the arrangement of hours worked varied in the three organisations studied. While there was little change in Clothing Co. other than an enhanced ability for the employer to utilise rostered days off, workers in Supermarket Co. were dealing with the reality of longer trading hours, including 24 hour trading in some locations. The arrangement of hours at Community Co. was rigidified under various arrangements in the enterprise agreement. While predictable hours are generally seen as a benefit for women workers, the outcome was the reverse in this organisation. Previously these part-time workers had a large degree of control over their working hours, enabling them to organise the hours to suit their own needs. Under the enterprise agreement this level of employee control was reduced significantly. This exemplifies one of the debates about the benefits of ‘flexible’ hours: benefits accrue to either the employer or the employee depending in large part on who has control of the organisation of hours worked (Strachan & Winter 1995, 70–84). In this case there was a change from determination of hours by the worker to a greater determination of hours by the employer, a result seen as detrimental by the women workers.

All enterprise agreements resulted in successive staggered wage increases over the duration of the enterprise agreement. The average percentage increases in Clothing Co. and Supermarket Co. are for full-time base rates, hence the estimated percentage increase does not apply across all the respective workforces. In terms of comparisons with elsewhere it is difficult to establish reliable benchmarks. Table 4 specifies the annualised wage increases per agreement for the three enterprises and for comparative purposes lists the average percentage wage increase gained through enterprise bargains in 1994 for men and women in the same industries as the case studies (as recorded in the ACTU’s Labour Information
Table 4: Negotiated wage increases under enterprise bargaining

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Clothing Co.</th>
<th>Community Co.</th>
<th>Supermarket Co.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>2 yrs</td>
<td>3 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No. of wage increases</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cumulative increase %</strong></td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual average increase %</strong></td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elsewhere - females</strong></td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elsewhere - males</strong></td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CPI increase 1995 %</strong></td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average weekly earnings increase 1995 %</strong></td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* calculated as the percentage increase in base rate pay over the period
** for enterprise bargains, 1994, in the same industry, LIN database

Network (LIN) database). The annual percentage increase in the consumer price index (CPI) and the increase in average weekly earnings for 1995 are also given for comparative purposes. The estimates and comparisons in Table 4 involve some problematic data. For example, the LIN database is over-represented by the manufacturing sector, relative to workforce numbers, and under-represented in the case of the retail and community services sector. Increases in average weekly earnings can reflect factors additional to negotiated wage increases, such as changes in the workforce, industry and occupational structure and changes in average over-time hours (Burgess 1995).

The average wage growth for each of the three agreements was higher than the wage increases recorded for female workers through enterprise agreements in
the same industry. This applied also for Clothing Co. and Community Co. relative to the increases secured in male-dominated workplaces in the same industry. In the case of Supermarket Co. the wage increase was relatively lower than that secured under enterprise bargaining in male-dominated workplaces in the same industry. In all three cases the wage increases were below the percentage CPI growth in 1995 but above the percentage increase in average weekly earnings in 1995.

In one sense the negotiated wage outcomes appear favourable relative to industry norms and relative to average workforce norms in the same period. More importantly, there is no conclusive evidence that the wage increases are disadvantageous relative to male-dominated workplaces in the same industry. In another sense, however, the negotiated wage increases equate to real wage reductions across the board for 1995. It seems that employees across the Australian workforce are bargaining away various conditions and lifting enterprise productivity/flexibility in return for real wage cuts. This is a matter for concern in these three workplaces since the majority of female employees are relatively low paid and often work less than full-time hours. For example, many part-time/casual female employees at Supermarket Co. and Community Co. earn less than $300 per week (before tax).

Training

Training has been high on the industrial relations agenda since the late 1980s and the introduction of award restructuring and is recognised to be of special importance for enhancing women’s job opportunities. Yet it was not a feature of any of the enterprise agreements studied. Women workers in the three industries represented in the case studies predominate in the lowest employment grades in their organisations. While they clearly exhibit skill in their work as machinists, sales assistants and community carers, there is little public or industry recognition that this work requires specific skills. Work in these areas, as in many other areas of women’s work, attracts little training from employers. When training is provided it is more likely to be in-house training, often on the ‘sit by Nellie’ model of one worker gaining skills (through on-the-job experience or possibly an external training course) and then passing on this training by working directly with another employee at her machine or with a client. This was the case at Clothing Co. where a machinist would be trained and then pass on some of her skills to other employees at the workplace.

The lack of emphasis on training of women workers observed in these case studies reflects the wider picture of women’s access to training. Junor (1993, 12) observed that there was a marked gender difference in the average hours spent on training (both internal and external) between women and men with women gaining around 45 hours of training per year compared to 60 hours for men. Training access was
also related to age, decreasing for women after they reached their 30s and for men after they reached their 40s. Women were more likely than men to outlay their own money on vocational education because employers expected them to enter employment already fully trained. In addition, training for work mainly performed by women frequently was not accredited training (Junor 1993, 7), an issue of debate in the clothing manufacturing industry.

The training for women in the industries investigated, and in many other areas of employment, was specific to the particular operations of the individual workplace and provided little in the way of transferable skills. Broader, generic skills were not the focus of the training and it did not form part of a recognised accredited system of training. Nor were there signs that this is likely to occur in the future. As Baldock (1990, 49) commented, a failure to achieve proper skills audits, training and accreditation will reinforce the ‘distorted hourglass’ shape of women’s service sector career structures. This is of major significance in the industries studied. The top of this model is small and filled with male managerial workers (Clothing Co. and Supermarket Co. or female managerial workers recruited from a specific professional qualified base in the case of Community Co.) while the base is composed of a large body of female service delivery workers. The narrow neck represents the path to the managerial jobs through which very few of the service delivery workers are ever able to pass. While some of the enterprise agreements paid lip service to training needs, there were few concrete outcomes.

Another problem which can be identified in the industries studied is that women were expected to possess certain skills which were valued by the employer but not remunerated as skilled work. The caring exhibited by the fieldworkers in Community Co., for instance, is a valued attribute in a worker but, as in the work of other health and community workers, this skill is not rewarded in monetary terms (Strachan 1995) and workers receive low wages. Those working in Supermarket Co. were valued in part for their customer service skills, skills summed up by one woman in another research study (Poynton & Lazenby 1992, 15) as ‘you have to be easy, patient, especially nice, like people, like kids, be adaptable’. While retailing work is basically concerned with managing customers, an activity which has a direct economic benefit to the employer, it does not receive proper recognition ‘much less financial recompense’ (Poynton & Lazenby 1992, 16–18).

Career paths

The organisations in the case studies mirror major trends in their industries with a variety of internal labour market strategies used to keep overall labour costs down. Part-time and casual work predominated in retailing and some sectors of community service and have increased their share of employment over the past
two decades (Dawkins & Norris 1995). The allocation of this work to women, or conversely the uptake of these strategies by female-dominated industries, is not coincidental but the result of expectations that these strategies are acceptable to women. There is strong evidence that in male-dominated industries other internal labour market strategies have been used (Hunter et al. 1993).

The availability of career paths for women workers is an issue closely associated with training. Career path opportunities, especially for female employees, was an explicit goal of the award restructuring process in the latter half of the 1980s. Career path opportunities, however, remain a mirage rather than a reality across many industries (Strachan & Winter 1995, 85–99). Training or multi-skilling is linked to the needs of the employer, needs which are driven by cost containment. A few machinists in Clothing Co. have received additional training and can act in a number of positions. These workers with additional skills are classified at a higher award level and receive increased wages, a policy which limits the career progression of the larger workforce because of the extra labour costs which the employer would incur. Movement to a higher level in the award in the organisations studied is dependent on employer need or promotion, a situation which has been observed more widely. Strachan and Winter (1995, 86) reported a statement which could be applied to the industries studied:

much of the support for career paths expressed by management seemed rhetorical because most organisations often did not recognise or value the skills, experience or qualifications (if relevant) that clerical workers held when promotional opportunities arose.

The culture of many organisations militates against seeing women in non-traditional jobs or management positions. While this may not be as obvious in female-dominated industries, certain positions or career paths may be effectively barred to women. There is obvious gender segregation in Clothing Co. and in movement to senior management positions in Supermarket Co. In reality the structure of the three organisations requires the majority of women workers to remain employed in the base two levels of the award.

Work and family policies

In recent years it has been widely acknowledged that issues concerning the combination of paid work and family responsibilities are of vital importance to women workers. These issues are now placed within a context of work and family policies, a conscious recognition by trade unions and government of the special needs of women workers and the development of so-called ‘family friendly’ workplaces. Women have retained the primary responsibility for home and children for although there is apparent consensus between men and women that couples should share work and family responsibilities, when it comes to practice, it is clear that it is women who make the accommodations necessary to meet family needs. (Wolcott & Glezer 1995, 110)
Some women have achieved the flexibility to manage household and parenting responsibilities by working part-time, particularly when they are responsible for preschool children. Wolcott and Glezer (1995, 110) conclude that attitudes and values about gender roles and priorities regarding work and family clearly influenced the trade-offs couples made between income earning and family caring responsibilities. Although there is evidence of some degree of shift in gender roles around work and family roles, this appears to be a slow process of evolution, not revolution.

In the past few years there has been increasing emphasis on policies which promote a more equal share in this load. This is impossible to legislate for; however, policies which have the potential to make this combination of responsibilities easier have been implemented in some workplaces. Parental leave of 52 weeks unpaid leave is a minimum standard in the federal industrial relations legislation. Through the family leave test cases many awards now have provisions which enable employees to use their sick leave in order to care for ill family members. Some industries, however, are only addressing these policies to the 'core' of the workforce and ignoring the preponderance of women in the 'periphery'; casual workers, for instance, may not be eligible for parental or maternity leave.

Despite the widespread rhetoric relating to work and family policies there is little evidence of changes in enterprise agreements which enhance a worker's abilities to combine these parts of their lives. In its analysis of agreements, DIR noted that women were more likely to be affected by family leave and equity provisions but examples of specific equal employment opportunity provisions (DIR 1995, 244) suggested, however, that these clauses indicated a nebulous commitment or compliance with recognised legislation and provided no additional commitments. This attitude was confirmed with a study in December 1996 of 7,532 certified agreements on FATEXT (database produced by DIR) of which only 439 (5.8 per cent) had a clause specifically on equal opportunity or affirmative action. From an analysis of 150 of these clauses (first 150 on database) it is clear that the overwhelming majority of clauses do no more than state the employers' legislative requirements (Strachan & Burgess 1997, 324). The low incidence of specific consideration of EEO issues in agreements shows that it is of little importance on the bargaining agenda and such policies were non-existent in the agreements studied. The awards and agreements contained only the standard clauses on parental leave and sick leave and, given the high incidence of casual workers at Community Co., many workers may not be eligible for the benefits of such clauses.

EVALUATION: ENTERPRISE BARGAINING, GENDER, PARTICIPATION AND EQUITY

The Department of Industrial Relations Report on enterprise bargaining in 1994 commented that, as compared to men, women under enterprise bargaining were
less likely to be consulted, more likely to be faced with a change of hours and a change in the contract of employment; more likely to receive new training opportunities, family based leave, and employer subsidised child care; more likely to report that they were better off (DIR 1995, 21-3). These three cases are in conformity with some of the above observations. At Community Co. and Supermarket Co. there was minimal workplace consultation in terms of the development of and negotiations over the terms and conditions of the enterprise agreement. All three agreements were characterised by the desire of employers to achieve greater flexibility in the inter-temporal deployment of the mainly female workforces. While training was mentioned in the enterprise agreements, the commitment by employers was to internal, on the job training (non-accredited), largely to increase multi-skilling and to improve the functional flexibility of the respective workforces. Career path opportunities for women in the workplaces studied remain minimal as a result of a number of factors including the high incidence of part-time and/or casual employment, the location of senior managerial positions outside the workplace or gender occupational segregation within the enterprise.

While wage increases appeared reasonable in the light of industry norms and in comparison to economy wide wage movements it should be emphasised that the wage increases received, largely in exchange for trade-offs in conditions (especially working time), were still below the increase in the CPI. All three industries face competitive or government imposed cost constraints which will be sustained into the future and with the three enterprise agreements due to be renegotiated we see no reason for a reversal of the syndrome of conditions trade-offs for real wage cuts.

The federal conservative (Liberal – National Party coalition) government, elected in 1996, has introduced industrial relations reforms that will assist in the process of reducing employment security and strengthening managerial prerogatives. The major thrust is to deregulate employment arrangements and to remove the potential intrusion over workplace arrangements provided by the award system and trade unions. The Workplace Relations Act 1996 (operative from 1997) builds on the foundation of enterprise/workplace bargaining introduced in the past decade but contains some quite different emphases. It introduces the individualisation of workplace agreements and severely limits union powers. The 1996 Act is based on the policy of 'Better Pay for Better Work' which the conservative parties propounded in their election campaign: 'A more flexible industrial relations system will increase productivity, achieve faster real growth in wages and profits and, most importantly, create more real jobs.' The policy stated that an industrial relations system 'where employers and employees work as a team' was needed 'at the level of the individual enterprise where employers and employees can see most clearly that they have a common interest in the success of the enterprise' (Reith 1996, 1). A major objective of the Workplace Relations Act is the individualisation of industrial relations, 'ensuring that the primary responsibility for determining matters affecting the relationship between
Employers and employees rests with the employer and employees at the workplace or enterprise level' (Workplace Relations Act 1996 Part 1). The influence of the Industrial Relations Commission and awards which set industry wide minimums will decline under the Coalition Government's proposed industrial relations legislation.

There is a real danger that in industries subject to intensive competitive pressures and government cost cutting objectives that the terms and conditions of employment will be more readily eroded than in the past. For female-dominated workplaces this could be translated into real wage cuts, more unsociable working hours, increased employment casualisation, less external training, greater career path exclusion, less effective workplace representation and growing work intensification. While these case studies suggest some recognition of the needs and aspirations of female employees the reported material progress is fairly limited. However, the real issue is whether even the modest gains can be sustained within an industrial relations regime that enhances the discretionary and bargaining power of employers and reduces the external validation of agreements.

Acknowledgments

This research project could not have been carried out without the financial assistance of the Federal Department of Industrial Relations, the efforts of Roy Green who acted as a co-ordinator for the researchers and liaised with the Federal Department of Industrial Relations and all the managers, trade union officials and employees at the surveyed workplaces who generously gave their time and support to the project. The participation of the three enterprises was conditional upon their not being directly identified. An earlier version of this article was presented at the Third Newcastle Interdisciplinary Gender Studies Conference, University of Newcastle, 1996. We would like to thank the two anonymous referees for their helpful suggestions.

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Workplace Relations Act. 1996.