

Foreword

In '48 in one of my first classes in economics, I argued with my teacher (male) about the injustice of the female basic wage being less than that of a man. His response was that no one would employ women if they demanded equal pay.

Women's workforce participation has greatly expanded since then, we have seen successive challenges arguing for equal pay in the arbitration system—but, as the great Mary Gaudron said in 1979: 'We won equal pay for equal work in 1967. We won again in 1969 and again in 1972 and 1974. Yet we still do not have equal pay' (quoted in Burton 2010).

Those critical cases arguing for equal pay owed much to the work of women trade unionists including Edna Ryan (1984), who successfully presented the 1974 Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) case for women to receive the adult minimum wage and was one of the 'founding mothers' of the National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW).

Since the '70s, scholarly studies in economics, political science and other fields have greatly expanded our understanding of the extent of gender inequality built into the tax, health, education, retirement incomes, employment and social policies of our nation. Recently, the CEO of the Workplace Gender Equity Agency opined that at the current rate of change, it would take 50 years to get rid of the gender wage gap (Belot 2017).

On 6 July 2017, the Commonwealth Office for Women circulated *Towards 2025: An Australian Government strategy to boost women's workforce participation* (DPMC 2017). For all its shortcomings, the contrast between this strategy and the 'white picket fence' policies of the early Howard Government could not be greater.

That said, as this valuable book documents, inequality is built still into the very fabric of our policies. That must change.

In 2014, NFAW produced its first *Gender Lens* report on the Commonwealth 2014–15 Budget in response to the manifest unfairness of it. The report was produced by volunteers in a civil society organisation, after the fact and without access to government data or modelling capacity. Since then, our *Gender Lens* report has grown in coverage and sophistication. It has become an important contribution to public debate about the budget. But it cannot substitute for gender-aware policy formulation, for gender-aware budgeting by the government itself.

Australian women, and Australian society in general, need better gendered data, a reinstated Time Use Survey, policy that does not implicitly disadvantage women whatever their income, their social class, their disabilities or their ethnicities.

I commend the study of the entirety of this book to every politician hoping to obtain the votes of Australian women. And women—stand up for change.

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References

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