

# Frank Stilwell and Kirrily Jordan, *Who Gets What? Analysing Economic Inequality in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, 2007

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It is likely that anyone who writes a whole book about inequality will think it a problem, and want to do something about it. Complaining about this would be foolish, as long as the data and arguments are presented competently and honestly.

Competence and honesty are not a problem here. Stillwell and Jordan present an exhaustive description of Australian incomes and wealth, the rich, the poor, and geography and gender inequalities. There are no big surprises, but a comprehensive and up-to-date summary of the available data, its strengths, and its weaknesses (such as the tendency of the BRW rich list to miss old family fortunes). I must admit that I do not see the trend to increasing inequality in this data as clearly as they do. Equivalised household incomes have been bouncing around in a fairly narrow range for the last decade, as has the wages share of income since the winding back of the Whitlam and Fraser wage breakouts. While the profits share has been rising more consistently and is now at a record high, this has eaten into rent and interest as much as wages.

Their recommendations are equally unsurprising: more progressive taxation and regulated wage setting. Of course right-wing 'think' tanks are in 'denial' about inequality, and women's lower earnings are a result of 'patriarchal ideology'. Inequality is also linked to Clive Hamilton's 'affluenza' — the failure of economic growth to bring happiness — since materialistic aspirations will be greater in a more unequal society. Strangely, the index has entries for the Labor party and government, but not the Liberals.

This book falls firmly into the 'worthy but dull' category. If you want a handbook on inequality in Australia, *Who Gets What?* is fine, if a little long and burdened with editorials. If you want your beliefs challenged, look elsewhere.

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