

## 'SIT DOWN GIRLIE'

### Girlie tries to get a job



#### Costello's labour pains

The slight national increase in the Australian birth rate has been attributed by Peter Costello to Peter Costello. He is reported in *The Australian Weekend Inquirer* (9–10 April 2005) as linking the government's maternity bonuses with the increase. Demographers, on the other hand, call the increase a 'baby boom echo'. This refers to women in their thirties who have deferred parenthood for many reasons including study, work or just can't find the right partner. The latter seems to be the biggest difficulty of all.

#### Costello's bludgers

In the meantime the Federal Government's campaign to get single mothers and people with disabilities back to work continues to demonise single mothers as lying, cheating, welfare bludgers. There are approximately 450,000 sole parents who receive welfare, and on a talkback radio show in April 2005 Costello said taxpayers don't mind 'helping a person in genuine need [but] I think the public rightly thinks, "why are we all paying taxes here?"'. Why do they have to pay taxes for people who could really work?' (George Megalogenis, *The Australian Weekend Inquirer*, 9–10 April 2005).

Get real and understand the world you live in Peter! Nearly half of all marriages end in divorce. A year after separation the average woman's income drops by \$21,400 or 42% while the average male's drops by 8% (*The Age*, 9 April 2005). Many single mothers who work in the paid work force are paid the basic wage of \$447 gross a week. These mums find it extremely difficult to make ends meet and rely on annual decisions of the Australian Industrial Commission to adjust the basic wage. Many are now fearful the Federal Government will abolish the Commission and instead have these decisions made by a panel of experts reporting to parliament.

Meanwhile the Australian Council of Social services has warned that up to 120,000 people with disabilities could have their pensions cut by up to \$40 a week because of government plans to overhaul the Disability Support Pension. ACOSS warns that the moves will not reduce the number of people dependent on welfare but will increase the hardships they endure.

#### Conscience clause?

Should doctors and pharmacists be able to refuse to supply contraception and other medications to women in rural and remote areas on moral grounds? This is a hoary old chestnut that hit the media in the early 1970s when a Tasmanian doctor in a remote location refused to prescribe the pill. In rural Victoria recently a pharmacist refused to supply a customer with the morning after pill 'on moral grounds'. While such behaviour may be annoying and inconvenient to women in

the metropolitan areas, it is far more so for women who may not have an easily accessible alternative means of supply. The Pharmacy Guild of Australia's position is that if a pharmacist does not supply prescribed or other medication they must ensure the person is referred elsewhere. The issue has also arisen in the increasingly right-wing moralistic United States.

#### Obituary

Andrea Dworkin, Feminist, author and tireless campaigner for women's rights particularly in the areas of pornography and sexual abuse died in April 2005 aged 58. One of her many achievements was in 1983 when she and Catharine Mackinnon drafted and promoted the civil rights law in Minnesota which recognised pornography as sex discrimination. *The Guardian* reports her as saying she would like to be remembered 'in a museum, when male supremacy is dead. I'd like my work to be an anthropological artefact from an extinct, primitive society.'

#### Priests

What do the Pope and Princess Diana have in common? Very big funerals. Canberra's auxiliary bishop Pat Power has argued that the next Pope should allow married men to be priests. He is quoted (*The Age*, 5 April 2005) as saying the new Pope will need to be more responsive to the needs of the local church, 'something that went into the shade with Pope John Paul II'. Power points to the rising number of trainee priests who leave to get married and laments the lost contributions to the church they and their wives could have played. Others will remember the deceased Pope's legacy as his moralistic and unrealistic banning of the contraceptive pill and later banning the use of condoms to help curb AIDs.

#### Metrosexuality

Chris Hastings and Beth Jones report from London (*The Age*, 19 April 2005) on a survey conducted to find out what today's women want from men. Ninety per cent of those questioned said their ideal man was low maintenance, easy going and had a bit of 'growl' in him. They preferred men who spent time working around the house and those who spend their money on tools rather than cosmetics. Only 9% liked blokes who spend money on designer suits. Bad news for the fashion industry. Kathy Lette, when questioned about the findings, criticised the concept of 'metrosexual' men as a media-created myth. 'I think a lot of men called themselves metrosexual because they thought it would get them a more intelligent bonk', she said.

EMMA PLOYER and GERDA YALOINS are feminist lawyers.