

'SIT DOWN GIRLIE'

Girlie on the swings
and roundabouts



Only lonely Tony's feeling guilty?

Tony Abbott's plea to 'strengthen' marriage by bringing back a fault-based system for divorce has not met with much support. Even Lone Father's Association's Barry Williams was hesitant, telling *The Age* he was in favour of 'some sort of fault' (*The Age*, 13 July 2009). Prior to passing the Family Law Act in 1975, marriage could only be dissolved if a couple was separated for more than five years or if a partner could be proven guilty of adultery, desertion, cruelty, habitual drunkenness, insanity or was imprisoned.

Private detectives were often hired to peep into the nation's bedrooms or scour the garbage to come up with evidence of infidelity. This was used to influence property and custody settlements. It often involved couples agreeing to a 'set up' to establish a 'guilty' party so a divorce could be obtained. A return to the old days of fault finding would also be a return to more adversarial approaches to family law rather than the emerging alternative dispute approach using mediation. Tony Abbott seems to be responding to 'the problem' of rising divorce rates, however ABS data show divorce rates peaked in 2001 and have fallen every year since even though there are more marriages.

Women at work

Melbourne Institute labour economist Mark Wooden finds it 'completely bizarre' that women are doing well in the workplace while men are suffering (*The Age*, 10 July 2009). In the first six months of 2009 an extra 25 800 women gained employment while men's jobs fell by 56 400. The figures produced by the ABS also reveal full-time work for women rose by 26 500 while the number of men employed full-time fell by 100 000.

Adele Horin, on the other hand, noted women in management could be \$13 500 a year better off if they had a sex change (*The Age*, 13 July 2009). Full-time female managers earn 25 per cent less than their male counterparts. Some is related to part-time or reduced hours of work but researcher Dr Ian Watson of Macquarie University thought it most likely due to discrimination.

In the UK Sarah Nixon is claiming sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, constructive dismissal and unpaid wages against her boss, one time Conservative Party candidate Ross Coates. Mr Coates, the employment tribunal has been told, does not approve of his employees becoming pregnant and 'told another employee that "all women should be sterilised".'

Meanwhile in Venice a nine-century-old tradition has been broken. Giorgio Boscolo, a 23-year-old mother of two has become the first ever female gondolier. She reckons steering a gondola is far easier than giving birth.

Take a seat, mesdames

In Kuwait women have at last taken a seat in parliament with four being elected. One Aseel al-Awadhi, a professor of political philosophy at Kuwait University has a doctorate from the University of Texas and is jubilant calling the election results '... a victory for Kuwaiti women and a victory for Kuwaiti democracy.' (*The Age*, 18 May 2009.)

In Zambia a woman has been arrested and charged with distributing obscene materials in order to corrupt the morals of society. She was fingerprinted, taken to jail and later released on a bond. She faces up to five years in prison if convicted. Her 'crime' involved her sending a photograph to government officials of a woman giving birth outside a hospital. The birthing mother was unable to be admitted because health workers were on strike. Chansa Kabwela says she sent the photos as a plea to have the strike ended so women could receive safe health services. She said, 'The Government deliberately decided to misunderstand my intention. I wanted them to see the suffering of the mother. Instead they called it pornography.' (*New York Times*, *The Age*, 15 July 2009). The child in the photographs died shortly after being born.

Faith full

In Victoria churches, religious leaders, some parents and private schools are opposing a review of the Equal Opportunity Act vowing 'to defend discrimination based on faith'. Those supporting their brand of 'faith' say their religious freedom to discriminate within churches, schools and church welfare services are under threat (*The Sunday Age*, 19 July 2009). Currently Christian schools, for example, can legally refuse to hire a Muslim as a staff member. Groups such as the Law Institute, community advocates and the Victorian EOHRC are arguing the exemptions are too broad and permit widespread discrimination. The *Options Paper* suggests prevention of discrimination in non-core roles not directly related to worship or the teaching of faith. The review also covers whether private men's clubs can continue to discriminate against women.

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