

## Making the Link 2

**I**t is with great pleasure that we present a selection of key papers from the Women, Management and Industrial Relations Conference, held at Macquarie University, Sydney in June 1990.

As with the first *Making the Link: Affirmative Action and Industrial Relations*, published last year, we have provided a number of appendices containing recent data and information relating to women at work. It is our hope that the book will stimulate thought on the important matters discussed and that it will also serve as a useful tool for research.

The Women, Management and Industrial Relations Conferences have met with a magnificent response from leading figures in government, enterprises, authorities and unions. They have participated energetically in the delivery of high quality papers and in the debates which have followed. The Conferences have also attracted considerable media attention, with articles prominently placed in the electronic and print media. And most importantly, seats at the Conferences have been in high demand with the 1989, 1990 and 1991 Conferences all "sold out" before the event. All are clear signs of the increasing significance attached to the matters discussed. There is recognition that issues affecting women at work must be addressed on both moral and economic grounds. It is now a dwindling and depleted band that would dispute the fact that women have suffered discrimination at work. Certainly government, enterprise and unions leaders have indicated their readiness to explore ways in which changes can be implemented in industrial relations to remove discriminatory barriers. High on the agenda is concern to diminish conflict between work and family responsibilities.

These are the primary matters investigated in this book. The first chapter, by Ed Davis, looks at developments in industrial relations and in particular at award and union restructuring. Although award restructuring is viewed as an opportunity for women workers to improve their relative position it is acknowledged that progress on this front has been uneven. Increasing the proportion of women workers covered by unions and lifting the proportion of women officials are both regarded as necessary for union survival. The debate on this within union forums is discussed.

The second chapter, by Valerie Pratt, draws attention to the major reforms that are occurring in industrial relations. Her concern is that women's views should be heard and taken into proper account. She warns that failure to heed affirmative action principles will leave

discriminatory barriers in place. This, she contends is to the detriment of women and their workplaces. Senator Peter Cook, federal Minister for Industrial Relations, also concentrates on the linkage of industrial relations and affirmative action. He details recent government initiatives designed to improve the lot of women at work.

Heather Carmody, Executive Director of the Council for Equal Opportunity in Employment, leads off the next section focussed on award restructuring. She outlines the economic imperative for change in the workplace and presents examples of ways in which enterprises can improve their productivity through more flexible and adaptive approaches. Donna McKenna, the Legal Officer for the Labor Council of New South Wales, spells out her concern that important opportunities for change may be missed, that the favourable rhetoric and good intentions enveloping award restructuring may fail to be translated into policy implementation. Jennie George, Assistant Director of the Trade Union Training Authority, points to the enormity of the task involved in award restructuring and the crucial role for training, if award restructuring is to work in the interests of women. The current distribution of training is seen as discriminatory and a serious barrier to economic development.

The third section, on developments in EEO, contains papers from Clare Burton, Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment, and Quentin Bryce, Sex Discrimination Commissioner. Clare Burton explores ways in which EEO principles can be integrated with, and infuse, human resource management. The desired outcome is that EEO is incorporated into organisational planning and practice. Quentin Bryce presents a detailed comparative analysis of legal approaches to sex discrimination in several countries. She identifies indirect discrimination as the next major obstacle for attention.

The final three papers address the tension between work and family responsibilities. Ilene Wolcott, from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, looks at the "cracking of boundaries around the separate domains of work and family life". This is most obviously reflected in the rapid increase of women in the workforce and particularly of married women. She argues that more must be done to assist working mothers, and provides examples of model practice. Iola Mathews presents the ACTU view. She states that the peak council, since the late 1970s, had developed wide-ranging policy designed to improve the pay and conditions of women workers. An element of urgency now permeates this concern as union leaders

understand that failure to recruit and to retain women workers is fatal to union survival. Elise Callander, General Manager of Employee Relations at Coles Myer Ltd., concludes the papers with discussion of the need for more flexible work patterns. She suggests that employers and employees have much to gain from the development of more flexible arrangements. Many prevailing awards are criticised for their rigidity and inherent costs. Greater flexibility, she writes, confers greater choice, enabling a more satisfactory balancing of work and family responsibilities.

The back section of the book comprises six appendices. The first appendix contains the latest general data on women in the workforce and the second presents selected findings from the most recent round of reports to the Affirmative Action Agency. The third is the text of the International Labour Organisation's Convention 156 on the treatment of workers with family responsibilities. The federal Government ratified this Convention in early 1990. The fourth is the text of the Summary of the Parental Leave Decision made by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission in July 1990. The Decision is important for the rights granted to fathers and its encouragement to mothers and fathers to avail themselves of part-time work in the first two years of their child's life. The fifth appendix sets out detailed guidelines for departments and authorities in New South Wales on the implementation of the Structural Efficiency Principle. The guidelines provide for the application of EEO in this process. The sixth and last appendix lists selected references.

Finally, many people are involved in a project of this sort. Our most appreciative thanks go to all the speakers at the Conference and to three people who have been intimately involved in the business of converting papers and related material into this book. Pam Morpeth, from the Labour-Management Studies Foundation, has done an outstanding job in presenting a draft of the papers and three of the appendices. Lisa Gervasoni, from the Affirmative Action Agency, has produced the other three appendices and worked with flair on the cover design and printing arrangements and Caroline Falls, with great efficiency and skill, has acted as sub-editor and prepared the manuscript for publication.

**Ed Davis and Valerie Pratt**  
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