



**New Zealand Federation of Business
& Professional Women Incorporated**

Kia Ora

Welcome

I am Angela McLeod Vice President Issues, New Zealand Federation of Business and Professional Women Inc - BPW.

BPWNZ is simply put a group of working women, working for women. For 70 years we have been advocating for equality in the workplace and have played a significant role in achieving the advancement of women.

BPW has lobbied for more flexible working conditions to suit the needs of working parents for almost thirty years but although there have been some notable advances in this time, we believe that legislation is the base from which we can move forward as a nation. Quality Flexible Work Legislation is family friendly and will give parents and primary care givers the legal framework with which to ask for quality flexible work. Therefore we are proud to be part of this Coalition.

We acknowledge that there are already businesses in New Zealand who have great employee/employer relationships and that negotiation for quality flexible work occurs and benefits both the employer and the employee. And there are cases where businesses actively encourage work/life balance - it is part of their business strategy, they have high staff engagement and therefore high productivity, and are competitive in the market place.

But what about one of our members, a woman lawyer working in a mid-range practice who took time off for the birth of her child and when it was time to return to work was told that she had to go back to working 44 hours per week - and - that no alternative arrangement would be considered.

Or the woman health worker who has a child with chronic asthma and an employer who is not sympathetic to her need for flexibility, instead pressuring her to increase her hours to 8:30-5:30pm day. She's in a commuter time warp - she works in Central Auckland and lives in Papatoetoe. She can't drop her girl off to school much before 8:30 and after school care finishes at 6pm - and charge an extra \$10 for every 5 minutes over time.

Yes it would be preferable if employers and employees could resolve issues like this without recourse to legislation. However, for that to work the employer has to seriously consider any request rather than dismiss it out of hand. Equally, many employees will not even make a request because they are afraid that asking for special consideration may put their employment at risk or limit future prospects

This is why we need legislation - we need the legal framework for negotiation. Working parents, women in particular, need this for their careers, income and sanity, New Zealand businesses need it - for improved staff engagement, productivity and performance. New Zealand needs this - for our social and economic well-being. Improving our work/life balance makes New Zealand a more attractive place to live; quality flexible work legislation will be our point of difference in attracting skilled workers, new businesses and ethical business investment. All of this leads to an increase in our economic performance. And we all want that.

Quick responses to criticism of the proposal

The bill will reduce some of the stress associated with being a working parent. Even the most organised parent, with good child care arrangements can still need an opportunity to arrange more flexible working hours. Babies in day care, particularly in the first year, pick up all the bugs going. Child care centres have policies to exclude children with illness, particularly infectious ones – chicken pox, colds and flu. A sick kid is stressful enough without worrying whether an employer will penalise the parent.

Another issue, particularly in Auckland, is commuting times. Many child care centres penalise parents who arrive late, after 6pm, at \$10 per five minute block – being able to leave work early enough to ensure you arrive on time to collect your child would be an advantage.

Perhaps the most far-reaching benefit we see to the Employment Relations (Flexible Working Hours) Amendment Bill will be the impetus it gives to employers to really think about some of their management practices. Most employers wouldn't think twice about breakfast meetings (muffins and coffee at 7.30am) (*but day care doesn't open until 7.30am*) and consider the afternoon meeting running into early evening with drinks to follow – a great team building idea. Events like this are also an opportunity for an employee to get his or herself in front of senior management and make the connections so important to advancement with an organisation. So the employee who stares at her watch and races to the door is seen as not-committed, not a team player, to be passed over for promotion – when in reality she needs to get to day-care before it closes. We support the Bill's intention to foster dialogue between an employee and employer and provide a framework in which the parties can discuss situations such as the examples we have given and come to an amicable agreement that recognises the concerns of the working parent and improve the employer-employee relationship.

May be self defeating and reflects current demand for work-life balance. By removing voluntary approach to employee requests and enforcing legislative alternative opens way Employment Relations Authority to enforce a decision. Employer may not want to take on a potential employee for fear that they could be faced with a personal grievance if they do not agree to a request for flexible working conditions.

Situation is not much different now, employers may be reluctant to employ women with young children or who could potentially be mothers in future, for fear that they will not return to work after birth of a child or will make 'unreasonable' demands such as leave during school holiday periods.

Any company managing its workforce on the basis of their potential to disrupt is likely to be severely disadvantaging itself – women as a proportion of all workers. Should we perhaps exclude middle-aged men – who don't exercise and perhaps smoke and drink more than they should – a heart attack risk? Maybe we shouldn't hire recent graduates – they head overseas the moment they get any experience. Better to hire the best person for the job on offer and then work to ensure that the job fits the employee to ensure that turnover is reduced and the business continues to benefit from its happy, motivated staff.

Perhaps the right to request flexible working hours should be extended to everyone. This would reduce resentment amongst the workforce and provide a bigger pool of potential solutions. So rather than trying to arrange coverage around one person's request to finish early so they can get to their child's day care the employer could resolve the issue by agreeing to allow another person to start an hour or two later and work into the early evening – providing an after hours phone service in addition to normal duties.

BPW NZ RESOLUTIONS IN SUPPORT OF FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS

Childcare

BEING aware that there are some employers who have implemented policies and practices to assist employees with family care, urges the New Zealand Employers Federation, the New Zealand Manufacturers Federation and the New Zealand Chambers of Commerce to actively encourage their members to investigate and implement supportive policies and programmes to provide for adequate coverage of childcare for their employees.

We offer the following ideas which have been collected from surveys in New Zealand and the United States.

- 1) Provide for flexible work times.
- 2) Contribute to out of school care programmes.
- 3) Foster the establishment of work teams which provide cover to support workers who need time off for family commitments.
- 4) Contribute to home care service for sick children.
- 5) Provide access to an information and referral service for employees.
- 6) Consider setting up a creche as a joint venture with other companies. **(1994)**

Index Ref 7.0 Business, Trade & Employment Resolution 7.10

Economics & Employment Policy

URGES the government through the Minister of Labour to amend employment legislation to:

- 1) Include a period of unpaid leave to be available to employees called "caregiver leave";
- 2) Described "caregiver leave" as available for the care of dependent relatives;
- 3) provide a timeframe for "caregiver leave" that is similar to the timeframe for "extended leave" which is available for the care of a new child (s.26 Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act 1987). **(1994)**

Index Ref 7.0 Business, Trade & Employment Resolution 7.09

Support for Pay Equity

BPW NZ strongly supports the continuing steps Government is taking to support the pay equity issue and urge the Government to fast track it and urge its implementation. **(2004)**

Rationale

As outlined in the discussion document 'Next Steps Towards Pay Equity' (MWA), EEO, parental leave and childcare policies assist to extend women's employment options, but do not address the issue of "inequality in women's and men's average pay as a labour market-wide policy issue."

Statistics continue to show women earn less for work of similar value and jobs considered men's work are remunerated at a higher rate and also have more status. With increasing levels of debt under the student loan scheme, women are further disadvantaged, as it takes them longer to pay off their debt than men.

Government legislation must be pursued at a vigorous rate to ensure that equal pay for work of equal value exists for all women.

Index Ref 7.0 Business, Trade & Employment Resolution 7.23

Equal Employment Opportunity Trust

THAT BPW NZ encourage members to support the Equal Employment Opportunity Trust in their drive to provide Family Friendly Facilities within the workplace. **(2000)**

Index Ref 7.0 Business, Trade & Employment Resolution 7.20

Job Sharing and Part-time Opportunities

THAT NZFBPW advise the Minister of Labour that it endorses the views expressed by the New Zealand Planning Council in the publication 'EMPLOYMENT' of October 1980, and supported by the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women, that increased flexibility in employment and greater personal choice by those in the labour force (women in particular) would be achieved:

- (a) by the removal of those restrictions on part-timers which would deprive them of the opportunities to train, earn promotion and have careers; and
- (b) by the greater use of such measures as flexible working hours and job sharing.

The Federation expressed the hope that policies will be developed and ways and means found of encouraging employers and unions to effect these desirable changes speedily. **(1981)**

Index Ref 8.0 Status of Women, Resolution 8.2

Shared Responsibility by Both Spouses

THAT the Federation adopt as Policy recognition that acceptance of shared responsibility by spouses for the upbringing of children and the upkeep of the home is essential if married women are to have equality of opportunity in economic, civil and political life.

THAT clubs be encouraged to support and sponsor activities that would help to achieve general acceptance in New Zealand of the principle that responsibility for child rearing and home-making should be shared by both spouses. **(1979)**

Index Ref 8.0 Status of Women, Resolution 8.1