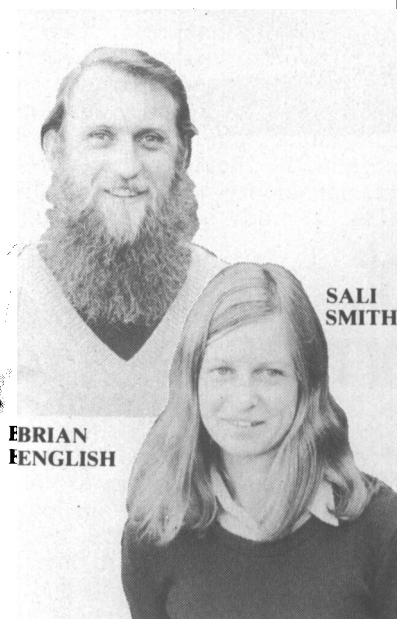


## Family Policy and Family Research



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In its broadest definition social policy encompasses the entire network of social relationships. David Gil says that social policy is concerned with "the quality of life or level of well-being of all members of society and with all intrasocietal relationships, among individuals, social units and society as a whole."

(Gil, 1970:415). As a basic social unit, the family is an important element in every social policy system.

In some countries explicit recognition is given to this fact and the major components of family policy are incorporated in one or a small number of closely related and complementary pieces of legislation.

However, in most countries, family policy is not explicitly stated but it is affected in various ways and to various degrees by many laws and regulations. This is the case in Australia. A survey of family policy in Australia must include legislation at national and state levels related to marriage and divorce, social services, taxation, health, education, housing, child and youth welfare, and the criminal jurisdiction. The complexity and diversity of these arrangements leads inevitably to anomalies and disjunctions in the system of family policy. A number of these difficulties were described by English (1975).

### Complex

No matter how any particular social policy system is formulated, it inevitably consists of a complex set of social experiments. Every welfare provision is in some respects an experiment in helping those in need, or in encouraging certain individuals or groups to change in particular ways. A wide range of motives, political and otherwise, underlie policy decisions and the introduction of new services, but every service is essentially an experiment in planned intervention in human affairs. The Seebohm Report noted this experimental nature of service provisions and commented that it is "both wasteful and irresponsible to set such experiments in motion and omit to record and analyze what happens." (Home Office, 1968:142)

Researchers often direct their attention to the welfare recipient. The use of beneficiaries and clients as subjects for research often occurs because they are a readily accessible group. They are known to an agency and their relationship to that agency provides some inducement to cooperate or at least comply with the wishes of the researcher. Many studies of client groups have yielded valuable information for agency planning or practice, but the potential of such studies for evaluating policy and contributing to knowledge about the wider society is often not realised. Studies of client groups generally yield very little information about the place of the client or the agency in the wider society and they do not often challenge the relevance of the service or point to new directions for intervention.

### Three Limitations

There are three major limitations in most social welfare research projects which reduce their potential contribution to knowledge about the wider society. These limitations lie in the conception of the research problem, the selection of research methods and the utilisation of social theory.

The research problem is often conceived in specific client or agency terms rather than in broader community or societal terms. For example, researchers set out to discover the characteristics of persons receiving particular services such as marriage counselling, rather than to investigate the social context in which the service is offered, i.e. the patterns of marriage and family living of various groups in the community and the use of counselling services by particular persons.

### Inappropriate

Researchers often select inappropriate research models or generate inappropriate methods from suitable models. Two common problems are the drawing of unrepresentative samples and the failure to use comparison or control groups. These problems are often attributed to the limited resources available to the researcher. In fact,

*A "Newlands" van  
I presume, Mr. Rollingstone?*



many projects go to great expense to select large samples that are unrepresentative when smaller but more representative samples would be more appropriate.

The use of social theory in research is closely related to the formulation of the research problem and research design. The failure to replicate studies, or even to relate findings to previously published material, means that researchers fail to benefit from previous experience and do not contribute to theory building. This is evidenced by the large number of research projects which begin by constructing a new questionnaire or instrument when the literature contains many validated instruments which might be used or adapted.

Some commentators have attributed these limitations in social welfare research to the limited training and expertise of researchers, a problem which can be overcome. However, additional factors might also be involved. Rosenblatt believes that rigorously planned and conducted research is often threatening.

He says that the researcher "like other change agents . . . challenges the sanctity of the status quo, he forces people to rethink positions" (Rosenblatt, 1968:53). Abrams (1974) also says that political implications often inhibit policy makers from initiating research or lead them to formulate research problems in specific client-related terms rather than in terms of the system of provision and its wider implications.

It is important that researchers remain sufficiently independent in mind and action to study welfare provisions in their broad context and to report all the implications of existing provisions. Where possible studies should include some attention to alternatives to the existing provisions. In this way knowledge about the society is increased and there is a sounder base for planning and practice. Whether or not knowledge is used, and even the manner in which it is used, in any particular case may depend upon a political decision. The researcher may involve himself in this political activity after his results are published, but political pressure or bias

alone should not be allowed to dictate the subject matter or the method of study in social research.

### **SOCIAL WELFARE PROVISIONS FOR ONE-PARENT FAMILIES**

One-parent families and the services available to them have received growing attention in Australia in recent years. Initial results from the 1975 Family Survey indicate that this group now comprises approximately one in eleven of all families with children in Australia. Government assistance to one-parent families is an interesting example of the social welfare experiment in Australia. It has far-reaching implications because of its direct effect upon the families involved and because it also affects other individuals and families throughout the community. The following account of the development of these services highlights some of the major changes that have taken place.

Special attention was given to the one-parent family when the Commonwealth Government began to pay widows' pensions in 1942. From the outset deserted and divorced women were included in the definition, but unmarried mothers and deserted de facto wives were not. Deserted wives did not become eligible for a pension until six months after they were deserted. For several years after 1942 the proportion of deserted wives in the group of women receiving widows' pensions remained constant, but in 1947 there was a sharp increase and from 1947 to 1957 the number of deserted wives who were receiving widows' pensions rose from 2,551 to 7,290 — an increase from 15.3% to 35.3% of all mothers in this group. By June, 1972, deserted wives accounted for 48% of mothers receiving widows' pensions. Continued concern at both state and commonwealth levels about the number of deserted wives resulted in further services being established. The States Grants (Deserted Wives) Act, 1968 provided for cash grants from the Commonwealth to the states to provide assistance to deserted wives during the first six months of desertion and to the wives of prisoners during the first six months of their husband's imprisonment. The act also provides

subsidies for state assistance to deserted de facto wives, the de facto wives of prisoners and unmarried mothers.

In 1973, a Supporting Mother's Benefit was introduced by the Australian Government for unmarried mothers and other women who are left alone to bring up children and who are not eligible for widows' pensions. In April, 1976, there were 70,145 mothers receiving widows' pensions and 44,600 women receiving supporting mothers' benefits. The latest development in this system of financial support for one-parent families is a proposal to introduce in the next federal budget a benefit for male headed one-parent families.

### **Not Research Based**

Much of the literature on one-parent families in Australia is not research-based. However a number of studies have been reported and some of the major ones are outlined here. In 1958, the (then) Commonwealth Department of Social Services published a survey of deserted wives granted widows' pensions in Victoria. The report contains information about demographic and social characteristics of the deserted wives and their husbands. Some comparisons are made with census data but no control group was used. (Commonwealth Department of Social Services, 1958). Aitken-Swan (1962) used a multistage cluster sample of dwellings in the Sydney metropolitan area to select 92 widows with dependent children and studied these families together with 108 widows with children selected from Bathurst and Grafton in New South Wales. The report concentrates on the physical and economic needs of the widows and gives some attention to the social implications of widowhood. Krupinski and his associates studied deserted wives in Victoria. The sample included 138 women drawn from deserted wives receiving welfare assistance from the Victorian Social Welfare Department, together with 100 other deserted wives who had children in day care or who were members of one association for deserted mothers. These latter

groups were included to give greater variability to the sample and "to prevent a bias towards financially deprived mothers" (p.6). This study concentrates on demographic and social characteristics of the deserted wife and her husband, and the physical and economic situation of the deserted wife. The study also included a personality inventory which indicated a high level of neuroticism in the women included in the study. (Krupinski et al., 1970).

### NATIONAL FAMILY SURVEY

The increase in the number of deserted wives seeking government assistance was discussed at the meeting of the State Ministers for Social Welfare with the Commonwealth Minister for Social Services in May 1972. A recommendation was made at that meeting that funds should be set aside for a family research project. Funds were made available by the Commonwealth Government and the Family Research Unit was established in October 1972 to undertake a series of studies and surveys directed towards documenting families at risk, family disruption and family breakdown in Australia. Special attention was to be given to the incidence of family breakdown, emerging family forms and services available to families. Research staff were appointed early in 1973 and began a review of literature on the family in Australia. Apart from demographic studies, there are only a small number of published studies of the family in Australia. Those most often cited are ten to twenty years old (e.g. Adler, 1966; Brown, 1957; Fallding, 1957; Taft, 1957).

From the outset the terms of reference were interpreted broadly and a number of research proposals were drawn up. The major proposal was for a national survey to study family composition and life style, with special emphasis on a comparison between one-parent and two-parent families, including families receiving pensions and benefits. In March, 1974, the Family Research Unit made a request to the Australian Bureau of Statistics to conduct a national family survey. At that time the Bureau was planning a general social survey. After

negotiation it was decided to develop the Family Survey as the basic element of the General Social Survey.

It was decided to draw the sample from all states of Australia and to take a sufficiently large sample to allow estimates of major variables to be made for each of the states. Rural areas were excluded from the sample because of the high cost of interviewing in such areas. After the Darwin cyclone in December, 1974, it was also decided to exclude the Northern Territory from the sample: the families who remained in Darwin could not be considered representative of the normal population, and almost all were living in abnormal situations. The exclusion of rural areas and of the Northern Territory means that the survey sample was drawn from approximately 85% of the Australian population.

### Major Feature

A major feature of the Family Survey is the comparison of one-parent and two-parent families. Approximately 1,930 families of each type were selected for the survey, using a multistage, area-based cluster sample of dwellings designed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. From census data it was estimated that two-parent families would occur in 40% of dwellings and that approximately 4% of dwellings would contain one-parent families. This meant that about ten times as many dwellings were sampled to locate the 1,930 one-parent families as were sampled to locate the same number of two-parent families. The search for the one-parent families was conducted in two phases. The first phase, in February 1975, was conducted in conjunction with the Australian Bureau of Statistics' quarterly labour force survey. At this time any households which contained one-parent families were identified and recorded. Between March and May, 1975, Bureau interviewers conducted phase two of the survey in which a second group of one-parent families and all the two-parent families were selected. All interviews were conducted during phase two.

Sample selection was based on an operational definition of a family that enabled interviewers to quickly and reliably assign each member of a household to one and only one family. As the Family Survey is primarily interested in families with children, the definition adopted intentionally excludes childless couples, and persons whose children have grown up. A family is defined as **a child or children and the adult or adults responsible for their care.** A child is any person aged 17 years or less at his last birthday who is not married nor the parent of another child. An adult is any person aged 18 years or more at his last birthday, or a person of any age who is married or the parent of a child. Persons who are absent from the family but expected to return are included as family members. This prevents families being misclassified because of the absence of a parent, for example on a business trip or in hospital.

Within the two broad types of families, one-parent and two-parent, further classifications can be made. For example, considerable attention is paid to comparisons between families which receive pensions or benefits and families which do not receive such aid. A further classification of families may be made on the basis of the marital status of the parents.

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Before designing the survey questionnaire, considerable time was spent in examining reports of earlier research done overseas. Where possible the interview schedules used in such studies were also examined. This overview enabled the Family Research Unit to benefit from previous experience, and to design a study which will provide comparative results.

A number of pretests of the survey instrument, particularly of the attitude questionnaire and the method of identifying families, were conducted throughout 1974. A full pilot test was conducted in Adelaide and an exmetropolitan area of New South Wales in October, 1974. During the pilot test it became clear that the questionnaire was too long, and



therefore it was decided to reduce the number of subject areas. Questions on fertility were omitted because of Australia's planned participation in an international fertility survey in 1976. Indebtedness and household expenditure were also omitted as these topics are included in the Household Expenditure Survey conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 1974 and 1975.

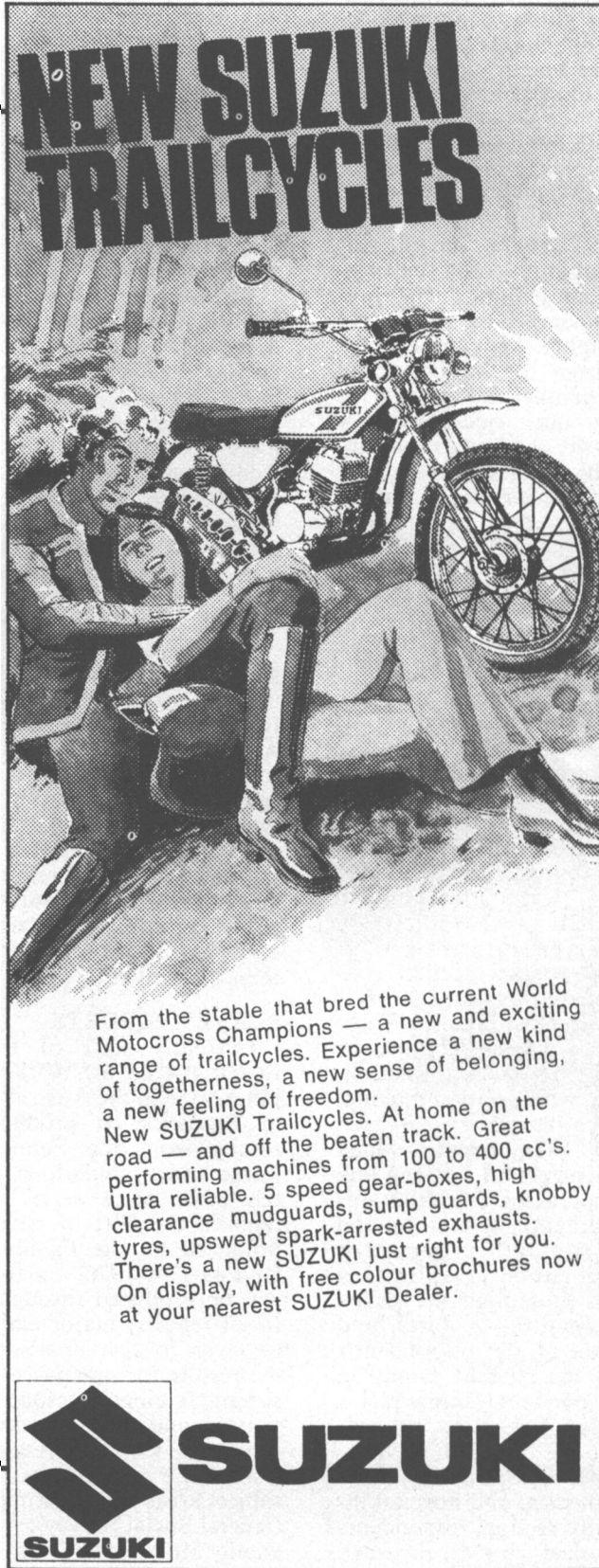
It was also decided that duplication of information from both parents in two-parent families could be avoided by having certain segments of the questionnaire answered by only one parent.

The survey questionnaire was designed to yield information comparable with other studies. One of the main ways of ensuring this is the use of standard classifications for responses. Thus the questions about workforce participation of individuals are adapted from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' quarterly labour force survey schedule. The definitions of family and household used in the Family Survey are an extension and modification of census definitions; it is possible to reclassify families into the census categories. Occupations are coded using the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Standard Index of Occupations, and the coding frames for industry, religious denomination and country of birth are those used for the census. Thus data collected in the Family Survey is classified in ways which ensure comparability with official statistics and with a number of other major Australian research studies.

#### **SUBJECT AREAS OF THE FAMILY SURVEY\***


**Background Variables:** This section contains the major background variables for the survey: age, sex, marital status, country of birth, religious denomination, and educational qualifications.

**Accommodation:** Information was collected about the types of accommodation used by families and the associated costs. An indicator of relative accommodation cost is derived by calculating the proportion of the income of the family head which is expended on ac-



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commodation costs (defined as rent, or mortgage plus rates). Other information sought relates to length of residence, access to household items, residential mobility and housing stress.

**Children:** Details are collected about the number, age and sex of children, their school status, health, arrangements for the care of children not yet at school, the parents' aspirations and expectations for their children, and problems which concern the parents. In order to simplify the interview procedure, shorten the interview and reduce the number of records for each family, most questions were asked about the children as a group. However, this approach could not be used for the questions relating to the aspirations and expectations that parents have for the education and occupations of their children.

\* A copy of the survey instrument and notes on all aspects of the Family Survey are available on request from the Family Research Unit, School of Social Work, University of New South Wales, Kensington, N.S.W. 2033.

**Family Tasks and Social Contacts:** There are inherent difficulties in looking adequately at these topics as elements of a large survey. However an attempt is made to record the patterns of task allocation in families including the reallocation of tasks during emergencies.

The social contact section contains a list of eight types of contacts which apply to most families. These relate to three types of contacts or motives for contact: information-seeking, help with decision-making, and assistance in need.

**Parents of Respondent:** Many studies have suggested a strong link between the present marital status and family situation of persons, and the marital status of their parents or the family situation in which they were raised. Questions are asked about the country of birth and marital status of the respondent's parents and the type of family in which the respondent was reared.

**Health:** Basic information was collected on the use of health services, and whether respondents are covered by medical and hospital insurance. In this section, respondents are also asked for their own

assessments of their mental and physical health.

**Marital History:** This section is designed to investigate links which have been suggested by earlier studies between the continuation of marriages and a number of variables: age and marital status of the partners at marriage, length of acquaintanceship, religious denomination and education of the marriage partners.

**Attitudes to Marriage and the Family:** An attitude scale was developed and administered to respondents in the General Social Survey as well as to adults in the Family Survey. The responses of these two groups will be compared. Additionally, the responses will be examined in relation to other sections of the questionnaire to see if there is an association between attitudes as measured by this scale and other characteristics of a respondent.

**Occupation, Income, Pensions and Benefits:** Most of the questions used in this section are adapted from other surveys conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Information was collected about the respondent's occupation, and his gross and net income from wages, salary, pensions, benefits and other sources. It should be noted that the questions which relate to income from pensions and benefits also serve to identify the recipients of these types of aid.

## SURVEY REPORTS

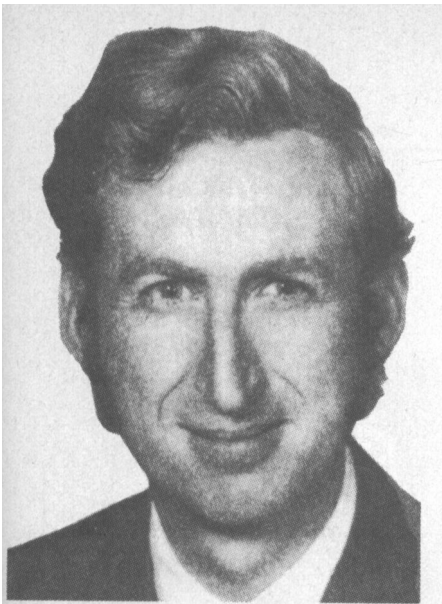
Currently staff of the Family Research Unit are working in conjunction with the Australian Bureau of Statistics to produce tabular results from the Family Survey. These cross-tabulations will form the basis of a series of survey reports, the first of which will be produced by the Family Research Unit late in 1976. Further reports will be produced throughout 1977. In all reports, major emphasis will be given to a comparison between the results for one-parent and two-parent families. Results for pensioners and beneficiaries will be compared with the results for the rest of the respondents. For those subject areas which form part of the General Social Survey as well as the Family Survey, results of the family

respondents will be compared with the results for the general population. Thus in respect of some variables (health, marital history, attitudes, occupation, income, and background variables) a broad social context will be provided, and it will be possible to view all families within this context. The position of pensioners and beneficiaries in relation to all families and in relation to the general population can be assessed. For all other subject areas of the Family Survey, it will be possible to view the circumstances of welfare recipients in relation to the position of all families.

In addition to the series of reports on specific aspects of the Family Survey, a technical report will be produced. A final report will comprise an overview of the project and a discussion of the policy implications of the project findings.

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**DR CARL BRODERICK VISITING**

Dr Broderick the world renowned sociologist and leader in fields of Family Relations and Marriage Counselling will be in Australia from the 29th August to the 20th September, 1976 as a guest of the Family Life Movement. The visit is in association with the Movements Golden Jubilee Celebrations.

Dr Broderick will be leading a workshop to be held at the Lecture Theatre, Mercy Maternity Hospital, Clarendon Street, East Melbourne on the 9th September, 1976 between 1.30pm and 9.30pm.

The purpose of the workshop is to enable a widely representative group of leaders in fields of family counselling, sex education, religion, human relationships, child development, marriage counselling, sociology, to share in a multi disciplinary workshop. Issues to be considered will be. Parent Education, Education for living, Role of Parent and Teacher in statutory and voluntary agencies, Family models in developing relationships, etc.

The registration fee is \$8.00 which includes afternoon tea. An evening meal is available in the Hospital Cafeteria.

**WORKSHOP TIMETABLE:**

- 1.00-1.30 p.m. Registration at Mercy Hospital for 'Talk-in' and workshop.
- 3.00-3.30 p.m. Registration at Mercy Hospital for workshop.
- 3.30-9.30 p.m. Workshop program.

**REGISTRATION FORM: Please return by Monday, September 6, 1976**

To: Mr. Don Campbell, Director, Family Life Movement, Room 707, 220 Collins St., MELBOURNE 3000.

Please register me for the FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION WORKSHOP. My registration fee of \$8.00 is enclosed.

**VIET. ORPHANS ASK TO GO HOME**

Daily advertisements for lost children appear in the Saigon papers, reports Betty Jean Lifton in a recent **Saturday Review** article. And some of the lost are now living in the United States, after having been airlifted as "orphans" during the last days of the Vietnam war. Now one year older, many of the children have pleaded to be returned to their parents.

But how difficult that is has been revealed by the legal difficulties which surround the children, and their parents (some of whom have come to the US to obtain custody of them). "It would take a King Solomon to unravel the bureaucratic red tape that has accumulated," says Lifton. "The seemingly simple operation of sending possibly a few hundred non-orphans back to their families has become entangled in the emotional snarl of adoption politics."

Since the children have lived in America for the past year it is contended by US officials that any claims for custody by Vietnamese parents must go before American courts. "Perhaps the real question is how can parents in Vietnam possibly have the means to appeal in our state courts?" notes Lifton.

"Can the best interests of the Baby-lift children be served by denying them the right to return to living parents — especially to those mothers who are in this country pleading for them? Until these questions are answered by a court of law or by an international commission acting officially on behalf of the two countries involved, the children remain the hapless victims of the conflict, as surely as they were of the war itself."

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**INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD**

A Committee for the International Year of the Child has been set up by the United Nations. It is anticipated that it will be celebrated in 1979 to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child.



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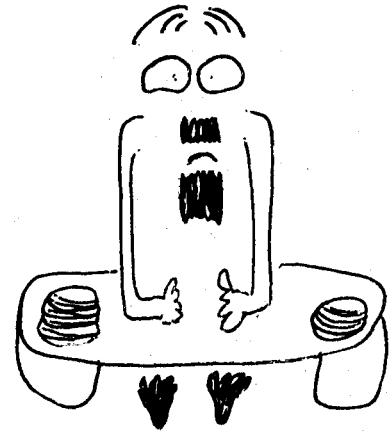
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## FROM THE BUSINESS (dejected) MANAGER'S DESK

Dear Readers,

I am disheartened. Not, I quickly add because of you, my dear subscribers and cajolers of potential subscribers. YOU, have been truly magnificent.

And a special thank you to the dear old lady from Rockbank who sent the pair of paper scissors and comb. Much appreciated as you can see. I'm disheartened, not just because of Mr Frazer's dislike of dole bludgers and welfare workers, or the savagery committed on my favourite welfare programs.

And it's not Mr Lynch's assurance that income tax would remain static while I am still reeling from the impact of a 2.5 Medi-slug. No, my friends, it is because I can't fulfill my promise. I said you could have a breakdown of the present subscribers list and I can't deliver. And it's not because it's not been done. It has. But the little figure wizard who did it disappeared on holiday without trace. I hope that when he reads this he melts into the snow or the sand, whatever the case may be, with shame and fear.

So your well groomed, disheartened, but also delighted (with you) business manager says "keep those cards and letters rolling in", particularly those new subs. Congratulations to the many who took advantage of me to "Get Four and Get Four Free" and until next time when I will tell you what I can't today, Regards.

B.M.