

The Family Violence Protection Bill [Victoria]

(This can be accessed via the Victorian Parliamentary website)

Since 2005 WEL Victoria has followed and supported the work of Dr Chris Atmore, Policy Officer, Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic), and the Victorian Family Violence Justice Reform Campaign to get the new Family Violence Protection Bill before the Victorian Parliament.

The group has been working with the Victorian Law Reform Commission and the Attorney-General's Department on a Bill which repeals the Crimes (Family Violence) Act 1987 replacing it with what the Campaign dubbed 'the whole package', an Act aimed at covering all aspects and results of family violence. The Bill reached its second reading on 26 June 2008.

(The section regarding stalking intervention orders between *non-family* members remains in force until the law relating to these can be reviewed and if necessary, new legislation introduced.)

Recently some media (e.g. *The Age* 24/6/08) headlined the fact that the use of financial constraints to confine and control women by 'money bullies' is included in the Bill. Most people have by now heard of verbal and emotional violence, but some may not have been aware of the financial pressures imposed on many women by controlling spouses.

It should not, however, come as a surprise. Family violence has always, essentially, been about control. As several sensible judges have noted, by no means all men who kill or assault their wives or children are subject to uncontrollable rage. Such men often 'present well' and, however enraged,

would not dream of physically attacking a workmate or their boss or other annoying people [though recent reports suggest increasing numbers feel entitled to].

For these publicly restrained men, the aim of violence in their private lives and the threat of it, once they have established their readiness to use it, is simply to control 'their' women and children. The more sophisticated can do it with words or emotional blackmail; those who are the sole or primary family income earners can do it with money.

Many of us can recall the days when women with children felt unable to leave violent, promiscuous or otherwise abusive husbands simply because without the men's financial support women faced impossible conditions for feeding their families: menial jobs in appalling work conditions and no-one to look after their children. Many, as girls, were pushed into the workforce when they completed compulsory schooling, because their families saw no point in educating or training girls for well-paid jobs.

If feminism has achieved nothing else, it has helped improve women's financial status, their ability to limit the number of children they have and their access to child care, with or without a live-in partner. But some men cannot get out of their heads the old - and no longer legal - idea that they own their wives and children as personal possessions, and have the right to control their every move.

The new Bill seeks to deal with known varieties of this illegitimate control and to remove problems currently faced by women trying to evade its tyranny. No doubt some men will think up new

strategies: those with an appetite for control are ingenious in feeding their hunger. But this Bill should subvert many of the devious tactics that the old Act - 20 years old last year and much amended - could not.

Note: WEL works on women's issues and hence on female victims. The Act, of course, applies equally to perpetrators and victims of either sex.

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