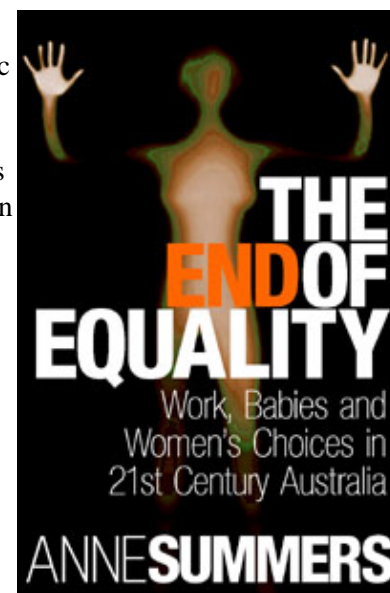


The end of equality by Anne Summers

The search for equality for women in the workplace, the often limited childcare options, the decision whether to have children, the social, economic and attitudinal barriers within some careers, are all issues still of paramount concern to women in particular and society in general in the 21st century. This new book by Anne Summers author of the major work 'Damned whores and God's police', contains valuable insights and provides a cogent discussion of the status of women in Australia today.



THERESE SCOTT: The statement you make at the beginning of your new book, is very stark : "we have come to the end of equality". Do you feel the main way to make steps towards equality is through attitudinal changes which flow on to the decision makers of society?

ANNE SUMMERS: Well, I think we have to get the subject of women back onto the national political agenda. The first step to doing that is for there to be information about why it is necessary. One of the reasons I have so much information in this book is because I really want to alert people to what's going on. Hopefully they will talk about it and take action which will then flow through to the decision makers.

TS: Is this a book in a way which makes you disappointed to be compelled to write given the positive actions for equality during the Whitlam, Hawke and Keating governments?

AS: Well in a way. I never really expected that I would be writing this book because I really did think that the progress towards equality that we had started really was unstoppable and I thought it was irreversible. It's been a great disappointment to me to find out that is not the case.

TS: The focus groups which you sat in on, which form most of the book, apart from two when you used the two way mirror, provided rich and diverse statements from various sectors of women. Was there a particular response which you found particularly startling or shocking?

AS: The reason I did the groups was really more of a reality check to make sure it wasn't just me that was thinking these things. That it was actually the views of women themselves. I was particularly interested to know their views on the whole issue of having babies and whether or not they felt under pressure, and it turns out they certainly do. Women are really thinking long and hard about when they will have their first baby or even if they'll have a baby because of the pressures society puts on women today. It was something that I suspected but I certainly got it confirmed by the groups.

TS: There was quite a wide range of people in those groups too.

AS: Yes. One thing to clarify: I watched all of them through a two way mirror and just one in Townsville I sat in on. We did women in Sydney, Melbourne, Bathurst, Brisbane and Townsville and they were aged 15 to 50 and they were a mixture of women full-time at home with children and working full and part-time. I think it was a pretty good spectrum.

TS: It was interesting some of the different responses of the country women having children as opposed to some of the city women working. You also discussed the fact that many more women seemed to be in senior

management positions in traditional area of employment, such as Jan Fullerton, Director General of the National Library of Australia. It would seem to me a hopeless cause to try to balance out this distribution of senior management. What is your comment on that?

AS: Well it shouldn't be. We have a woman who is chief of police in Victoria and I just noticed that Victoria has recently appointed Australia's first female Chief Justice. It certainly is possible for women to reach the top in supposedly non-traditional areas. I think again this is an area where we have to put pressure on governments and say, look we want women who are interested in those senior jobs, obviously not everybody is, but for those women who are interested and qualified, you shouldn't just think of them for areas where women have traditionally excelled. You should think of them for the range of jobs that exist.

TS: I feel this book will be alive to so many readers as it actively encourages proactiveness. You say "don't get mad, get even". You have a great detailed list of contacts in the book. Could you outline for our readers some of the ways we can change the world?

AS: Yes, well I think this is why the website www.annesummers.com.au is important too because I have a lot of the same information on the website where it's clickable, so it's easy to send an email to your MP from my website. I think what we can do first of all is to react. To say what is happening is unacceptable and we women are not going to put up with this. I think it is not that hard to make a political issue out of for example, lack of equal pay; out of the fact that the sex discrimination laws in this country are not being enforced, and out of the fact that childcare is simply beyond the reach of most people, even if they can find places. These are issues I think we have to put back on the political agenda. The reason I've got so many suggestions for action in the back of the book is because I was very conscious of the book that women might read the book and end up feeling depressed and impotent. Instead I want them to feel angry and empowered.

TS: Who do you hope will read the book – anyone with an interest in women's issues?

AS: I hope everyone will read it. I was on the Alan Jones program the other day and he said that every man and women in Australia should read this book. He was very steamed up about it, particularly the child care issues. I've been thrilled at the reaction I'm getting just through the website from young women.

TS: Just their positive reactions to it?

AS: Yes, they've read the book. I have actually put the website up since the book was published so unfortunately there is not a mention of the website in the book itself. But young women these days are very computer savvy and they just get on the web and fortunately you can find me through google.com and various search engines. They've just been sending off these emails to me and I think it's fantastic.

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