

SUMMARY

A History of “Family Policies” in Australia
“Family” as the Key of the Australian Politics

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The Australian Labor Party led by Kevin Rudd won the federal election of 2007 and the new Rudd Government came to office in December of the same year. The Australian Labor Party had adopted “working families” as a key phrase of the election campaign, especially in their early anti-WorkChoices advertisements. However, “working families” soon went beyond the original objective and the Rudd government launched a “Working Families Supporting Package,” consisting of wide range of programs for families with children, as the centerpiece of the 2008-09 budget. Why did “working families” win the central place in the politics of the current Australian Government and why was it “family” not “working people”? To answer this question, this paper looks at the formation of Australian “family policies” as a process of political intervention into the “family” constructed through the discourse around family and family policies, and analyse that process by textual analysis.

In Australia, family has been constructed as an object of political intervention through the discussion of “national family policies” and has legitimated the Commonwealth and its politics. Discussion and discourse on a basic wage (or a “family wage”) posited “the family” as a unit consisting of a male breadwinner, his wife (mother) and children. The family was reconstructed through the discussion of the maternity allowance, the child endowment and the family allowance and linked with the “Australian people,” which then justified the Commonwealth. Furthermore, especially from the late 1970s, “family policy” developed as a set of broad programs for education, unemployment, childcare, healthcare, and housing. Feminism and neo-liberal critiques of the welfare state grew, especially from the early and mid-1980s, and led to the construction of “working families” as a family in which both parents work and the phrase “families” as diverse in composition, in contrast to “the family unit” or “the traditional family.” Nevertheless, the construction of “working families” resulted in the re-construction of “the traditional family” and political intervention was accordingly divided. It was especially ironic that the former Howard Government assumed “families” as a welfare system and that supported their neo-liberal policies. The Rudd Government’s “working families” and its family policies need to be understood as an extension of this developmental process of “family policies” within its discursive space.