

Suffrage to Sufferance: 100 Years of Women in Parliament

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On Tuesday 11 February 1992, the 'In Brief' column of the letters page of the *Australian* newspaper included a terse letter from a Queensland man who noted *inter alia* that 'as soon as women were given a place in the nation's affairs Australia went down the gurgler'. It was a view shared by many men over the previous century. Another letter — also from a Queensland man, though I am not quite sure why I should have to add that—published in the same paper on the same day, described Adolf Hitler as 'the father of the women's liberation movement' because his 'mad ambition' had 'caused modern women to leave the kitchen and move to a work-place where she would inexorably establish her equality'. Perhaps, but it has not happened yet, although when women were first elected to Parliament, there was a general expectation in some quarters that this was the start of something big.

Indeed, when Nancy Astor won the by-election for her husband's seat in 1919 in Britain and took her place in the House of Commons, the *Daily Mail* wrote:

We anticipate a large increase in the number of women members, where there is so much legislative work for which they are particularly qualified waiting for them to do.

It was depressingly right on one count and sadly wrong on the other. There was, indeed, much to be done to balance the scales of justice where women were concerned. Over the following decades, female MPs did try to improve the status of women in the community, but the 'large increase in the number of women members' so confidently predicted by the *Daily Mail* has not occurred. Many women have tried to break the male hegemony, however, believing that they have as great a right and as good a capacity to contribute to the legislative process as men and that the mere possession of a double X chromosome should not be an inhibiting factor.

Two hundred years ago, Mary Wollstonecraft's 'A Vindication of the Rights of Woman' argued something similar; namely, that 'the sexual distinction which men have so warmly insisted upon, is arbitrary' and unnecessarily inhibits the role women could and should play in the world. She was right. But Thomas Paine was closer to the Realpolitik of the situation when he wrote, seventeen years earlier, that, whatever the merits of the case for equal rights might be, 'even with changes in attitudes and laws, deeply ingrained and oppressing social prejudices remain which confront women minute by minute, day by day'. The situation has not changed since he wrote those words over two hundred years ago.

Some of the prejudices to which Paine referred surfaced in the parliamentary debate on the New Zealand suffrage legislation, which took place before a gallery packed with women in 1892. Those prejudices were to be raised again and again in debates — both futile and successful — on women's suffrage in New Zealand; in subsequent years in Australia, at both a state and federal level; in Britain; in Canada; and in the United States. They were still being raised in Federal Parliament as late as 1983 and in

the press in 1992. During debate on the 1902 Federal Franchise Bill in Australia, for example, William Knox — free trader, anti-socialist and Liberal member for Kooyong — argued that giving women the vote was flying in the face of God's will. He said the Almighty had determined that a woman's place was in the home and letting women into the polling booths of Australia, much less the hallowed chambers of the Houses of Parliament, was 'running counter to the intentions and designs of the Great Creator and . . . reversing those conditions of life to which women were ordained'. His comments bear a depressing and striking similarity to those put forward in January 1992 as justification for some clergyman's opposition to the ordination of women into the Anglican church and to a letter in this week's *Business Review Weekly* arguing that affirmative action legislation was impeding women's 'ability to exercise their unique feminine potential to the full as wives and mothers'.

To both the politicians of the nineteenth century and the clergy of the twentieth, as well as to many other men and not a few women throughout history, the roles of the two sexes were, indeed, ordained by God and to challenge them was to come close to heresy. Apart from that, as many other MPs pointed out, everyone knew that women's brains were different from men's — for which we should all be duly grateful — their stamina was suspect, their household duties too onerous to allow for any additional burden imposed by involvement in the political process — as if voting occurred on a daily basis — and most of them did not want the vote anyway; and the ones who did had unacceptable ulterior motives, such as closing down liquor outlets, or wresting power from men in order to 'de-sex' them.

As for the women who wanted the vote, as one South Australian member of Parliament commented in 1894, they were, 'disappointed, childless creatures who have missed their maternal vocation; ill-favoured ones who will never get the opportunity of exercising it, the bitter-hearted whose day is past. In any event, if women got the vote it would inevitably lead to the dissolution of marriage and the institution of free love'. Pity it did not.

As far as Sir Edward Braddon was concerned in 1902 during the Federal debate, the very idea of a woman taking on the responsibility of voting was fraught with disaster. I have to tell you that this is a quote or you would not believe what I say. He said, 'Just imagine if the wife came back home and found her baby killed and the dinner spoiled — there would be not a moment's peace in the family afterwards'. In any event, he added, everyone knew that women are apt to act on instinct rather than reason. While he knew that the instinct of some dogs is better than some men's reason, he was not prepared to give women the vote because it was not the case that every woman's reason was better than every man's reason. This is typical attitude No. 1 for the day: all women must be better than all men in order to justify inclusion in the scheme of things.

Notwithstanding the troglodytes in the various parliaments around the world, women were in fact given the right to vote in all English-speaking countries by 1920. New Zealand women could vote as of 1893 and run for Parliament from 1919. South Australian women could vote and run for Parliament from March 1895 — not December 1894 as is commonly believed, although they were given the right to become MPs only as a result of a conspiracy gone wrong. It was one of those wonderful things that men conjure up.

There were a lot of people who did not want the suffrage to go through, much less give women the right to sit in Parliament. The original bill said, 'Women not to be

entitled to sit in Parliament'.¹ So, in order to get this clause removed, the men *against* the suffrage decided that they would combine with the men who *supported* women getting the vote but who did not want to see them in Parliament. Therefore, this would allow women to become members of Parliament and would so outrage even the people in favour of suffrage that they would immediately vote against the bill and that would be the end of women in the polling booths for a while! This was a terrific idea!

They all filibustered along in the chamber because there was one man known to be in favour of suffrage who was prone to going home on the last tram. It was December 1894. It was 11 o'clock and, if he did not catch the last tram, he was going to have to walk home. So there was some filibustering in the chamber. In the meantime, the supporters of suffrage were out in the corridor talking to this man to delay him until he could not catch the tram home. In the event, when the division was called, he was able to go into the chamber. And as a result women got the vote and the right to be members of Parliament in South Australia. I point out that the bill was not proclaimed until March 1895, which is why it did not operate until then.

In 1918 British women were enfranchised if they were over the age of thirty. This was done on the grounds that if women over the age of twenty-one had been given the right to vote female voters would have outnumbered male voters on account of the war losses! All adult females did not get the vote until 1928, but women were not allowed into the House of Lords until 1958.

Canadian women were fully enfranchised in 1918, although some provincial parliaments were rather more tardy, with Quebec not fully enfranchising women until 1940.

Women in New Jersey were entitled to vote in 1776 because the law allowed 'all inhabitants' who fulfilled certain property ownership and residential qualifications to vote. In 1807 the New Jersey General Assembly amended the law to allow only free, white males to vote.

Having given women the vote and the right to sit in Parliament, in theory, political parties were not so keen to see them elected in practice. In 1896 two South Australian nurses were nominated for Labor Party preselection in the state election that year, but were dropped from the list of candidates because they had been at the centre of a dispute over nurses' rights at the Adelaide Hospital two years earlier. The Party was concerned that having two such feisty women as candidates would leave them open to ridicule by the press.

Sixty-three years later, in 1959, the South Australian Supreme Court heard counsel for an unsuccessful male candidate in a Liberal Party preselection contest argue that the woman who beat him was not entitled to stand because she was not a 'person' under the South Australian Constitution Act. This, I might add, was not the only time in which women had been classified as non-persons. The court had ruled in 1920 in South Australia that women were not persons for the purposes of the Public Notaries Act. In Canada the Supreme Court had ruled in 1928 that women were not persons under the British-North America Act for purposes of being appointed to the Canadian Senate. The Canadian women actually went to the British Privy Council and had that overturned, with the Privy Council men puffing their wings up and saying, 'This is

¹ *South Australian Parliamentary Debates*, p 1038. This refers to Clause 4 of the Adult Suffrage Bill. The clause was defeated in the Legislative Council, 17 votes to 4, on 22 August, 1894.

ridiculous in the twentieth century'. But somehow or other that passed by the South Australian Supreme Court.

It was an argument, too, that was put against Catherine Helen Spence when she stood for election to the constitution convention in 1896, and against Vida Goldstein when she nominated for the Senate in 1903. Contrary again to popular opinion, Goldstein was not the 'first' woman to stand for elected office. Several women had, of course, run for the United States presidency, unsuccessfully, in the nineteenth century. But even as far as Australia was concerned three other women also nominated for the 1903 election in Australia — two for the Senate and one for the House of Representatives in New South Wales. None of them were successful, but it says something for our history books that very little is known even of the existence of these women — much less what they were on about.

The first woman to win a seat in any English-speaking parliament was progressive Republican Congresswoman Jeanette Rankin who was elected to represent Montana in 1916 — four years before American women were entitled to vote. It was she who was given the right to introduce the nineteenth amendment, giving women in America the vote, into the House of Representatives — and it was her vote against America's entry into World War I which was used by some British MPs to justify their opposition to female suffrage. That over fifty Congressmen voted against America declaring war in 1917 apparently went unnoticed! This brings me to typical attitude No. 2 for the day: all women are defined by the action of any one woman; men are treated as individuals.

As was to happen with other women who entered Parliament, Rankin annoyed many men by focusing on issues that they had either ignored or treated inequitably. Her campaign platform in 1916 included female suffrage, legislation protecting children, tariff reforms and prohibition. She criticised the United States administration for spending \$300,000 to study pig feed while allocating a mere \$30,000 to identify the needs of children, arguing, with considerable justification, that, if 'the hogs of the nation are 10 times more important than the children, it is high time that women should make their influence felt'. Her pithy comments and ability to highlight anomalies of this sort did not endear her to her male opponents.

When Nancy Astor was elected to the House of Commons in 1919, making her the first woman to be elected and to take her seat in the British House of Commons, she established two traditions that were to continue in Britain and other countries for many years. She inherited her husband's seat and she made a point of taking up issues relating to the needs and rights of women and children which had previously been ignored, overlooked or deemed unimportant by the men in the House. While the men fussed over whether it was proper for her to sit thigh to thigh with a male on the Commons benches and debated whether or not she should wear a hat in the House — she did — and how the Speaker should address her — politely — Nancy Astor sailed into the place, determined to reform, if not its procedures, at least its legislative priorities. She fought for stricter liquor laws relating to the sale of alcohol to minors and joined women who were elected over the next few years in badgering the Government into regulating nursing homes, providing access to education for canal boat children and shoes for children in poverty-stricken families.

In later years, British women in Parliament won a variety of welfare measures ranging from child endowment to an allowance for elderly people in institutions. They were not always successful in their reform campaigns, however. With support of other women in the House and many of the men, Thelma Cazalet-Keir pushed through equal pay for women teachers in 1944 only to see Prime Minister Winston

Churchill march down into the Commons next day and threaten to call an election if they did not reverse the vote. They did.

British nurses had no more luck with Health Minister Enoch Powell when he refused the request for a pay increase with the comment that 'those who take employment that is not merely a job but a vocation should be content with remuneration that might otherwise be regarded as deficient because of the satisfaction their work afforded'. That same year he gave both dockers and doctors pay increases amounting to tens of millions of pounds. Typical attitude No. 3: only women have to make do with a warm inner glow.

Nevertheless, once women were in Parliament as members they were in a position to include women in the parliamentary process more than ever before. The women who have sat in the public or strangers' galleries of parliaments over the last one hundred years have undoubtedly helped to focus the minds of male MPs on issues ranging from suffrage to abortion to equal opportunities. The women who sit on the green and red benches in the chambers of the parliaments ensure, by their very presence, that men do not forget the female half of the population. This occasionally incites resentment from among their male colleagues and produces the odd spiteful comment such as that directed by Liberal Senator Chris Puplick to Labor Minister Senator Margaret Reynolds in Canberra in 1989. Leaning across his desk in the middle of a debate, on a topic which I have long forgotten, he said, 'We know that Senator Reynolds is on the front bench not because of the number of neurones she can put together but because of the number of chromosomes she has'. Neither Senator Peter Walsh nor Senator Bob Collins, both of whom had interjected during other parts of Senator Puplick's speech, chose to defend their absent ministerial colleague.

Historically, in Australia and elsewhere, I have to tell you, talent has rarely had much to do with ministerial appointments. Innumerable male MPs have been elevated to the ministry because of the perceived need for factional balance in the Australian Labor Party — perhaps balance is not quite the right word to use in the case of the Australian Labor Party — or because the National Party was always guaranteed a specific number of cabinet positions in a Liberal-National Party coalition government. Gender balance was just another element in the process, but the only one ever used to cast doubt on the ability of the incumbent or the validity of her appointment. Typical attitude No. 4: only women have to be talented to succeed.

The comment, however, and the lack of support from her male colleagues, reveals at least part of the reason why so few women are preselected to run in safe seats and why extremely talented women such as Jessie Street, for example, have been excluded in the past from taking their place in parliaments, not just in Australia but elsewhere.

There is still a strong belief in the community and the political parties that women belong in the home and men belong in the House and that women who defy this dictum are unfairly and unnaturally usurping male roles and have no real right to do so. The extent of the belief that politics is still something for men is revealed in the fact that as late as 1984 the British Conservative Party's candidate application form had a space for the candidate's wife's maiden name. Furthermore, the sorts of questions which are still asked of female candidates, but which are never asked of men, indicate that women are still not accepted by party hierarchies.

In the years I was a Senator the question I was most frequently asked was, 'How does the family cope?', which was closely followed by inquiries about whether I employed a housekeeper and whether I spent weekends cooking and freezing casseroles so the family would have something to eat while I was in Canberra. The answer to both

questions was: 'No'. I was never quite sure what lay behind the questions. Was I meant to feel guilty at leaving spouse and children behind whenever I went to Canberra and elsewhere? Probably. Certainly, many people were disappointed that Ian and I stayed married and that the children were never made wards of the state. It would have been so convenient for some of the critics to have been able to say, 'See what happens when women with young children become politicians', conveniently ignoring, of course, the marriages of male MPs which break under the strain of the demands of their job. In the end, one of my male colleagues, not from my own party, was wont to say — jokingly, of course — that the only reason Ian stayed married to me for so long was because I was away from home so often. Typical attitude No. 5: only women have a responsibility to make a marriage work.

The attitude of the media, presumably reflecting attitudes in some sections of the community, was most dramatically brought home to me when a Melbourne journalist rang my husband late one evening in December 1977 just after I had been appointed to fill a Senate casual vacancy. After some minor small talk, he burst out with the really important question: how did Ian feel about being married to a woman who earned more than he did? Ian actually said that he did not care where the money came from as long as it came, which gave me a breadth of opportunities that I do not think he realised at the time.

That inability to deal with independent, powerful women still exists in the media. Their treatment of female MPs still leaves much to be desired and was made clear by the manner in which one paper dealt with Carmen Lawrence's accession to the premiership in Western Australia. There she was, pictured on page one, arms folded at the waist, standing in a kitchen surrounded by pots and pans. The caption, in very small print, read: 'Dr Lawrence can stand the heat - inspecting the kitchen of an Aboriginal centre'. That particular piece of gratuitous stereotyping paled into insignificance compared with the opening paragraph of the story beneath the photo: 'Dr Carmen Lawrence', wrote the male journalist, 'is no Margaret Thatcher. She hasn't the beauty of Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto and, while she might have the intellect, she hasn't the years of Israel's Golda Meir'. He could have pointed out she was not dead either. It is difficult to imagine any journalist or anyone else choosing to compare an Australian male politician with, say, Winston Churchill, John Kennedy or Francois Mitterrand. Yet it was apparently regarded as perfectly acceptable to comment in this fashion about a prominent and capable woman.

Margaret Thatcher, on the other hand, probably would not have minded the article at all. Despite the existence in parliaments around the world of women like Thatcher who see themselves as unique and who declare that the women's movement has done nothing for them and that they therefore have no intention of doing anything for the women's movement, I do not subscribe to the theory that women are their own worst enemy. It is time, however, that female MPs like Thatcher realised that they would not be MPs or even entitled to vote had it not been for a hefty dose of what they like to call 'social engineering' ninety years or more ago; nor would they be entitled to own property, keep any money they saved from the housekeeping given to them by their husbands, attend university or do a plethora of other things they take for granted, had it not been for the efforts of determined women in and out of the world's houses of parliament over the last one hundred years, whether that presence was a silent or vocal one as strangers in the gallery or as determined and reformist members on the floor of the House.

That the fight was not yet over was made clear by the concern expressed in all seriousness by one member of the Australian Senate when he canvassed that potentially disastrous consequence of giving women the same access to something else

taken for granted by men, namely, the right to employment and other services without discrimination.

During the debate on the Sex Discrimination Bill in 1983 — and usually when I use this quote I have the red Senate bound volume of *Hansard* with me; otherwise nobody believes that it is real; you are just going to have to take it for granted — Senator Austin Lewis waxed long and eloquently about 'the problems for employees' marriages as a result of '....compulsory close cohabitation'. He asked the Minister and the Senate to consider a number of specific situations. The first of these involved²

. . . a driver working for a long distance trucking organisation who is required to drive, perhaps, from Melbourne to Perth and back with great regularity and who necessarily sleeps in the vehicle. . . From time to time one driver sleeps in the truck while another one continues to drive or alternatively the vehicle is stopped while the drivers have their compulsory break. It concerns me that if, as a result of their employment provisions, one of those drivers is male and the other one is female and they are required by the employer to share that job, that may perhaps create complications for them. . .

Senator Ryan, who had been amazingly patient during this whole debate, interjected at that point to ask him: 'What sort of complications?' He responded thus:

I suggest to the Minister that she is totally naive if she does not believe that two people sharing such a job and staying at various places overnight might not develop a very close relationship.

The Minister did her best to allay his fears about truck drivers and his other concern regarding male and female employees of Telecom 'working underground or around a Telecom pole'. She pointed out:

There are men and women working in the Senate and we spend a great deal of time in each other's company. . . Indeed on occasion we have been in this chamber until the early hours of the morning and some people have even gone off to sleep. I hope that that has not caused marital trauma for the spouses of those honourable senators who are married.

Far from convincing Senator Lewis, this helpful comment from the Minister simply provided more grist for his mill. He said:

Senator Ryan mentioned the fact that we work together in this chamber.

although there are some of us who would doubt that from time to time—

One would not think that there would be anything going on in this chamber.

which is also fairly true—

² Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, Vol S101, 13 December 1983, p 3701.

However, one observes that some things do go on from time to time. Nevertheless, in this building the Minister would be aware that great difficulties have been created by close proximity working relationships between men and women. Frequently, marriages of members of parliament and of staff have broken up as a result purely and simply of the close proximity of the couples working together. A sexual relationship may not necessarily develop. I have tried to explain to the Minister, but she apparently does not seem to be able to grasp it, that a wife who is at home caring for three or four children, trying to get them off to school and trying to keep them clean, is aware that her husband is at work surrounded by glamorous women who may very well be endeavouring to use their guile to woo him in some way. It is a matter of grave concern to many women in this country that their husbands may in some way be subjected to improper influences.

At that point I looked around the Senate chamber and thought; 'He has got to be joking!'. Nonetheless, it was clear from his comments that the primeval fear, the self-deluding justifications, for limiting the involvement of women in the empowering roles of money earner and decision maker had changed little in nearly a century. Sadly, this man was not the only member of parliament worried about what would happen if all employment doors were opened to women. Listening to the debate for hours on end made many of us realise that his 'factory floor to boardroom jezebel' theory was widely held and that the need to protect men from themselves as well as from all the ambitious and predatory women in the work force was simply a re-run of an age-old excuse for limiting women's opportunities in life.

While this sort of attitude continues to exist women will remain a minority in Australia's and the world's parliaments. That the comments I have quoted were all made on the public record by male members of Parliament over the span of one hundred years, apparently unaware of or indifferent to the implications of what they were saying, is a clear indication that, as far as equal participation in the political and parliamentary processes is concerned, women in the English speaking world have a long way to go before our right to participate as a matter of choice in a full range of responsibilities and occupations in society is accepted.

This is made clear, too, by the fact that there has been only a marginal improvement in the success rate of female candidates in the last fifty years. In Australia, the average success rate for women contesting House of Representatives seats between 1943 and 1969 was 4 per cent. In the same period the average success rate for male candidates was 32.5 per cent. Women still make up less than 10 per cent of House of Representatives candidates. Their success rate in the 1990 election was 7.1 per cent. The male success rate was 21.5 per cent. As Dr Colin Hughes said, 'The major parties in Australia are still hurling the majority of their women candidates against the most heavily fortified of their enemies' seats'³.

Only in the case of seats won via a system of proportional representation do women get anything like a fair go. The fact that women make up 25 per cent of the Australian Senate, which uses a system of proportional representation, but only 6.7 per cent of the House of Representatives, which is made up of single member electorates, is proof enough of the value to women of multimember electorates. To date in Australia — that is, in the 90 years in which women have been enfranchised nationally in this

³ Dr Colin Hughes, *"A Target Missed: Women in Australian Elections"*. Paper delivered to American Political Science Association, 1990 Annual Conference, p.8.

country — a mere sixteen women have been elected to the House of Representatives and thirty-five, including women as casual vacancies, to the Senate.

The paucity of women in parliament limits their chances of getting into the ministry and hence in implementing policy changes. Nonetheless, we now have two women premiers and have had two women lead a federal political party. In the case of the two premiers I have a strong, if unprovable, suspicion that they were elected at a time of strife within their political parties because the men saw the job as a poisoned chalice.

John Major has made British history following the election a few weeks ago by appointing two women to cabinet and another to a non-cabinet ministerial position. That is the largest number of women ever in the British Cabinet. In fact, I am not aware of more than two women ever being in cabinet at the same time in any Westminster style parliament prior to this. Even in the United States, where the President appoints his cabinet from outside the Congress, there have never been more than two women members at any one time.

The political parties everywhere have the power to change this by the simple expedient of running more women as candidates in winnable seats, but they are amazingly reluctant to do that. Furthermore, in what I am sure is a complete coincidence, the last electoral distributions abolished three seats held by women, and none of those women are likely to be preselected in a safe seat. In the main, women are pitted against men in seats which are safe for the men. Then the women's lack of success is used to justify the palpably wrong claim that women are an electoral liability, and the process repeats itself. When women are represented at percentage levels above single figures, it is almost always in those houses of parliament which are regarded within political circles as being the less powerful or the less important chamber. Thus, there are more women in the Australian Senate than in the House of Representatives. They are less of a threat to ambitious men there, because fewer ministers are selected from the Senate. In America, on the other hand, where the Senate is regarded as the senior chamber, there are two women compared with the twenty-five in their House, and no major party has ever put forward a woman as its presidential candidate.

All of this raises the question of whether, indeed, women make a difference in ministerial or other positions, and, indeed, whether it matters if they do not. Certainly, in my discussion with people like Helen Clark, a minister in the previous Labour government in New Zealand, and Carmen Lawrence in Western Australia, the answer seems to be, 'Yes, they can make a difference if they want to'. Both women told me in interviews that they went out of their way to use their position to influence the status and effectiveness of departments dealing with so-called women's issues. But that impact was also partly due to the fact that they were powerfully positioned women who were able to put their sympathetic ideology into practice. Senator Susan Ryan was able to do something similar. Conservative women tend to have a different agenda and, as far as the second part of my question was concerned, I believe that they have every right to have a different agenda.

Sadly, however, despite the fact that the suffrage campaigns — which began in Seneca Falls in America in 1869 and first bore fruit in New Zealand in 1893—made the voting system at least more democratic than it had been, and while women are now finally, one hopes, regarded as persons in their own right rather than the property of some man, there still seems to be a mutual antipathy between women who want to be politicians and the men who control political parties. Until that is overcome, women will go on being elected to Parliament only in numbers sufficient

for the parties to claim they are not opposed to female MPs, but in numbers small enough not to interfere too much with male ambitions.

It is worth while remembering that, until women became a force at the polling booths, there was little need for men to act in anything other than their own interests. Until women were elected to Parliament, the progress of extending to women rights, privileges, opportunities and freedoms that had been taken for granted by men was very slow in coming; even since then it has been an uphill battle in some areas. We are still waiting for equal pay to be granted for work of equal value. We are still waiting for work traditionally done by women in the home and in the paid work force to be given the status it deserves.

Canadian women, indeed, had to mount a massive campaign to have an equal rights clause included in their Charter of Rights in 1981, and then another to have this excluded from the clauses that could be overridden by provincial governments.

I would ask you to remember, too, that in Australia in the last decade we have seen one federal government unsuccessfully try to punish the wives of men on strike by denying those women access to unemployment benefits. We have also seen another government successfully take benefits from some women over forty-five on the grounds that, once their children were over sixteen, the women could go out to get paid employment.

Add to this the fact that the legal possibility of rape in marriage was resisted in Britain until last year — the same year that the Legislative Assembly here in the ACT abolished a husband's right to claim compensation for loss of consortium - something a wife has never been able to claim — and it must be very clear that the hard-won rights of women are still held only on sufferance, and that the price of their total acceptance must be eternal persistence. Thank you.

I am now quite happy to take questions for the next fifteen minutes.

Questioner — I think your party is poorer because you are not leading it, and the Parliament is weaker because you are not in it. Was the result of that election that you stood for the result of a male conspiracy, political dirty tricks or a political destruction?

Ms HAINES — I am not going to comment on your first two comments, although I thank you for them. No, there was no male conspiracy, although I understand that the two parties did discuss tactics with each other. But it was not to get rid of me as a woman; it was to get rid of me as a Democrat threat to the two party system essentially. There was the odd dirty trick but no more than you get in any other campaign. That is politics and one has to live with it.

Questioner — Can you tell me why there are more women in the Senate?

Ms HAINES — Yes. There seems to be a general pattern that the Houses which have a proportional representation form of election will elect more women than men. If you are electing six people for a state, or three, if it is a half Senate election, the blokes do not mind if one of those is female. What they certainly do not want is a woman having a hold on a single member electorate. That is fairly consistent.

If you looked at the Scandinavian countries, for example, or the European countries that have PR, you would find greater numbers of women representatives than you would find in Australia, Britain or America. At least in Australia we have preferential

voting for the lower House, which gives women something more of a chance. The other countries have the first past the post system and that pretty much rules women out in a single member electorate.

There is another reason for the Senate having a higher proportion of women than the House of Representatives. The Senate in Australia, unlike the American Congress, is regarded as less important, less powerful than the House of Representatives. The powerful chambers tend to elect fewer women. This is because there is more competition from men — because it is seen as more powerful — and PR is an easier way for women to get in. Those are the two reasons why the Australian Senate has more women.

Questioner — I understand from South Australian history that that State was not settled with convicts. Therefore, it did not have the problems associated with settling convicts. Do you think that that led to more reasoned thinking and thereby women getting the vote before the other states?

Ms HAINES — The question, for those of you who could not hear it, was regarding the point that South Australia was not a convict settlement, it was a free settlement, and therefore there was likely to be a different sort of person there and groups of people who were more receptive to the idea of women being enfranchised. That certainly would appear to be true on the evidence in New Zealand as well, which was also not a convict settlement, and in Western Australia, which had the occasional shipment, but was not actually settled as a convict settlement. Western Australia followed South Australia within a matter of years in enfranchising their women, well before the other Australian states and before the Federal government. New Zealand, of course, was first up in giving women the vote in 1893. So there does seem to be some indication.

In addition, if you look at the American situation, the midwestern and northern states tended to give women the right to vote for state elections earlier than the eastern seaboard states. In those western and northern states, women were much more involved in money making and developing the state than was the case on the much more moneyed eastern states side of that continent.

The other phenomenon that seems to be apparent in international suffrage is that countries which have religions that are basically Protestant give women the vote before Roman Catholic or Islamic countries do.

Questioner — What is your opinion of compulsory voting?

Ms HAINES — My opinion of compulsory voting is that if you have to make a horse drink you should not be giving him water anyway; you should let him die. I really do think it is a bit bizarre that you give somebody a right and then hold them by the ear to make them go to have their name crossed off. I do not necessarily subscribe to the theory that we have to have compulsory voting so that Labor voters get to the polls. That is not necessarily a correct theory. I am aware of the fact that before Australia had compulsory voting — and we were not always a compulsory voting nation — a couple of what were then Country Party Senators lost their seats because the election was held on a good harvesting day.

Questioner — What strategies would you suggest to make women's unpaid work more recognised financially in the system knowing that nurses and teachers traditionally took so long and knowing that even today in 1992 a woman looking after her children in her home is paid \$2 per hour. Can it be done through tax recognition? What strategies would you suggest to be effective?

Ms HAINES — The only way that you will quickly get the work done by women accorded the status it deserves is if you make all the men do it. People value what they do and people in power — men have had pretty much a stranglehold on it for centuries — value what they do and do not value what they do not do. This is not as conspiratorial as it sounds; it is a perfectly normal human characteristic to value what you understand and what you do yourself rather than what somebody else does if you have never experienced it.

I think we are going to get there eventually. I do not know how it will be achieved, whether it will be done, as it has been suggested recently, through splitting incomes for single income families. That in some ways worries me because you have single income families that are single parent families that are not necessarily going to get any benefit. Whoever the sole parent is, you have the double bind of either choosing to be in the paid work force and a sole parent, or being a full time parent and on some sort of pension and benefit and incurring, or at least being the recipient of, the opprobrium of the community, which seems to believe that all sole supporting parents are nymphomaniac teenagers who all get pregnant on an annual basis, by different men by way of variety, in order to become millionaires on the supporting parent benefit.

Questioner — In view of the number of independents doing so well in federal and state parliaments at the moment, do you see that trend continuing and do you see that as a chance for more women to get in?

Ms HAINES — The answer to the last question is that it depends on the electorate. In Western Australia, Dr Liz Constable got in as a Liberal independent in the seat of Floreat because of a conspiracy that went wrong. I understand the conspiracy that went wrong was engineered by Senator Noel Crichton-Browne, but that is hearsay and I will not repeat it. I think the electorate is most definitely becoming unhappy about the party system and probably the two party system in particular. Last year I did some research on this and at that stage the only Parliament in Australia that was in the control of the government of the day was Queensland and that is because it is a unicameral Parliament. There was no other Parliament in any state or at the federal level in Australia that was in the hands of the government. The Prime Minister had the lower House but not the Senate. The Premier of Victoria had the lower House but not the upper House. Nick Greiner in New South Wales and John Bannon in South Australia had neither House and Carmen Lawrence was fast losing her grip on both as well. How long that phenomenon will continue I do not know, but it is certainly a reflection of irritation in the electorate.

We do have a major problem in making it more widespread because at least federally in Australia you have a situation where 70 per cent of the seats are so safe you could run a semi-trained gorilla as a candidate—it has been known to happen — and it would win. You have a position where only 30 per cent of the seats are likely to change hands, for all sorts of whimsical reasons. That is one of the other disadvantages of single member electorates. You have a position where something like 300,000 people in this country will determine a change of government. That is pretty hard for independents in large numbers to break into given that electorates in Australia are about 77,000 people. It is going to be much easier for that to continue to happen at state level I think. I thank you very much for joining me today.