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Trust the Women

Women in the Federal Parliament

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Note

This issue of *Papers on Parliament* brings together a collection of papers given during the first half of 1992 as part of the Senate Department's *Occasional Lecture* series and in conjunction with an exhibition on the history of women in the federal Parliament, entitled, Trust the Women. Also included in this issue is the address given by Senator Patricia Giles at the opening of the Trust the Women exhibition which took place on 27 February 1992. The exhibition was held in the public area at Parliament House, Canberra and will remain in place until the end of June 1993.

Senator Patricia Giles has represented the Australian Labor Party for Western Australia since 1980 having served on numerous Senate committees as well as having been an inaugural member of the World Women Parliamentarians for Peace and, at one time, its President.

Dr Marian Sawyer is Senior Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Canberra, and has written widely on women in Australian society, including, with Marian Simms, *A Woman's Place: Women and Politics in Australia*.

The Hon. Susan Ryan, AO, was the first woman to become a Labor federal minister, serving between 1983 and 1987 in the ministry of the Hon. Bob Hawke, and using her place in the government to bring about far-reaching changes affecting the place of women.

Janine Haines was the first woman to lead any Australian political party when, in 1986, she became leader of the Australian Democrats in the federal Parliament.

The Hon. Dame Margaret Guilfoyle, DBE, was the first woman to sit in the federal cabinet and to head a government department, when, in 1975, she joined the Liberal ministry of the Hon. Malcolm Fraser in which she continued to serve until 1983.

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Women in the Federal Parliament

Senator Patricia Giles

Address when opening *Trust the Women* exhibition

In addressing this gathering as one of the women who has been elected to Parliament I am obviously obliged to make some observations about the select group to which I am privileged to belong - though I am reluctant to generalise.

Gender is one of the few distinctions that Australians make in distinguishing politicians, rating women ahead of used car salesmen and male politicians on measures such as trustworthiness, conscientiousness and being in touch with the electorate. Like all averages, these obscure the fact that there are wide differences between the twenty-nine women currently in the federal Parliament as there are between the one hundred and ninety-five men. Additionally, on the distribution of any of our characteristics including masculinity and femininity there would be considerable overlap blurring gender and party lines.

It is impossible therefore to describe the typical woman parliamentarian, but I am prepared to claim on our behalf that by definition we are tenacious, resilient and hardworking - like most of the women who are our constituents, the main distinction being our addiction to committee work!

One is frequently asked why is it so important for women to be in Parliament? Can't men represent all their constituents effectively? The answer is, of course, that maybe they can, but there is not a lot of evidence from recent or past history to give us much reassurance in that regard.

A couple of interesting intellectual exercises suggest themselves. Let us imagine Australia in the 1990s with no women in Parliament and consequently a demoralised and discouraged women's movement that has given up and gone back to home and hearth, or has been driven underground! Or even more thought provoking - consider an Australia in the 1990s where all the parliamentarians were women and all the institutions dominated by women - a thorough matriarchy. Would the men be organising for equal pay, child care and the right to control their own bodies? Would sole supporting fathers be the largest group of beneficiaries vulnerable to community criticism? Would men be safe on the streets at night or in their own homes? Would we have been so utterly careless of their needs?

It takes only a superficial analysis to discover how the agenda has expanded, due to the influence of women in recent years, to reflect the everyday lives of women, their increasingly complex roles in a changing society, and their inevitable life experiences. We are talking here about over half the population's joys and achievements, burdens and disadvantages previously adjudged to be restricted to the 'private' realm, now accepted as community concerns and responsibilities. Obvious issues such as violence against women and children have been trivialised by the use of the word 'domestic' until quite recently. Breast and cervical cancer, responsible for the high levels of

mortality and morbidity among women, have been around for a long time but only recently have attracted public funding for preventative and monitoring measures.

Another frequent question is: 'Do women parliamentarians ever work together across party lines?' Of course we do, especially in the Senate where there are more women and a vast committee system, where much of our most productive and largely consensual work is done. We sometimes travel together; the further away from Canberra, the more we find in common. At times of course, just like our male colleagues, we have serious differences of opinion which our traditional parliamentary system is designed to absorb according ultimately to the wishes of the electorate.

It was a rare and rewarding experience however when, last November, I was able to send to the Canadian Status of Women Bureau a supportive message signed by nearly every woman in the federal Parliament on the anniversary of the Montreal massacre.

This exhibition celebrates not only our achievements but places us in the historical context which helps to explain the absence of women prior to 1943 and the comparative deluge after 1980. The scene is set by Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill, as well as by the political women of this century who wielded great influence but failed to be elected to the Australian parliament. To the examples shown here, Vida Goldstein, and Jessie Street who stood repeatedly without success, Bessie Rischbieth who rejected party political activity, and Muriel Hegney and Alice Henry, outstanding trade union women, I can add a couple of whom you may not have heard.

Muriel Matters, travelled to Britain to join the Women's Freedom League after Australian women achieved the vote in 1902. She was a talented speaker who performed regularly in Hyde Park on Sunday afternoons, and threw herself wholeheartedly into the campaign for women's suffrage. She was among those who chained themselves to a grille in the Ladies Gallery in the House of Commons, whence she harangued the honourable members. In 1909 she floated over Westminster in a balloon shouting 'votes for women' through a megaphone, for which she was imprisoned. Her name appears on the Roll of Women Suffragette Prisoners 1904-1914.

Marian Phillips left Australia in 1904 as a young historian to take up a research scholarship at the London School of Economics. Working first with the Poor Law Commission, the National Union of Suffrage Societies and the Labour Women's League, in 1918 she became the Chief Women's Officer of the Labour party in England, a position she held until her death in 1932.

In that time she succeeded in creating 'the largest mass movement of working women that has been seen'. She was elected to the House of Commons as the Member for Sunderland from 1929-1932. Her obituaries were inclined to regret that her evident political talent had not been deployed on a wider set of problems than simply organising women!

I sincerely hope that one is no longer expected to cringe because one emphasises the long neglected needs of 54 four per cent of the population.

In fact, the women in this Parliament have a wide range of interests and expertise. If there is not at least one woman on every committee it is because there are not enough of us. There are many reasons for committed, motivated and talented women failing to become members of parliament, but three groups are easily identified.

The first are discouraged from the outset, believing that their circumstances preclude them from ever seeking preselection (lack of confidence, and/or resources) or family responsibilities that cannot be reconciled with parliamentary life.

Members of another group stand once or twice for unwinnable seats and, personally wounded, give up too soon (see Marian Sawer and Marian Simms¹ for those of us who have persevered despite defeats.)

The third group are, or become, the spouses of men who have made it into parliament. We know who they are, those whose own political ambitions have been sublimated on the basis that one politician in a family is quite enough, and sadly, merit tends not to be the criterion determining which of the two will be that one.

Few if any women seek election for its own sake. Prestige may be of importance to some; the salary, especially for women is not inconsiderable. But the job security is abysmal, and there have to be more intangible rewards to defray the physical and emotional demands of the job, with its long hours, incessant demands (one is never off duty) and extreme incompatibility with anything like a normal social or family life.

Most of us seek and find rewards in the stimulus and never-ending variety of public life, and the opportunities that we have to expand our knowledge, and to influence people and events through our work within the Parliament, our electorates and our parties.

I am sure many of my colleagues have experienced the special excitement and challenge of the past decade as the widespread second wave of the women's movement, through non-governmental persistence, was instrumental in prompting the United Nations to declare 1975 the first Women's Year; upgrading the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (DEDAW) to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); upping the year to a decade and extending the process to the year two thousand, developing the climate for a generation of immense change.

We Australian parliamentarians and non-governmental women can take quiet satisfaction from the fact that the role that our own country plays in the United Nations and Commonwealth forums on the Status of Women is strong, constructive and widely commended. Measures developed and implemented in Australia are internationally applauded and emulated by governments of many nations.

As this exhibition clearly demonstrates however, the head count of Australian women parliamentarians is not impressive by world standards. We are sold short by the International Parliamentary Union which only counts national lower houses, crediting us with 6.3 per cent. In total we are 12.5 per cent with an impressive three leaders² (out of eight) and a moderately respectable proportion of women ministers.

Developments in Australia which are of such crucial importance to women depend only partly on those of us who have been elected, many initiatives having come from

¹ Sawer, Marian and Simms, Marian, *A Woman's Place: Woman and Politics in Australia*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1984.

² Ms Rosemary Follett, the Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory, the Hon Dr Carmen Lawrence, Premier of Western Australia and the Hon Joan Kirner, Premier of Victoria.

the non-government women's movement which also acted as a kindergarten for many of us. Our successes are greatly dependent upon the extent to which our parties can be educated, and our efforts are greatly magnified by the fact that we are only the most visible part of our ever growing and strengthening network of talented women. Some of them identify themselves as feminists, some do not, but it is frequently and bitterly observed that we are 'everywhere'- well true - but 'taking over'- not just yet.

It has been very important for Australian women generally that all our institutions are being infiltrated. Educational, health, legal, academic, union, military and religious systems have responded at varying rates to the notions of equality and social justice promoted strongly by the women's movement and accompanied by the steady emergence of better qualified and more confident women.

In short, we who have the honour and privilege to have our portraits in the Parliamentary Handbooks, if only fleetingly, owe much to the splendid body of women who are involved in all aspects of political and economic systems, from policy development to practical application in all sectors - government, non-government and private enterprise.

Within the parliamentary system the same applies. There have always been significant numbers of women secretaries, cleaners and caterers providing the parliamentary support system. But even in 1981 when my term commenced the parliamentary establishment was predominantly male. How this has changed! Starting with Anne Lynch, Deputy Clerk of the Senate, and Lyn Simons the former Sergeant-at-Arms, there are now droves of women throughout the system including the gardens and the Press Gallery.

How one feels for Dorothy Tangney who for the twenty-five years of her term as a Senator was the only woman in caucus! Would she believe the photograph which we see in the exhibition of the three women officers of the Labor caucus, or the one of the Senate with women similarly in positions of authority?

My sincere thanks to the President of the Senate, the Hon Kerry Sibraa, and the Clerk, Harry Evans for their sponsorship and encouragement of this exhibition.

The exhibition is a great credit to those who have produced this informative and attractive display, presenting today's parliamentary women in the historical and social context which explains, but hardly excuses our low numbers. Our parties must be constantly challenged to improve women's representation if only for the sake of sheer electoral expediency. They ignore this challenge at their peril!

Housekeeping the State Women and Parliamentary Politics in Australia

Marian Sawyer

I have taken the title for today's lecture, 'Housekeeping the State', from Catherine Spence, whose photograph appears in the 'Trust The Women' exhibition curated by Ann Millar and currently on view in Parliament House. I shall begin with a sketch of Catherine Spence, based on the biographical work done by Susan Magarey, as an introduction to today's theme. Spence arrived in South Australia from Melrose in Scotland in 1839 when she was fourteen years old. A year later she witnessed what is believed to have been the first public election in the world conducted using proportional representation (PR) - an election for the Adelaide Municipal Corporation.¹ Spence's father had become Clerk to the Corporation and she later recalled in her autobiography how he had explained to her the bearings of this unique system for minority representation. Later again she became Australia's most active advocate of PR, promoting the ideas of Thomas Hare and John Stuart Mill on the subject and visiting them in London together with Rowland Hill, who had been responsible for the use of PR in Adelaide back in 1840. They enthusiastically endorsed the pamphlet she had prepared, *A Plea for Pure Democracy*, which was designed to popularise this election method.

By the 1850s, after a period working as a governess and teacher, Spence had become a writer, publishing (anonymously) novels such as *Clara Morison*. A later novel, *Handfasted*, was submitted for a prize offered by the *Sydney Mail* but rejected as 'calculated to loosen the marriage tie'. Meanwhile she had also become a social commentator, writing for the serious papers and journals of the time, for the first thirty years under her brother's name or in other ways disguising the unacceptable fact that the journalist was a woman. As well she became a social reformer, working to improve the treatment of destitute and delinquent children, engaging in issues such as education for girls and writing the first social studies textbook for Australian schools (also in the 'Trust the Women' exhibition). Towards the end of her life she chaired the board of a women's co-operative clothing factory, set up to counter the 'sweating' of women in the clothing trade.

Spence's career as a public speaker began in 1871 when she defied convention by presenting her own lecture at the South Australian Institute rather than having it delivered by a man. Five years earlier a man so bungled the delivery of a lecture she had written for the Institute that she had resolved next time to offer to read her own text. Despite her shaking knees, she told the audience that she wanted to make it 'easier henceforward for any woman who felt she had something to say to stand up and say it.'² From the 1870s she became as well a regular preacher in the Unitarian church. In 1891 Spence gave a wider audience the opportunity to hear a woman platform speaker when again reading her own paper to the Australasian Charities Conference in Melbourne. Vida Goldstein's mother, although an active feminist who

¹ Wright, J F H, *Mirrors of the Nation's Mind: Australia's Electoral Experiments*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1980, p 93.

² Quoted in Magarey, Susan, *Unbridling the Tongues of Women: a biography of Catherine Helen Spence*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1985, p 154.

had helped collect signatures for the monster suffrage petition, was content to have her husband read the paper she had written for the same conference. Spence's success at the Charities Conference led to Dr Charles Strong inviting her to address his Workingmen's Club. From this date Spence's platform career was well and truly launched and by a year later she had given forty public addresses.

Most of these addresses were on the subject of PR, which on the advice of her brother she called 'effective voting' as this was easier to say repeatedly than 'proportional representation' (they hadn't started saying PR as we do today to avoid this problem). In addition to lecture tours which took her to the United States and Canada, as well as to Sydney and Melbourne, Spence ran mock elections and helped form effective voting leagues. Her system of PR, which included giving fractional values to all votes when distributing the surplus over a quota, rather than distributing a random sample of votes at full value, became known as the Hare-Spence method. This feature was later adopted in Tasmania and from 1984 in Senate elections.

As part of her campaign for effective voting Spence stood in 1897 for election to the Federal Convention. She thus became the first woman to stand as a political candidate in Australia, despite the reported disinclination of the Returning Officer, W.R.Boothby (after whom a federal electorate is now named) to accept her nomination. In the event her nomination was accepted, but there was speculation as to whether she would be allowed to sit if elected. She gained 7,383 votes, coming 22nd out of 33 candidates. Thus Spence missed out on becoming a 'founding mother of the Australian constitution' but she felt the results of the election demonstrated her case for PR in so far as the delegates elected were quite unrepresentative of the population. Constitution-making remained an all-male affair, from which women and working men were excluded.

Spence lent her considerable prestige to the women's suffrage movement and had become Vice-President of the South Australian Women's Suffrage League in 1891 despite initially being what she described as 'a weak-kneed sister'. She also ensured that women's political organisations took up the cause of PR even though evidence had not yet become available concerning the importance of PR in achieving adequate parliamentary representation for women. Today we have ample international evidence for this, with all countries where women form over a third of MPs using PR and even the Dail in Ireland, elected using the Hare-Clark system, having a higher proportion of women MPs than the Australian House of Representatives. In Australia we can see that the houses of parliament with the highest proportions of women, the NSW Legislative Council (36 per cent), the ACT Legislative Assembly (35 per cent), the Senate (25 per cent) and the Tasmanian House of Assembly (20 per cent) all use forms of PR.

In her old age Catherine Spence described herself as a 'new woman' - she had followed her own injunction and trained her mind 'to be a useful and amiable member of society, no one's wife, and no one's mother'.³ Nonetheless, despite her personal defiance of conventional expectations of womanhood, Spence was, like many other suffragists, a practical and hard-headed politician. She knew that women would not persuade male legislators to grant them political rights if such rights were seen to lead to women rejecting their conventional roles as mothers, daughters, wives. That is why Spence, at the first meeting of the Women's Non-Party Political Association in 1909 said: 'Women were much criticised when they essayed to enter the field of

³ Magarey, *op. cit.*, p 46.

politics, but women may well take their share of housekeeping the State, without neglecting their own houses'.⁴

In Australia, as elsewhere, women's entry into the male realm of public life was viewed as a serious threat to the social order and the social economy. Henrietta Dugdale provided a scathing account of the material motives of the opponents of women's suffrage in her feminist utopia, *A Few Hours in a Far Off Age*, published in Melbourne in 1883 and displayed in the 'Trust the Women' exhibition. She wrote that: 'Some there are who say: "If we permit women to go beyond her sphere, domestic duties will be neglected". In plainer language, "If we acknowledge woman is human, we shall not get so much work out of her"'.⁵ Dugdale was regarded as a shocking figure in her time, the first to advocate full political rights for women (in a letter to the *Argus* in 1869) and a proponent of rational dress - she made her own divided skirts. She is part of the rich tradition of Victorian radicalism and became president in 1884 of Australia's first women's suffrage society.

Opponents of women's suffrage asked who would do the housework and who would mind the babies if women obtained political equality with men. Sir Edward Braddon was still raising the spectre of women deserting their domestic roles in the 1902 debate over the Commonwealth Franchise Bill. He asked:

Does the honorable gentleman [Sir William Lyne] think of the case when the woman will not take her husband along with her [to the poll], but will go alone and leave him at home to look after the baby and cook the dinner? That is what the honorable gentleman has to think of as a possibility in many of the homesteads throughout the Commonwealth.⁶

Other speakers such as the Member for South Sydney agreed that extending the franchise to women would mean taking them away from their proper sphere and a 'lapse of domestic obligations'⁷ while the Member for Kooyong declared that 'It is man's duty to be here, and it is woman's duty to attend to the family.'⁸

Suffragists who were more pragmatic or politically experienced than Henrietta Dugdale provided constant reassurances that women's role in public life would merely be an extension of the maternal role, not an alternative to it and there would be no lapse in the performance of domestic duties. As Lilian Locke said, campaigning during the lunchbreak outside the Geelong Woollen Mills in 1904: 'No woman could be so much interested in a budget speech or an electoral Bill to forget to put the chops on.'⁹

This was also a theme of the testimonials gathered from colonial statesmen to support the cause of women's suffrage in the United Kingdom. For example, Sir John Murray, Premier of Victoria testified while at the Imperial Conference in London in 1911 that

⁴ Spence, Catherine, *Minutes of first meeting, Women's Non-Party Political Association of South Australia*, 1909.

⁵ Dugdale, Henrietta, *A Few Hours in a Far Off Age*, Melbourne, 1883, p 67.

⁶ *Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates*, 23 April 1902, Vol IX, p 11937.

⁷ *Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates*, 23 April 1902, Vol IX, p 11952.

⁸ *Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates*, 23 April 1902, Vol IX, p 11941.

⁹ Quoted in Searle, Betty, *Silk and Calico: Class, Gender and the Vote*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1988, p 50.

women's suffrage in Australia had 'enlarged women's knowledge of public questions, without lessening their interest in their homework'.¹⁰

The fear that women would desert their unrequited domestic roles if they obtained political rights was a longstanding one. At the time of the French revolution, when a number of brave souls argued that the rights of man should be for women too, the philosopher Condorcet supported his case by providing an assurance that 'women given political rights would not neglect homes, children or needle'.¹¹

In general, as we have seen, the Antipodean case for women's suffrage rested on the proposition that the overall sexual division of labour would remain undisturbed and that women would contribute to housekeeping the state without neglecting their homes and children. Political success was gained on these terms.

Initially women's influence in the state was conceived primarily in terms of the power of the vote - women with the vote would be more likely to be listened to by politicians. As Mrs Martel, one of the women who stood for the Senate in 1903 wrote: 'Until we got the vote we agitated in vain for certain reforms. Immediately the vote was granted, and fully a year before we were able to exercise it, we found member after member introducing measures which previously we had pleaded for all to no purpose'.¹² The Senate agreed with this viewpoint, stating in the resolution cabled to the British Prime Minister Asquith in 1910 that women's suffrage had 'given a greater prominence to legislation particularly affecting women and children, although the women have not taken up such questions to the exclusion of others of wider significance'.¹³

There was a widespread belief that the enfranchisement of women in Australia and New Zealand had contributed to the introduction of progressive legislation including old-age pensions, the maintenance of illegitimate children and deserted families, pure food acts and separate children's courts.¹⁴ Nonetheless the consolidation of the modern party system effectively tamed the 'women's vote' and it was to be party loyalty rather than sex loyalty which largely determined the political behaviour of women.

In the years between 1902 and 1907 a number of party-linked women's organisations were established, including the Women's Committees of the Labor Party, the Women's Liberal League and the Australian Women's National League. These organisations contributed to the stability and strength of the Australian party system, 'blunting the growth and the effectiveness of the autonomous women's bodies'¹⁵ which had flourished during the campaign for women's suffrage.

¹⁰ MacMillan, Chrystal et al. *Woman Suffrage in Practice*, International Woman Suffrage Alliance, London, 1913.

¹¹ Condorcet, Marquis de (1790) 'Sur L'admission des femmes au droit de cité' Oeuvres Vol. 10. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1968.

¹² Martel, Nellie Alma, 'An Interview in London', *The Dawn*, 1 June 1905, p 45.

¹³ *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 17 November 1910, Vol LIX, p 6300.

¹⁴ See for example Martel, Nellie Alma, *The Woman's Vote in Australia*. 4th edn, The Woman's Press, London, 1913; Goldstein, Vida, *Woman Suffrage in Australia*, The Woman's Press, London, 1913; and MacMillan, op.cit.

¹⁵ Searle, *op. cit.*, p 17.

The contribution made by women to political parties has often been characterised as another form of 'political housework'. This refers to low status chores such as canvassing, door-knocking, enveloping, making the tea and fund-raising — auxiliary functions traditionally performed by the women's organisations associated with the political parties. In some cases these organisations were in effect transformed into what Bob Hogg has called a 'catering service for Party functions'.¹⁶ While thanks were duly recorded at election times or at party conferences where 'splendid teas' had been provided, the general attitude towards women party members was extremely patronising. For example the *Workers Weekly Herald* advised women in 1937 that '... there is quite a lot you can do to help over the back fence or the front gate. What way does the woman next door vote? Labor? Are you sure?'¹⁷

In 1953 Frederick Eggleston said in his *Reflections of an Australian Liberal* that:

The most disinterested work on the Liberal side is done by the women in Leagues such as the Women's National League of Victoria. They like political work, they have good meetings, love to be addressed by the members or leaders of the party, and work like tigers in canvassing votes. On the other hand ... As they canvass during the day time, they only see the women of the house, whose opinion as to how the family vote will go is not always reliable.¹⁸

A book on the 1959 State election in South Australia tells us that:

The L.C.L. was well served by its middle-aged women members, particularly where there were women's branches with substantial membership. These took over the bulk of the essential, and often dreary, chores, leaving the men and the paid organisers free to look after the planning, co-ordination and financing of the local campaigns.¹⁹

Caroline Hogg, now a senior minister in the Victorian government, has talked of the turning point in her own life which came with the rejection of the political housework role:

I joined the ALP in 1966 because of my concern over issues such as capital punishment, the Vietnam War and democracy in Greece. The Women's Central Organising Committee traditionally made the morning and afternoon teas for the State ALP Conference - and these were the high points of the conference. In June 1967, in the Trades Hall Vera Kent and I downed tools - the soap-saver and the tea-towel - to listen to the Vietnam debate.²⁰

To go back to the early years of the century, there was besides the question of women's voting power, the further issue of the newly granted right to sit in parliament. How could this right be exercised within the constraints of maintaining the overall sexual division of labour within society? The short answer is with great

¹⁶ Hogg, Bob, Speech to 'Recognition for Women in Australia', at a joint seminar of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs and the Office of the Status of Women, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Official Hansard Report, July 1991, p 168.

¹⁷ *Workers Weekly Herald*, 27 August 1937, p 3a.

¹⁸ Eggleston, F W, *Reflections of an Australian Liberal*, F W Cheshire, Melbourne, 1953, p 133.

¹⁹ Hetherington, R and Reid, R L, *The South Australian Elections 1959*, Rigby Limited, Adelaide, 1962, p 93.

²⁰ Address to National Labor Women's Conference, 24 January 1986.

difficulty. The historical condition placed on the relatively early grant of political rights to women in Australasia was the major reason for the extraordinarily long time it took for women to convert the right to stand for parliament into the right to sit in parliament, particularly at the federal level.

The paradox involved in obtaining political rights on the condition of upholding the primacy of women's domestic duties was recognised by the suffragists themselves - for a start Catherine Spence, Vida Goldstein and Rose Scott, leading suffragists in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales respectively were themselves all unmarried by choice. Lilian Locke, who had used, as an argument in favour of the suffrage, that no woman would be so interested in a budget speech or an electoral Bill as to forget to put the chops on, was two years later complaining about women's absorption in domestic duties at the expense of housekeeping the state. During the 1906 federal election she said in a speech at Charters Towers that:

Many women have been blinded as to the far reaching importance of their part in the political fight and are utterly absorbed in the carrying out of trivial domestic arrangements. They have no time to help save sweated workers; no time to help save white hairs from a paupers grave; no time to help save one child from starvation; no time to help the great seething mass of humanity in their struggle for standing room only on God's earth - no time - because they are too busy washing the blankets.²¹

Katharine Susannah Prichard was another politically active woman to express frustration at the degree to which women's political participation was stultified by a 'too conscientious devotion to household duties'. In an International Women's Day Address in 1945 she said: 'So much futile polishing, shopping and refurbishing of garments, wastes the priceless thought and energy of women.'²² Elsewhere she wrote about how Australian women, regardless of professional qualifications, became domestic drudges when they married and had children and how the same applied to women who would like to become active in progressive movements: 'Always it is a question of who is to look after the children, who will do the washing and ironing, cooking, sewing, if the mother of a family is away from home often, or for any length of time.'²³ It was the existence of domestic servants which enabled some women to participate more actively in politics in other countries. Prichard pointed out that it was to Australia's credit that domestic servants were rare in this country, but the social services which should exist instead of servants to prevent the double burden falling on women were undeveloped.

And regardless of the ways in which women politicians addressed themselves to upholding the family, their very presence in the male sphere of public power and authority was seen as a threat to a family structure premised on women's dependence. The need to defuse this threat is an important key to understanding the experience of those women who succeeded in entering Australian parliaments in the first half of this century.

²¹ Quoted in Searle, *op. cit.*, pp 53-55.

²² Prichard, Katharine Susannah, *Straight Left* (Articles and addresses on politics, literature and women's affairs over almost 60 years: from 1910 to 1968, collected and introduced by Ric Throssell), Wild & Woolley, Sydney, 1982, pp 235-6.

²³ Prichard, *op. cit.*, p 246.

Firstly, in order to demonstrate commitment to the ascribed roles of wife and mother it was important that women with political aspirations should be married. Parliamentary roles could then be seen as an extension of the maternal function rather than as an exercise of power in competition with men - identified as mothers women appeared less threatening. The state would be the 'larger home' in which there was a natural division of functions and women played a complementary role to men as 'helpmeets'. Some early women MPs were unmarried, but they made up for this by the family devotion and the motherly characteristics they displayed - what might be called 'virgin motherhood'. For example, May Holman, the first Labor woman MP was single but as John Curtin put it in his radio tribute after her death, 'she had the family instinct pulsing strongly'. Senator Dorothy Tangney, who was also unmarried, was photographed by *Pix* not long after her election checking the family roast. The text read: 'The Senator Is Perfectly At Home in the Kitchen, whether cooking the family's dinner or doing the large wash-up which follows'.²⁴

As pointed out in last year's *Senate Brief*²⁵ on 'Women in the Senate', Dame Annabelle Rankin was another unmarried woman who was unofficially referred to as Senate 'mother'. On her retirement one Senator remarked that he was sorry to see her go because as Government Whip she had 'always provided midnight suppers for honourable senators whose tempers were frayed...'²⁶ Irene Longman, the first woman MP in Queensland and herself married but childless was also frequently described as giving the 'motherly side of the question'. In Parliament 30 out of her 35 contributions outside question time concerned women or children.²⁷

Despite such possibilities it was in general women who had fulfilled the roles of wife and mother who were most acceptable. On the other hand married women had to be seen to perform their duties to their family as well as their public duties. This meant, for a start, that it was rarely permissible for women to embark on a political career until their children were grown up - and they themselves were already approaching an age which would be held against them. Senator Agnes Robertson was one woman who successfully fought back against such discrimination. She was first elected in 1949 at the age of 65 as a Liberal Country League Senator for Western Australia. At the age of 73 she was dropped from the ticket as 'too old'. She then ran successfully for the Country Party, defeating the young man endorsed in her place. And even where married women waited, they were still always open to charges of neglecting their responsibilities to their home and family. Edith Cowan, Australia's first woman MP, elected to the Western Australian Parliament in 1921, was accused of being a disgrace to women and of heartlessly neglecting her husband and children. Her youngest child was thirty at the time of her campaign and her husband was out canvassing for her.

When Cowan was elected, the *Age* ran an editorial which was generally favourable to this historic event. It did, however express concern that her example might encourage too many women to stand for parliament: 'Were political office to become the ambition of the fair sex, and were standing for parliament to become the latest craze

²⁴ *Pix*, 22 April 1944, p 5.

²⁵ *Senate Brief*, No 3, Research Section, Senate Department, Parliament House, Canberra 1991.

²⁶ *Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates*, 12 May 1971, Vol S 48, p 1716.

²⁷ Williams, Janice, 'Women in Queensland State Politics', *Refractory Girl* 4, p 14.

of fashion, there would be many dreary and neglected homes throughout the country sacrificed on the altar of political ambition'.²⁸

The fear that Edith Cowan's election would lead women to desert the servicing roles they performed in families was reflected in much of her press coverage. The *Bulletin* attempted to counter the threat with a page of cartoons entitled 'The New House-Wife'.²⁹ The cartoonist reassured male readers by depicting Cowan's role in parliament as scrubbing, polishing and tidying up after male members: housewifely 'instincts' would prevail. This treatment was particularly interesting as Cowan was a woman of great intellectual seriousness and few if any housewifely 'instincts'. She early gave up the running of her household to her daughters.

The need for the kind of reassurance provided by the *Bulletin* and other organs of opinion at the time of Cowan's election remained constant. The burning question in relation to women's entry into public life was always 'who will do the housework?'. When the Victorian MP Fanny Brownbill died in 1948 she was praised not only for her 'motherly demeanour' but for the fact that 'the late honourable member's home life conformed to the model upon which the very foundation of the British Empire rests'.³⁰

Similarly, when Dame Ivy Wedgwood died in 1975, it was said in tribute that:

She was able to combine 2 careers, which male senators would find it extraordinarily difficult to do. That is to say, she was a senator fulfilling and discharging the senatorial responsibilities that devolved upon her as a senator and at the same time she was still fulfilling the life of a devoted wife...³¹

Note that the role of a wife, the primary role for women, is conceptualised as a career in itself because it involves the provision of services; male senators, even if husbands and fathers, are not considered to have two careers.

In 1955 Mabel Miller, a barrister and Deputy Lord Mayor of Hobart, was elected first woman member of the Lower House in Tasmania. The *Hobart Mercury*³² ran a front-page photograph of her mixing a salad and informed the readers that she still performed her domestic chores 'like any other housewife'. Women parliamentarians were highly visible because of their rarity, attracting considerable media interest, and hence it was particularly important to reassure the public that they still had to perform domestic duties or servicing roles. The sexual order was still intact, as was the social economy relying on the unpaid work of women - barely dented by the achievement of formal political equality and the entry of a handful of women into parliamentary roles.

²⁸ *Age*, 15 March 1921.

²⁹ *Bulletin*, 31 March 1921.

³⁰ *Victorian Parliamentary Debates*, Vol 228, p 2967.

³¹ *Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates*, 19 August 1975, Vol S 65, p 4.

³² *Mercury*, Hobart, 21 February 1955.

So these early generations of women politicians were constrained in their careers by the need to demonstrate that their first commitment was to traditional gender roles in the home, and that housekeeping the state could only come later and never at the expense of the primary role. As we have seen, this meant that the early women MPs tended to embark on their parliamentary careers somewhat late in life. It also meant that Australia, like other countries, had a number of political widows among its early women MPs. This phenomenon has been termed 'male equivalence'³³ and signifies that the presence of women is legitimised by their standing for husbands or fathers. It appealed to party preselectors because of the possibility of cashing in on the popularity of the recently dead through attracting a sympathy vote and sometimes also postponing a damaging factional struggle over a seat. The most notable example was Lady Millie Peacock, the first woman to be elected to the Victorian Parliament. Lady Peacock replaced her late husband (a former Premier) at a by-election, during which she did not speak on her own behalf, instead being vouched for by party leaders. She carried her silence into Parliament where she made only one contribution, a speech on the Factories and Shops Bill where she paid tribute to her late husband.

The silence of Lady Peacock was an extreme case. Generally women parliamentarians were active contributors, but the need to present their parliamentary role as an extension of the maternal role, constricted the range of subject matter dealt with by early women parliamentarians. If the state was simply the larger home, then women must assume similar roles in the state as in the household and be mothers rather than simply parliamentary colleagues. As we have seen, it was particularly important for women parliamentarians, because of their visibility, not to trample on existing gender expectations.

The first woman cabinet minister in Australia, Florence Cardell-Oliver, was deeply concerned at the effects of the depression, particularly the fate of undernourished children and of men on 'sustenance'. She campaigned continuously for the delivery of free milk to schools both as President of the Council for Free Milk, and as an MP; she eventually supervised implementation of the scheme as Minister for Health in 1949. Although these were gender-appropriate concerns, Cardell-Oliver did not have an easy time in the Western Australian Parliament. In a speech delivered in 1937 she referred to a vitriolic attack made on her in parliament a few weeks earlier suggesting she had got her parliamentary nomination through giving luncheons to the President of the Nationalist Party. She continued:

I had dared to tell the Government that the children were underfed and that the condition of the sustenance men had become hopeless, and that the relief system was rotten. It is easy enough for members to laugh while many are starving. Members have laughed every time I have spoken in the House on these subjects.³⁴

When first appointed to cabinet as an honorary minister without portfolio in 1947 Cardell-Oliver remarked that she was only there to pour the afternoon tea - a remark also attributed to Dame Enid Lyons when she was appointed to federal cabinet without portfolio in 1949. A parliamentary contemporary of Dame Annabelle Rankin, Condon Byrne, summed up the ethos of this era in comments on Rankin's career:

³³ Currell, Melville E, *Political Woman*, Croom Helm, London, 1974, pp 167-72.

³⁴ *Western Australian Parliamentary Debates*, 24 November 1937, p 2024.

Annabelle came into politics in pre-women's liberation times. It was a period when women were barely accepted in public life and they were expected to participate in public affairs as women and for women. Therefore, one would look in vain for women, perhaps at that stage participating in general debates on general issues. My recollection is that Annabelle confined herself in a major degree to the discussion of those things which particularly concerned women. That is, questions concerning the aged, matters concerning the family, family welfare, children and things of that character and, of course, questions of international aid where solicitude for the underprivileged, the deprived and the dispossessed is most important.³⁵

Certainly Dame Annabelle made it clear in her maiden speech that she saw herself as having a special responsibility to represent the viewpoint of homemakers, particularly those in the lonely places of Australia and for that reason she felt a 'strong womanly bond' with Senator Tangney. As she said: 'There are things that transcend party politics, and Senator Tangney may be sure that in anything designed to help the women of Australia, or the children who are in their care, she can count upon my ready and sincere interest.'³⁶ The claim to be above party politics when representing the interests of women and children was common among early women MPs, most of whom were non-Labor but at variance with their male colleagues in their desire for greater social expenditure. The acknowledgement of 'special responsibility' led to maiden speeches by women in state parliaments covering topics such as the carriage of prams on public transport, the provision of creches, playgrounds and child endowment.

This self-imposed limitation made women more acceptable as MPs at a time when there was extreme nervousness about the entry of women in parliament and its impact on sex roles, but it did not solve the problem of the low regard given by their male colleagues to so-called women's issues. In 1964 the United Associations of Women reproduced a letter written to the *Sydney Morning Herald* complaining about the trivialisation of issues raised in parliament by women Senators. It read:

Last week I listened to a question time in the Senate, during which two women Senators asked questions. In both cases their subjects concerned women and women's causes. They were good questions, but in both instances the ministers replied with a mixture of coyness and fatherliness that they no doubt also apply to their teenage grand-daughters' demands - that 'keep the little woman happy tone'.³⁷

Already in the 1960s women were beginning to express impatience with the limitations imposed by traditional gender roles in politics. When Kay Brownbill was elected to the House of Representatives in 1966, after a gap of fifteen years since the retirement of Dame Enid Lyons, she reacted with irritation to questions concerning what she would do for women, and responded that she did not want to be labelled 'a woman MP' with duties restricted to women's interests.³⁸ At first women with this new orientation avoided any collective identification with other women, fearing that such identification might threaten their acceptability as 'serious' politicians.

³⁵ Browne, Waveney, *A Woman of Distinction: The Honourable Dame Annabelle Rankin D.B.E.*, Boolarong Publications, Ascot, Queensland, 1981, p 123.

³⁶ *Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates*, 22 October 1947, Vol 193, p 1045.

³⁷ United Associations of Women News Sheet May 1964.

³⁸ *Australian*, 8 May 1967, p 2.

Later, after the arrival of the second wave of the women's movement in Australia at the beginning of the 1970s, women politicians emerged who sought to introduce new feminist perspectives into both the content and style of politics. These women were critical of assigned gender roles both inside and outside the family and successfully challenged the traditional constraints on women's participation in the public sphere. As a result women MPs today are far younger than in the past, and have traditionally combined paid work with the raising of children before entering parliament. Some have even had babies after election to parliament, like Ros Kelly, or even after election to cabinet, like Yvonne Henderson in Western Australia. There is still more pressure on such women to demonstrate that they are not neglecting their families than on their male colleagues who can present as 'good family men' without undertaking time-consuming domestic tasks and responsibilities. The suggestion that women would be better occupied at home looking after their families still has a place in the lexicon of political abuse, as cabinet ministers such as Ros Kelly can testify. Nonetheless the times they are a-changing.

One image, which would have been unthinkable for earlier generations of women MPs, appeared in the *Age* of 17 August 1987. Caroline Hogg, then Minister for Community Services in the Victorian government (today one of the most senior members of the Victorian cabinet), was photographed with her husband Bob Hogg, now National Secretary of the ALP. The photograph depicted Caroline Hogg in her kitchen, as we have seen a traditional venue for reassuring photographs of women politicians. But this photograph was not reassuring. It depicted Caroline dressed in business clothes taking notes from a phone call, with paper and pens in front of her at the kitchen bench. Meanwhile, Bob Hogg was at the sink, doing the dishes. This was an advertisement for a symmetrical marriage in which roles were interchangeable and indeed, as Bob Hogg has told us, he spent the first two or three years of his son's life staying at home, working from there part-time and child rearing.³⁹

Women are now willing to share their domestic housekeeping roles with men and are themselves increasingly achieving leadership roles in Australian politics. Women's role in housekeeping the state is being re-evaluated by male political pundits such as Rod Cameron, who in 1990 declared that the Australian electorate was ready for the feminisation of politics and needed motherly figures to clean up the financial messes caused by male attempts to involve government in risk-taking entrepreneurial activities. It seemed that not just housekeeping but springcleaning was needed. Cameron said that the election of Dr Carmen Lawrence as Premier in Western Australia epitomised this trend:

At a time of crisis, it was not a strong man that was wanted. Strong men had made the mess. The presence in Victoria of Joan Kirner as Premier is another sign. Like Carmen Lawrence, she is a mother, a former education minister and has a brief to heal the scars and divisions created by the perception of financial mismanagement.⁴⁰

It also seems that we have passed through the dominant political attitude of the 1980s - that those identifying with the losers rather than the winners resulting from deregulated markets were 'wimps' - ie. having womanly concerns. The need for maternal caring is now frequently referred to also in relation to environmental issues.

³⁹ Hogg, *op. cit.*, p 172.

⁴⁰ Cameron, Rod, an address to the *11th National Convention of the Public Relations Institute of Australia*, Canberra, 19 October 1990.

A recent snippet in the *Age*⁴¹ about global pollution suggested : 'Women should rule the world. It needs cleaning.' As Jane Elix, formerly national land degradation co-ordinator for the Australian Conservation Foundation (and now director of the Australian Federation of Consumer Organisations) has commented, women are expected to perform the role of 'ecological housewives'.⁴²

Regardless of these stereotypes, women are certainly today taking a greater share in housekeeping the state and not only in the wake of financial disasters, as we can see in the ACT where our Chief Minister, Rosemary Follett, became the first woman to attend a Premiers' Conference in 1989. Women in leadership positions are challenging the male norms which have dominated behaviour in formal political institutions; they have also expanded the content of politics to include issues which were previously unnamed, let alone the subject for public policy, such as sexual harassment and domestic violence. Needless to say the topic of unpaid work is also treated quite differently today than when its existence, allocation and consequences for the financial security of women were concealed beneath the platitudes about the family or about motherhood uttered by male politicians. As we have seen recently, many men still feel that they have no need of such information, which is indeed subversive of social arrangements which have been very comfortable for some.

Whether women will in the end be successful in changing the extremely combative and adversarial traditions of Australian politics and whether more humanistic versions of collective purpose can displace managerialist, market and dominance themes in the public arena will depend in part on the degree of community support and community pressure for change. We must all keep up that pressure.

Dr LAING - Thank you very much, Dr Marian Sawer, for so ably laying the foundation for our series on women in parliament. Dr Sawer has kindly indicated that she will take brief questions if there are any from the audience. Are there any questions?

QUESTIONER - I am very pleased that we have an opportunity to ask questions because I think that two-way communication is important. I would merely like to ask that more of us pay attention to effective emancipation and I thank you very much for using the word in a way that made me think of that. We are using votes and playing the numbers game. Democracy is a process and a way of life; it is not a numbers game to be ruled over by manipulators making us millions.

Dr SAWER - I think that it probably is notable that there are no female numbers men in politics today.

QUESTIONER - Can I ask you to give your opinion on the effects that factions, particularly factions in the Labor Party, have had on both the preselection and election of women candidates at Federal level?

Dr SAWER - That is the kind of question I had hoped to avoid answering. I think that the operation of factions is seen by many women as being akin to machine politics — that is, the achievement of power and achievement of positions through manipulation of rewards, a kind of politics with which women have never felt particularly comfortable.

⁴¹ *Age*, 11 January 1992.

⁴² Elix, Jane, 'Green Girls and Ecological Housewives', *Refractory Girl*, Issue 35, May 1990, pp 11-14.

Obviously, there are women who are working through factions and are achieving their goals through factional membership but I think that, on the whole, it is a form of politics with which women are not particularly comfortable and it certainly does not seem to be operating in favour of the preselection of women for single member constituencies.

QUESTIONER - That was the question I was going to ask but can I take that one step further? If we are not getting very far working through factions, can you foresee any system for achieving the overall aims, as women, without us being forced back into the specific roles of women and not having it appreciated that women are interested in all areas of life — not everything affects us all? My difficulty is that if we organise just as women we will alienate ourselves from the mainstream again. I was wondering whether you had any thoughts on that?

Dr SAWER - I think that women have been taking an extremely active political role in Australia in the 1980s to 1990s but this is not seen so much in formal political parties. It is certainly seen in community politics where women are creating political processes which are somewhat different from those of traditional political parties which are perhaps often more consensus seeking, less hierarchical and less factionalised.

Women are exploring alternative forms of political action. Their success in the formal political parties tends to be linked to the perceptions of numbers men that women may be a political asset in marginal seats and that they may bring over 2 or 3 per cent of non-traditional voters for that party. So we still have the situation we had in 1906, with safe seats not being wasted on women. Maybe somebody in this audience has something creative to say about how this can realistically change in the near future, because I find myself not terribly optimistic on this question.

QUESTIONER - I am concerned about the vocabulary used so often relative to the whole question of criteria being set. If we look at the criteria for people having safe preselection, how much of that vocabulary makes it easy for men to be seen as powerful in that area? How many of the women's strengths carry over to management type things? Where a woman has managed a home or managed community affairs, it is relegated as being not valuable, but it equates basically to the same sort of thing that men have done.

Even our own unconscious choice of words, such as 'women's issues'— if we think that to the logical conclusion, women's issues are also men's issues. They are family issues; they are the country's issues; they are future issues. I think that we possibly need some area where the choice of vocabulary is looked at as not giving further power to men to win those safe seats preselection. Do you know whether anything is being done in that area?

Dr SAWER - Of changing the vocabulary?

QUESTIONER - At least looking at the vocabulary to see whether there are hidden undertones which detract from women winning in those areas.

Dr SAWER - I think that language is an area in which a lot of work has been done. In fact, some people say that too much work has been done in this area and that women are chasing after non-sexist language rather than grappling with the real issues of the day.

Of course, it is true that language reinforces power relations. It is true that women's experiences, perspective and capacities perhaps are undervalued by party preselectors so there is a kind of barrier in the perception of the electorate. The electorate would perhaps rather have women because women are not yet smeared with that dreadfully bad reputation that male politicians have in Australia. Women are not seen as so cynical or power seeking and so on. The electorate is ready for them but the party preselectors still are not.

QUESTIONER - This is not a question; it is just a comment that I think there is cause for hope in this regard. In the recent by-election for the seat of Floriat in Western Australia, Dr Liz Constable failed to gain pre-selection for the Liberal Party, due to some numbers deals, and stood as an independent and won the seat, which was a very, very safe Liberal seat. She won it as an independent so perhaps that is a message from the electorate to the parties that they can really see through what is happening.

Dr SAWER - Thank you.

'Fishes on Bicycles'

The Hon. Susan Ryan AO

A WOMAN WITHOUT A MAN IS LIKE A FISH WITHOUT A BICYCLE. Did the slogan that adorned many of the doors and walls of women's liberationists in the 1970s imply anything about women and politics? Women in Parliament are not women without men, they are women surrounded by them. But in making their way through the congestion of legislation, policy, scrutiny, representation, electioneering and leadership, are women as unnatural and unlikely as fishes on bicycles? Do a few fishes on bicycles change our perception of fish?

According to which social commentator you favour, social change is either excruciatingly slow or frighteningly rapid. It depends on your viewpoint and the issues. In the history of the human race, or even the history of the Australian Parliament, seventeen years is not a long time. It will be seventeen years this December since I was elected to the Senate. The changes to the parliamentary program, to policies and legislation, to the media's expectation of what happens in Parliament and to the community's expectations about who their political leaders will be and what they should look like, have changed in that time.

When I went into Parliament women parliamentarians were not quite as rare a sight as a fish on a bicycle : they actually did exist.

After being elected in 1975, I joined four women who had already been in the Senate for a short period, Liberal Senators Guilfoyle and Martin, and Labor Senators Coleman and Melzer. Senator Walters from Tasmania was also elected in 1975. So there were six: a small but noticeable number. Across Kings Hall in the House of Representatives there were no women. Four women had been elected to sit in the House of Representatives since Enid Lyons broke that barrier in 1943, but in 1975 there was none. There was no woman leader or minister in any state parliament. The memory of Enid Lyons had faded. Margaret Guilfoyle became the first, and sole, female cabinet minister in the Fraser Government.

I was the first Labor Senator for the Australian Capital Territory, along with John Knight who was the first Liberal Senator for the Australian Capital Territory. My election was greeted with many media comments and profiles emphasising my gender, age, hair colour, marital status, physical size and motherhood. About my political agenda they were less informative. Being female evoked comment, but even more remarkable than my female presence in the Senate, I was a feminist. Most people, including Senators and members of my own caucus room, did not quite know what that meant. I did. I had formed my political aspirations and drawn my political energy from feminism, that movement for gender equality beginning at the end of the 1960s, called, in retrospect, Second Wave Feminism and at the time, Women's Liberation. It was my first political involvement and I did not linger very long. I was interested in the questions being explored within Women's Liberation: the nature of the female; the operation of oppression; defining the patriarchy; the possibility of a 'women's culture'. But there were more urgent and important questions for me. Along with other activists I moved straight from the basic assumption of feminism, that women were unfairly treated by society (all societies), to the conclusion that the

remedy for this unfairness was in the hands of women themselves. This was a political solution - one that required the exercise of political power.

As I conducted my analysis of the obstacles to equality and fairness for women, I was drawn again and again to the political system. External obstacles to equality for women abounded. Many of them were rooted in legislation and public policy created in the parliaments of Australia: practices such as denying permanency of employment to married women; limiting women's education; restricting them to a narrow range of training and employment; wages policies that refused to accept the reality of female economic independence and failed to note that many women supported dependents; refusal to acknowledge the consequences for women of women's fertility.

Considering these policy failures, and examining the way in which Parliament made laws and budgets, I came to believe that not only was a woman's place in the House and in the Senate, as my first campaign slogan proclaimed, but a feminist's place was in politics.

In our kind of democracy, particular groups seek to impact on political decision makers through the formation of lobbies. This method had traditionally been pursued with success in Australia by farmers and miners. More recently, the ethnic and green lobbies have achieved many victories. It occurred to some of us very early on that a women's lobby should be established to influence the content of laws and the performance of politicians. We formed the Women's Electoral Lobby in the year leading up to the election of the Whitlam Government in December 1972. WEL utilised shock tactics, the media, persuasion, and a bit of psychological terrorism, to get issues like child care, equal pay, reproductive control, and access to education and training, on to the agenda of the newly elected Whitlam Government.

From my feminist perspective, this lobbying was necessary but not sufficient. It left women on the outside of political power, waiting, persuading, threatening, but not acting directly to achieve change.

That short and intense period where the Women's Electoral Lobby became an effective part of the 1972 election campaign determined my parliamentary career. How much more efficient, I thought, how much more effective, if we were in there making the decisions, instead of knocking on the doors trying to attract support. Debate on the ill fated Lamb-McKenzie Abortion Reform Bill in 1973 exemplified the problem: the debate was conducted in an all male chamber; the women were outside rallying, organising, shouting through loud hailers, preparing for disappointment. I decided that next time we should be in there making the laws.

I set about organising a preselection base throughout the Labor Party branches in the ACT. I worked with other Labor Party feminists and progressive male members to try to ensure that the branches reflected this new and dynamic commitment to gender equality. This strategy, to the amazement and annoyance of seasoned political commentators, succeeded: I was endorsed and won a Senate seat in 1975.

I was often asked at the time, and subsequently, what I expected, what misgivings I had. It is hard to say whether my expectations were too modest or totally extravagant. I did expect that I would be able to make changes. It was both better and worse than I anticipated. I found many supporters, but so much that seemed to me to be logical, sensible, fair, and of general benefit to the community, seemed to others to be radical, eccentric and impractical.

My central objective in Parliament was economic independence for all, including women. Economic independence means the capacity to provide for your own needs and for the needs of those for whom you are directly responsible. Although the Whitlam Government had persuaded the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission to accept the principle of equal pay, it would be decades before that principle became reality for all workers. How were women to achieve economic independence? The answer involved a logical series of policy initiatives. Women needed to be able to compete on merit for permanent and rewarding jobs. I never believed that such jobs should simply be handed out according to some numerical concept of fairness, nor that others, in this case men, should be deprived of their economic independence in order to make way for women.

So, the next logical step involved education and training. If women were to compete on merit for good jobs, then they had to have access to the fullest and widest range of education. That meant reforming schools, changing the universities, and giving women access to apprenticeship and technical training. Further, I never expected that as a result of the reforms I was advocating, women as a group would lose interest in bearing children. While I respected individual choice in these matters I thought it likely that the majority of women would, like myself, have children and seek employment. The logical consequence of that prediction was better provision by society for support and assistance in the rearing of children, particularly very young children, hence the policy of child care.

In developing a logical policy framework, it had to be acknowledged that contraception and family planning techniques were, to sum up in one word, unreliable. That is they did not work for all of the people all of the time. While the unplanned pregnancy often became the wanted and much loved child, there were cases in which it could be a personal catastrophe. The choice of termination should be available to women.

This was the policy framework that provided the direction for my parliamentary career and explains to a large extent its successes and failures.

I still find it hard to believe that the objectives that I had at that time -equal opportunity in employment; access to education and training; child care services; fertility control - were radical enough to upset and destabilise the parliamentary system and the community it represented. But enormous resistance was organised to these objectives. There was resistance within the Labor Party and inside the federal caucus. My advocacy for child care, reproductive control, or equal pay, was often met by my own colleagues expressing fear at the electoral danger I was creating with such views. Some notable Labor figures complained that I was taking up the cause of a tiny majority of over-educated women, a cause that would be unsettling and unwelcome to the vast majority of Australian women who (I could only infer from the comments of my colleagues) were totally satisfied with their lot.

That resistance was overcome. The Labor Party, despite being in many respects a reflection of the conservative society it inhabits, does have a central core of commitment to equality, and therefore to change that will create better opportunities. Slowly the Labor Party started to build policies to address the inequalities suffered by women.

I must also acknowledge the support of somewhat unlikely figures: Bob Hawke, as Prime Minister, fully comprehended the issue of structural discrimination in the workforce and put his weight behind the package of equal opportunity measures. The present Prime Minister, Paul Keating, when Treasurer, never dismissed my budgetary

proposals aimed at assisting disadvantaged women, particularly single mothers and older women. I had powerful opponents in cabinet as well as outside and the extensive program of reform for women I was able to secure would not have succeeded without the support of the most powerful figures of the government.

Outside, things were harder. Administrators in TAFE and universities, employer organisations and even unions, produced reason after reason why women could not, without disaster, be admitted to apprenticeships, managerial jobs, professorships or crane driving. Misrepresentation of the objectives and procedures of the Affirmative Action Act flourished in universities and I suspect continue to this day.

I also met resistance in Parliament on the other side, as one would expect. We have a highly adversarial parliamentary system: governments are there to govern and the opposition is there to oppose. Many of my earlier contributions to parliamentary debates were greeted with groans of scorn and derision by Senators on the opposite side. But to be fair, the groaning was not universal and, as time passed, I realised that there were Liberal Senators particularly, but not exclusively Margaret Guilfoyle and Kathy Martin, who were prepared to acknowledge female disadvantage and use the powers and processes of the Parliament to make some improvements.

I did however have some fairly torrid times in my early years in Parliament, none more so than during the debate on the motion that I brought into the Senate to disallow the termination of pregnancy ordinance introduced into the Australian Capital Territory by the Fraser Government. During that debate I realised that even when some agree with you in conscience, they will not always stand shoulder to shoulder with you after the division bells are called. The opposition to my 1978 abortion initiative reverberated several years later during the debate on the Sex Discrimination Bill. Again it is fair to acknowledge that the obstructionist tactics on the other side of the chamber, the red herrings, the misrepresentation, the filibustering, were tempered by the quiet support of Margaret Guilfoyle and the active participation of Senator Peter Baume. Two years later, Ian McPhee crossed the floor to vote for the Affirmative Action Bill in the House Representatives, a principled act which hastened his political demise.

In my early attempts at women's policy there were times when I felt like a fish on a bicycle. But the work of a parliamentarian, even one with special commitments, can never relate to one set of issues only. I had two broad objectives when I entered Parliament. One was to bring into consideration matters of vital importance to women which had been neglected; the other was to establish, through my work and by supporting the work of other women in the Parliament, recognition that women were capable parliamentary performers. I wanted to demonstrate that the neglect of female candidates by the major political parties had been an error, and had deprived the nation of a great deal of capacity.

A summary of my early speeches, questions, Senate committee work, reveals an extraordinary array of topics from ASIO to environmentalism to aboriginal issues to telecommunications, media monopoly, taxation reform and urban planning. This diversity characterises the work of many energetic backbenchers. In my case, it reflected a concern to ensure that no one could justly accuse me of being a single issue politician.

I spent seven years in opposition and five and a half years as a cabinet minister. We have heard of the double burden of the working mother. I suggest the double burden concept also applies to the woman member of parliament, the female minister, because she has two jobs. The jobs have synergy and reinforce each other, but there

are two jobs nonetheless. You need to respond to, take up, defend and advocate the special interests of women; and you need to demonstrate that in fulfilling this role you are not taking away from your capacity to contribute to other vital areas of policy; you are not engaging in special pleading, and you are not asking someone else to shoulder your burden. This is a complicated message and media and other commentators often get it wrong.

I have been concerned in the four years since I resigned from Parliament, to detect a theme emerging in what is written and said by some journalists, women parliamentarians and feminist academics, about the burdens. The comments are often too negative, and do not reflect the reality as I saw and experienced it. This negativism has a discouraging effect on women who are contemplating a parliamentary career. When one runs into difficulties, loses crucial support of a faction, or fails to persuade the expenditure review committee of a budgetary submission, it is too easy to say 'the boys stopped me; I experienced this failure because I am a woman'. I am not decrying the personal experience of women who say that is how they felt; I am not saying that I have never been the victim of sexism or the double standard. But I am loath to support the thesis that life in Parliament is really too hard for women. It must be remembered that men have their policy failures, experience factional treacheries, and lose cabinet debates. When I and my colleagues who had worked hard to rebuild Labor's electoral fortunes after the terrible defeats of 1975 and 1977 came into office in 1983, each and every one of us in cabinet was sometimes overwhelmed by the enormity of the task. I was not the only minister who felt torn between the ideals in our platform and the reality of government, who felt miserable at failing to persuade my colleagues to a particular policy. These were experiences we shared. Look at prime ministers and opposition leaders. At the pinnacle of parliamentary power, there is no ivory tower, no shelter from the storm, and ultimately no buffer against ambition, disaffection, treachery or failure. Everyone in Parliament has to endure such experiences, women included. It is important to acknowledge the difficulties that are universal in order to deal with those that do arise from discriminatory attitudes to women.

It is worth noting also that some initiatives that are initially greeted with hostility are subsequently integrated into the mainstream of public policy. A good example of this is the practice of analysing budgets in terms of their specific impact on women. This is an initiative for which I think I can take credit. In 1981 as an opposition front bencher I made a detailed analysis of the effect of the budget on women in various circumstances throughout the community, and published that document. I continued this practice until, as Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women in 1984, I authorised the preparation within the Office of Status of Women of a detailed Women's Budget document. On the night of the budget speech when I announced this initiative, several opposition Senators exploded in derisory mirth. Some political correspondents similarly dismissed this step as trivial. I note now that the Women's Budget paper is a standard in several state governments as well as the federal Parliament in Australia. When the current Leader of the Opposition, Dr Hewson, made a public statement on International Women's Day this year, he attached to that statement a detailed comparative analysis of the effects on women of the Fightback package and the Prime Minister's One Nation statement. From this I assume that in the event of a change of government, the practice of issuing a Women's Budget statement will continue.

As more women achieve positions of power in parliamentary democracies throughout the world, discussion has developed as to whether cabinet posts can be divided into 'soft' (social policy) and 'hard' (economic policy and defence), and whether women escape stereotyping by avoiding the social policy portfolios and seeking the 'hard' jobs.

I am a sceptic about such analysis. From my experience, large portfolios with complex administrative and financial arrangements, huge budgets and high visibility in the electorate are tough to manage. This is true, whether it is social security or defence. In fact, because defence is not an issue that touches on the daily lives of the electorate, social policy can be a tougher area to manage than defence, finance or resources. Also it is worth noting that the woman who has achieved the longest and most influential period as a world leader, Margaret Thatcher, the former Prime Minister of the UK, cut her teeth on the education portfolio.

I have not made a statistical analysis of the numbers of questions asked of ministers in the period that I was in cabinet, nor of the number of censure motions, urgency motions, matters of public importance nor the relative number of press conferences and other public and media appearances made by ministers over that period. My informed guess would be that education received at least as much attention as treasury or finance, and certainly more than defence, foreign affairs or trade. It may also be worth noting that since the reorganisation of Commonwealth administrative arrangements in 1987, the portfolio that I once held, which covered the Commonwealth's involvement in schools, the ACT education system, TAFE, higher education, research and for a period incorporated youth affairs, is now administered by a cabinet minister and two junior ministers. Ministerial responsibility for the ACT education system has since become the responsibility of the ACT governing body.

During my period as Education Minister I pursued initiatives such as peace education, arts education, special measures for girls and women in maths, science, engineering, physical education, and TAFE. These interests could be stereotyped as appropriate for a woman politician. I should point out however that I spent a large amount of my time setting up the initial formal links between education and industry; in restructuring and rationalising higher education; in expanding the Commonwealth's role in technical education and training; and in planning a series of high level, rigorous reviews of various disciplines in Australian universities.

I instance these activities because they are perceived as 'hard' rather than 'soft', and not stereotyped as women's interests. I can assure you, I was very interested.

A major concern during my first years as Education Minister was the vexed, century old, question of state aid to private schools. In political life a problem solved is a problem forgotten. An examination of my parliamentary and extra parliamentary activities during the first period of the Hawke administration, would show how vigorously the state aid debate was pursued at that time. My parliamentary career contained many periods when I was in the eye of a storm, be it abortion, university fees or the Australia Card. Only the Australia Card debate prompted rallies of more thousands and controversy of greater heat than our decision to reorganise schools funding to ensure more assistance to schools with fewer resources. The Australia Card debate was like a bushfire: it came from nowhere, raged hot, and burnt out when the particular legislative program was withdrawn, but the organised campaigns around state aid continued over a long period and necessitated sustained and detailed negotiations by me with virtually all sectors of the education community in every state and territory of Australia. The matter was settled with the agreement of all parties. A new formula for the funding of schools was embodied in legislation in 1984. Each year since then the government has allocated the funds to maintain that formula and the matter arouses no comment.

I believe that the personal hostility I endured during the difficult and turbulent period prior to the new formula was exacerbated by my gender, but this was not significant.

What was significant was that this episode demonstrated that a woman parliamentarian could resolve even the most contentious of problems.

Looking back on my time in Parliament, I can identify issues and actions that typify the parliamentarian anxious to achieve social change. All who have embarked on such a course, the many men and the few women, have had turbulent times. My involvement with reforms for women made my parliamentary work even more turbulent and controversial. The presence of a newcomer in the citadels of power is always a challenge, whether the novelty is to do with a person's gender or as in the case of Senator Neville Bonner, the person's race. There is no avoiding that extra dimension of controversy. Only when a critical mass of women parliamentarians is achieved, will gender cease to be an issue.

I would like to conclude this lecture with two main points. First, I will answer the questions I am most often asked - what were your greatest achievements and what was your greatest failure?

The achievements which give me greatest satisfaction come from the two areas with which I was most closely associated in government.

In terms of policy, I was pleased to be able to maintain an extensive commitment to public education from the beginning of school through to the funding of universities for undergraduate and post graduate studies and research. Even more rewarding is the fact that the objective I advanced at the Economic Summit in 1983 of lifting the school retention rate from one third to two thirds before 1990 has been easily achieved, thus improving opportunities for an entire generation.

In terms of the legislative role of the Parliament, I am enduringly grateful that I had the opportunity to initiate and implement laws against discrimination against women in the workplace and other areas. I monitor, with continuing pride, the success of the Affirmative Action legislation with its careful, evolutionary strategy to desegregate the Australian workforce and increase both the range of job opportunities available to women, and the pool of talent available to industry and higher education.

The failure that continues to distress me is the failure of aboriginal policy. In the three years I spent as shadow minister for aboriginal affairs I worked closely with aboriginal people in cities, towns and tiny communities in remote areas. I pursued their concerns in parliament on a daily basis. The two ministers I shadowed, Fred Chaney and Peter Baume, were capable and committed. Our collective efforts at that time have not been productive. Good intentions abound, resources are increasing, new administrative and representative structures have been put in place, but the injustices experienced by Aboriginal Australians continue. I failed to make significant change

My second concluding point involves the diminishing credibility of parliaments throughout Australia. Failures of economic policy and administration have resulted in a deepening cynicism about the parliamentary system and those who work in it. This is a problem for all of us but perhaps women parliamentarians, especially those with feminist values, can make a special contribution. It seems to have been the case that women parliamentarians, both federally and at the state level, have been able to establish more credibility with the electorate than their male colleagues. In the case of our two women premiers, reflecting their feminist values they have deliberately sought to be more consultative, more flexible, more cooperative and more reasonable in their demeanour inside and outside of Parliament. At the same time, they have demonstrated decision making capacities at the highest level. Perhaps this is a signal

pointing the way to reform of parliamentary conventions and procedures. If women parliamentarians can make a contribution to regenerating the authority of Parliament, then for that reason as for many others, I hope in the next decade we see many more fishes on bicycles.

Dr LAING - On behalf of the Department of the Senate, I would like to thank you very much, Susan, for that terrific insight into your time as a parliamentarian; they were certainly times of change. I know that people in the audience will have some questions to ask of you and I understand you are happy to field those questions.

QUESTIONER - My question has nothing to do with our parliamentarians in the state governments, but is a general question about sexual harassment of female parliamentarians within the debate. Is there a difference because of gender? You talked about the derision that comes from the other side. Is there a gender aspect to that? If there is, what is one of the ways to assist potential parliamentarians as well as ones who are already there?

Ms RYAN - I think some of the rubbishing that we experienced during debates on bills like the Sex Discrimination Bill had a sexist overtone, but I do not think that is a set of problems which should deter women from entering a parliamentary career. My view about sexual harassment is that it is a problem which is worse where women have the least power: the more power you have, the more you are able to deal with it. The best way of dealing with any sexual harassment that might arise for a woman parliamentarian is by using the forums of the Parliament to expose it.

QUESTIONER - As a non-Australian, I have been interested in the Westminster system. It seems that it proposes a lot of obstacles to women getting ahead in the sense that you cannot put bright, dynamic women into ministerial positions unless they have already been members of the Parliament. In the same way, it is very hard for a woman to ever be considered for Prime Minister because she does not have that power base. Is it realistic to think that the Westminster system will ever be reformed in some manner that would help women move up in a better way?

Ms RYAN - I do not think that we will move as far away from the Westminster system as, say, the American system which brings in outsiders as ministers. I do not think I would support that reform. For all the frustration of working your way through the parliamentary system as we know it in Australia, I think it is good training and a good school and by the time you do get to be a minister (and that has happened all too rarely up till now) you have a very good grasp of what you are dealing with in the electorate, in the parliamentary system and in the bureaucracy.

My address today was focused on women parliamentarians and my own experience. I did not have time to embark on other very important ways of achieving social change, such as the appointment of key women to key bureaucratic positions. It seems to me that through that mechanism (and it was certainly one that I was very pleased to be able to utilise very effectively and I know there are some beneficiaries of that system here) and by being prepared to appoint women to key positions within the bureaucracy, statutory bodies and so forth you can bring in a whole lot of competence and energy for the business of creating better government. You do not have to be in the Parliament to be a part of making better government; you can be in the bureaucracy and in the statutory bodies.

I was very pleased to implement a policy in our cabinet of always examining the possibilities of appointing a woman for such positions. We did make some good appointments and they do continue. I would like to see more of them, by the way; I

think the numbers might have slipped back a bit. But in answer to your question, I think the Westminster system is a good system for Australia, with modifications. I do think that we should seek out and find other means of bringing competent women into the business of government, as I have said.

QUESTIONER - I was very interested in coming to this lecture today to get your thoughts on whether you think there are signs of a new phase of change and how we should proceed down that path if, indeed, there is one.

Ms RYAN - I would like to say 'yes' and I think that I can almost say 'yes'. A year ago I would have said no. I felt then that a lot of the gains that we, including many people in this forum today, had made had started to be taken for granted and that, in a way, the opportunities presented to women by those changes, particularly the legislative changes, were not being pursued as energetically as we had hoped. But I think that there has been a shift, even by the Senate and may I congratulate the Senate staff, and Ann Millar in particular, for organising the exhibition on women in parliament and setting up this public lecture series. Even an action like that actually starts to stimulate a lot of discussion and debate around not only the question of women in Parliament but also the question of women in the community, women in government, women in industry and so forth.

Also, we seem to like decades and landmarks of ten years, twenty years and so forth. In December this year it will be the twentieth year since the election of the Whitlam Government. That was the first government elected, if you like, under the influence of feminists or with some sort of response to the agenda that we had put through WEL. I think that when people look back at the past twenty years and see what was achieved and what has happened we will get a welling up of debate and argument and a consciousness that women are, in many circumstances, still far from equality but that the vehicles to advance the cause are there. I would like to see more women driving those vehicles over the next decade and I think that there are some hopeful signs.

QUESTIONER - There are times when I try to keep quiet but this is a bright and dynamic challenge to me. It is very hard to maintain a position in any of the structures, seats of power, et cetera, large or small, if you are bright and dynamic. I think that the important thing today is that we throw away this power game by working constructively, by helping more and more people to be bright and dynamic. I find that even a bureaucrat becomes human when, across the counter, you allow your humanity to sparkle.

Ms RYAN - I have no argument with that.

QUESTIONER - There seems to be two main obstacles to women getting further ahead. One is the male backlash, which we have seen a lot of examples of recently, and the other is the perceived breakdown of feminism and the move towards post-feminism. Could you give your comment on whether you feel the male backlash is a permanent and rising force or a passing fad and also your definition of post-feminism and whether you think that might last.

Ms RYAN - The male backlash had started before we had even got anywhere for them to lash against. We heard about the male backlash in 1972 when we had got almost nowhere. The male backlash will be permanent and successful if women let it be. I can only repeat the kind of thing that some people here have been hearing me say for many years and which my role model, Edna Ryan (who, unfortunately, is not with us today because she is not feeling very well) instructed me and many of my generation

in, which is that women have to take control of the agenda and make these reforms happen.

If we sit back and say 'Oh, the backlash is terrible,' and allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by all of the awful things which still do happen - sexual harassment included - then the male backlash will succeed. If we say, 'We are not accepting this; we live in a democracy and we can influence what governments do; we can influence what corporations do; we can influence what happens in the workplace; we can even influence the media', although that is probably the hardest but it is not impossible, then the backlash will be - what was your phrase - a temporary phenomenon. So it is really up to us - and I hope, of course, that we make sure that it is a very short-lived phenomenon and thus very temporary.

In relation to post-feminism, I struggle with post-modernism in architecture, literature and literary criticism and I think that post-feminism is uncalled for. I use the term myself with irony, which is not always appreciated in Australia. Wearing short skirts is post-feminist, if you are allowed to do it. But I think that we have not got to the stage where we should be allowing the movement of feminism to be replaced by another movement - that is not to say that the movement does not have to change; it certainly does.

The movement certainly has to attract that support of women - very young women, and I am pleased to see that there are some here today who will take it forward in their own way and whose agenda will not be the same as the seventies agenda. So, change certainly - new blood, new ideas, new directions, certainly - but not a stop and not a fragmentation of the programs which would be the analogous thing to post-feminist literary criticism or post-feminist architecture. So let us have contemporary feminism or feminism for the year two thousand.

QUESTIONER - I would like to ask you specifically about the abortion issue - like the state aid issue, it does not ever seem to go away and the worrying upsurge in debate about it at the moment which has significant, implications whether we are old-time or contemporary feminists. Do you have any advice for other members of the contemporary women's movement about effective political ways of combating moves to do away with the current abortion legislation?

Ms RYAN - I do not think that we need any new strategies. I think that we need to revive the ones that were effective in the seventies, but we need to revive them very fast and very systematically. I think that the state aid debate is settled - I hope it is - but I do not think that the abortion issue is settled and I suppose that you could say that that is the clearest sign of the male backlash.

It is not unique to Australia. Obviously, we have seen what has happened in the United States. It has a much worse legislative and policy position and a much worse real situation for women because of their lack of proper health insurance and facilities. We have also seen the abortion issue come to a head in the most unlikely of places, Ireland, and perhaps some progress, even in Ireland, will be achieved on this issue.

I think that it is not just an issue for feminists or for those of us who were trying to get a more humane approach in the seventies; it is an issue for all women and I think that it is an issue for all men. It is time to get another broad-based coalition together to make sure that legislators in every Parliament of Australia - and it is essentially a matter that will be changed in a legislative way in the state Parliaments, not in the Commonwealth Parliament - are very well aware that over 80 per cent of Australians

- the last time I ever saw a poll on this issue was a few years ago - support choice and all of the policy infrastructure that goes there. They have to be reminded.

People get nervous when these controversial issues come onto the agenda again and parliamentarians - who are in some ways a nervous breed - get nervous. Those special interest groups which have a reactionary program in mind are very well organised. They will use all of the latest pseudo-medical data to support their case and so forth, and the general populace can be left out of the debate. That must not happen. It is a debate that needs to involve everybody. Everybody should make sure that legislators know what the majority of Australians want on this very important fundamental issue.

QUESTIONER - I would like to congratulate you on what you have achieved in your time here. I have been extremely impressed to hear what you have been doing. Especially in light of the backlash that we have been talking about, it would seem that the feminist agenda has taken a back seat in both government and opposition policy, particularly when you look at the One Nation and Fightback packages. Do you think this is so and, if so, why?

Ms RYAN - I cannot pretend that issues to do with the Australian women - be they feminist or not - are as high on the agenda of either major political party as I would like to see them. Without saying they have taken 'a back seat', I think there is reason to examine both political agendas and to make sure that women's issues get a higher priority. I suppose the reason why that has happened comes from the recession. In one sense, it is understandable that the dreadful consequences of the recession - namely, unemployment and what that is doing to individual people and families - become the dominant preoccupation.

However, we all know that disadvantaged groups fare even worse in times of economic hardship. Therefore, it is not really the time to say, 'Look, we are so worried about unemployment, we cannot look at matters affecting women'. I think both things have to happen. Again, the reason is that women generally have not been as focused in their political activity as they were and it is time to focus again.

There is a signal that such activity would be fruitful. I hope people have taken note of that signal. As I said in my address, I was pleased to notice that, firstly, Dr Hewson made a statement on International Women's Day - I suspect that is the first time a conservative leader has done that - and, secondly, he chose to do the impact analysis of the two statements on women. That suggests to me that the Liberal Party is polling the electorate and is finding out that women are very dissatisfied with the state of the nation - as well they might be - and that they are open to policies that offer some remedy. Obviously the government will note that also and will take action. But we seem to have a situation where, for the first time in some years, we might get the Government and the Opposition vying for the women's vote again. That is a very fertile opportunity; please take advantage of it.

QUESTIONER - You said that the Sex Discrimination Act was one of the big successes and I think so too. But one of the exemptions given by that Act is to religious educational bodies. You also talked about the issue of State funding to private schools. I wondered whether you had ever been tempted to tie in those two issues. Did you ever think that you could remove those exemptions for religious educational institutions, given that the states fund them?

Ms RYAN - We certainly did look at it. When I was drawing up the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Bill I was very ambitious. In looking at the scope of the legislation,

we had the benefit of my private member's bill from a couple of years before. At the time when the bill was passed in the Senate it would not have been possible to pass it without those exemptions. My judgment was that it was important to get the major provisions of the bill - major in the sense of affecting the majority of people - in place and that there would be opportunities to look at exemptions later on. Indeed, there has been a very good and constructive review which has led to the dropping of the exemptions for superannuation provisions. So that has been very important.

In terms of religious bodies, that is a very vexed issue in a nation where the Constitution specifically prohibits, under section 116, the funding of religious bodies. I really think it is probably the topic for a whole lecture and discussion in itself. I do not see that anything is lost by looking again at the implications of those exemptions, but I would suspect that unless a case can be made that the dropping of those exemptions would have broad benefit they probably would not succeed.

QUESTIONER - I am Christabel Chamarette, Senator for the Greens, Western Australia. I have been interested in hearing what you had to say. More than the backlash, I am concerned that part of the failure of increasing the gains in terms of women's interests has been the cooption of women into patriarchal processes and a failure to address gender inequalities within our society. Would you like to comment on anything, particularly in the parliamentary area, that can be done to challenge that?

Ms RYAN - A lot has been done. The debate about cooption as against staying outside is a debate which I am sure will continue to be pursued within feminist circles. As I indicated in my address, I resolved that very early on and decided to seek to exercise political power to achieve certain ends. A lot of feminists did not support that course of action; a lot were active supporters of it. Within the parliamentary system, which is such an old system with entrenched practices, change of any kind - even quite minor changes such as what time you break for dinner - seems almost impossible to achieve. It is not a system that lends itself easily to change.

I would like to see a lot of changes in the parliamentary process. As I suggested in my concluding remarks, I think the kinds of reforms that Premiers Kirner and Lawrence announced when they became premiers - that is, to try to achieve within Parliament more reasonable debate, more serious addressing of the issues, less buffoonery and less school playground stuff - were important. They are not the most important things that they are doing, but they are important. Polling indicates that the community supports both of them. In fact, their own personal standing in the community has benefited because they have adopted a more reasonable and dignified way of conducting parliamentary business.

So I would like to see an all-party review committee of parliamentary procedures in this place, with a brief aimed at removing some of the behaviour which is not only obnoxious to many of the women in the place but also is certainly obnoxious to many people in the electorate, and which is behaviour that seems to stem from the previous male dominance. Perhaps you might like to take that up as part of your parliamentary work and I wish you success. Thank you.

Suffrage to Sufferance: 100 Years of Women in Parliament

Janine Haines

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—

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.

The Senate: Proportionately Representative but Disproportionately Male

The Hon. Dame Margaret Guilfoyle, DBE

Mr Evans and ladies and gentlemen, I am very honoured to be part of the series of lectures that has been arranged by the Senate to note the women who have been in the Federal Parliament and, perhaps, to note the struggle that it was for some of those women to achieve parliamentary service.

It was very interesting to see the exhibition in the Parliament today; it made me reflect upon the many fine women who have been, and who are, members of the Parliament. Some of the pictures and the mementos brought back personal memories and others made me realise, in a more general way, the work done over perhaps two centuries to see equality of opportunities for women, particularly with regard to parliamentary service.

I have read the speeches of Susan Ryan and Marian Sawer, who have preceded me in this series of lectures. I have not had a chance to read Janine Haines's speech, but I hope that I am able to cover some different ground from that already covered, in case some of you have been tigers for punishment and have come to all four lectures.

It has been said, and we all know because we can see the Act on the wall in the exhibition, that the federal franchise was granted to women in 1902. It ought to be noted that, although we were somewhat early in having the franchise, it was much later that a woman actually entered Federal Parliament. That was not until 1941, when Dame Enid Lyons was the first woman to enter the Federal Parliament.

That was a long time ago. It would have to be said that from 1941 until 1971, when I entered the Federal Parliament, there had been but few women parliamentary representatives. At the time that I entered the cabinet, there was one other female Senator, Dame Nancy Buttfield; I was the second. I was the seventh woman elected as a Senator in Australia. At the time that I left in 1987, seventeen women were Senators and I think eight women were members of the House of Representatives.

In that period of seventeen years we saw progress in the numbers, but maybe those numbers will fluctuate from time to time. It is perhaps time to ask the question: are women in a transitional stage moving towards equality, not only with parliamentary service or parliamentary opportunities but also in all their spheres of activity?

The year 1975 is very much a notable year on our Australian political calendar but it is seldom remembered that it was also International Women's Year. It was in that year that there was focus, through the United Nations, on the aspirations of and difficulties for women. Throughout that year many countries around the world focused on women and on the themes of equality, development and peace.

Some years after that, in the late 1970s when I was in Canada, I was given some of the literature that had been produced during International Women's Year. I was fascinated to read about some of the early suffragist movements in that country and to look at some of the comments written some forty or fifty years before we started reading *The Feminine Mystique*. It was noted by the women in that country, which can be comparable in many ways to Australia, that the world had offered but few

opportunities for women and that it had been thought that women had a more confined place in the scheme of things.

I was interested in one book given to me. It was edited by Gwen Matheson and entitled *Women in the Canadian Mosaic*. She dedicated it to 'our mothers and foremothers'. We do not often use that term. We are quite happy to talk about our forefathers in a very general way, but it is unusual to see the word foremother.

She quoted in her book a feminist called Nellie McClung, who had written that 'the world has suffered long from too much masculinity and not enough humanity'. She also wrote that 'people must know the past to understand the present and to face the future'. Her book was called *In Times Like These*. It was written in the 1800s — a very different time from that which we were looking at in International Women's Year. But we were looking at the same struggle for the removal of customary and attitudinal barriers which act as obstacles to the progress of women. The struggle is not new, it has not ended, but it is good to focus upon it from time to time.

I found interesting another quote in the same book written in 1879 which read: 'The vote for women will not be the panacea for all human or womanly ills, it will simply be the opening of another door. The passage to a larger freedom'. We need to look at the past to understand the present and to look to the future. Perhaps you might indulge me, as I am the seventh woman who was elected to the Senate, by personalising some of the remarks that I make.

I was reminded recently of the words of James Edmond, who, after having walked with the artist Norman Lindsay past three women in a Sydney street — they may have been a grandmother, a mother and a daughter — wrote some doggerel about them, part of which reads, 'The woman I was, the woman I am, and the woman I'll one day be'. It is perhaps a bit circular when you start to analyse it, but if I look at the three generations of my own family starting with my mother, I see that there have been some changes, particularly in the last twenty years, during which time I was elected to the Federal Parliament.

My background is not a political one, in that I am not the daughter or a close relative of someone who was a political person. However, I do have a background that is without inhibitions about women's rights and responsibilities. My mother was a teacher who was widowed when I was ten years old. She was in Australia without relatives and had three children to support. I was very accustomed to the needs of a sole parent family and I was aware that, at any time, a woman must be capable of independence. My mother was quite selfless but, of necessity, she recognised that women should have political, economic and social rights equal to men. It was always her aim that I should seek education for a career.

Most of you know that I faced election for the Senate in 1970 following the retirement of Dame Ivy Wedgwood. I had a career as an accountant in business and in practice; I had married and had three children; and I had about twenty years service in the Liberal Party, particularly in the Victorian division. It is fair to say that I am a product of my own time and my own circumstances, just as we all are.

After I left school, I continued to study while in full time work until I was admitted to the professional institute at the age of twenty-one. The timing of this was notable, in that it was shortly after the war and I had the advantage of professional qualifications at a time when men of my age had been in wartime service; they were the ones who had to catch up. This was probably a reversal of the current situation: now women's careers are interrupted by family responsibilities. They often feel that they have

interrupted careers; they are always striving to catch up the time taken away from their careers.

I avoided some of the problems that some women had in that they were forced to leave employment which they had enjoyed during the war years when there had been a shortage of male employees. After the war, the returning servicemen were placed in the jobs that had been undertaken by women — in banks, industry and many places — because returning servicemen needed to be re-employed at that time.

In my case, education was important in that it gave me the opportunity to continue with my career without any displacement because of returning servicemen. It was generally recognised that my qualifications — at a time when there was a scarcity of people who were qualified to do certain jobs — were an advantage to me. I cannot claim that I had overcome great adversity in doing this: the timing and the circumstance suited my aspirations.

The education that I had gained for myself was important, because it is true to say that in the 1940s it was not recognised that there should be an equal right for men and women to seek education at a tertiary level. That meant that women had less of an opportunity to undertake some of the employment that they would have wanted.

If I look at my political background, I see that it is still very important for anyone wishing to enter Parliament to form a close association with the party of his or her choice. The Liberal Party was formed in the 1940s. It won Federal Government in 1949 and had a long and uninterrupted period of government. The opportunities that I had in the Party enabled me to hold office at the branch level in the early 1950s and to have a progressive involvement until such time as I became state chairman of the women's section of the Party. I was a member of the State Executive, the Federal Council and other bodies of the Party at the time that I became a candidate for preselection in the 1970 Senate election.

In Victoria, the Liberal women had equal representation on all-party committees and on the State Executive. This was thanks to the effort of women who were members of such organisations as the Australian Women's National League and others at the time of the formation of the Party. Dame Ivy Wedgwood was one of those women who had been active in the Australian Women's National League, as was Dame Elizabeth Couchman and others who, at the time of bringing their organisation into the new Party, insisted on the equality of voting power within the Party.

I was in a party that recognised the equality of the women in voting strength, but it is true to say that it was not a party that was seeking parliamentary representation for large numbers of women. In fact, the women in those organisations that preceded the Party were those who worked for the advancement of women and for sound government, but it was not a primary aim of theirs to see numbers of women actually entering the Parliament. They were interested in policies and issues, and they were delegates to many other community organisations and represented the Party in a number of ways in the community. They recognised the power of women to influence political thought and values, without necessarily seeking political office for themselves.

At the time of my preselection in 1970, I was one of three women who contested that vacancy from a field of some twenty candidates. My particular challenge was not a male-female one at that time, but rather a country-metropolitan challenge. This followed the changes in the Senate that had occurred in the Victorian team. John Gorton left the Senate for the House of Representatives and was replaced by Ivor

Greenwood, who was regarded as 'metropolitan'. The 'country' people felt that their slot ought to be filled at that time. However, the women of the Party felt that replacing Dame Ivy Wedgwood with another woman was important to them, and I gained that particular spot.

So I entered the Senate in 1971 very conscious of my responsibilities coming into one of the most powerful Houses of Parliament in the world. I was one of so very few women who had been elected to Federal Parliament and I did not at any time want to have a label of 'tokenism'. I have always recognised that there are so many dangers in tokenism. It can shut out many women who should be considered equal to other party members. The token woman perpetuates the notions of women's issues and a woman's point of view, and very often salves the conscience of those who do not consider that all women should be regarded on their merits.

Parties seem to place women in positions where proportional representation is used in upper Houses and they look for what they call a 'balanced ticket'; that is, 'We have one of everything, including a woman'. Sometimes there may be more than one woman, but there are few instances — and none that I can recall — where there is a majority of women on a balanced ticket.

The responsibility for women who are elected is to understand that, if the woman succeeds, her success belongs to her as an individual but, if she fails, her failure relates to all women everywhere. I was conscious of this and was often asked whether I was the first woman doing this or that. I always said that I thought that was not important. What was important was that I not be the last woman to have the opportunity to gain a seat in the Senate. I brought that attitude to my work in the Senate. It was not a case of wishing to be the one with the woman's point of view, or the token woman, but rather a case of wishing to be a full member of the Senate in every way.

When I entered the Senate, I naturally brought my own background in business and in practice and, I think, an understanding of the Australian political system. I did not come thinking that it was my role to pursue a single issue, nor did I think that you could be a single-issue person in a national parliament.

I was fortunate that I had the discipline of a party, working as it must to govern for all people everywhere. That means that you accept your responsibilities as a working member of the Senate and you do not look to a narrowing of the contribution that you might make.

At my first party meeting, I was fortunate to be chosen by my colleagues as a member of the Joint Committee on Public Accounts. It was important to me because it sounded as if it would be something that I would find interesting. I always felt that this committee, which included all parties and both Houses of Parliament, would give me one of the best opportunities I could have to learn about some of the processes of accountability of public expenditure and to get an understanding of how government works. It brought us closer to those people with whom we were working in the Public Service and the Auditor-General, with whom we also worked, and in many ways it brought us closer to a wide range of interests in many departments of the Government.

I served on that committee for some years until I became a minister. I returned to that committee in my last years in the Parliament, when I was again in opposition. In fact, my first words uttered in the Senate were to present the report of the Public Accounts Committee about six days after I had arrived in the place. I was absolutely terrified. I

had about a page and a half of instructions about when I had to sit, when I had to rise, when the President would indicate that he was seeking a vote and when I would then speak again to actually present the report and to have it adopted. It was not a case of making a maiden speech — it was simply a formality for me — but for some reason I was the person who had to present this report and it was my first utterance in the Senate.

I also became a member of the Standing Committee on Finance and Government Operations, which again seemed to link with my background. On that Standing Committee I had the opportunity to do the work of the Senate and to inquire into, among other things, matters of probate and things that were of topical interest at that time.

By the end of I think 1971 I was selected to go on to a select committee of the Senate to look at foreign investment in Australia. To work with colleagues on a select committee which brought into the Parliament those people in the banking sector, the mining sector and all of those who were investing in the development of Australia was a unique opportunity for me. The question was to relate to the extent of foreign investment. It is not new — we are talking about the early 1970s — and we are still talking about it in the 1990s.

If I look at the timing of my entrance to the Parliament, I see that I preceded the wave of the women's movement groups that were forming in the early 1970s or in the late 1960s. I think the Women's Electoral Lobby would say that it was most active around 1972, with that election which resulted in the change of government. I had, however, been politically active on similar issues in the late 1960s. Arising from much of the change that was occurring, there were pressures for the formation of a women's bureau in the Department of Labour. There were many issues in the United Nations Status of Women Commission — equal pay, equal opportunity and things of that kind — and there were early policy moves for child-care facilities, which I think were brought into effect at the time of the Gorton Government. My activities revolved around the issues that later became the issues of the women's movement, but I think my entry preceded its real activity. I am not able to say, as for instance Susan Ryan would say, that those groups of women worked to secure my election to the Parliament. I think I was active just that little bit earlier than was the women's movement.

In 1974 in the Senate I was asked by Mr Snedden to be the shadow minister for the media. This brought a new range of activity to me. Being a shadow minister in the Senate gives you the opportunity not only to shadow a particular area but also to represent a number of other shadow ministers — or ministers if your Party is in government. By being shadow minister for the media I had a range of other interests as well in which I needed to have some specialisation, including the issues of health and all the Medibank Bills that were around the place at that time. So 1974 was a very interesting and valuable time for me. I had direct responsibility for the handling of certain bills — such things as the Australian Film Commission, changes that were proposed for the Broadcasting Act, different areas of work that brought me to a new range of people with whom I have had a long and continuing association.

In 1975 Malcolm Fraser asked me to be the shadow minister for education. I recall that as being about my hardest year. To be shadow minister of that enormous area with no resources other than one staff person in an office in Melbourne was very difficult. I found that that again opened new areas of interest to me, particularly with the changes that were occurring in education through the period of the Whitlam

Government and the emphasis that there was everywhere on the need for education to be enhanced and for opportunities to be wider than they had been in the past.

I notice that none of your literature says that I was the caretaker minister for education in 1975. At the time of the appointment of the caretaker government I found that I was minister for Education for some six or seven weeks until that election had been held. Becoming a minister overnight was indeed a shock, particularly as we were in an election. The Senate had risen without passing the States Grants Education Bills. In the flurry of events on 11 November we had passed the budget, but it was only as I was walking across Kings Hall afterwards that the Clerk of the Senate came to me and said, 'Do you realise you've got up without passing the States Grant Education Bills?'. I really did not quite know what that meant, but I knew in about a day, because after being sworn in as Minister for Education I went straight to Western Australia to start my campaigning there. I arrived at the hotel with yards and yards of telexes giving me instructions about these bills and how the states were going to start the schools without the bills having been passed and so on. I realised then the segregation that there is between the Parliament and the Executive and the division of powers that do exist.

After that election I became Minister for Social Security. I was that minister for about five years until becoming Minister for Finance in 1980. As Minister for Social Security I probably had working for me the largest number of women in any government department in Australia. In fact, I think we estimated at one time that about 83 per cent of the people with whom the department dealt were women. It would be hard to say that we were not closely aware of the issues of women: whether they were single-parent women, unemployed women, or women who were seeking care and facilities for their disabled children or whatever requirement they had through that very large department. In that time I had an opportunity to see very closely the needs of women — having been the minister responsible for the International Year of the Child and later to be the minister who started the activities for the International Year of Disabled Persons.

After the 1980 election I was asked by the Prime Minister to be the Minister for Finance, which I found perhaps the most interesting part of the whole of my parliamentary career. In that area the minister looks at the whole of the activity of government. Having been the largest spender in Social Security, I became the person who tried to stop the other ministers in other departments spending — not as successfully as I might have done if you look at our 1982-83 budget. But it was as Minister for Finance that I drew on all of the experience that I had in the Senate. Having been a member of the Senate I was aware of the accountability of government to the Senate.

I, of course, have been elected more than most people who had the same number of years that I had in the Senate because I struck the double dissolution of 1974, which we loosely refer to as the Gair affair. That was when Senator Withers, as Leader of the Opposition, proposed an amendment to Appropriation Bill (No. 4) and Senator Murphy declared that the government would treat that as a denial of supply. A double dissolution was granted on the bills that were not passed by the Senate, and under section 57 of the Constitution the Senate passed the Appropriation Bills and the Supply Bills and then raced off to that 1974 election at which the Government was returned. Mr Whitlam won that 1974 election and led the Parliament into a joint sitting of both Houses of the Parliament. That was a fascinating exercise because a number of important bills were the subject of that joint sitting. At that joint sitting I spoke on the health bills which we had not been passing, but which were passed at the joint sitting.

The 1974 election brought three new women Senators into the Senate: Ruth Coleman from Western Australia, Jean Melzer from Victoria and Kathy Martin from Queensland. Dame Nancy Buttfield had retired at that election, so I was joined at that time by these three new Senators. There were four of us in the Senate, and there were no women in the House of Representatives.

In 1974 I worked through all of the things that we did. In 1975, to reach the date that I mentioned earlier, there was the dismissal of the Whitlam Government on 11 November and I became the Minister for Education.

Prior to that election in 1975, the Senate did another very interesting thing. It brought the public servants to the Senate to discuss matters in connection with the government's borrowing of money which was the subject of much discussion and the reason that the Senate was delaying the passage of the appropriation bills at that time.

You could ask me, I am sure, whether I felt that all of this was a worthwhile career for me. It was some seventeen years of my life. I would have to say that I felt I had the opportunity to do the things that I was capable of doing. I felt that my contribution was equal to those of my colleagues. I did not feel that I had any special privileges because I was a woman minister and a woman in the cabinet. I would have to say that, particularly as a Senator, I feel that the women have had opportunities to do things at first-hand and to recognise the concept of responsible government through the activities of the Senate.

As I looked at the exhibition I saw the number of women sitting in chairs in the Senate or in the House — in the case of Joan Child, as Speaker — and I recognised that the highest office and the control of the institution were in their hands at that time.

The Senate has always been, and I hope always will be, the place where legislation is analysed and where every clause and every subclause can be challenged and defeated. It is not a case of the numbers always being with the government of the day. Before 1972, the Democratic Labor Party had the balance of power in the Senate. It is not new for Independents to have the balance of power in the Senate.

I believe that in debate in the Senate the analysis of legislation can clarify the arguments. As a shadow minister or as a minister, when I went back to the debate in the other place to see what the argument and the issues were, I was often appalled to find that, because of the sheer force of numbers in the other place, there was very little argument there and the issues were very obscure.

I believe that those who have been fortunate to have served in the Senate have had more opportunities than most to question the extent of the executive's powers and to assert the general principle that Parliament is sovereign over the executive. At a time when many of our institutions are being questioned, that responsibility in the Houses of Parliament should not be treated lightly. The Parliament is the democratic expression of the people, and the general principle that Parliament is sovereign over the executive is a very important one to cherish.

If I were to conclude my generational framework for women — that is, the woman I was, the woman I am and the woman I one day might be — I suppose I would have to look at the women in the next generation following me. Some of them are in the parliaments. I look at my daughters and others in their age group who have careers. Starting from my mother's generation, through mine and now to my daughter's, I ask:

is the new generation making progress towards equality? You could probably say 'slowly' in the political context but there are now many more examples of parliamentary service and some solid achievements that can be the signposts for the future.

But women are still minority participants in preselections. Their career paths in the professions in commerce and in the Public Service are now notable. Their positions in the trade union movement are stronger in some cases. All of these things should position them as stronger contenders for political endorsement if that is their aim.

In terms of choices and support structures through legislation and by practice, there is greater recognition of their needs in the pursuit of a career. My daughters' generation may find that the door has been opened, but that — in the words of that earlier suffragette — 'the larger freedom may only be a reality for the next generation'; that would be my granddaughter.

Women's influence either in politics or in the community cannot be measured only by counting the women in Parliament or in government. There are so many pieces in the mosaic of our community life. I have the greatest admiration for women who are policy makers, advisers and in positions of responsibility. There are few who have ultimate responsibility in their sphere. The women in professions, in academia, in commerce, in the judiciary and in other institutions are playing a more dominant and more constructive role than ever before in our history. I think that we could say quite frankly that they are instruments of change.

We said earlier that we need to look at our history to understand our present and our future. I think it ought to be acknowledged that the growth of the decade of the 1960s made change urgent for those women who wanted to reach their potential and who sought independence. The social policy changes which were inescapable for government in the 1970s and represented growth of government in the 1970s developed a belief that more government meant more human happiness. I think that is now established.

What worries me is that the recklessness of the 1980s set the stage for modern government in the 1990s to make radical policy changes. It can be hoped that economic circumstances do not provide an excuse for governments to slow the momentum of the progress of women and deprive them of the career opportunities for which they have become trained and educated.

If we have worked through the 1960s, the 1970s and the 1980s only to reach the 1990s where it is an easy excuse or reason to say that economic circumstances do not permit this to occur, then I hope that we do not give the lowest priority to women or the needs of women in their participation as full members of society.

Equal participation of women in the Parliament, in the whole of community life, can only lead us to a better understanding of humanity and to the fulfilment of the aspirations that we would have for a civilised society.

I congratulate those who have arranged this series of lectures. I understand that you would like time for questions so I am watching the clock. I would be happy to accept questions and try to answer them on any of the matters I may have touched on or any of the things on which you feel I may have a point of view which interests you. Thank you very much for coming and for giving me this opportunity to talk.

QUESTIONER — I am from Australian Associated Press. On that last point you made, could you explain your concern that economic problems might be used as an excuse not to expand equal opportunities?

Dame MARGARET GUILFOYLE — I think we are in a political climate where some radical changes are occurring. Local government and academic institutions are changing with many of the policy changes. It is very easy for the government of the day to say that economic necessity means that some changes must be made. I hope that the changes that are made take into account the progress that has been made through legislation — sex discrimination legislation, human rights legislation and other legislative advances — and do not place opportunities for women lower than they should be or lower than any other sector of the community.

QUESTIONER — Would you say that realistically it is more difficult for a woman, especially a married woman with children, to enter into political life when community views and actions towards women and their role have not changed as much as some of us would have liked? For example, I was disqualified from the local government council for having the audacity to bring my children along to the council meetings. That was subject to an inquiry. When I said I had no other choice at that stage because there were problems at home, none of the men councillors could understand that those sorts of problems can impinge upon our public life. Do you see that?

Dame MARGARET GUILFOYLE — There are undoubtedly conflicts for women who choose careers, whether they be representatives in local government, State government or Commonwealth government. It is very difficult for a woman with children to enter the Commonwealth Parliament because of distance, travel and time away from home. I do not know how you overcome some of the attitudes that you have mentioned. I think there is a need for an attitudinal change, but there also needs to be a recognition by women that some things would make it difficult for that particular career at that particular time.

I think it should also be recognised that Parliament would not be the ideal place for children and that bringing children into a House of Parliament would not be good for the conduct of the business of that place. I think there is a need for recognition of what is appropriate and what can be managed. But undoubtedly women who go into any career — whether it is industry, commerce, academia or wherever — must make choices about conflicts that impinge upon family responsibilities. None of us can say that it has been easy or that it is easy.

I look now at the next generation that I mentioned, and I see that the women have very little choice about whether they will work or not. Most of them have to work. Therefore they have many conflicts with regard to the needs of their children and the way in which those conflicts can be resolved. They can be resolved by the other parent accepting some or equal responsibility for children, but undoubtedly each family has to manage in its own way, and each woman finds it extremely difficult. You get that gap in the service of a career that I likened to the gap of the men who were away at the war for four or five years. It is a gap that you have to try to close, and very often it is difficult to do so.

QUESTIONER — I would like you to comment on the complexities of today. I feel very strongly that we must not encourage the world to think that democracy is merely a numbers game. A citizen, to my mind, is responsible the whole of the time for what each person thinks is right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate. We do not relieve ourselves of responsibility by putting a cross every five years or less. The rivalry that

has been encouraged, almost to the stage of gang warfare, has been damaging to us. At most times it is more important to gain respect. I was a single councillor on the rural district council and on the parish council, and gaining the respect of those men so that others following after would find the door easier to get into seemed to me important. It is important to be accepted by other people. I have many fine Aboriginal friends and it gives me great pleasure that I can be accepted by them. I think we have to remember that education starts at the cradle and not when the child goes to school. Sovereignty is the people's sovereignty, not national parliamentary sovereignty. I think Sir Thomas More demonstrated that for us Londoners. Decision is a matter of personal conscience.

Dame MARGARET GUILFOYLE — I am sure that most of what you have said would be accepted as the basis for the belief in our society as a place where people can work together. Some of the qualities that you have mentioned would be more predominant in women than in men, but if we are to work in a society as a whole society then there is the need for an interchange of those views and values.

I think that democracy, where every so often — and I do not mind how often — we get a chance to vote on issues, is something that we should value. If a parliament is elected and if a government is chosen by the people, that is a fairly healthy way in which to resolve any differences that we may have or differences in priorities that we have. It is not an easy time for governments to work in, and I think that respect and support of the people in the things that governments are trying to achieve are very important. That is what a national characteristic is and I certainly would always want to enhance it. I think you do it very often by enhancing the institutions that are important and that are our heritage.

So I think those words that you have given to us today reflect many of the values that most people would support. I like the way in which you believe that you ought to gain the respect of your male colleagues in whatever organisation you are in. I think that is very important. It is probably just as important that they have your respect.

QUESTIONER — Thank you for this address here today. I have just one question which goes back to your career as Minister for Social Security. There were a number of quite critical accounts published of your handling of the crisis in women's refuge funding in 1977, when the provisional arrangements under the community health program were expiring. There was a very long delay in the submission coming forward from the Department of Social Security. It has been said in accounts that that submission was bound to fail because it was not a very strong case to take over the women's refuge funding. Would you take this opportunity today to present your side of that story, which I do not think has been heard?

Dame MARGARET GUILFOYLE — My recollections about it might be imperfect. In any of the funding that came through in that department, you were sometimes looking at maintaining what had been in existence or you were looking for newer services that could be given. There were certainly differences in the community and possibly in government about the need for funding for women's refuges. I do not think that in my department, or certainly not in my mind, there was any doubt about the need for places where women and children could be safe from physical abuse and problems in the lives of their children.

I cannot quite recall 1977 and what the difficulties were with regard to it. I know that we had funding under a homeless persons program. We had funding under a women's refuges program and there were difficulties in some of the states with regard to accepting funding for women's refuges because they had different views about that

particular policy. But I would have to refresh my mind on exactly what point is worrying you. I can only think that some of the difficulties arose with negotiations with state governments.

I can recall that one difficulty that arose was the reluctance of those who were running women's refuges to provide information to government because they believed that made them insecure. I think there were some difficulties of accountability in the sense that governments usually like to know where places are, how money is expended and things of that kind. That might be one of the difficulties that you referred to, but I cannot expand any further on the point that you have raised.