



informed

Issue 405

August 2010

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TWO IMPORTANT DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

2010 WELNSW Annual General Meeting

Sunday 19 September

**10am at 66 Albion St
Surry Hills**

Followed by light lunch

Next Exec/members meeting

Tuesday 7 September

6pm at 66 Albion St

ELECTION ROUND UP

WEL it was an interesting election campaign, and a busy time for WEL.

Prior to the campaign, WEL developed a *Feminist Policy Framework* which we used to evaluate the policies of the major parties. The framework can be found on our website at www.wel.org.au.

Through this framework we focussed on two broad areas of importance for women, covering eight specific policy areas. These were:

- Women's financial and economic security
- Pay Equity
- Taxing and Supporting Income
- Superannuation and Retirement Income
- Education and Training
- Balancing Work and Family
- Child Care
- Paid Parental Leave
- Family Law
- Workplace Culture

It's hard to believe that so many years down the track we are still campaigning for the same things.

The campaign appeared to start off quite WEL, with both the ALP and Liberal Party trying to outdo each other on paid parental leave. It seemed that having a woman as Prime Minister might indeed make a difference in terms of policy and pitching for the women's vote.

Alas, the hope was shortlived. The campaign quickly became very slick and polished, with little of either leader's real personality coming

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WEL NSW Inc is a member of WEL Australia and is dedicated to creating a society where women's participation and potential are unrestricted, acknowledged and respected, where women and men share equally in society's responsibilities and rewards.

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All members are invited and encouraged to contribute or comment. Ideas, comments, articles or clippings from other media all gratefully accepted. Content may be edited.

The editor(s) happily read emails sent to welnsw@comcen.com.au and hard copy articles or letters can be posted to the WEL office.

Deadlines for contributions to the next editions: 13 July and 10 August. There is no newsletter in December. WEL-Informed is copyright. Material may be reproduced, acknowledgement required.

Editor for this edition: Lorraine Slade, Advice/Mailout Team: Anne Barber, Josefa Green.

Join the national WEL email list, email your name, email address and your WEL group (eg NSW) to owner-wel-members@lists.nwjc.org.au

DISCLAIMER

Views expressed in WEL-Informed are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect WEL policy. Unsigned material, apart from inserts, is by the WEL-Informed editorial team.

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through. The strong focus on marginal seats also made it very difficult for WEL – and many other community focused organisations – to get much traction. WEL's strategy was to try to focus on good and fair social policy. It was – and still is – our contention that what is fair for women is fair for society. Good social policies that help women also help men to better manage all the aspects of their lives.

We developed fact sheets for each of our policy areas (listed on page 1), setting out why these were important issues. These are still on our website and will be the basis for continued work with whoever forms government over the longer term. We did try to maintain a focus on policy, but the media releases we put out on policy matters were ignored by the majority of media outlets.

What was picked up though were some of our lighter moments. Tony Abbott won our "Misogynist Quote of the Week" two weeks in a row. Of course, that was something that interested many journalists and garnered WEL quite a bit of coverage. As they say – any publicity is good publicity and we did use the opportunity – particularly doing live radio – to talk about our fairness framework and focus on good social policy. One 40 minute live interview on ABC National Radio provided for a wide-ranging discussion. The phone-in callers seemed to agree with us and raised some issues of their own.

As I write this it's still not clear who will be in government for the next three years, but it's looking increasingly like it will be a coalition of Labor, Greens and Independents. The independents seem focused on improving the processes of government – the way Bills are introduced and debated, consultative processes between the houses as well as with the community, and government actually taking notice of evidence and Senate and Joint Select Committee investigations on policy areas.

That heralds a new approach in the way community organisations, including WEL, can work with government, and we look forward to interesting times ahead.

During the campaign WEL put in place a number of initiatives that we will carry on with. These are the weekly e-update, and use of new media including twitter, facebook and a new look website. The e-update, particularly, has been a great way to communicate with our feminist network, and your feedback has been positive. I've really appreciated all the input and information on what's going on from some very WEL-informed women. Keep it up.

Kathleen Swinbourne
WEL Coordinator

HOW TO VOTE POSTCARDS

To provide voters with a comparative summary of the major parties' policies on key gender equity issues, WEL NSW developed a postcard scorecard. This postcard compiled assessments of the ALP, Coalition and Greens policies against the WEL feminist framework. We distributed the postcards at major stations, through letter box drops and on the day of the election at polling booths in marginal electorates.

This postcard compiled assessments of the ALP, Coalition and Greens policies against the WEL feminist framework.



Overall 2,000 postcards were handed out to voters. On the morning of Thursday 19th August a collection of WEL NSW members and volunteers handed out approximately 1,000 cards at Martin Place in just two hours!

The public response was overwhelmingly positive. Many voters commented that they had not seen this type of non-party political evaluation and comparison of the major parties policies this election campaign, and that it would be extremely helpful in their decision of who to vote for. Others commented on their disillusion with the lack of clear policy put forward by the ALP and the Coalition.

We hope that our postcard not only helped people decide how to vote, but also got them thinking about these key gender equity issues that have had little discussion during an election campaign that was more focused on the personalities and fashion choices of the leaders than on party policy.

Melanie Fernandez
WEL Executive

POST ELECTION – DO WE GET THE GOVERNMENT WE DESERVE?

The old claim is we get the government we deserve. If you feel Australia deserves more than this campaign offers, help us change political priorities. How do we put feminist fairness on the social policy agenda of which ever major party is in power?

I ask this question as we wait to see who will govern us because the campaigns of both major parties did not show any substantial feminist influences. Apart from an odd debate about paid parental leave, which was mainly about credibility and costs, the overall choice between the two major parties from a social perspective was somewhat confused. The mix of poor campaign promises from both major parties and the possible influences of the rather conservative back benchers do not promise a creative, socially responsive and caring government.

The policy frameworks and record

The brief summary below draws on our feminist framework analysis and does suggest the ALP will be better for women than the Coalition.

The ALP did not clearly run on its record because they needed to justify the removal of Kevin Rudd, while the Coalition claimed an almost miraculous conversion on the above policy but little else. Tanya Plibersek issues a long statement of their fairness runs on the board over the last two plus years. These included signing the optional protocol, fixing the IR injustices of Workchoices through Fair Work legislation and introducing some additional rights to request flexibility. The improved equal pay possibilities under this system may be the most significant change to women's incomes, if allowed to continue. Re other claims, these are less clearly beneficial, such as the increased child care tax rebate without any related control over fees and the increase in single age pensions but no action on superannuation inequities. Negatives included the introduction of Income Management which substantially affects sole parents, pegging the rises on sole parent and Newstart benefit recipients.

The Coalition still carries the weight of its many omissions when in power, and shows no serious attempts, apart from its paid parental leave plan, to change the gender biases in its wider policies. It claims to support the child care changes and promises not to reverse the Fair Work changes but this is not entirely clear, as regulations can be used to limit choices.

Commitments

There hasn't been much new policy in our areas of concern. A very belated afterthought from the ALP added two weeks paid Paternal/Partner leave at the minimum wage to the already legislated parental leave scheme, but two days before the election, so it was hardly noticed. Apart from that, neither of the major parties does well on general fairness scores on changing the social barriers, such as discrimination, that create disadvantages. Both assume individual effort is the solution to the problem and penalise those who fail to improve their lot. Their campaigns have emphasised economics, fear and self interested money bribes and have not offered voters any clear visions for making society fairer.

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Gender and numbers

While we are still in political limbo, awaiting the decisions of the cross benchers, we still have a woman PM. It is interesting to note both that all the cross bench deciders in this case happen to be men and the net number of women is likely to be reduced. Figures produced by Women on Boards show the number of women likely to be elected:

36 women (24 per cent) in the House of Representatives compared with 41 women (28 per cent) in the last Parliament.

Party	Total members	Female members	Per cent female
Labor	73	23	31.5
Liberal	45	11	24.4
Liberal National Party	21	2	9.5
National Party	7	0	0
Green	0	0	0
Country Independents	0	0	0
Totals	146	36	24.6

Note: the above table was developed from election information available as at 1:00pm, 23 August 2010. * Includes Country Liberal Member from NT.

These figures and the furore around gender in the leadership coup suggest that we need to seriously reconsider whether our focus needs to move beyond numbers of women in power. This election showed a disgraceful lack of policies that made societies fairer for women or for many other marginalised groups despite having some very high profile women. This is because we have not seriously changed the priorities of what is valued away from macho male models.

In fact the last thirty years of dominant economics as policy frameworks have seen some back sliding from the more socially oriented policies of the seventies. Now the Global Financial Crisis has shown the weaknesses of the market model, it is time to put the idea of good feminist social policies high on the political agendas or risk the rise of parties that want to go back to future.

Eva Cox

**2010 WELNSW
ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING**

**SUNDAY
19TH SEPTEMBER
10AM**

**66 ALBION ST
SURRY HILLS**

ALL WELCOME

CONVENOR'S REPORT

As I write this report, the seat count for the two parties is Coalition 73 and ALP 72 with the seat of Brisbane still in doubt. The negotiations with the triumphant Independents look like they will continue for some weeks. We will know whether our first female Prime Minister will take her place in history as the canniest negotiator or Abbott will force the three to revert to type. They appear to be free spirits and have positioned themselves wisely to extract the most beneficial concessions, some for the nation and a little more for their constituents. Some might see this as too provincial and narrow and others will say they are loyal to the people who elected them.

Whatever the outcome, WEL Australia worked hard to provide sufficient information on our website and through our e-Updates to inform our members, and all who access our websites, so that they could vote with a feminist understanding of the issues at stake. The ALP adopted a high risk strategy taking into account the removal of Rudd and going early with little new policy. Julia Gillard appeared to me to be a great asset to them, but in the end there was too much cynicism and disillusionment. Too many people also voted informally. The Greens, on our assessment, and certainly listening to their commentary after the election, had the most to offer those who were interested in social policy and how we should live our lives into the future. They will control the Senate after 1st July, 2011 and will be a tempering influence, as well as progressing good social policy and hopefully an effective and far-sighted policy on climate change.

The sad loss by Maxine McKew of her seat was balanced by the happy loss of Wilson Tuckey as a member of the House. In a democracy, the cliché stands. There are winners and losers.

Your Executive has worked hard with our Election Coordinator, Kathleen Swinbourne to achieve maximum exposure in a saturated media during the campaign. We hope that WEL made a difference.

Our focus for the next few months will be on the State election. The strategy for this campaign needs to be thoughtful and targeted on policy issues. The commentators have little doubt about the outcome, but great doubts about the alternative government. It is mostly clear where the Opposition stands in relation to the Government's policies and initiatives, but their action plan: **Start the Change** contains very little on social policies. Its key themes are: *Rebuilding the NSW Economy, Returning Quality Services, Renovating Infrastructure, Protecting our Local*

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Environment by returning planning powers to the community. The actual strategies are an attack list on the ALP Government's wrongs rather than a coherent and cohesive set of policies for the State's future development and the building equity and access to services for all in the community. Pru Goward has been reported as questioning women's health services, but the Coalition's position on many of the issues facing the women of NSW is not too clear. We will be working to flush these out in the next few months.

WEL NSW will be holding its **Annual General meeting on 19th September at 10 am**. As members you are warmly invited to attend and contribute to a post-election as well as a pre-election discussion. We are looking for new leaders and more online contact with all members hoping that our websites attract a new constituency of interested women as well as re-engaging those who are experienced and seasoned campaigners. Join us at the AGM with some light lunch.

Jozefa Sobski
Convenor

Judy Malcolm, an early WEL member and contributor to the WEL Newsletter for some years with Dorothy Simons passed away on 29th July from a massive stroke. She is fondly remembered as a great feminist and a great wit. My contact with her was in more recent years as she was for some time an activist resident of Haberfield. She campaigned successfully for an independent woman candidate for Ashfield Council.

Barbara Coddington told us that she was the only person who could come to dinner and have everyone convulsed with laughter all the way through the meal – and she was just talking.

Sue Marks confirmed this with her own dinner party story, "when Judy took to her place at the table, an evening of earnest chatter would turn into an entertaining and engrossing discussion with everyone in stitches."

Diana Wyndham, like any good social historian, was able to produce a collection of stories written by Judy and Dorothy for a range of progressive magazines and journals and **Honi Soit**. As well as her extensive contributions to the WEL NSW Newsletter, she also worked on the Sexual Offences Law Reform with Jocelyn Scutt in 1977.

We will be including a longer obituary in a future issue of the newsletter after the wake which is to be held on Friday 15th October at Joan Bielski's home in 36 Milray Avenue Wollstonecraft. RSVP to Joan on 02 9437 6916.

Jozefa Sobski

Vale Judy Malcolm

BUDGET CUTS IN UK HURT WOMEN

In a recent article in the Guardian Weekly ("*Thousands of women fear loss of jobs as they bear brunt of cuts*" 13/08/2010) it is reported that the Fawcett Society has launched an unprecedented legal challenge to the UK budget. "The women's rights group is seeking a judicial review to declare (Chancellor) Osborne's emergency budget unlawful."

The Society is arguing that an "equality impact assessment" should have been conducted prior to the cuts being confirmed. It has filed papers with the High Court seeking a review. It claims that under equality laws, the Government should have assessed whether its budget proposals would increase or reduce inequality between women and men. The Treasury has failed to provide any evidence that such an assessment took place.

"Even just a top line assessment of the budget measures show that 72% of cuts will be met from women's income as opposed to 28% from men's. This is because many of the cuts are to the benefits that more women than men rely upon, and the changes to the tax system will benefit far more men than women," reports the Fawcett Society's media release.

The Society claims that women earn less than men, own less, and have less control over their finances than men. Yet, on their estimate, some 5.8 billion pounds of the 8 billion of cuts will be borne by women. Women will also bear the job losses as most of these are coming from public services which employ 65% of workers.

The legal basis of its request to the High Court in the UK rests on the requirement in their Sex Discrimination Act, 1975 for public authorities to exercise their gender equality duty to conduct an equality impact assessment before a policy decision is taken. If such an assessment reveals a risk of discrimination, urgent action is required to address those risks.

The Minister for Women and Equalities and Home Secretary, Teresa May acknowledges that there was recognition at senior levels of the government that women, ethnic minorities, disabled and older people would be hardest hit. She admitted in a letter to colleagues that a legal challenge had a real chance of success.

This is a story we should watch as it develops because it has some lessons for our governments. Impact statements are nothing new as a device for determining or trying to predict policy and program outcomes. Family and social impact statements were once fairly standard in the preparation of Cabinet Minutes, but they are not a legal requirement. The case for granting of a Judicial Review is to be argued by lawyers retained by the Society. Go to www.fawcettsociety.org.uk for more information and news updates.

Jozefa Sobski

This is a story we should watch as it develops because it has some lessons for our governments.

BENNELONG LOST

What are we to make of Maxine McKew's loss in Bennelong? Well, *The Australian* ran a story on 26th August based on a few unnamed sources which seeks to provide an explanation. She resisted a party directive to run a negative campaign against her opponent, the former tennis player, now property developer and new Member of Parliament, John Alexander.

Apparently, her relationship with the party machine totally broke down, because she refused to circulate a sheet of negatives about her opponent. She felt that the campaign being suggested was crude and inaccurate and had the potential to backfire.

A senior (unnamed) party source quoted in the story said of a meeting with Ms McKew: "Party office and the central campaign were keen on our using a much more aggressive approach to define John Alexander, once he nominated. Our relationship with her broke down completely after the leadership challenge."

She was close to Kevin Rudd. She was a star recruit and achieved the seeming impossible in defeating John Howard. Her campaigning energy her passion and compassion won her many supporters also from outside the electorate. Her loss is the loss of a woman of integrity, who like some in her category, did not fit the party mould and found what Mary Delahunty has called 'the belly of the beast' too destructive of her own personal values. Political life is tough and demanding. It has its rewards when good policy leads to positive outcomes for the marginalized and disadvantaged. But, it also has its costs.

Maxine ran her own show with her own people. Who will know whether that contributed to a lesser swing against her? Comparing her electorate to that of Lindsay or Greenway does not prove that the party was right. They are different constituencies which require different approaches.

Maxine McKew's apparent disgust with the "brutish" elements of politicking may have cost some party support, but it has won her respect amongst those who see these elements as playing only a destructive or counter-productive part in the overall process. They contribute to voter disillusionment or apathy and destroy trust.

The story in *The Australian* concludes with a comment that her alienation from the NSW Right resulted in the tardy delivery of campaign materials and a lack of personnel. There will be more analyses and perhaps also recriminations, but there are also lessons for all parties. The campaign was overwhelmingly one about the leaders and not their policies. The leaders were the targets and the stars. The futures they offered were very much more of the same. Perhaps the contest over ideas and hopes for a better, fairer and more just society may be revived during this period of more balanced political power.

Jozefa Sobski

FEMINISM IRRELEVANT ? WOMEN WORLDWIDE AND THE UN DO NOT THINK SO.

In the 16 June Weekend Australian just after Julia Gillard became PM, a journalist, Tess Livingstone, wrote a spiteful condescending article headed "Sisterhood – a reminder of its irrelevance". She wrote that "women are well represented at every level of politics and the judiciary" and "that Margaret Thatcher was a superb leader" as though power for middle class women was all that feminism was about. She then said, that as a cost cutting measure all federal and state offices for women should be abolished. She deserves to be back working on the social pages, the fate of women journalists before the 1970s if they could get a job as a journalist at all and before women journalists like Suzanne (Zany) Baker of the SMH stood up for women journalists. I continue to be astonished at the female beneficiaries of feminism who seem to be totally ignorant of women's history or worse are still dominated by the old fashioned male view of the world.

Livingstone seems unaware that feminists are concerned for all women. They are concerned that women get equal pay, pay equity, equal education and training and job opportunities; that women were safe from domestic violence and sexual assault. She also seems to think that feminism stops at the border. She appears not to know that feminists care about and work for the women being trafficked and sexually enslaved; the women used as bargain chips in wars; the under age female children who are married off by relatives; the female children forced to bear children themselves before their bodies are mature enough for childbirth and the female babies who are starved or murdered in favour of their brothers. (for the latter see Gendercide. Anne Henderson. The Monthly, June 2010)

Fortunately the UN shares women's concern. The Sun Herald (4 July) reported that the UN recently brought all UN programs relating to women under one umbrella organisation to be known as UN Women. Its formal name is UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. In approving the new arrangements the UN General Assembly called "for governments to end discrimination against women and close the gender gap in 12 critical areas, including health, education, employment, political representation and human rights".

The UN Deputy Secretary General, Asha-Rose Migiro said that UN Women would for the first time give the UN a single recognised driver. The report also said that the new arrangements were supported by women's organisations. Foreign Minister Stephen Smith also expressed Australia's support for the new arrangements.

I continue to be astonished at the female beneficiaries of feminism who seem to be totally ignorant of women's history or worse are still dominated by the old fashioned male view of the world.

Joan Bielski



connected

Event at State Library of NSW

Illustrated Talk at the Dixon Room, Mitchell Library

Thursday 9 September, 5.30pm for 6pm. Cost \$20 includes light refreshments, bookings essential

Women in the Crowd: streetscapes at the Library

Works of art can reveal a broader picture of humanity than traditional or non-visual documentary sources. Streetscapes, in particular, are populated with images of women of all classes going about their daily lives, largely unaware of the artist's scrutiny. Such unselfconscious portraiture provides a valuable counterbalance to the rarefied ranks of females of the leisured classes, the conventional subject matter of studio portraits. Original material from the Library's collection, including maps and early accounts of the story will be on display.

Join Curator Margot Riley for this fascinating illustrated talk.

Bookings: Email bookings@sl.nsw.gov.au or phone 9273 1770

WEL Executive/ Members Meeting

Tuesday

7 September

6pm

66 Albion St
Surry Hills

ALL WELCOME

NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

A special welcome to new members, and many thanks to all members who renewed their membership in the past month, and especially to those who gave so generously to WEL.

Consider a Bequest to WEL NSW

A bequest enables you to perpetuate your ideas and make a difference far into the future. Please remember WEL in your will.

The following wording is recommended:

I bequeath the sum of (amount written in words and figures) free of all debts, duties and taxes, to the Women's Electoral Lobby (NSW) Inc (ABN 50 242 525 012) for its general purposes, and I declare that the receipt of the Treasurer for the time being of the Women's Electoral Lobby (NSW) Inc shall be complete discharge to my executors for this gift, and that my executor shall not be bound to see to the application of it.

If 'RENEWAL' is stamped in your newsletter and/or a renewal form is enclosed or attached to your email copy, your membership renewal is now due. Please renew your membership of WEL NSW

Don't forget to let WEL know if you change address.

WEL NSW Executive

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To join WEL NSW

Download a membership form from
<http://welnsw.org.au> or phone (02 9212
4374) for a membership package

IF NOT CLAIMED WITHIN 7 DAYS PLEASE RETURN TO:

WOMEN'S ELECTORAL LOBBY (NSW) Inc
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