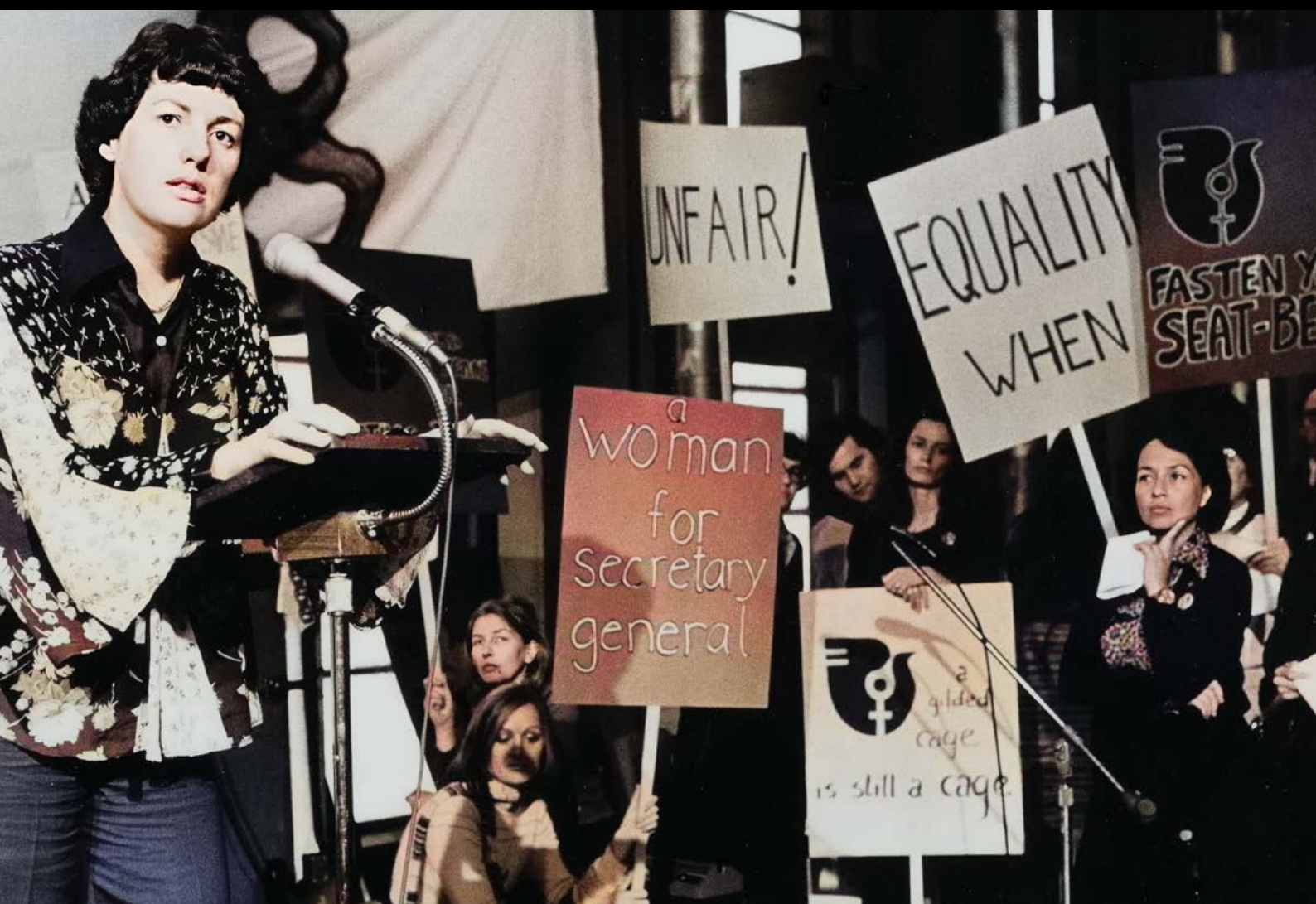


Whitlam Institute

WITHIN WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

# REVOLUTION AND REFORM: THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT AND THE WHITLAM YEARS



A 50th Anniversary Legacy Paper  
**Dr Elizabeth Reid**

August 2023

**50<sup>th</sup>**

Anniversary of the  
Whitlam Government  
1972-1975



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*Gough Whitlam 2010*

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## About the Author

### Elizabeth Reid

Dr Elizabeth Reid AO FASSA FAHA is a feminist development worker, academic and writer. She taught philosophy at the Australian National University before being appointed as an adviser to Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in 1973 on matters relating to the welfare of women and children. Her development work since then has taken her to Africa, Papua New Guinea, the Pacific, Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean, Central America, and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Elizabeth has worked as a national and international public servant with the United Nations, UN specialised agencies and UN regional commissions, and national governments. She has also worked with local and international non-government organisations and with faith-based organisations. She retired from field work in 2015 and now lives and works in Canberra.

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**Cover photo:** Elizabeth Reid, International Women’s Day, 1975, UN Headquarters, New York (Author Bettye Lane, 1930-2012). SCHLESINGER LIBRARY ON THE HISTORY OF WOMEN IN AMERICA, RADCLIFFE INSTITUTE, HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

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# Foreword

In his 1972 *It's Time* policy launch speech, Gough Whitlam issued a challenge to Australia to make "a choice between the past and the future, between the habits and fears of the past, and the demands and opportunities of the future." This challenge – a clarion call to a new generation of Australians – was heard by a young and tenacious Elizabeth Reid, then a senior philosophy tutor at the Australian National University.

On 8 April 1973, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam announced the appointment to his personal staff of Elizabeth Reid to "conduct research and advise the Prime Minister on a range of domestic issues, especially those bearing on the welfare of women." Reid had already worked for the Bureau of Census and Statistics and for Control Data, Australia and had been active in women's organisations including the *Women's Electoral Lobby*, the *Women's Liberation Movement* and the *Association for the Study of Women and Society*.

It was an historic appointment – the first of its kind in the world. Reid took on the monumental task of identifying and advocating upon issues that mattered most to Australian women and working for changes from within the new Whitlam Labor Government. She monitored all Cabinet documents and exerted immediate and immense influence. From this early platform, Elizabeth Reid's extraordinary life has traversed academia, politics, and public policy development – making lasting impacts in each.

The Whitlam Government transformed the Australian political, economic, and cultural landscape. Many of its ground-breaking reforms could not have occurred without the *Women's Liberation Movement* and the *Women's Electoral Lobby*. From equal pay legislation and access to affordable childcare, to the funding of women's refuges and health centres and the implementation of the Single Mother's Benefit, women were demanding reforms that challenged long-held assumptions about the place of women in society and the discrimination and disadvantage they faced.

In this Whitlam Legacy Paper, "Revolution and Reform: The Women's Liberation Movement and the Whitlam Years," Elizabeth Reid revisits the feminist revolution of the Whitlam years and her place at the nexus of the *Women's Liberation Movement* and the Whitlam Government. As Reid recounts, her appointment as women's adviser opened a floodgate. She received thousands of letters from women all over Australia who felt they finally had someone within government who would listen to their issues. And listen she did, travelling around the country to hear first-hand from women about their struggles and what they most wanted the new Whitlam Government to change.

From her early days as an activist in the *Women's Liberation Movement*, Reid understood that unless reform measures were accompanied by changes to the attitudes that disadvantaged women, progress would only be temporary. Reid had cautioned women that "the temptation to resort to pious platitudes and hollow but resounding rhetoric [would] be overwhelming. For the breadth of the task ahead of us, the difficulty in realising its practical ramifications, the unperturbable ignorance of so many people, the power of the structures we must combat, all militate against us" (Speech to *World Conference of the International Women's Year*, Mexico City, 1975).

Describing herself as "a revolutionary in a reformist job," Reid's account of her journey through the corridors of power in government is remarkable. Her early involvement in the *Women's Liberation Movement*, and the ideas and principles of a social movement that wanted things done differently, highlights the transformation possible when a radical feminist movement works with a progressive government.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Juriansz'.

**Professor John Juriansz**

Director, Whitlam Institute

11 August 2023



Elizabeth Reid, 1973.  
PHOTO: NEWS LTD/NEWSPIX.

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Kirsty McEwin and Meredith Hinchliffe resting after screen-printing WEL T-shirts at the Women's House, 12 Bremer Street Griffith. Canberra, 1970s.  
PHOTO: CHRIS RONALDS.

## The Context: The Early 1970s

The Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) swept through Australia like a bushfire. It was one of the most important social movements of its time whose influence was felt in virtually every aspect of Australian political, economic, social and cultural life. At our fledgling Women's Liberation meetings, we gathered together the details of our lives, reflected on them, and formulated our demands.<sup>1</sup> We were curious, rebellious, and passionate, swept off our feet by our own outrage at our place in the world and by the excitement of the times.<sup>2</sup>

Early in the 1970s, Peter Wilenski, Gough Whitlam's principal private secretary, proposed to the newly elected Prime Minister that he bring someone onto his staff who could advise him in this emerging area of policy.<sup>3</sup> Whitlam, although not necessarily aware of the demands of the movement, nevertheless was aware of its issues.

Prior to the 1972 election the newly formed Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) surveyed all political candidates to assess their knowledge of women's needs and concerns such as childcare, family planning, attitudes to women's participation in the workforce and sex education in schools.<sup>4</sup> Two weeks before the election The Age newspaper published the survey scores in a Women Voters Guide. Prime Minister McMahon received a ranking of one out of 40. Whitlam received a score of 33 out of 40. Pat Eatock, an Aboriginal woman and member of the Canberra WLM, stood as an Independent in the ACT, and achieved the highest score of any candidate in the 1972 election, scoring 40 out of 40.<sup>5</sup>

Towards the end of his term in office, Whitlam stated that:

*For most of this country's history women have lived without visible political power; they have been excluded from almost all levels of government in our society. The momentous decisions of war and peace, of finance*

*and technology, as well as the everyday decisions which affect how all people live, have been made by a minority of individuals who happen to be born white and male. Women whether they be conservative, liberal or radical should be fully represented in the political power structure simply as a matter of right: not just because they are women, but because they are capable human beings with skills, abilities and creativity from whom the world has much to gain.*<sup>6</sup>

Immediately on his election, Whitlam addressed a number of issues of concern to women. As Prime Minister-elect, he asked for assurance from the Public Service Board that the provisions of the 1951 International Labour Organisation (ILO) Recommendation on Equal Remuneration for Work of Equal Value had been applied within the Commonwealth public service and its agencies.<sup>7</sup>

In his first days as prime minister, he re-opened the Equal Pay case in the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission and briefed Mary Gaudron to present the Commonwealth's case. He appointed Elizabeth Evatt a presidential member of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission. He abolished conscription, which had been the concern of the Save Our Sons protest movement of women.<sup>8</sup> He removed the sales tax on oral contraceptives, placed contraceptives on the pharmaceuticals benefits list, and lifted the ban on the advertising of contraceptives in the ACT. He also provided funding for family planning development assistance programs.<sup>9</sup>

Women were on the agenda, but few were involved. Women's issues were rarely spoken about, or reported accurately or objectively, and decisions were taken elsewhere. Very few or no women were consulted.



International Women's Year, WEL and Women's Liberation badges. The UN Conference on Women was held in Mexico City in June 1975. At the urging of the Conference, the UN declared the years 1976-1985 as the UN Decade for Women. PHOTO: GAIL RADFORD.

## The Women's Liberation Movement

The WLM in Australia was a non-partisan political movement. It was a commitment to a form of social change that was not just an inner journey, although it was that, but, necessarily, a political struggle, not for piecemeal reforms, but a struggle for a coherent set of changes that would transform society and women's lives irrevocably. The structures oppressing women were to be assailed and dismantled. Social, political, economic, linguistic, and cultural life would become effectively unrecognisable.

We were very clear that our aim was not equality, which we understood, perhaps simplistically, as meaning women becoming more like men. Equality is not the answer for as long as our society remains sexist. If pushed, we preferred the concept of equity, as it carries within it the concept of fairness in difference. We felt that what was really needed was a reimagining of equality - that men needed to spend more time as fathers, carers, partners, and in the community.

Our approach was women-centred and our aim was to change the power relations in the world that harmed women so that women would be the negotiators and agents of their own lives, empowered and equipped for citizenship in a more caring, humane and fair world. We had a vision of a society based on kindness and the common good, rather than on competition and strife between individuals, groups, and nations.

We wanted to do things differently. To change how power relations operate in the world requires us to understand them. To become a feminist is to begin to identify how what happens to me, happens to others, and that this 'happening' is part of a social structure. Ann Curthoys, in the first issue of *Mejane*, wrote of it thus:

*When thinking about the situation of women in our society I am again and again brought back to the realisation that in trying to grasp the exact nature of the oppression of women, I keep a stereotype called 'housewife' in my head, which helps to summon up all sorts of images of unpaid unrecognized work, drudgery, petty repetitive tasks, powerlessness, unfulfillment, watching patronising housewives' television programmes which assume that housewives are the most stupid and childlike section of the adult community ... It is a picture of life from which I, and I am sure many other women interested in Women's Liberation whether we are housewives or not, recoil and hope desperately but not terribly confidently to escape.*

*Of course, the oppression of women goes much further than the fact that housewives, but never househusbands, exist—it reaches into the total cultural, economic, political, sexual, and social life of women.<sup>10</sup>*

It is hard to imagine today that the image of the housewife could carry so much baggage. But the 1950s with its depiction of the "artfulness" of the housewife was still too close to us.<sup>11</sup> Ann continues: "in light of our understanding of how women are affected by the housewife role, 'we must consider all sorts of alternatives, alternatives for us as women, and alternative ways for humanity to cope with housekeeping and childrearing.'"<sup>12</sup> This we accepted as a challenge. But to bring about the feminist revolution, we needed to understand what changes were necessary and how these changes could be brought about.



## A Precursor to Political Activism: Developing the Theory

We needed a platform that was coherent, germane, and transformative. Impassioned debates took place in the women's liberation movement about reform versus revolution, about wages for housewives, about radical lesbianism and a separatist movement, about the nature of sisterhood, about the landscape of patriarchy, of misogyny, and of sexism. At the Canberra WLM meetings, a topic for discussion was scheduled for each meeting and one of its members led the discussion.<sup>13</sup>

The WLM developed a set of practices for social transformation. The first of these was the principle of 'voice', that is, the active participation of all women, not just the articulate or educated, in discussions. The voices of all women were to be listened to, and their realities were to be appreciated, reflected on, and incorporated into the analysis. The theoretical basis for this practice lay in the collective experience of women being silenced. This was such a common experience that there was a shared sensitivity to women becoming themselves the silencers.

The second practice, that of consciousness-raising, was based on the way women relate to the world, not as solitary selves but as being and growing in connectedness with others. Other practices included the practice of sisterhood, the non-appropriation of other women's stories, the distribution of tokens at the beginning of a meeting to lessen the domination of the articulate,<sup>14</sup> and a non-hierarchical structure without "leaders" or "stars," particularly not media created ones.<sup>15</sup>

In January 1973, a Feminist Theory Conference was held at Mt Beauty in Victoria. The conference was attended by over 100 women from around Australia.<sup>16</sup> It was organised by a small group of Canberra WL members: Daphne Gollan, Biff Ward, Susan Magarey and Eileen Haley. Their aim was to further the discussion and acceptance of a theoretical approach to the WLM.<sup>17</sup> The organising group "called themselves 'The Hevies,' defensively, to ward off attacks at intellectual pretentiousness for wanting to talk about theory." As Susan Magarey notes "We needn't have worried: Shirley [Castley] noted acerbically [in a review of the Conference in *Liberaction* published by the Hobart Women's Action Group]: 'Theoretical discussions were few and far between and discussions of feminism were kept pretty much at the experiential level.'"<sup>18</sup> As a follow-up to the Theory Conference, Canberra WL started a Feminist Theory group.<sup>19</sup>

The practices of the WLM led us from our individual experiences of the patriarchy to theory and then to political actions. We began to formulate our demands, but the identification of a desired change was not sufficient: some actions could reinforce the status quo, some could be counter-productive, some inadequate. We needed to piece together actions to form a seamless and coherent whole, that could be revolutionary in its impact - a tapestry of actions, some with the State, some without, some by ourselves, some with the patriarchs.

## Patriarchy's Hierarchies

Our theory began wherever women were, it was women-centred without being essentialist. Its analysis valued the diversity of women's experiences and women's cultures, as a source not only of knowledge and values, but also of women's creativity. The diversity was a diversity of ethnicity,

status, class, religion, sexual orientations, nationality, creativity, geographic locations, and other specificities—a consequence of who we were and the practices of the WLM.

The concept of patriarchy helped us understand our realities. Patriarchy refers to the power relationships by which women are oppressed, a system of social structures and practices whereby women are kept subordinate and exploited in various ways. The subordination that we experience at a daily level, regardless of class, ethnicity, sexuality, etc., takes various forms: discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression, violence. It may occur within the family, at a place of work, in society. The details will vary, but the theme is similar.

The aim of the WLM was, among other things, to end all forms of patriarchal oppression. But we were not just *against* the shackles of oppression, we were struggling towards a new sense of positive identity for women, both individual and collective. We were for the creation of safe spaces where women's agency, empowerment, sexuality, and creativity could flourish, whether in the arts, the caring economy, reproduction, relationships, as politicians, artists, wives, and workers.

## Sexism/Uncovering Patriarchal Power Structures

When women talked about their experiences as women at a WL meeting, we were describing the various forms of patriarchal control that we have personally experienced. We began to understand that what we are up against is a *system*, a system of male domination and sense of entitlement, of male control, in which women are subordinate and the hierarchical relation among the sexes is produced and reproduced.

Sexism is what causes women to be brutally bashed and beaten, to feel confined and constricted.<sup>20</sup> It is what causes women to be abused and raped, to seek backyard abortions, to be continually called on to nurture and care for others. In women, sexism causes feelings of shame, a pervasive sense of personal inadequacy, the distressed apprehension of the self as deficient or diminished. The feeling of shame does not arise just from women being so thoroughly objectified, so continually on display. Sexism is internalised. One becomes crippled by the surrounding cultures of violence and violation, neglect and indifference, of reproach and scorn, by the silencing of our voices, the contempt for our strengths. This disempowering of women's attunement to their social environment, this fitting of oneself into a smaller space, an enfeebling space, cannot be captured in a gender analysis, or through pro-diversity or pro-equality initiatives.<sup>21</sup>

Sexism works against the emergence of a sense of self in solidarity. Reforms such as access to education, health, or employment do not necessarily, or even often, reduce this feeling of shame. A politics of access, or opportunities, does not reach anywhere near the social and psychological condition that marks the lives of women more profoundly than those of men.

Our growing understanding of the nature of sexism made women's control over our bodies central to our liberation. Thus, taking back control over our sexuality, the right to abortion, the rejection of the institutionalisation of heterosexuality, and the ending of all forms of violence against women and girls, especially sexual and domestic violence, were central to our program.<sup>22</sup>

## Reform, Revolution, and the State

Identifying the structures of power that keep women in a subordinate position also raises a question about the role of the State, as distinct from the Women's Liberation Movement, in the development of a revolution. Does the State have a role to play in ending the ideology of patriarchy? This is a difficult question. Sexism and patriarchy are interlinked. Sexism can only be challenged and overthrown by changes in the attitudes of men to women, but, more so, by changes in the attitudes of women themselves.

We, both the WEL and the WLM, understood that unless reform measures were accompanied by attempts to change the attitudes that disadvantaged women, the reforms could easily be reversed. Reforms such as equal pay for work of equal value, and access to childcare centres, to education and to health care, are all necessary because they tackle the disadvantage and discrimination that women experience. However, we argued, such reforms cannot be the only aim and end of social change for women. For the notion that there is a place, role or sphere for women has not been challenged, nor has the notion that there should be distinct and separate spaces and roles for men and women.<sup>23</sup> It is conceivable that all these changes could happen, and women could still be disadvantaged and discriminated against.

Who is this "we"? Does the Women's Liberation Movement, or the State, need to bring about a revolution and develop a revolutionary program? Should this be the imperative of both? At the first meeting of the Australian National Advisory Committee for International Women's Year 1975, on 11 September 1974, Whitlam committed his government to working with Australian women to achieve lasting change. But he also acknowledged the importance of, and need for, a much broader cultural shift in attitudes:

*Government legislation can only achieve so much, and I shall not pretend to you that any Government can achieve immediately for Australian women the revolution required to allow them to develop fully as individuals ... For instance, it must be said that, even if we were to remove all the inequalities of opportunity and of status, it still would not be enough. We have to attack the social inequalities, the hidden and usually unarticulated assumptions which affect women not only in employment but in the whole range of their opportunities in life ... This is not just a matter for governments ... it is a matter of changing community attitudes and uprooting community prejudices, and ... this requires a re-education of the community.<sup>24</sup>*

The Prime Minister himself had committed us to working together towards a revolution and provided another attempt to capture our understanding of sexism.

## The ALP Policy Agenda and Whitlam's Intellectual Influences

By the time of the 1972 campaign launch, Labor had a cohesive, coherent and transformative agenda. It was a radically different program, and context, from that of twenty years earlier, when Whitlam entered Parliament, even more so from that of the immediate post-war



Gough Whitlam delivers Labor Party policy speech, Bowman Hall, Blacktown 1972. PHOTO: RICK STEVENS/THE SYDNEY MORNING HERALD.

years. Whitlam's involvement in the ALP arose from a deep respect for the party's wartime leaders, Curtin and Chifley, whom he saw as championing a more equal and democratic Australia. Whitlam brought with him to the Labor Party, as Race Mathews would later observe, "a political creativity, clarity of purpose and courage ... [and] a strong sense of national identity ... The broad intellectual influences which shaped his outlook and actions were those of the Fabian Society, of which he was a member, and such near-Fabian American scholars as J. K. Galbraith."<sup>25</sup> He also brought a love of books and reading as well as walking, both gained from his parents, and a deep interest in the Arts, which he shared with Margaret, his wife.

Whitlam laid out the basic elements of the 1972 campaign speech in the 1961 Curtin Memorial Lecture where he argued that through its "financial hegemony," the Australian government "can create better conditions in transport, housing, education and health; it can create new industries; ... it can create new communities."<sup>26</sup> This new agenda for reform had as its philosophical basis the doctrine of positive equality.<sup>27</sup> This concept does not have as its primary goal equality of personal income. Rather its goal is the greater equality of access to the services that the community provides.

During twenty years in Opposition Whitlam drew on the formidable Fabian capacity for research and policy development; the chasm between intellectuals, academics, "longhairs," and trade unionists had begun to be bridged. The belief that only working-class MPs could represent working-class interests had been set aside. Whitlam now referred to the ALP as a party of reform, more frequently than as a Socialist party and in place of the Fabian concept of "democratic socialism" he frequently argued for "social democracy."

Whitlam replaced the Fabian notion of persuasion by “propaganda” with that of “informed consent.”

In 1967 Whitlam recruited Race Mathews, a long time Victorian Fabian and a Labor Party supporter, to take over from John Menadue as his Principal Private Secretary; he was Peter Wilenski’s predecessor. Whitlam and his staff adopted the Fabian approach. The consideration of each new policy proposal started from principles of social justice. Evidence was gathered and carefully analysed. Whitlam attached “overriding importance to research and insisted that policies should be justified in depth with facts.”<sup>28</sup> Experts were extensively consulted and the policies that emerged were tirelessly expounded to gain the informed consent of the community. In this, Whitlam showed “deep respect for the intelligence of the electorate and a belief that they want to be involved and educated.”<sup>29</sup>

### *Whitlam’s commitment to the United Nations meant that he made a special effort to implement the objectives of the International Women’s Year.*

Whitlam believed that governments can become more responsive to citizens by becoming more inclusive in how they design, target and deliver public goods and services. They can use evidence and research to enhance their capacity to learn by doing and in the process become a force for good. This approach led to a re-definition and transformation of the Labor Party program. Whitlam was moving past the traditional Labor concept of the citizen as a male wage-earning head of household, with women and children as dependents, to a more gender and racially inclusive concept. It was also a re-imagining of the notion of class through a focus on education and health opportunities. Whitlam was re-envisioning what it meant to call Australia a social democracy.<sup>30</sup>

His own electorate, Werriwa, was a policy breeding ground for the observant, a textbook of inequalities. It was the fastest growing region in NSW and had grown unplanned, unsealed, unsewered and under-serviced. Its population was the most diverse, its birth-rate the highest, and it had more unsatisfied telephone applications than any other electorate in NSW.<sup>31</sup>

Whitlam honed his policies in his speeches, from his first speech in March 1953 to his campaign speech in the federal election of 1972. So, in the 1972 campaign speech, he could say: “[We] offer the Australian people the most carefully developed and consistent program ever placed before them ... [It] has three great aims. They are:

- To promote equality
- To involve the people of Australia in the decision-making processes of our land
- And to liberate the talents and uplift the horizons of the Australian people.”<sup>32</sup>

Whitlam outlined what he meant by an enabling State and a social democratic State, and he redefined Australia’s role as an international player.

## **More Independent Australia Internationally**

For Whitlam, Australia’s foreign and domestic policies were inextricably linked. In the 1972 policy speech Whitlam stated that “[m]ore than any foreign aid program, more than any international obligation which we meet or forfeit, more than any part we may play in any treaty or agreement or alliance, Australia’s treatment of her aboriginal people will be the thing upon which the rest of the world will judge Australia and Australians – not just now but in the greater perspective of history.”<sup>33</sup>

Whitlam changed Australia’s presentation of itself in the international arena. He deeply believed in the United Nations and its specialised agencies, and in international diplomacy. He saw the United Nations as being engaged in constructing a world framework of law, order and justice through international instruments, including treaties, conventions, covenants, agreements and protocols.<sup>34</sup> Australia worked strongly within the Commonwealth and played an important role in the Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings, culminating in our influential stance on the enactment of sanctions on South Africa at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Jamaica in 1975.

Whitlam’s commitment to the United Nations meant that he made a special effort to implement the objectives of the International Women’s Year (IWY) in 1975. Australia sent an official delegation to the 1975 World Conference of International Women’s Year, held in Mexico City, in June–July 1975, and funded a number of other women to attend the parallel non-governmental conference, the Tribune. In early 1974, at Whitlam’s request, a study tour was undertaken looking at the social policies for women being implemented by other social democracies, such as Sweden and the UK. Australia also attended the United Nations’ preparatory meetings for the Bucharest World Population Conference in 1974 and the IWY Mexico City Conference in 1975. Whitlam reflected: “No country in the world won greater praise for its activities and initiatives [during the Year] than Australia.”<sup>35</sup> Australia became an important player on the international women’s stage.

## **Two Forces Collide: Entering the Corridors of Power**

In April 1973, I was appointed Special Adviser to Whitlam on matters relating to the welfare of women and children. I arrived in Whitlam’s office as a seasoned activist.<sup>36</sup> I also had an activist lineage: both my parents strived to advance social justice, in the trade union movement, in the Labor Party and in the reform of the Catholic education system. The WLM had equipped me with a radical conceptual framework, a feminist discourse, an ever-growing list of concerns, and passionate commitment. For the next two and a half years, the women’s movement operated, at least in part, through the State to achieve a feminist revolution, including much needed feminist reforms, and the funding of feminist services.

Even before the job of Special Adviser to Whitlam on matters relating to the welfare of women and children had been advertised, the Canberra WLM had identified some of their areas of concern: the right to work, equal pay rate for

the job, equal opportunity for work and education, free 24-hour childcare, safe contraception, safe legal abortion on request, defining our own sexuality, and smashing the draft criminal code.<sup>37</sup> This latter, the Draft Criminal Code for the Australian Territories, tabled in Parliament in 1969, would have legalised rape in marriage, made even fewer abortions legal, made it a crime to take the abortion pill, and ensured that joint property within a marriage would legally have belonged to the husband.<sup>38</sup>

The wider WLM embracing Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Canberra was demanding “access to contraceptives, abortion, divorce, women’s health, equal pay, prevention of rape and battery of wives, [as well as expressing] a concern about beauty as oppressive.”<sup>39</sup> WEL’s first Broadsheet, in February–March 1972, proclaimed that reforms such as equal pay, equal opportunities, day care, contraception, abortion, and prevention of ecological ruin, were too urgent to wait any longer. They argued that women should vote as a bloc in the coming elections on specific issues rather than on party lines.

When I took up the job, the WLM principle of ‘voice’, that is, the active participation of all women, not just the articulate or educated, committed me to listening to what women—as many women as possible—had to say about their lives. In the months following my appointment, I travelled around Australia, listening to women talk about their problems and about the changes they wanted. The women who spoke out came from all backgrounds: migrant, Indigenous, rural, elderly, suburban, working, single, wealthy, married. We talked in factories, in housing estates, on farms, in schools, at women’s meetings, in dairies, in gaols, in universities—in short, wherever

women were. I was deluged with letters. In a short time, I was receiving more letters than any member of Cabinet other than the Prime Minister.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, I began the long march into the halls and offices of Parliament and the bureaucracy to learn how to formulate, seek approval for and implement the emerging policies.

From the lists, letters and discussions, five areas of much needed reform emerged: employment and financial discrimination, the education of girls, childcare, social welfare, and urban planning. These themes framed a program of work for us.<sup>41</sup> These lists do not, of course, cover all their concerns. Clearly there was much that overlapped in these lists: the right to work, equal pay, discrimination in the workforce, childcare, the education of women and girls, women’s health, especially reproductive and sexual health, rape and violence against women.

The letters that I received were often about different forms of financial discrimination, discrimination in taxation, or discrimination in housing or benefits. But there were other letters, heartbreaking ones, on the unnecessary and unwarranted medical examinations of girls, on women not being able to sit in judgement of men on juries in Queensland, and so on.

What surprised me most, on a recent re-reading of documents from those times, was our emphasis on the redevelopment of the suburbs and on the collectivisation of housework and care: “In the area of urban planning, we must try to design living areas and work areas and community areas that are helpful to people instead of harmful. The effect of suburban living on housewives



Applicants for the position of Women’s Adviser to the Whitlam Government, L to R: Dany Torsh, Eva Cox, Suzanne Baker, Anne Summers, Elizabeth Reid and Lyndall Ryan. Canberra, 1973. PHOTO: NEWS LTD/NEWSPIX.

trapped in the home, isolated from others, is being shown in the cluster of illnesses known as the 'suburban neuroses.'<sup>42</sup> In an interview with Dany Torsh, I said: "I am really worried by the increasing incidence of ... alcoholism, drug taking, suicides, psychotic and neurotic behaviour in women, mainly in the suburbs. The social cost, the cost in human terms, is appalling."<sup>43</sup>

There were two intellectual influences on this thinking: the work and activism of Jane Jacobs on town planning and how the design of cities might better serve urban life,<sup>44</sup> and the accounts of the collectivisation of housework that we had studied at the Canberra WLM discussion groups. Our WLM posters depicted collective cries for "Help" arising from row after row of houses, or else housewives on treadmills.<sup>45</sup> Yet today the phrase, "suburban neuroses," and the preoccupation with it, seem to have disappeared. The solutions that we were discussing in those times were collectivist and communal; for example, medium density housing, shared facilities such as laundry, or shared services, such as childcare, cooking and cleaning. This is in sharp contrast to today's world where the policy response is increasingly individualised and personalised.

These key areas were the *reformist* agenda, the areas of need that women, within and without, the women's movement, had identified. We, the WLM and WEL, still needed to sort out the policies which could bring lasting benefits to women from the ones which would just replace "one set of inequalities by another."<sup>46</sup> We weighed each proposed reform for the good or the harm it could cause: "The question is what makes any specific reform positive rather than negative?"<sup>47</sup>

## My WLM Legacy: Living One's Revolution

My other endowment from the WLM was the beginning of an understanding of what we were up against and of the limit of lists of reforms. The intensive discussions and readings from those days provided me with some insight into what we were not trying to achieve. What we were struggling for was not some future post-revolutionary utopia, neither a socialist nor a utopian future society. *Our task was to create a revolution in the act of living it.*

The revolution had to be something that we could do, rather than something that we would aim for and hopefully someday arrive at. Eileen Haley, a member of the Canberra WLM, described it as "a change of consciousness, a break-down of our learned conceptions of what constitutes 'public life' and 'private life'... In this sense feminism *is* a revolutionary movement. Its effect on the participant is to transform her consciousness of herself and of the world. This is the beginning, in the smallest possible way, of the transformation of the exterior oppressive reality."<sup>48</sup> It was a revolution that had to occur in each person's heart and head, in each person's language and behaviour, and at every level of society.

We had to live our revolution ourselves at the same time as fighting for it. It was not a case of reform versus revolution, but of working out how we could create a revolution that would unfold alongside our reforms, assisting us in determining which reforms might be more effective, and increasing their effectiveness. The first thing many of us did was to cease to be "lady-like." We started swearing, we insisted on our space in public bars and restaurants, we started drinking boldly and doing whatever else was considered at that time to be un-lady-like behaviour, but which we experienced as energising and transformative, as living our lives more freely.<sup>49</sup>

At the Women and Politics conference in 1975, Biff Ward, of the Canberra WLM, in a paper titled "The Politics of Feminism," described this as "the means is the end," meaning "the way in which we conduct our movement, the way in which we are as a movement, the way in which we relate to each other, the way in which we carry out our struggle are all part of the change that we want."<sup>50</sup> What Biff identified as needed in the WLM was also true of a household, a workplace, a community, and a society: "The old revolutionary concept of doing anything to get to the day when we seize power and raise the flag and then human relationships will change and be lovely isn't on any more... To me, what the means being the end is about is self-management; it's about everyone being involved and making the decisions of how we work and what we work on and who we work with and what is the right thing to do at the moment and what's not."<sup>51</sup>

What we felt was needed was something more diffuse and less tangible than a reform. We aspired to a change in the way that women were perceived and valued, a conscious awareness that each one of us, regardless of religion, class, ethnicity, age, race, culture, ability, etc—but particularly, regardless of gender—carries within ourselves the seeds of sexism. For want of a better phrase, it was called a revolutionary consciousness. We still had a lot to learn! We needed to develop policies to address the necessity for a revolutionary consciousness. But which policies and how to identify them?



Elizabeth Reid with Gough and Margaret Whitlam and participants at the Women in Politics Conference 1975. PHOTO: NAA A6180, 9/9/75/27.



Liz O'Brien, right, explains the proposed course in women' studies to fellow students, 1974. Photographed by Ian Mackay. PHOTO: NAA: A6180, 10/6/74/39.

## Developing a Revolutionary Consciousness from Within: How to Put Our Principles into Practice?

We began by putting the practices of the WLM into everything we did. We sought, in Biff's words, to live our revolution. We knew that *how* we did something was as important as *what* we did.

We were committed to honouring the WLM principles of voice, consciousness-raising, sisterhood and solidarity.

Thus, in planning the Women and Politics Conference, held in early September 1975, and hosted by the Australian National Advisory Committee for International Women's Year (NAC), we wanted to ensure the event was accessible to as diverse a range of women as possible. The conference had to be affordable, all voices (over 700) must be heard, the program should be flexible, reflect women's interests and be built around relatively unstructured small group work.

To ensure that all women, particularly Indigenous, migrant and rural women, who lived far from Canberra could attend, it was decided that no participant should pay in excess of the air fare from Melbourne to Canberra. To further minimise costs, accommodation was made available in the Australian National University at the rate of \$5 per day. Additionally, special efforts were made to encourage women from minority groups, particularly Aboriginal and Islander women, to attend. In cases of hardship, these women were not required to make any financial contribution themselves. Free childcare facilities were available at the conference.<sup>52</sup>

We believed that language is "man-made" and thus able to be challenged. Robin Lakoff published her influential article, "Language and Woman's Place" in 1973 and so we were aware of the way women's voices were inflected and of Lakoff's thesis that linguistic discrimination was part of how women were denied access to power.<sup>53</sup> We insisted on the inclusion of non-sexist language, and the refusal of terms used to put women down. At the federal level, the use of the title "Ms" was introduced but it was decided that it should be voluntary, so that those who wanted not to be known by their marital status could do so. As Anne Summers wrote in *MeJane*, we tried "to prefigure the kind of social relations which would prevail in the kind of society we are trying to create."<sup>54</sup>

We felt that language should reflect women's agency and strength. And so, we quietly changed, in all speeches, correspondence and publications, words that reflect an outdated reality, such as "man-months" or "chairman" or "mankind." Such terms strip women of agency and empowerment and re-enforce the belief that it is only men who work or exercise power. Also, the use only of the pronoun "he" to pick up the referent of general terms; even of the constant ordering of pronouns as "he and she" rather than, at times, "she and he"—all were subtle ways of keeping women in their place, of putting women down. Expressions such as "She thinks like a man" or, said with surprise, "she's quite intelligent," downgrade the opinions of women.<sup>55</sup> The press invariably referred to me as a "girl." The belittling, or the sheer disregard for women, contained in such language habits needs to be pointed out time and time again until the deep-seated and unconscious prejudices that lie behind so many of these expressions are confronted.<sup>56</sup>

## Developing a Revolutionary Consciousness: The Royal Commission on Human Relationships

One of the first occasions we had to identify an initiative that could significantly contribute towards the development of a revolutionary consciousness, indeed to making the personal political, was the establishment in 1974 of the Royal Commission on Human Relationships.<sup>57</sup> Not only was great care taken with the selection of the Commissioners and the formulation of its Terms of Reference, and even with its name, but much thought went into how we could maximise its impact on the attitudes and values of ordinary Australians. We wanted the Commission to reach out to those who had had no voice up until then, in such a way as to give them the sense that they were being listened to, then to reflect on what they were hearing and to let Australians know what was happening, usually out of sight, in such a way that the impact of their own behaviour and the underlying attitudes and values that caused the problems could be better understood.

For Whitlam the task of the Commission was "to ensure that no area of need will be overlooked, that no social problem relating to women, whether they be married or not, with or without children, aboriginal or newcomer, English speaking or not, young or old, rural or urban, will be hidden away, forgotten or neglected." It was, he added, "the First Royal Commission in history to investigate such social problems."<sup>58</sup>

The Commission was to inform and educate Australians about the extent and the effects of these social problems and report back regularly to all Australians on our relationships with one another and our behaviour as citizens and members of society. It had powers to investigate rape within and outside of marriage, violence to women and girls, family planning and fertility control, sexuality and gender, childbirth, the termination of pregnancies, and relationship education.<sup>59</sup> Whitlam placed the Commission's work in perspective:

*Before we can act in this area, we must know why all this is so and what can be done to change it. We have removed many areas of discrimination and injustice, but we feel very deeply that governments must take some responsibility in removing the cause of this discrimination, of these injustices. The cause lies invariably in the deeply ingrained cultural assumption that every woman's primary role is that of daughter, wife, mother, mother-in-law, or grandmother; nurse, secretary, teacher or shop assistant: the deeply ingrained assumption that women are here to serve or assist. The well-being of men and children within our society must not be at the expense of the wellbeing of their wives and mothers. For this is too high a price to pay.*<sup>60</sup>

The choice of Commissioners ultimately assured the effectiveness of its work. All three—Justice Elizabeth Evatt, Anne Deveson and Archbishop Felix Arnot—set to work identifying people with expertise for staff positions and creating a safe and respectful feeling in their office. The Commissioners travelled all over Australia, talking, listening and reflecting. They held public hearings, creating safe spaces in which people gave testimony of trauma and violence, disappointment and shame. They answered

phones, met with people one on one, even at times in their own homes, read huge piles of correspondence, held public forums, watched videos, read research papers, and more. They received over 1,200 written submissions, heard testimony from over 400 people and talked with thousands more in informal discussions.

The first Interim Report of the Commission came out in January 1976. It set out the Commission's terms of reference, and the approach that the Commissioners would take to the task. However, in early 1976, the Commissioners were instructed to cut short their inquiry and to ensure that all work was completed by the end of 1976. Their Final Report came out in November 1977 in the middle of an election. Not one of its 511 recommendations, which covered almost every aspect of Australian society—human relationships and social change, sexuality and fertility, including unwanted pregnancies, adoption, abortion, and fertility control, changing nature of the family, domestic violence, rape, child abuse, single parenting, discrimination against women, indigenous Australians, migrants, gay and bisexual men, and the people with disabilities—was ever implemented. Nevertheless, the Commission and its commissioners, through the hearings and discussions, the research program, the Reports, and the recommendations, had a profound effect on the lives, norms and values of many Australians and on our nation's culture.<sup>61</sup>

## Developing a Revolutionary Consciousness from Within: International Women's Year

Another important initiative, chosen because of its potential to contribute to the changing of people's attitudes towards women, was the honouring of IWY in 1975 which, in 1972, had been proclaimed as such by the United Nations General Assembly. On International Women's Day (8 March) 1974, the Australian Government announced its own program to mark IWY and in September 1974, a National Advisory Committee was established.<sup>62</sup> Its role was to publicise and coordinate the government's IWY program, and to allocate funding to individuals and groups for projects that supported the three objectives of the Year: to change attitudes, to reduce discrimination, and to encourage women's creativity.

More than \$3.3 million was allocated, mainly for grants to women's groups and organisations to be spent over

the course of the Year.<sup>63</sup> The Government's approach was outlined in a paper entitled *International Women's Year: Priorities and Considerations*, tabled in Parliament in December 1974. It was clearly stated in the paper that the funds were for projects that did not fall within the responsibility of any government department or other institution, that were once only funding requests, or which could be finished within the life of the Committee. The Committee took responsibility to channel demands for on-going funding requests into the appropriate department or institution, to argue the need for funding from regular budgetary sources with the department, and, in this way, to act as a catalyst for change within the bureaucracy. Projects that "lie within the responsibility of existing institutions," it noted, "include, for example, childcare centres, women's health centres, women's refuges, family planning clinics, legal aid, distressed housing, rape crisis centres, interpreters for non-English speaking people, and so on."<sup>64</sup>

Almost 700 grant applications were received, and a significant number of one-off projects were funded. For example: the National Youth Council of Australia was funded to publish and widely distribute a book by young women for young women entitled *If I Was a Lady and Other Picture Stories: A Mature Girl's Guide to Motherhood, Occupation, Education and Pleasure*. Another grant went to Lilla Watson and Julianne Schwenke to prepare a video on Aboriginal Women in Queensland. Another went to the South Sydney Women's Centre in Redfern, NSW, to help establish the women's centre. A grant was made to the Local Government Women's Association to publish *Women in Australian Parliaments*, by Miss A. Viola Smith. A conference on Women and Madness was funded, as was a film on cystitis and its treatment. The Women's Trade Union Commission (NSW) received a grant to establish a women's trade union centre. The Centre for Urban Research and Action was funded for research on problems facing migrant women in the work force, while the Sunshine International Women's Year Committee received funds for research into women's lives in a working-class area.<sup>65</sup>

All the supported applications were to contribute to changing people's attitudes, to the re-thinking of societal assumptions, beliefs, prejudices and opinions about women, their "proper" roles and their capacities, that is, to our consciousness raising objective.<sup>66</sup>



Royal Commission on Human Relationships in Melbourne, showing the three Royal Commissioners, from L to R: journalist and broadcaster Anne Deveson, Justice Elizabeth Evatt of the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, the Reverend Felix Arnott, Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane. 8 August 1975. PHOTO: NAA A6180, 21/5/75/5.



Poster advertising the Women in Politics Conference, with the Australian Government symbol for International Women's Year. Canberra, 1975.



Elizabeth Reid speaks at the Women in Politics Conference. Canberra, 1975.  
PHOTO: NAA A6180, 2/9/75/16.



The UN World Conference of the International Women's Year opened at the Juan de la Barrera Gymnasium in Mexico City on 19 June 1975. There were 110 delegations represented at the opening session, with women delegates outnumbering the men by about six to one. UN PHOTO: B. LANE.

## Developing an International Revolutionary Consciousness: The World Conference of the International Women's Year, Mexico City

In keeping with the importance that Whitlam placed on the United Nations, Australia played an active role in the international celebration of IWY 1975. The first ever United Nations international conference for women was held in Mexico City from 19 June to 2 July 1975. Australia was a member of the Consultative Committee responsible for assisting the United Nations with the planning of the conference and our delegation to the Mexico conference was one of the strongest and most articulate there.<sup>67</sup>

The delegation was well prepared and our experience at the Consultative Committee had alerted us to the fact that the United Nations was no different from Australia at the national level in that when asked about what women wanted, the reply was invariably a shopping list of demands, rather than an analysis of the workings of sexism and of patriarchy. We argued that, whenever the words, 'racism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism' occurred in documents of the Conference, so too should 'sexism'<sup>68</sup> a term that had not to that date appeared in United Nations documents or debates. Ours was not an objection to the demand for a new world order but rather we insisted that the Conference concern itself with how racism and colonialism specifically affected the lives of women. We lost. The Conference was rendered too uneasy, too embarrassed by such language.

The themes of the Conference were Equality, Development, Peace. In the plenary, the Australian Delegation argued that:

*Women share with men the responsibility for establishing a just international order without which true peace cannot be achieved. We must not forget the women who have fought, time and time again,*

*for such an order ... but such is the tragedy that even when women and men fight together as brother and sister ... too often the new society benefits women no more than the old. Their brothers in the struggle carry within themselves the roots of treason: the myths and prejudices which keep women in their place.*<sup>69</sup>

We argued that it is this reason which is the unifying force that affects the lives of all women, for all women are influenced, deformed and harmed by a society's expectations of how they should behave. Every society is sexist and every woman (and man) lives in a sexist society. The speech continues:

*...Women, like the people of the third world, know the effects of oppression: oppression is the bitter bread of our daily lives. This insight, born of experience, must not continue to be considered irrelevant to the attainment of peace. It is this insight alone which ... justifies the linking of women with peace.*<sup>70</sup>

Perhaps for the first time at a United Nations Conference, the claim was made that 'the recognition and removal of violence towards women is essential towards the recognition and removal of violence internationally' that is, that the ending of domestic violence is a precondition for peace internationally.

In her book on the IWY Conference, Jocelyn Olcott called the Mexico conference 'the greatest consciousness raising event in history'.<sup>71</sup> As one reporter summed up: 'It is safe to venture that, after Mexico City, the world will not be the same. The rising tide of expectations has gone past evolution to revolution.'<sup>72</sup>



The Australian delegation to the World Conference on Women. Mexico, 1975.  
PHOTO: DEVELOPMENT POLICY CENTRE.

## Developing a Revolutionary Consciousness from within: Women's Health, Women and Politics

Two national conferences were also held during IWY. The first, jointly sponsored by the IWY National Advisory Committee (NAC) and the Department of Health, whose Minister, Doug Everingham, was very supportive of women's health initiatives, was held in Brisbane in August 1975. It was on Women's Health in a Changing Society. It drew 900 participants with widely varying backgrounds: health practitioners, health consumers, and health activists. It was the first conference in Australia to deal exclusively with matters relating to women's health and its agenda was set by the participants. In his opening speech—after challenging the conference to discuss the difficult question of whether women's health should be integrated throughout the health service or whether it should be considered separately, for example, Aboriginal health—Whitlam said: "The very concept of women's health is a troublesome one, it brings to mind those problems or illnesses that are associated with women: reproduction, suburban neurosis, valium-dependency, psychotic disorders and so on." By contrast, he noted, "[t]he concept of men's health jars for not only does it not evoke any similar associations with men's illnesses, but it is no more or no less than the concept of health itself."<sup>73</sup>

It may be difficult for us to imagine the state of women's health in the 1970s. Let me quote some of the figures in Whitlam's speech to the conference:

*Further there is an increasing incidence of psychiatric illness amongst women, with the two most common psychiatric diagnoses—depressive states and psychiatric neuroses—being more common in women than men ... they are twice as common in married women as single women. Almost three times as many married women as*

*single show severe neurotic symptoms, twice as many married women as married men have felt that a nervous breakdown was impending, and many more women than men experience psychological anxiety ... Over 10% of women are dependent on headache or sleeping pills. About 4 million prescriptions for Valium are made out each year, the majority of these being written for women.*<sup>74</sup>

No wonder we felt the need for a national conference on women's health.

The second national conference, held the following week, was on Women and Politics.<sup>75</sup> Whitlam believed that "too few women have been involved in making decisions at all levels of Government, in the Public Service, in the political parties and in the trade unions. Decisions which affect their lives both as women and as citizens." He had committed himself not only "to involve the people of Australia in the decision-making processes of our land," but to specifically involve women along with migrants, Aboriginal people, the disabled, those living in poverty and the unsewered. He continued: "This must concern not only my government but the whole Australian Parliament, the State Parliaments, local government authorities and all other bodies whose day-to-day decisions on matters of policy and practice affect the lives of all people, not just men."<sup>76</sup>

The success of this conference can be gauged from the personal testimony of the very diverse women who attended. The first few days were days of conflict and disorder but as the women became aware of the structure of the conference and the fact that they could organise discussions to speak about anything of concern, and could follow their interests

through the program, the discord settled down and the participants turned their hands to learning as much as possible.

Beryl Beaurepaire, then Chair of the Federal Women's Committee of the Liberal Party of Australia, noted: "The most significant benefits originated in the smaller workshops, where everyone could have their say, and individual opinions were given far more prominence than occurred in the plenary sessions [and] the program was sufficiently flexible to cater for topics which emerged during the week." Following the conference, women increasingly became involved in local political activity: some joined the political party of their choice; others became involved in lobby groups or unions.<sup>77</sup>

The success of the conference can also be gauged by the backlash of the Australian media. Media coverage was disgraceful. It highlighted the division that occurred, particularly at the beginning of the conference, without considering that a lack of division would have been unrealistic in so large and diverse a group of people. Yet the negative nature of the coverage was a uniting force as many women felt for the first time the omnipresence of sexism in the media.<sup>78</sup>

## Leaving the Corridors of Power

Sara Dowse, the first head of the Office of the Status of Women, reflecting on the priorities of those times, said:

*The stated aim was to change community attitudes about the place of women in society, and each and every reform adopted was considered in light of how it would help in reaching this objective. A new childcare program was initiated, with a greatly increased allocation, because of its perceived centrality in enabling women to fully participate in society. There were important initiatives in health and women's services ... the establishment of women's units in key government departments ... [which] went forward for Whitlam's signature on the day of the Dismissal, to be taken up by Fraser after his election.*

*... My main contention is that changing community attitudes about women was Reid's foremost consideration and influenced all our actions in the bureaucracy during that period. At the time, I admit, I wasn't entirely attuned to her vision—nor, needless to say, were her many critics within the movement.*

*I didn't see how important a few million dollars set aside for International Women's Year could be, compared with the \$75 million, say, spent on childcare. Yet with hindsight it is easy to see ... how that childcare program could be undermined in subsequent years whereas the ripple effect of IWY has been enormous.*

*Likewise with 1975's Women and Politics Conference, which galvanised women across the political spectrum to plunge into politics, putting their hands up for office at every government level. At the time, however, the media had a field day with both. How can [one] forget how demeaning the media was to everything women did in those days?<sup>79</sup>*

All these changes had a consciousness-raising dimension. Their aim was to increase women's confidence and self-respect, which would enable them to act as morally responsible agents, refusing

to accept abject and dependent lives. Once again, our "personal" experiences had become political.

Even before my resignation, in October 1975, it was clear to Sara and to me that it was not possible, in the long-term, to be a bureaucrat and a feminist visionary. If your desire was to contribute towards the expansion of a revolutionary consciousness, you would be continually speaking truth to power. It would be uncomfortable and would demand such extraordinary skill, agility, and judgement over time as to be incompatible with a career in the bureaucracy. After the Women and Politics Conference, when the Prime Minister bowed to pressure from some of the men in his party to move me sideways into the bureaucracy, and so silence me, I resigned.

## Power and the Performance of Masculinity

In a democracy along with power comes accountability. Even in our most revered institutions women too often experience the workplace through a culture of sexism that undermines their worth and value. The performance of masculinity can be toxic and oppressive, both sexually and in other ways: jokes, language, attitudes, in the experience of pleasure, and more.

In 2012 Australia's first female Prime Minister Julia Gillard called out a culture of misogyny in her own workplace in a speech to parliament that went viral, as women all over Australia recognised something of their own experience in her words.<sup>80</sup>

Since 2021, two #MeToo moments again pierced the culture of silence around workplace bullying, sexual harassment and gender discrimination in Australia's most powerful institutions. Firstly, the accusations by six former High Court staff members who were Judge's Associates that they were harassed by former Justice, the Honourable Dyson Heydon, AC KC. After a specially commissioned internal inquiry, the Honourable Justice Susan Kiefel AC, Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, issued a statement in which she found their accounts of their experience borne out and believed.<sup>81</sup> Secondly, the testimony of Brittany Higgins that she was allegedly raped by a fellow Liberal staffer led many other women who have worked at Parliament House to tell their own stories of bullying and sexual harassment. All these accusations have two things in common: power without accountability, and toxic masculinity.<sup>82</sup>

The harrowing details of these women's experiences in two of the most important institutions in the land must require those of us who worked in Parliament House in the past to think back on the experience. Is the culture of silence, which pre-dated the 1970s and persists still today, so pervasive and muzzling that we, who worked there around half a century ago, remain gagged and traumatised, or were those times different? What was it like for a woman to work in Whitlam's office?

In the early 1970s, Australian society was patriarchally saturated. The idea of men as the head of the household went unchallenged and permeated all aspects of society from pubs to boardrooms to bedrooms, from church to picnics and fetes. A notion of a 'male breadwinner' was widespread leading to gendered inequities in wages and conditions, the absence of women from union management, and a Labor Party dominated by men.<sup>83</sup> In such a culture, the

political public sphere is a male space: there may be different ways of being a man, but each involves being-a-man. As the historian Frank Bongiorno argues, in the 1970s, the male political actor was involved in “embodied practices and rituals that assumed male dominance.”<sup>84</sup> Women who entered the public sphere then had to negotiate what it meant to be a woman in a masculine space. In the early 1970s, there was not a single elected woman in the Labor Caucus, so none in the Whitlam cabinet and there were only a few women policy advisers. All secretarial positions were filled by women.

In a workplace, behaviour can be offensive and oppressive without being sexual. In those days, there were plenty of men—politicians, staffers, and journalists—with hard-earned reputations for drinking. The environment was misogynist

## **Overall, Whitlam’s office was a welcome refuge where one could get on with one’s work.**

and booze sodden, men drank consistently or excessively, except for Whitlam who only now and again had a glass of wine, Mateus Rose preferably. Jokes were sexist and language demeaning. I, being in my early thirties, was referred to as a “broiler.” Then, as now, rape occurred but was rarely discussed and virtually never reported. It was usually associated with booze or the exertion of power over a woman. Or both. Apologies were rarely forthcoming and blaming the victim was a sport. The notion of consent had not yet been interrogated and was assumed rather than sought.

Overall, Whitlam’s office was a welcome refuge where one could get on with one’s work. The air was redolent with smoke, but not so much with innuendo or suggestive comments. People worked long hours and mostly did not drink to excess. To my knowledge, the “hard word” was not put on women in the office. Rather, our competency, intelligence, and sense of humour were appreciated and valued. The boozy men quickly learnt to tell their worst sexist jokes elsewhere and Whitlam exercised his learned and often acerbic wit at will. The only “loaded” witticism I can remember him making to me was once when I was staying over at Kirribilli House, he quipped: “We will be in the classical missionary position tonight!” meaning that he would be sleeping (with Margaret) on the floor above mine.

The masculinity that was performed in political spaces in the 1970s was overtly heterosexual. It was not that there were no non-conforming men amongst the male staffers and politicians, but rather that there was no accepted space in the parliamentary arena for forms of masculinity that were other than heteronormative. Yet, it was also a time of political activism around homosexual law reform and the emergence of more visible gay venues, publications, and the first openly homosexual political organisation, CAMP, Campaign Against Moral Persecution.

In the 1972 election, David Widdup of CAMP NSW stood as an openly gay candidate in Prime Minister Billy McMahon’s seat of Lowe, with the memorable slogan: “I’ve got my eyes on Billy’s seat.”<sup>85</sup> Accusations of being gay, even transexual,<sup>86</sup> were commonplace in those gendered political spaces.

As early as 1970 Whitlam had expressed the view that attitudes to homosexuality were an issue of “private morality.” When in August 1972, Dennis Altman sent

Whitlam a copy of his landmark book *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*<sup>87</sup> Whitlam wrote back immediately congratulating him, pointing out that The Draft Criminal Code for the Australian Territories, which was tabled in 1969, contained some “fearsomely archaic prohibitions on personal conduct.”<sup>88</sup> Before his election, Whitlam had made known that he was in favour of reforming the laws relating to homosexuality.

In government some of Whitlam’s senior colleagues, Dr Moss Cass and Bill Hayden, pushed for a vote to decriminalise homosexuality. Whitlam supported a conscience vote and wanted the motion moved as a private member’s bill, not as a government proposal. He also wanted a senior Liberal involved to ensure the issue

remained non-partisan. Former Prime Minister John Gorton agreed to move the motion and a vote to decriminalise homosexuality in the Federal Territories took place on October 18, 1973. To the surprise of many members the motion was carried 64-40. There were, as Peter Blazey tells it, “some surprising bedfellows. Bill Snedden, Bill McMahon and Paul Keating voted against it, while Whitlam, Andrew Peacock and Doug Anthony voted for it.”<sup>89</sup>

## **Whitlam and Strong Women**

Whitlam lived comfortably in the presence of strong women who were intelligent, independent, outspoken, smart, and courageous. His mother, Martha, his sister, Freda, his wife Margaret, and his daughter, Catherine, bear this out. There is no doubt but that Whitlam experienced closeness, connectedness and support over the seventy years of his relationship with Margaret. As Senator John Faulkner (Labor, NSW) and a Whitlam confidant, said: ‘Although their private jokes could be impenetrable to others, their devotedness to each other was evident to all.’<sup>90</sup>

One of the tensions in my job came about with the appointment of the National Advisory Council (NAC) for IWY. Traditionally, the United Nations Association of Australia convened a group to celebrate a United Nations Year. However, we wanted to celebrate IWY a little differently. We wanted women with a wide range of experience to be involved in planning and making decisions about the Year, so we handpicked for diversity.<sup>91</sup> Margaret Whitlam’s name came up as a possibility. She was chosen because we felt her experience as a social worker and a strong, independent woman who was a wife and mother would resonate (and, as Robin Morgan pointed out in her poem “Monster,” she shared her pillow at night with someone we wanted to influence).

Margaret came from a legal family with ties to the Labor Party. Born in Bondi in 1919, she cast her first vote, in Wentworth in 1943, for Jessie Street. Her views were her own, and she was not too timid to share them. At her first Press Conference at the Lodge, she spoke of her support for equal pay, about the need to decriminalise abortion, the legalisation of marijuana,

and her belief that marriage was not necessary unless the couple intended to have children. She often said: "I say what I think when I want. I am not a mouthpiece for my husband or for the ALP and it is very frustrating for me when people assume that I am."

I had not spent much time talking with Margaret and so, when the invitation came for her to join the NAC for IWY she was justifiably uncertain about why she had been chosen. She accepted but brought her knitting along to the first few meetings! As John Faulkner recounts, "she was at first reluctant to accept because she felt that she was insufficiently militant. She soon became a respected and integral part of the committee, not as the Prime Minister's wife but as Margaret Whitlam, a woman of great good sense, great good humour and absolutely no pretensions."<sup>92</sup>

Margaret Whitlam was, as Senator Faulkner contends, one half of one of the most extraordinary and certainly the most enduring personal and political partnerships in Australian history.<sup>93</sup> In a statement released by Whitlam on the occasion of her death, he writes: "She was a remarkable person and the love of my life. We were married for almost 70 years. She encouraged and sustained me and our four children (Antony, Nicholas, Stephen and Catherine), their families and many other people in a life full of engagement with Australians from all walks of life."<sup>94</sup>

The impact of the Whitlam years on the performance of masculinity and on the sexual mores and behaviours of people is often interrogated and their lasting impact questioned. Let me share an insight that I personally experienced. After I left Australia in 1975, I went to live and work in Iran. Sometime after I arrived, I was told that there was to be a trade delegation to Iran from Australia. Rumour had it that the Australians had a list of over twenty items on which they wished to negotiate; the Iranians had only one item on their list: they wanted access to our uranium. There was no overlap between the two lists.

I was invited by the Iranian Head of Delegation to attend the opening lunch as his guest. The surroundings were opulent. The architecture breath-taking. The Iranian men's couture was stunning. I sat to the right of the host. The Australian delegation stumbled in, dishevelled, muttering about lost suitcases, and unironed suits, and other grumbles. One by one they lifted their heads and started to look around and were startled to see a woman on the other side of the table. Their curiosity was sparked and the questions started, obliquely at first and then full on. I introduced myself.

For the rest of the lunch, individually or in groups, they assailed me with stories of the changes that they had experienced in their marital lives because of the Whitlam government, mainly about how their wives no longer just lay there and "took it," but now demanded sexual satisfaction, and how their marital life was so much the better for it. Or stories of how their wife had become a painter, or a lawyer, or a nurse, or self-confident, and was a different person because of it. Almost all the stories were about their sex lives and marriages and how these had improved beyond belief because of the cultural, social, and political changes that had been initiated during Whitlam's time.

## Whitlam, the WLM, and Social Justice

Whitlam consciously set out to transform Australian society. Those with the least access to social justice and human rights—Indigenous peoples, migrants, the poor, the remote, the people with disabilities, and others—were to be recognised and included as full citizens of Australia, with equitable access to its resources and riches. During his 1972 Campaign speech, Whitlam promised to "legislate to give aborigines land rights—not just because their case is beyond argument, but because all of us as Australians are diminished while the aborigines are denied their rightful place in the nation." He saw a clear connection between Australia's treatment of indigenous people and Australia's role and standing in the international community: "Let us never forget this: Australia's real test as far as the rest of the world, and particularly our region, is concerned is the role we create for our own aborigines."<sup>95</sup>

Whitlam respected the First Australians. He recognised their rights, especially their land rights and their right to live a life without poverty with all its associated ills. Because Whitlam was so clear about this, no case had to be argued for it by his advisers. Thus, it became an automatic part of my work, for those two and a half years, to correspond with,<sup>96</sup> meet with,<sup>97</sup> listen to,<sup>98</sup> appoint to,<sup>99</sup> travel with,<sup>100</sup> have hearings on,<sup>101</sup> fund activities of,<sup>102</sup> and develop policies with and for<sup>103</sup> Aboriginal women. This interaction based on mutual respect has been written out of history. For the historical record, it is important.<sup>104</sup>

The relationship between the WLM and the dispossessed is more contentious. Pat Eatock has written about the time she spent with the Canberra WLM in the Bremer Street Women's House:

*Early in 1972, Bobbi Sykes and I were invited to speak to a group of Canberra women about land rights, the Aboriginal Embassy and other issues of concern to Aboriginal women ... This was my introduction to Women's Liberation ... One week later I arrived in Canberra, penniless, with a five-month-old baby—to stay. After three weeks, still penniless, Amanda and I moved into the Bremer Street meeting room ...*

*The atmosphere at Bremer Street in 1972 was electric. Hardly any evening passed without some sort of meeting, with twenty to sixty women. Consciousness-raising was a twice weekly event. General meetings, action groups, and the embryonic Women's Electoral Lobby had a weekly time and place. Days were filled with the comings and goings of newsletter production, the preparation of leaflets, classes ... or just dropping in.*

*I was an active participant. Not only by choice, but also because baby Amanda and I couldn't go to bed until the meetings ended. We stayed for about six weeks.<sup>105</sup>*

Pat describes herself as the first "refugee from suburbia" that Canberra WL had to deal with: "the physical presence of the 'Green Valley housewife,' her baby, the nappies and disorder, and the endless recitations of my latest trauma as I fought for recognition of my [welfare] entitlements" were concrete evidence of the urgent need for a women's refuge.<sup>105</sup> Her description of that time underlines the importance of a multi-dimensional or intersectional

approach to women's issues, one encompassing race, class, location, education, and other variables, along with gender:

*1972 [was] an extremely traumatic year ... I was often in despair. When meetings closed, usually in the early hours of the morning, I was left alone to cry myself to sleep: no future, no place to go. Too working-class proud to ask for charity, I fed the baby sugar-water while humorously describing my latest battle with welfare. During the first nine weeks I received only two \$10 food vouchers. Few women at the meeting noticed. I understand, but still resent, the pressures put on me to 'move on.'*<sup>106</sup>

There was an awkwardness present at these meetings. Were the differences in up-bringing and circumstances too great? Pat describes the Canberra women's movement as "predominantly middle class, educated and articulate," but whilst that may have created some barriers, it should not have made it impossible to bridge the differences. But it did.

We had a long journey ahead of us, both moral and political, before coming to a threshold of understanding that what was needed was a stance of deep listening to and thinking through their stories of their lives, and that our "advantages" were the benefits of colonialism. Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues that "white feminists and Indigenous women speak out of different cultures, epistemologies, experiences, histories and material conditions which separate our politics and our analyses."<sup>107</sup> That is true, but the critical question is how can such profound differences be overcome?

The WLM had developed a set of practices precisely for breaking down such differences: the practice of sisterhood, to overcome the mistrust and suspicion created by difference; the practice of voice, that is, the voices of all women were to be listened to and their realities reflected on; to ensure respect for differences through a commitment to deep listening; and the creation of consciousness-raising groups, where the personal became the political.<sup>108</sup> Whilst those women in the Canberra WLM were sincere in their following of these practices they were clearly not enough.

We in the WLM knew that being a crusader for women was a constant struggle: one had to be actively involved. Yet, as Suzanne Bellamy of Sydney WLM says in the film *Brazen Hussies*: "You don't necessarily carry the image of yourself that someone else does and it's deeply shocking when you are called for your actions."<sup>109</sup> Although we were sensitive to class, education and articulateness, we failed to interrogate our very whiteness.

This was a profound failure. It was no excuse to say: "But we have an Aboriginal woman/migrant woman/poor woman ... in our group." We did not have the terminology that exists now to name and become conscious of this failure: "unconscious bias" or "implicit stereotype," for example. However, such terminology, whilst acknowledging that people can act on the basis of prejudice and stereotypes without intending to, frames prejudice as involuntary, as something soaked up from the world around us. It may exculpate us.

Together we need to develop a conceptual framework to discuss the intersections of sexism, racism and other forms of injustice, the role of activism and advocacy in challenging them, and how to address our own complicity in them.

## Whitlam's Reform Agenda: Policies from which Women Directly Benefited

The 1972 Labor Party campaign speech deals explicitly with women and their specific needs and roles. First, in the area of childcare, the speech accurately states: "A woman's choice between making motherhood her sole career and following another career in conjunction with motherhood depends on the availability of proper childcare facilities." However, the speech defined childcare as sessional care, within pre-school education.

The WLM argued, on the basis of evidence, that childcare was essentially different from pre-school education and needed to be addressed in itself. The ABS *1969 Childcare Survey* had revealed that 19 per cent of children below school age were the responsibility of people in the work force and a further nine per cent were the responsibility of persons who would work if suitable care arrangements were available.<sup>110</sup> Where the WLM differed from Whitlam was in the *how*: how could one ensure that childcare was available, affordable and accessible to all parents in need of it? How could the emotional and social needs of the young child and its family be met within a narrow educational focus? How could the needs of people in employment for childcare be best met? Not, we felt, only through pre-school education.

***According to Whitlam, equal pay for work of equal value was his government's "most striking and historically significant" reform for women.***

A new and visionary childcare program was tabled in 1974. Central to it was the idea that services should be comprehensive, community based and responsive to community needs, and that no rigid distinction was to be made between educating children and caring for them. When announcing the establishment of the Children's Commission, Special Minister of State Lionel Bowen said: "As a government we are breaking new ground. Never before has such a wide scale attempt been made to assist local communities in the initiation, planning and implementation of services of such crucial importance to themselves and ultimately to this country as a whole."<sup>111</sup>

The 1972 campaign speech also addressed the conditions of women workers in the Commonwealth Public Service, with initiatives relating to equal pay, part time work, and maternity leave. Whitlam would have been aware of the history of legalised unequal pay for women in Australia, going back to the 1907 Harvester case, which has so distorted our wage system to this day. Yet, in *The Whitlam Government 1972-1975*, Whitlam mentions neither this distortion nor its causes, listing rather the relevant ILO conventions that the Menzies Government had failed to ratify and the policies of the ACTU Congress on equal pay from its first announcement in 1941. He points out that the ALP had adopted the policy of equal pay for both sexes in 1936, although a focus on the male provider remained a central plank of Labor thought right up to Whitlam's



Germaine Greer and Elizabeth Reid at the first International Women's Day Conference in March 1975. PHOTO: KEYSTONE PRESS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO.

time.<sup>112</sup> In 1969, the principle of equal pay for equal work was adopted. In 1972 the Arbitration Court granted equal pay for work of equal value and in 1974 the more significant judgement in favour of an adult minimum wage was made.<sup>113</sup>

According to Whitlam, equal pay for work of equal value was his government's "most striking and historically significant" reform for women.<sup>114</sup> However, the true significance of the demand for equal pay was not just that women became eligible for a fairer wage, but also that two of the most discriminatory and harmful furphies in Australian industrial and social history, that of the male breadwinner and that of the male head of household were being challenged and the process of their public dismantlement had begun.

The Commonwealth could act directly to improve the employment conditions of those they employed. Women working in the public service, which at that time employed upwards of 64,000 women, saw their conditions improve with the passing of the Maternity Leave Act, which offered 12 days full pay and 12 months of unpaid leave for new mothers, and outlawed pregnancy-related discrimination. Partners in same sex relationships received the same benefits as spouses for diplomatic postings.

Another lesser-known initiative was when Whitlam wrote to the Chief of the Defence Force, in 1974 stating that, if possible, he would like to open up all parts of the Defence Force to women.<sup>115</sup> By the early 1970s, women were allowed into some non-combatant roles, but the combatant roles were considered to be suitable only for men. Combat forces were male bastions cocooned within a brutal male culture, more than a trace of which still survives today.

## ***Whitlam was concerned that in a country as wealthy as Australia, some people could not afford basic healthcare.***

In 1975, for IWY, the service chiefs established a committee to explore opportunities for increased female participation, especially in the military. This led to reforms that allowed women to deploy on active service in support roles, pregnancy no longer being grounds for automatic termination of employment, and to changes to leave provisions. Equal pay was granted to servicewomen in 1979. In January 2013, serving women were allowed to apply for all positions in the ADF, except special forces, which became open to women in January 2014.<sup>116</sup>

Perhaps the policy that most challenged, and changed, the structural underpinnings of patriarchy was not equal pay but the 1973 Supporting Mother's benefit, payable to any woman with the sole custody and care of a child. Until this reform the only benefit payable to a woman was the Widow's pension. For the first time, women, including unmarried women, were able to choose to keep their children. Previously, for most women, their choice was between abortion and having their child adopted.<sup>117</sup> In 1974, some 26,000 women received the benefit, of whom 14,000 were not married. This measure gave women a sense of agency, increased their self-esteem and provided financial independence. It changed our language—no longer were such children stigmatically classified as "illegitimate" or "bastards" and it moved a whole group of women out

of poverty and despair. The Supporting Mother's benefit also changed our understanding of what constitutes a family and it contributed significantly to the demise of the adoption industry in Australia. With this simple benefit, the whole patriarchal edifice of blood lineage was challenged.

## **Whitlam's Reform Agenda: Policies from which Women Benefited Indirectly**

If there were policies of the Whitlam government from which women directly benefitted, there were also those from which they benefitted indirectly. Without Whitlam, Australia may not have enjoyed universal healthcare. It was a reform that came about through strong leadership, starting in 1967, and a clear vision for how to make Australia a fairer society. Whitlam was concerned that in a country as wealthy as Australia, some people could not afford basic healthcare. For him, universal access to healthcare was a basic right of citizenship. Most women need access to health care in their child-bearing years. Women are much more likely than men to experience sexual violence. If health care were wholly in the private domain, their relative poverty would be a terrible disadvantage.

The public funding of women's services helped women survivors of violence, sexual assault, aggression, and humiliation to establish independent lives.<sup>118</sup> The *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) introduced no-fault divorce, along the lines argued in the Canberra WEL/WLM submission to the Senate, by replacing the dissolution of marriage through evidence of guilt, with a single ground for divorce, namely, the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage. This made it more possible for women to leave violent or otherwise

intolerable marriages. It was also another example of Whitlam's belief that personal matters were political.

But some of the changes that were introduced were not sufficiently well thought through. The ILO Convention No. 111—Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), 1958, was ratified by Australia in June 1973. As Gail Radford commented at the Women and Politics conference: "That's what we asked for. We didn't really go much beyond that and be more specific about how we wanted it implemented and what we wanted done so what happened was a National and six State committees were established."<sup>119</sup> Radford was appointed to the National Committee and Pat Giles was appointed chair of the WA Committee. Both were members of the WLM and WEL.

The Committees were established under the tri-partite organisational structure of the ILO—with trade unionists, employers, and government representatives—and in their terms of reference followed the ILO Convention. As Gail continues: "these people who are doing the discriminating in the workforce, they're sitting in judgement deciding on cases, [on] whether they're discriminating, which seems a little odd...some progress was made with people who didn't realise that they were discriminating ... they were people of goodwill and they redressed it."<sup>120</sup> The

Committees still exist although they last met in 1985/1986. Now their functions are covered, among other bodies, by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

The Australian Assistance Plan (AAP), established by the Whitlam government in 1973, was an outstanding example of the development of a format for the provision of social welfare services centred on communities. It drew citizens, particularly women, into a new sort of political decision-making structure, responding to their self-identified needs, drawing on their resources and time, and supplementing them with funds to be made available from all levels of government. It was an attempt to return administrative power to a grassroots level where welfare needs are best assessed.<sup>121</sup>

The AAP was axed by Fraser in 1977 but not before it was evaluated, in May 1976, by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS): "The AAP has demonstrated that ability to, first, promote the principle of participation and give real resources and real control over priorities to individuals, groups and communities and secondly contribute to diversity and choice in welfare programs for communities."<sup>122</sup> As can be seen in a 1974 film by Suzanne Baker, of the Regional Council for Social Development for Newcastle, the AAP drew women into local processes of needs identification and decision making, even though the context remained predominantly sexist.<sup>123</sup>

Another policy that brought immeasurable benefits to women, their families and generations of their children was free tertiary education. Whitlam argued that every citizen had the right to educational opportunity, regardless of their socioeconomic background, gender or ethnicity. Free tertiary education had a significant impact on the ways people saw themselves and their opportunities in life.<sup>124</sup>

This policy is an important symbol of Australia's commitment to fairness. In his three years in government, participation in higher education increased by 25 per cent. The main beneficiaries were women. We know from lived experience, and family stories, that Whitlam's free education mattered. It is a question of choice whether a country has free education or not. Combined with a properly progressive system of taxation that claws back an appropriate share of the private income gained, as Whitlam assumed it would be, free tertiary education is a test of a country's commitment to the values of social democracy.<sup>125</sup>

Whitlam's policy of free tertiary education challenged our understanding of the class system, by showing that women did not fit easily into its categories. Historically, married women are classified in the class of their husband. This policy showed that many daughters and wives, whether their fathers or husbands were rich or poor, had been debarred, usually by the men in their families, from attending university. They emerged from under these patriarchal chains, into the sunlight and revelled in learning. The class system was being shown to be a system for highlighting the social distinctions that separate men in a system for categorizing men.<sup>126</sup>

Whitlam did not set out to excise the concept of class from public discourse but his policies freed women from the patriarchal notion of being tied to the class of the men in their lives. They could begin to forge their own way in life.

## Lessons Learned: Broad Based Consultation, and Revolutionary Consciousness

The fact that so little was dismantled in the decades after the demise of the Whitlam government suggests that the changes were widely accepted, both by the women of Australia and by those they elect. In part, this is not surprising. As well as ongoing relations with various parts of the WLM and with WEL, particularly Canberra WLM and Canberra WEL, a fair bit of my time was spent in building alliances and friendships with the older women's organisations: the National Council of Women under Joyce McConnell, the Country Women's Association, the YWCA, Business and Professional Women, Catholic Women's League,<sup>127</sup> Australian Federation of University Women, and others.<sup>128</sup> Bonds of respect and admiration were formed with Beryl Beaurepaire and Senator Margaret Guilfoyle of the Liberal Party with whom working relations were informal but quite solid.

Consultations had advanced on the establishment of a National Women's Centre on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra that would house a National Women's Resources Centre, dedicated to a special collection on the history of feminism in Australia, along with meeting spaces and communications for women's organisations.<sup>129</sup> Women's centres were springing up across Australia; Susan Magarey in her paper on the WLM in Canberra describes the Canberra Women's Centre in 1975.<sup>130</sup> Unfortunately, discussions on a National Centre were still at an informal stage and so fell through with the change of government. However, most of the Whitlam reforms survived, in one form or another.

During IWY, we formalised our approach and identified what we called the threshold changes that were needed to overcome the embedded discrimination and suffering that women experience in Australia. Women needed to reach a threshold in which the burdens of their lives—poverty, poor health, sexual violence, caring responsibilities—could be removed or alleviated.

Changes such as childcare, adequate health services, equitable workplace conditions, equitable education opportunities and freedom from violence—all these, and more, are necessary to bring women to the threshold of economic and emotional independence, to the possibility of sufficient peace of mind to be able to look at and reflect upon their lives, their values, and their wishes for the future. These changes resonated with women; they were what they wanted. The Whitlam years had taught them that they were attainable so they understood that they could hold the State to account instead of just listing their problems in their heads (while making the bed or sweeping the floor or any other of the endless repetitive tasks that women do), they could articulate them and demand, successfully or otherwise, that they be addressed.

The other type of change that we identified as essential was what we called, variously, bringing about a revolutionary consciousness, or attitudinal change, or changing the beliefs that society holds about the capacities, potential and life patterns of women and girls. These changes include changes in the language that we use, changes in the narratives we tell ourselves about ourselves, changes in cultural norms and values, changes in the ways we are depicted or talked about, and a rethinking of the concept of our "proper place." We argued that without these kinds of change, the threshold



Kindergarten Union of Tasmania Pre-School unit van at Snug Community Centre, preschool children.  
PHOTO: TASMANIAN ARCHIVES AB713-1-11557.

changes may just replace one set of inequalities by another and may not, in the longer run, be beneficial. In Australia, it was a fortuitous and timely blend of a reform-minded government and feminism that provided the space for trialling it.

## Were the Achievements of Lasting Benefit?

The achievements of the Whitlam years were uneven and unsteady, but almost everything survived even if its origin has faded from political memory. Some illustrative figures might help. Commonwealth supported childcare places increased from zero in 1969 to 246,000 in 1994, despite a decline in the Fraser years. Sara Dowse considered childcare to be the most important policy achievement because it signified agreement that “society is responsible for children, not just women.”<sup>131</sup>

There were achievements in the field of services for women. For example, women’s refuges expanded from an initial 11 in 1974 to about 317 in 1994. And women’s health centres grew in number from two in 1974 to about 60 in 1989. The women’s health policy that covered reproductive and sexual health, violence against women, ageing, mental health, women as unpaid or paid care providers, and the health effects of sex-role stereotyping, was initiated as a result of the first national conference on Women’s Health in a Changing Society. The program was scrapped by the Fraser government but was re-instated by the Hawke government. The violence of the police and of young male university students to women activists in the 1970s, as shown on the archival footage in the film *Brazen Hussies*, was shocking. Women are still subject to extraordinary levels of violence, with on average one woman losing her life to partner violence every week.

Women benefitted immensely from the introduction of no-fault divorce laws, and the establishment of the Family Law Court, with its emphasis on mediated discussion rather than confrontation. The laws against rape were modified; rape in marriage was designated a crime, thus reversing the common law tradition that, as the property of their husbands, women could be raped by their husbands with impunity. Rape and a male sense of entitlement remain contentious and difficult legal, police, and cultural issues, despite decades of activism and legal reform.

## Implementation: Childcare

At each level of the public service, policies have to be interpreted and then implemented. Whitlam was conscious of the difficulties of working through a bureaucracy that had served his conservative predecessors for 23 years. One of the problems was that in the process of implementation many of the policies and recommendations were diverted from their original purpose. Childcare is an excellent example.

Commonwealth government funding of childcare dates from the McMahon government with the passage of the *Child Care Act 1972* (Cth). With the election of the Whitlam government, responsibility for the Act was moved from the Department of Labour and National Service to the Department of Education. A Pre-school Commission was established and tasked with reporting back to government on measures that would ensure that all children throughout Australia would access pre-school education and that children of working parents and under-privileged parents would have access to child-care centres.

### *The government announced its intention to establish a Children’s Commission.*

Once appointed, I quickly made clear that I thought the 1972 ALP policy on childcare with its emphasis on sessional pre-school education would be of benefit only to those families that could afford to have one parent out of the workforce and thus be in a position to take a child or children to and from sessional pre-school. I pointed out that by definition these were not families in greatest need. This point seems to have registered sufficiently to influence the terms of reference of the Pre-School Commission Report.

The Report was tabled in Parliament in late 1973. It was widely criticised for being out of touch with community attitudes and for its emphasis on pre-school education. It failed to address the needs of working parents for childcare, that is, for continuing (non-sessional) access



WEL-ACT members Elizabeth Bilney and Meredith Edwards (with her daughter Karina and son Geoff) attend child-care demonstration in front of Parliament House, Canberra, 1974. PHOTO: CHRIS RONALDS.

to care for children aged zero to four (or five, depending on the starting age for schools in different States).

Meanwhile much work had gone on behind the scenes in the ALP to change the policy from the narrow goal of providing pre-school education to the establishment of a comprehensive childcare service throughout Australia on a priority needs basis. The Social Welfare Commission and the Priorities Review Staff were asked to prepare a new set of proposals for early childhood services. In the August 1974 budget, \$75 million was set aside for childcare. In September 1974, the Whitlam government announced its intention to establish a Children's Commission that would be responsible for policymaking, funding and the administration of children's services.

An Interim Committee for the Children's Commission was established to sponsor and promote the development of a wide range of children's services including early childhood education, full day care, family day care, playgroups, occasional care, out of school hours care, emergency care, and other services deemed necessary or desirable. The Interim Committee was also intended to oversee the development of a rating system through which funds could be disbursed to the neediest communities.

Insiders and outsiders who had worked so hard to get the importance of this policy understood and accepted, all heaved a sigh of relief. It had been a bitter and divisive struggle, but we felt that the outcome was evidence based and responsive to needs and that the budgetary allocation was a beginning. We had much else to do and so we turned our attention elsewhere. We had yet to learn that wherever there has been a battle over policy, that policy must also be carefully shepherd through the implementation phase if one wants to ensure its success.

The Interim Committee, many of whose staff had come from the Department of Education, were not interested in implementing the policies of the new Labor government. Their background was in pre-school education. Hence in the first year of the Committee, they allocated 82 per cent of the funding to pre-schools. This also reflected the ability of the long-established pre-school associations to make submissions, while the newer community-based childcare groups attempted to develop their submissions without any assistance from the Interim Committee.

## Some Observations: Networks Within and Without the Bureaucracy

My workload was immense. It could be said that I brought it on myself and there would be truth in that. For example, the correspondence I received, the volume was extraordinary and there was no way that Louise Lake, a member of Canberra WEL who worked with me, and I could have drafted the replies. I could have allowed the bureaucracy to draft their standard replies, sign them, and send them on their way. To do so, however, would have been a betrayal of the women who wrote. It soon became clear that the replies were in the very same vein as they had been for the previous 23 years. These were the replies that the women were complaining about. So many letters began: "I am so very glad that there is now someone in Canberra who will listen to my complaint." The bureaucracy needed to be more responsive to women's concerns.

We decided that the bureaucracy, too, should undertake a process similar to consciousness raising, for we needed to find a way of changing its culture. Depending on the content of the letter, we would send it to the responsible department to draft a reply. This would be returned to us for signature, and we would assess its adequacy. Usually, we would send it back, along with polite comments and a suggested outline of a response. This was a very valuable process for we became much better informed about the bureaucracy. It was also the beginning of a network of the like-minded as we got to know those within the bureaucracy who were responding to women's needs.

While this process created a huge workload, we thought it worthwhile. Eventually, in 1974, we asked the Prime Minister to establish a Women's Affairs Section in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to back us up, particularly in dealing with the correspondence. Sara Dowse, another member of Canberra WLM, who was appointed to head the Section, kept up the process of bureaucratic consciousness raising with the correspondence.

Lessons learnt from this approach were used to develop the machinery for the bureaucratic institutionalisation of matters of concern to women. This machinery became



Childcare Demonstration 1974. L to R: Andrew Peacock, Liberal Member for Kooyong; Don Chipp, Liberal Member for Hotham and Shadow Minister for Social Security; Elizabeth Bilney, Convenor WEL-ACT Childcare Action Committee. PHOTO: CHRIS RONALDS.

known as the hub and spokes approach to policy advising, making and implementation.<sup>132</sup> It became an effective way to get women's concerns dealt with. It was feminist in its conception, being a non-hierarchical structure within a bureaucratic hierarchy and could function as a network and thus strengthen both the centre and the periphery.<sup>133</sup>

The women's wheel, with its central policy and advocacy office and the women's units in the various departments with responsibility for areas of concern to women, soon attracted feminists who had entered the bureaucracy hoping to be able to effect change. Informal contacts were kept with the WLM movement and with WEL, ranging from information exchange to joint work on submissions such as the WEL submission to the Royal Commission into Australian Government Administration on administrative arrangements for women.

Meredith Edwards, an academic and active member of WEL, described this as a system of networking "when members of WEL worked closely with the feminists within government. In Canberra the WEL lobbyists became skilled in developing detailed and well-documented proposals for the Whitlam government. At the same time, the new bureaucrats who were feminists were learning the tactics needed to introduce feminist programs from within. A symbiosis, a 'weaving together from time to time,' developed between the insiders and the outsiders."<sup>134</sup>

## Some Observations: Insiders and Outsiders

The idea of "insiders and outsiders" was a constant theme. We, on the inside, came to value the outsiders, for they created the space for policy advocacy and development. They made possible this line of argument for those inside: "They (the outsiders) are demanding such and such. This is clearly an important issue for many women. Let us focus on what we can do." Or: "We may need to rethink the budgetary allocation."

The women who wrote submissions and demonstrated about childcare created the space for those inside to maneuver. But demonstrations on the lawns outside of Parliament House in favour of childcare, while joyful

affairs with balloons and babies, were also rowdy, and for many unsettling.<sup>135</sup> This serves to illustrate some quite different points that go to the lack of insight of many lobbyists and lobby groups and in particular, about causal claims: "Because she met X or Y at dinner/in his office/over drinks, we have a childcare policy." Or again: "Because of what this group did/wrote/argued, we have a no-fault divorce law." In fact, favourable policy decisions are sometimes taken despite the lobbying, not because of it.

When women were demonstrating about childcare outside Parliament House, we organised a delegation of women to come and talk with the Prime Minister. As I recall, they were not at ease and perhaps not well enough prepared. Yet after the policy was announced and the funding secured, I often heard claims being made that this individual or that group were responsible for the policy or for persuading the Prime Minister.

The sight of picnics on the lawn with balloons and prams warmed the hearts of some, but others, in particular some Labor caucus members, were persuaded that "those women have so much time on their hands, they should be able to look after their own kids (and are unlikely to vote for us, anyway)." So, the festive air of the demonstrations had a mixed reception. Outsiders can claim causality or effectiveness, but it is the insider that may have privileged knowledge of how things really work.

## Some Observations: Discord, Funding, Fractures, Sisterhood

However, those of us working within government were not only insiders. On more than one occasion, we were made to feel outside of the WLM or parts thereof. It was not easy to ensure that one's actions always lived up to the aspirations and self-narratives of the WLM.

Tensions arose as soon as the position of Special Adviser to Whitlam on women's and children's welfare was advertised. The response from the WLM and from other women's groups to the creation of the position was both welcoming and at times openly hostile. The Sydney *Mejane* collective had questioned the job before I was appointed, raising concerns about representation and accountability, asking how conflicts of loyalty between the Prime Minister and women would be resolved. Peter Wilenski, who chaired the Selection Committee of three,<sup>136</sup> answered that the committee was not proposing to choose a "spokesperson," rather the appointee would be expected to advise and do research on the status of women. For the first time in our history, we were being invited to try our hand at arguing, formulating and implementing what for years we had been writing, yelling, marching and working towards. Whatever position one came from, I felt I had to respond by applying for the job. Others thought it through differently.

Marilyn Lake argues that discord was always a part of the women's movement, and that feminism, like other social and political movements that operate against the dominant discourse, is always open to fracture and discord.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, our own consciousness raising was showing how deeply traumatised most women were. This made fractures even more likely.

There was a revolutionary intensity about those times that made discord almost inevitable. There was, for example, from time to time, a quickness to condemn and a tone of critical contempt from parts of the movement that sat awkwardly with an espousal of feminism. Funding is always a site of contention within social movements. It can be seen as a ploy to divert attention and energies into various service areas and so weaken the movement's capacity for reflection and analysis and/or weaken its ability to be a critical watchdog for issues of rights and discrimination. For some, funding is a means of enabling groups within a movement to make required changes. The discussion of this dilemma had rumbled on in the women's movement. There was a clear need for funding for women and so some said, "Let's go" while others stood at some remove from it.

***All of us as Australians have to insist that we can do so much better as a nation.***

Nevertheless, sisterhood reigned and still reigns. Some of the richest moments of the job came from the on-going discussions with and support from, the women's movement and from women all over Australia. We were connected by a deep vein of feminist solidarity and a shared desire to get something of value done.

Nonetheless, the job came at a high personal cost. Its coverage in the media was sensationalist and deeply sexist. My clothes, appearance, personal relations, opinions and beliefs were continually scrutinized in attempts to shame me, to make fun of me and to lampoon and discredit what we were trying to achieve. Backlash occurs whenever social change occurs. It is a pervasive reaction of the status quo.

## **Whitlam's Task and the Feminist Revolution**

Whitlam placed new ideas as well as issues on the national agenda. He gave new meaning to the principles of democratic socialism in its passionate pursuit of the values of equality, democracy, liberty, and social cooperation. The attainment of each of these values involved fundamental changes in our social organisation and our way of doing things.<sup>138</sup> There has been heated debate about Whitlam's legacy overall and his time in office often felt like being on a rollercoaster. However, in relation to the policies most affecting the lives of Australian women, there is no doubt that his legacy is strong and enduring.

Whitlam had the humility to admit that his policies may not always have been the best ones for women: "I have no doubt that you, the women of Australia, have carefully watched the changes that have come about in the last two years. For these are the changes which you yourselves have fought for so bravely. This Government may not always have done them in the way that you thought best, but we have done them sincerely and to the best of our ability. More significantly, our successes rest upon and are due to your determination, your experiences, your defeats and your successes."<sup>139</sup>

Whitlam had the imagination and leadership to accept that the world needed changing even in ways that he himself had not foreseen. He created the space for feminism to bring new insights into the polity: that the personal is political; that policies are not gender neutral in their impact, given the different locations of men and women in society and in the division of labour; that the accepted class categories ill-fit women; that decency and fairness must be applied to women if they are to remain accepted values in a social democracy.

Without the influence of feminism, social democracy in Australia would have been a much-diminished movement. The feminist agenda, framed in terms of reform and revolution, of patriarchy and sexism, of agency and voice, of the common good, caused significant discursive shifts, traces of which hopefully still lurk in today's shadows.

Without the Whitlam Government, the WLM in Australia would have followed a quite different trajectory. The timing of Whitlam's election just as the WLM was getting stronger and more organised, and the personality of Whitlam himself, meant that the WLM turned into a movement of women. In other countries, this did not happen. Subsequent governments could not pull down the dramatic changes made in the situation of women or in the sexist underpinnings of Australian culture. The WLM did not splinter into factions whose very *raison d'être* was to destroy each other. It did not seep outwards into a neo-liberal narcissism. Rather it gained strength in numbers even as it lost its analytical heart.

## **Looking Forward**

Lasting political change, genuine social reforms, come about when they are based upon principles and ideas. For these ideas to reflect a democratic process, rather than an imposition, they must be communicated, clarified, and argued in public. Then, they can contribute to political ideologies and allow for moral choices about how to live our lives and how to organise our social institutions. Without this, there can be no informed consent of the people.

It is important that we retrieve and rethink our heritage of social reforms, and the vocabulary within which they have been described, both as a political project and as a task for thinking politically in complex ways.

As Whitlam said in his 1972 campaign speech:

*All of us as Australians have to insist that we can do so much better as a nation. We ought to be angry, with a deep determined anger, that a country as rich and skilled as ours should be producing so much inequality, so much poverty, so much that is shoddy and sub-standard. We ought to be angry—with an unrelenting anger—that our aborigines have the world's highest infant mortality rate. We ought to be angry at the way our so-called leaders have kept us in the dark—Parliament itself as much as the people as if to hide their own incapacity and ignorance.<sup>140</sup>*

And as the *International Women's Year: Report of the Australian National Advisory Committee* states: "A viable and strong feminism does not whimper for women to be treated as human beings—it makes it impossible for this not to be the case."<sup>141</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 When the Glebe WL Collective began publishing *Mejane*, the paper of the Sydney WLM, with the first issue coming out on International Women's Day, 8 March 1971, there were already at least 10 WL groups in Sydney. Melbourne and Brisbane had groups. The Canberra WL Group began meeting in June 1970 and had its first public meeting in November 1970. The Hobart Women's Action Group was started in early 1972. The ANU WL group began in 1973.
- 2 *Brazen Hussies*, a documentary history of the Australian Women's Liberation Movement and those times, written and directed by Catherine Dwyer, uses superb archival footage and present-day interviews to chronicle and celebrate this history. Retrieved from: [www.brazenhussies.com.au](http://www.brazenhussies.com.au).
- 3 Peter Wilenski, personal communication. Peter had had contact with the WLM in the USA during his time in Boston prior to joining Whitlam's staff.
- 4 Neither the questionnaire nor the results seem to have survived. Patrick Mullins makes no reference to the WEL survey in his book, *Tiberius with a Telephone: The Life and Stories of William McMahon*, Scrive, Melbourne, 2018. The Age newspaper published scores in the Women Voters Guide, two weeks prior to the election on November 20, 1972.
- 5 Pat Eatock, "A Small but Stinging Twig: Reflections of a Black Campaigner," in Henry Mayer (ed.), *Labor to Power: Australia's 1972 Election*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1973, p. 153.
- 6 Gough Whitlam, Speech at the Opening of The Women and Politics Conference, Canberra, 31 August 1975. Retrieved from: [pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-3874](http://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-3874).
- 7 Gough Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government 1972-1975*, Viking, Melbourne, 1985, p. 17, 512.
- 8 Carolyn Collins, *Save Our Sons: Women, Dissent and Conscription during the Vietnam War*, Monash University Publishing, Clayton, 2021, p. xii.
- 9 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government 1972-1975*, pp. 19-22.
- 10 Ann Curthoys, "Women at Work: Some Ideas," *Mejane*, no. 1, March 1971, pp. 8-9.
- 11 See the opening archival footage in *Brazen Hussies* to get an idea of the cultural ideology of the housewife.
- 12 Curthoys, *Mejane*, pp. 8-9.
- 13 Julia Ryan recorded the discussion groups she attended from September 1972 to January 1973 in her WL notebooks: Women in Cuba, Dale (Sara) Dowse; Perspectives on Lesbianism, Claire McGrath; New Thoughts on Sexuality, Eileen Haley; Goodbye to All That, Helen Shepherd; Women in Vietnam, Dee Hunter; Action for '73, Jenny Oswald; Tolstoy, Monstrous Patriarch, Daphne Gollan. Other topics mentioned in the Canberra WL newsletter, included: the nature of the patriarchy, reform and revolution, egalitarianism and reform, power and women, anarchism and feminism, women and the Russian Revolution, women in China, women's reproductive rights and freedoms, a critique of Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, Thomas Hardy's view of marriage in *Jude the Obscure*, the redevelopment of the suburbs, women at work, wages for housework (Selma James, Pat Mainardi), redistribution of income in favour of the underprivileged, trade unions and women, equal pay, women's electoral behaviour, abortion and women, adoption laws and their reform, a woman's view of contraceptives, penal reform, and more. Ad hoc WLM Action groups were established as required. Some of those from the early years in Canberra included: campaign support for Pat Eatock, in the 1972 Federal election, childcare centres and creches in the ACT, family planning clinics in the ACT, reform of the Draft Criminal Code for the Australian Territories (tabled in 1969), reform of the divorce laws: a WL/WEL submission to a Senate committee argued that the only ground for divorce should be irretrievable breakdown of the marriage, International Women's Day organising committees, and a joint WL/WEL group to establish the first Canberra Women's Refuge (established in March 1975 and still operating). An analysis of the first two years of Sydney's *Mejane*, the newspaper of Sydney's WLM, shows a similar range of issues.
- 14 Each person would be given a number of tokens, often small stones, perhaps five, at the beginning of a meeting. Each time a person spoke, they would put one of their stones in the centre of the table. Once someone ran out of stones, you could not speak again until everyone had either used all of their stones or declared that they had said enough. The tokens would then be redistributed.
- 15 Elizabeth Reid, "Development as A Moral Concept: Women's Practices as Development Practice," in Noeleen Heyzer (ed.), *A Commitment to the World's Women*, UNIFEM, New York, 1995, pp. 119-121.
- 16 *Brazen Hussies* has archival footage of the Mt. Beauty Conference.
- 17 The topics discussed at the Conference included: The historical origin of female oppression: biology, private property; Is the matriarchy a myth?; sisterhood: how can women unite?; the patriarchy: the nature of authority, the family, institutions and structures; feminism: radical, lesbian, liberal, socialist; sexism in Australia: do you wake in fright?; and, lesbian oppression in the WL movement.
- 18 Susan Magarey, *Dangerous Ideas: Women's Liberation, Women's Studies, Around the World*, University of Adelaide Press, Adelaide, 2014, p. 52.
- 19 The Canberra Feminist Theory group met separately to discuss topics such as anarchism, socialism, Marcuse, and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*; Julia Ryan, personal communication.
- 20 In *Brazen Hussies* the level of male violence, and police violence, towards women is quite shocking.
- 21 Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, Duke University Press, London and Durham, 2012.
- 22 See the demands and the discussions in *Brazen Hussies* of the need for women to take control of their bodies.
- 23 International Women's Year Report of the National Advisory Committee, AGPS, Canberra, 1976, pp. 10-11. See also Elizabeth Reid, "Woman: Egalitarianism and Reforms," in *Equality: The New Issues*, The Victorian Fabian Society, Melbourne, 1973, p. 4.

- 24 Gough Whitlam, Speech by the Prime Minister, International Women's Year Inaugural Meeting of the Australian National Advisory Committee, Canberra, 11 September 1974. NLA Box 40, MS9262/14/69.
- 25 Race Mathews, *Australia's First Fabians: Middle-class Radicals, Labour Activists and the Early Labour Movement*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 232–233.
- 26 Gough Whitlam, "Socialism Within the Australian Constitution: John Curtin Memorial Lecture, 1961." Retrieved from: [john.curtin.edu.au/jcmemlect/whitlam1961.html](http://john.curtin.edu.au/jcmemlect/whitlam1961.html); reprinted in E. G. Whitlam, *On Australia's Constitution*, Widescope, Camberwell, 1977, p. 70.
- 27 For a definition, see Graham Freudenberg, "The Program," in *The Whitlam Phenomenon: The Fabian Papers*, McPhee Gribble, Fitzroy, Vic., 1986, p. 134.
- 28 Frank Bongiorno, "Whitlam, the 1960s and The Program," in Troy Bramston (ed.), *The Whitlam Legacy*, The Federation Press, Sydney, 2013, p. 40.
- 29 Graham Freudenberg, "The Art of the Matter," in Bramston, *The Whitlam Legacy*, p. 50.
- 30 Carol Johnson, "Gough Whitlam and the Re-imagined Citizen-subject of Australian Social Democracy," in Jenny Hocking (ed.), *Making Modern Australia: The Whitlam Government's 21st Century Agenda*, Monash University Publishing, Clayton, Vic., 2017, pp. 154–155.
- 31 Gough Whitlam, Maiden Speech in the House of Representatives, 19 March 1953.
- 32 Gough Whitlam, "It's Time," Election Campaign Speech, 1972. Retrieved from: [electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1972-gough-whitlam](http://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1972-gough-whitlam).
- 33 Gough Whitlam, "It's Time," Election Campaign Speech, 1972. It should be noted that this quote is from the full policy speech script but was not spoken on the day at Bowman Hall.
- 34 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government 1972–1975*, p. 174.
- 35 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government 1972–1975*, p. 518.
- 36 Activism was not new to me, having marched on the streets of London and Canberra, written articles on rape in marriage, masturbation and the objectification of women, the draft Criminal Code for the Australian Territories, debated abortion, sexuality, and birth control at the ANU, been a founding member of the Homosexual Law Reform Society of the ACT, and the Abortion Law Reform Association of the ACT, worked to establish the Family Planning Clinic in the ACT, been Campaign Manager for Pat Eatock, an Indigenous independent candidate for the ACT in the 1972 elections, worked on various submissions to government, including the WL/WEL submission on no-fault divorce law, and more.
- 37 Elizabeth Reid, "How the Personal Became Political: The Feminist Movement of the 1970s," *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 33, no. 95, 2018, pp. 9–30.
- 38 Elizabeth Reid, "The Draft Criminal Code for the Australian Territories," *Woroni*, 9 March 1972.
- 39 Susan Magarey, "Beauty Becomes Political: Beginnings of the Women's Liberation Movement in Australia," *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 33, no. 95, 2018, pp. 31–44.
- 40 Elizabeth Reid, "The Child of Our Movement: A Movement of Women," in Jocelynn A. Scutt (ed.), *Different Lives: Reflections on the Women's Movement and Visions of its Future*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1987, p. 15.
- 41 Elizabeth Reid, "Creating a Policy for Women," in *The Whitlam Phenomenon*, pp. 145–155.
- 42 Iola Mathews, "Woman's Voice in PM's Ear," *The Age*, 28 September 1973, p. 8.
- 43 Elizabeth Reid, interview by Dany Torsch, NLA, Box 9 MS9262/4/2.
- 44 Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Random House, New York, 1961.
- 45 Posters; personal collection of the author.
- 46 Elizabeth Reid, "Woman: Egalitarianism and Reforms," in *Equality: The New Issues*, Fabian Society Pamphlet, Melbourne, 1973, p. 2; reprinted as "Equality: The Myth of Conformity 1. Women," in Paul R. Wilson (ed.), *Of Public Concern: Contemporary Australian Social Issues*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1977, p. 222, where the editor has deleted the words "egalitarianism" and "reforms" from the sub-heading.
- 47 See the discussion of the potential benefits and drawbacks of maternity leave in Carol Ambrus and Dale Dowse, "Visions," *Canberra Women's Liberation Newsletter*, May 1973, pp. 6–8. NLA, Box 87, MS 9262/16/464.
- 48 Eileen Haley, "The Long Haul," *Politics*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1973, pp. 330–332.
- 49 To this day, I cannot control my swearing! But I vividly remember the sense of freedom that it gave me.
- 50 Biff Ward, "The Politics of Feminism," in *The Women and Politics Conference 1975*, vol. 2, pp. 149–152.
- 51 Biff Ward, "The Politics of Feminism," in *The Women and Politics Conference 1975*, vol. 2, pp. 149–152.
- 52 *The Women and Politics Conference 1975*, vol. 1 and vol. 2, Introduction. See also *International Women's Year: Report of the Australian National Advisory Committee*, Parliamentary paper, no. 210, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1976, pp. 147–151.
- 53 Robin Lakoff, "Language and Woman's Place," *Language in Society*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1973, pp. 45–80.
- 54 Anne Summers, "Where's the Womens Movement Moving To?" *Mejane*, no. 10, March 1973, reprinted in Susan Magarey, *Dangerous Ideas: Women's Liberation – Women's Studies – Around the World*, University of Adelaide Press, Adelaide, 2014, p. 34.
- 55 Reid, "Woman: Egalitarianism and Reforms," p. 6. Also, think of the pronominal violation one feels, as a woman, on hearing or reading Whitlam's definition of positive equality.
- 56 For an excellent account of feminist linguistic activism in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s, see Amanda Laugesen, "Changing 'Man-made Language': Sexist Language and Feminist Linguistic Activism in Australia," in Michelle Arrow and Angela Woollacott (eds), *Everyday Revolutions: Remaking Gender, Sexuality and Culture in 1970s Australia*, ANUPress, Canberra, 2019, pp. 241–260.

- 57 The origin of the Commission was a failed motion for reform of the ACT abortion laws in the House of Representatives. During the debate on the Bill, Race Mathews moved an amendment for a Royal Commission into Abortion to be established. The amendment lost but four months later Race proposed a Royal Commission into similar issues but with a broader scope. Malcolm Fraser moved an amendment which broadened the scope of the Commission even more. It was passed by an overwhelming majority of the House in a free vote on non-party lines. For fuller details, see *The Interim Report of the Royal Commission into Human Relations*, vol. 1, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra, 1976. See also Anne Deveson, *Australians at Risk*, Cassell, Sydney, 1978, pp. 2–4.
- 58 Gough Whitlam, International Women's Day Reception, Melbourne, 8 March 1975. Retrieved from: [pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-3643](http://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-3643).
- 59 *Royal Commission into Human Relationships, Final Report*, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra, 1977.
- 60 Whitlam, Speech by the Prime Minister, The Women and Politics Conference.
- 61 For a more detailed discussion of the Commission and its final moments, see Michelle Arrow, *The Seventies: The Personal, the Political and the Making of Modern Australia*, NewSouth Publishing, Sydney, 2019, pp. 187–193. See also Deveson, *Australians at Risk*, pp. 13–24.
- 62 Its members included Irene Greenwood, a long-time fighter for women and peace; Shirley Castley, a member of the Hobart Women's Action Group; Margaret Whitlam, wife of the Prime Minister; Aboriginal activist Ruby Hammond; ABC broadcaster Caroline Jones; Maria Pozos, a migrant factory worker; trade unionist Barry Egan; Diane Waite, women in remote areas; Ruth Ross of the organization Business and Professional Women; Jeanette Hungerford, occupational therapist; James Oswin, Secretary, Department of the Media; and Jim Spigelman, Senior Adviser to the Prime Minister and member of the 1965 "Freedom Ride."
- 63 *International Women's Year: Report of the Australian National Advisory Committee*, p. 2.
- 64 *International Women's Year: Priorities and Considerations. Statement Prepared for the Information of the Parliament and Tabled by the Prime Minister, the Hon. E. G. Whitlam, 4 December 1974*, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra, 1974; reprinted in *St. Marks Review*, no. 80, December 1974, pp. 22–23.
- 65 For the full list, see *Report of the ANAC International Women's Year*, part 2, section 2 and 3.
- 66 *International Women's Year: Report of the Australian National Advisory Committee*, pp. 74–75.
- 67 The official Australian delegation to the IWY Conference was composed of a diverse range of people. Its Deputy Leaders were Margaret Whitlam, and Robin Ashwin from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). Other members were Shirley Castley, Sara Dowse, Pat Galvin, Louise Lake, Lenore Manderson, Maria Pozos, Susan Ryan, and, from DFAT, John Campbell, Penny Wensley and Tony Wilson. A second delegation was funded to go to the parallel NGO Conference, The IWY Tribune.
- 68 Report of the World Conference of the International Women's Year, UN Document E/CONF.66/34.44.
- 69 Elizabeth Reid, Statement by the Leader of the Australian Delegation, World Conference of the International Women's Year, Mexico City, 20 June 1975. Item 15886, Whitlam Prime Ministerial Collection, The Whitlam Institute.
- 70 Ibid., p.8.
- 71 Jocelyn Alcott, *International Women's Year: the greatest consciousness-raising event in history*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017.
- 72 Ibid., p. 325.
- 73 Gough Whitlam, Speech by the Prime Minister, the Hon EG Whitlam QC MP, at the Women and Health Conference, Brisbane, 25 August 1975, PM Transcripts 3860.
- 74 Gough Whitlam, Speech by the Prime Minister, the Hon EG Whitlam QC MP, at the Women and Health Conference, Brisbane, 25 August 1975, PM Transcripts 3860.
- 75 See *Brazen Hussies* for some archival footage from the opening days of the Conference.
- 76 Whitlam, International Women's Day Reception.
- 77 *International Women's Year: Report of the Australian National Advisory Committee*, pp. 150–151. See also Michael McKernan, *Beryl Beaufort*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1999, pp. 120–123.
- 78 Ibid., pp. 22–23, 53–57.
- 79 Sara Dowse, "The Femocrat Factor," *Inside Story*, 6 June 2013, pp. 2–3. Retrieved from: [insidestory.org.au/the-femocrat-factor](http://insidestory.org.au/the-femocrat-factor).
- 80 Delivered on October 9, 2012, Julia Gillard's speech to parliament was a response to Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott, accusing Gillard of sexism. Her speech to parliament quickly became known as "The Misogyny Speech."
- 81 It is important to note that this reference reflects the view of Chief Justice Susan Kiefel AC that she found the investigation report to be persuasive, that she believed the women. The specially commissioned internal inquiry was held in confidence and issued a final report that was also kept in confidence. The Hon Dyson Heydon AC did not subject himself to examination but instead said through his lawyers: "...any allegation of predatory behaviour or breaches of the law is categorically denied..." No legal action was ever taken against Heydon and no legal sanction was therefore applied.
- 82 The trial of the accused Liberal staffer Bruce Lehrmann was abandoned in October 2022 after a juror was found to have brought outside evidence into the jury room. The prosecutor decided not to proceed with a retrial as it would pose an unacceptable risk to Higgins health.
- 83 *Brazen Hussies* both captures the nature of Australian society in the 1970s and provides a measure against which the demands then articulated by women can be compared with the initiatives of the Whitlam Government.
- 84 Frank Bongiorno, "Good Blokes? Gender and Political Leadership in the Australian Labor Party," in Zareh Ghazarian and Katrina Lee-Koo (eds), *Gender Politics: Navigating Political Leadership in Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2012, p. 25.

- 85 David Widdup, "I've Got My Eyes on Billy's Seat: Vote 1 David Widdup, Homosexual Candidate for Lowe," 1972 Election Poster. Retrieved from: [www.sl.nsw.gov.au/collection-items/ive-got-my-eyes-billys-seat-vote-1-david-widdup-homosexual-candidate-low-widdup](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/collection-items/ive-got-my-eyes-billys-seat-vote-1-david-widdup-homosexual-candidate-low-widdup).
- 86 Frank Bongiorno, "Good Blokes?," p. 24, referring to a short story, "Stiletto Inheritance," by historian Humphrey McQueen.
- 87 Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, Outerbridge & Dienstfrey/Dutton, New York, 1971.
- 88 Benjamin Riley, "Letter to Gay Activist Shows Gough Whitlam's Early Influence on Decriminalisation," *Star Observer*, 25 October 2014.
- 89 Peter Blazey, *Screw Loose: Uncalled-For Memoirs*, Picador, Sydney 1997 p. 175.
- 90 John Faulkner, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* (Senate), 19 March 2012; reprinted as 'Whitlam, Margaret Elaine 1912-2012', *Obituaries Australia*, oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/whitlam-margaret-elaine-15933.
- 91 Jocelyn Olcott, *International Women's Year: The Greatest Consciousness-raising Event in History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017, ch. 1 and 2, especially pp. 27-33, for a more detailed account of these tensions.
- 92 Faulkner, "Whitlam, Margaret Elaine 1912-2012."
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 Tim Leslie, "Margaret Whitlam Dies," *ABC News*, 17 March 2012.
- 95 Graham Freudenberg, *A Certain Grandeur: Gough Whitlam in Politics*, Penguin Viking, Ringwood, Vic., 2009, p. 239.
- 96 See correspondence with, for example, Faith Bandler, in my papers.
- 97 I met with groups of Aboriginal women and with individual Aboriginal women when in the listening phase of my job. One Aboriginal woman, Pat Eatock, worked closely with me, formally and informally, during the Whitlam years.
- 98 On the way to the Monday Conference on the Monday night of the Women and Politics Conference, I was surrounded and assailed by a large group of angry Aboriginal women, who did not feel that their concerns had been taken into account by the organisers. Immediately a session was organised for them, as it was for other groups that felt similarly. Pat Eatock has written: "I was an official rapporteur on the Campaigning stream of the Conference but throughout that week I was under constant attack from my Aboriginal sisters." Eatock, "There's a Snake in My Caravan," in Scutt (ed.), *Different Lives*, p. 30.
- 99 For example, three Aboriginal women out of fifteen members were appointed to the Aboriginal Arts Board in May 1973. Jeremy Eccles, "Whitlam Maligned by Fairfax," *Aboriginal Art Directory*, 24 October 2014. Retrieved from: [news.aboriginalartdirectory.com/2014/10/whitlam-maligned-by-fairfax.php](http://news.aboriginalartdirectory.com/2014/10/whitlam-maligned-by-fairfax.php). One Aboriginal woman was appointed to the National Advisory Committee for IWY (total membership of 11, nine women and two men) (See *International Women's Year: Report of the Australian National Advisory Committee*).
- 100 Two Aboriginal women (out of 10 women) were funded to go to the Mexico Conference for IWY (*International Women's Year: Report of the Australian National Advisory Committee*, p. 191); Aboriginal women from every State and Territory were funded to attend the Women and Politics Conference; over twenty Aboriginal women, both urban and remote, were funded to travel to conferences during IWY (*International Women's Year: Report of the Australian National Advisory Committee*).
- 101 Anne Deveson's account of the Royal Commission on Human Relations (RCHR), *Australians at Risk*, contains excerpts from the testimony of at least eight Aboriginal Women, including Shirley Smith (Mum Shirl), a founder of the Aboriginal Medical Service, Bobbie Sykes, journalist and early member of the Tent Embassy, and three Aboriginal men. See also the *Report of the RCHR*, vol. 5, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1977, section on Aborigines.
- 102 One example of government support was the funding, by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, of a film, *Sister if You Only Knew*, the story of the Aboriginal Women's Committee of South Australia and of the lives of the four Aboriginal women who founded it. Retrieved from: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUBuWuTv\\_9M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUBuWuTv_9M). (*International Women's Year: Report of the Australian National Advisory Committee*, p. 154). Also, Lilla Watson and Julianne Schwenke were funded during IWY to make a video on what it was like to be black and female (*International Women's Year: Report of the Australian National Advisory Committee*).
- 103 This is the area in which I felt that the Whitlam Government did not do well. For an elegant example of the sort of thinking that should have gone into policy development for Aboriginal women, see Meredith Burgmann, "Black Sisterhood: The Situation of Urban Aboriginal Women and Their Relationship to the White Women's Movement," *Politics*, vol. 17, no. 2, 1982, pp. 23-37.
- 104 A similar record can be made for migrant women and other women with little access to social justice, except perhaps disabled women, that is; I can remember very little focus on disabled women and their needs during those years.
- 105 Eatock, "There's a Snake in My Caravan," pp. 25-27.
- 106 Ibid.
- 107 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2000, p. 124.
- 108 Reid, "Development as a Moral Concept," pp. 118-121.
- 109 *Brazen Hussies*. The specific moment in the film appears at: 00:14:55:16.
- 110 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, no. 56, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1970, pp. 705-708.
- 111 Quoted in Deborah Brennan, *The Politics of Australian Childcare: Philanthropy to Feminism and Beyond*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. xx.
- 112 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government 1972-1975*, p. 512.
- 113 See archival footage in *Brazen Hussies* of the principled stand on equal pay by Zelda D'Aprano, Alva Geikie and others in 1969.
- 114 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government 1972-1975*, p. 516.

- 115 Until the Whitlam Government's reforms, the Australian defence force was administered by five separate government departments: the Departments of Defence, Supply, Navy, Army and Air Force. Defence Minister Lance Barnard argued that "the defence of this country is too important a matter to be administered by a demonstrably inefficient grouping of organisations whose functions are sometimes duplicated and whose very existence as bureaucracies bedevils great affairs with unnecessary conflicts." To create a more efficient, organised defence force, the Whitlam Government created a single Department of Defence in November 1973.
- 116 Mazoe Ford and Ruth Blunden, "Timeline of Women in the Australian Defence Force," ABC News, 21 April 2015. Retrieved from: [www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-21/timeline-of-women-in-the-australian-defence-force/6398388](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-21/timeline-of-women-in-the-australian-defence-force/6398388). See also, Women in the Armed Forces: The Role of Women in the Australian defence Force, Parliamentary e-Brief, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, no date. Retrieved from: [www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/Publications\\_Archive/archive/womenarmed](http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/archive/womenarmed).
- 117 See *Brazen Hussies* for Rosemary West's story.
- 118 *Brazen Hussies* has archival footage of the establishment of the women's refuge, Elsie, in Glebe, Sydney.
- 119 *Women and Politics Conference Report*, Vol. 2, 1975, p.160.
- 120 Ibid., p.160.
- 121 Melanie Oppenheimer, Erik Eklund and Joanne Smith, "Reach of the Imagination: The Bold Experiment of the Australian Assistance Plan," in Jenny Hocking (ed.), *Making Modern Australia: The Whitlam Government's 21st Century Agenda*, Monash University Publishing, Clayton, Vic., 2017, ch. 4.
- 122 Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government 1972-1975*, p. 364.
- 123 Oliver Howes, "A Say in Your Community with the Australian Assistance Plan," *Living Histories*. Retrieved from: [livinghistories.newcastle.edu.au/nodes/view/59930](http://livinghistories.newcastle.edu.au/nodes/view/59930).
- 124 See Christine Sykes, *Gough and Me: My Journey from Cabramatta to China and Beyond*, Ventura, Edgecliff, 2021.
- 125 Tertiary education remains free even today, for example, in Czechia, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Germany, France, and Denmark.
- 126 At the same time the WLM were discovering that the class struggle was a male dominated activity in support of male institutions in which men disagreed over the end of socialism and how to get there, while exploiting women.
- 127 My mother was the Federal President of the Catholic Women's League in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and also, for extended periods, President of the Canberra-Goulburn CWL. Through her, I came to know the strengths of the traditional women's groups as well as some of their officeholders.
- 128 The Hobart Women's Action Group published a humorous article in *Liberaction* on my dressing strategy with respect to traditional and modern women's groups and developed hilarious scenarios in which I would wear my Women's Electoral Lobby outfits to a Country Women's Association meeting, or my National Council of Women of Australia outfits to a Women's Liberation Movement meeting, and so on.
- 129 Correspondence with Ruby Rich 14th November 1974, NLA, Elizabeth Reid Papers, MS 9262/14/37.
- 130 Magarey, *Dangerous Ideas*, pp. 57-58.
- 131 Hester Eisenstein, *Inside Agitators: Australian Femocrats and the State*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1996, pp. 50-51.
- 132 Marian Sawyer, *Sisters in Suits: Women and Public Policy in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990, pp. 27-32.
- 133 Eisenstein, *Inside Agitators*, pp. 23-25, 39-40.
- 134 Quoted in Eisenstein, *Inside Agitators*, p. 40.
- 135 See archival footage of some of the childcare demonstrations in *Brazen Hussies*.
- 136 The other members of the Selection Committee were Gordon Bilney, foreign affairs adviser on Whitlam's staff, and Thelma Hunter, who was a senior lecturer in Political Science at the ANU and a feminist. At the time, she was working on reform and revolution in contemporary feminism.
- 137 Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1999, pp. 231-245.
- 138 Gareth Evans, "The Lessons," *The Whitlam Phenomenon*, p. 166.
- 139 Whitlam, International Women's Day Reception.
- 140 Election Campaign Speech, 1972. Retrieved from: [electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1972-gough-whitlam](http://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1972-gough-whitlam).
- 141 *International Women's Year: Report of the Australian National Advisory Committee*, p. 37.

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