women talking politics

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In planning for this edition of the newsletter, it seemed an obvious choice to focus on the 2005 general election. But I hadn't counted on the campaign, election and coalition building being so exciting (is that the right word?) Neither had I counted on such an overwhelming response from candidates and commentators to contribute their experience and ideas to the newsletter to produce this fascinating account of the events, and expert analysis of the outcomes. I am, as always, grateful to those who have willingly given their time and expertise. I hope you, the reader, enjoy the results!

Best wishes for the holiday season, and I look forward to bringing you further editions in 2006.

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***On saying less than we know***

A common practice of political science journals, including even feminist political science journals such as the *International Feminist Journal of Politics* is to require referencing styles that obscure the gender (and in some cases the ethnicity) of authors. Whenever authors publish under their full names, referencing styles require the abbreviation of given names to initials. This practice of less than full disclosure conceals in some cases a systemic failure to cite the work of women in the discipline. I have yet to find a convincing justification for the use of initials rather than names in academic referencing and urge those on editorial boards to seek to change it.

Prof. Marian Sawyer
Political Studies Program
ANU

## On the Campaign Trail: Candidates' Reflections on Election 2005

*Judith Collins*
*National Candidate for Clevedon*

My second parliamentary campaign, the 2005 campaign for Clevedon and the National Party vote, was vastly different from my first in 2002.

In 2002, I was fighting primarily for the candidate vote; having been placed at 43 on the party list my only hope of being an MP was through the electorate. I was a virtual unknown in the electorate in 2002, and having unseated an existing National Party MP for the candidacy, there was, quite naturally, a significant amount of suspicion about me. The Dominion newspaper at the time noted that Clevedon is 'on paper' a Labour seat; other political parties felt quite happy to personally attack me and some in my own party chose to shift their allegiance. Still I won the candidate vote by 3,127 but heavily lost the party vote with National taking only 24 percent.

This time was quite different. I had been working hard in the electorate, effectively 'campaigning' since August 2002. Consequently, with quite a high local profile and a reputation for delivering for constituents, I knew things were not going to be the same. When choosing my campaign team, I saw no need to change the winning formula. I kept the same campaign manager, Chris King, a few people were added, but the bones of the committee remained. What did change was the focus. We chose to campaign on the party vote primarily with 75 percent of our hoardings being party vote only. Our newspaper advertisements were 50 percent me as the candidate and 50 percent National as the party vote. Early on, we decided to repeat the exercise of 2002 and produce a 'vote for Judith Collins' brochure for delivery around the electorate but in the end we decided to save the money and put it towards the party produced postcards which mimicked our party billboards but with more detail. We kept the campaign focused on policy, not personalities and it worked.

In the past 3 years, I had noticed that Clevedon people were primarily interested in policies, not politics. The campaign in Clevedon was particularly nasty-free with no dirty tricks, and no abuse of or from any side. Standing against me were MPs from both Labour and New Zealand First and it seemed to me that all of us wished to campaign fairly.

The electorate of Clevedon is one of the fastest growing and most culturally and racially diverse of all the New Zealand electorates. Although, named Clevedon, the village and surrounding area make up a small part of the total constituency. The major voting areas are the City of Papakura to the south and the newer areas of Dannemora, Somerville, Howick South and Flat Bush to the North. Although 80 percent of the physical area of the electorate is rural, only 20 percent of the voters live rurally. The ethnic mix is extremely diverse with recent migrants forming a majority of the northern voters.

Public meetings were well attended, well organised and again focused on policies. We ran policy specific public meetings on education and law and order with education being the most popular. In total, there were seven public meetings, ten cottage meetings, eight public walkabouts, and over 200 volunteers helping on Election Day. Thousands of party brochures were delivered by volunteers.

We focused very much on cottage meetings with attendance ranging from eight to 30. Many of the attendees were either 'the converted' or those 'seeking to be converted'. I see these as very good mechanisms to discuss policy with people who will then go out and sell those policies for us. It is also a good opportunity to meet people in a less formal and relaxed setting than in a public hall. Door knocking again featured with most being conducted in the newer part of the electorate with many new migrants.

This election, I was required to spend days out of each week in other electorates helping new candidates as well as supporting the party leader in Auckland. The polls were a constant challenge with having us up one minute and behind the next and back again. I decided to take no notice and get on with it.

The organisation at electorate, regional and national level was superb. Both the parliamentary wing and the party organization worked like clock work with a focus on the party vote and, in the marginal electorates the candidate vote as well. It was very clear that the trend was for people to give us both votes and that the strategy of asking for the party vote was the most important decision in bringing the National Party back to strength. National now has 48 MPs up from 27. We now have 12 women MPs up from six. Our ability to represent voters has been hugely improved and just a few more party votes around each electorate would have brought in two more women MPs.

*Heather Roy*
*ACT List Candidate*

*Knock on Doors to win the seat*

Over the last few weeks of the 2005 campaign I was reminded of an advertisement taken out in *The Times* by the actor John Le Mesurier, better known as Sergeant Arthur Wilson from *Dad's Army*: 'Rumours of my death' he said, 'have been very much exaggerated.'

And so it has been with ACT. Every morning I would read the paper to find that another political commentator was writing our obituary. They had done the same in 2002 but it was still a disconcerting experience. We knew from our own polling that Rodney Hide was going to win the Auckland electorate of Epsom but the mainstream media steadfastly refused to publish any results that deviated from the established script. Only in the rough and tumble world of on-line news blogs were dissenting opinions aired and it is good news for ACT that a higher and higher proportion of people get their news on-line. The bloggers' world is simply too chaotic for spin.

As ACT's prospects were painted dimly our support weakened and some of our core supporters drifted to other parties.

There is an adage in politics that 'perception is reality' so it is useless to wail that the pundits got it wrong (again), and instead it is necessary to go out and change people's perceptions. The important question is what lessons are to be learnt from this campaign that can be applied to the next?

The impact of technology is undeniable. The increasing use of the internet and rise in the number of households with broadband connections means that it is going to be increasingly possible for politicians to talk directly to the people without the intervening medium of a journalist. The ACT politicians between them reached an audience of approximately 45,000 simply by e-mailing newsletters to subscribers. With modern technology this can be done at negligible cost.

But the seat of Epsom – and my consequential return to Parliament – was won by good old fashioned campaigning. As well as campaigning all over the country and in my own area of Ohariu-Belmont I spent many days in Epsom knocking on doors, shaking hands with voters in shopping malls, visiting business owners and dropping mail into letterboxes. Teams of people got on the phones. It is personal contact that impresses people most and kiwis like to have met the person they are voting for.

There are no guarantees is politics. The job contract lasts for three years, sometimes less and then every MP is at the mercy of the electorate. I am one half of the surviving ACT parliamentary team and the crucial nature of party list rankings was highlighted for me on election night. As number 2 of the party list my place in Parliament was guaranteed with the election night vote. My satisfaction at being re-elected along with ACT leader Rodney Hide was well and truly overshadowed by the loss of my very talented and able colleagues. Challenging times lie ahead – of this there is no doubt. But we in ACT love a challenge.

*Metiria Turei*
*Green Candidate for Te Tai Tonga*

*Metiria's musings on the con-fusion of birth, politics and fashion*

If I *ever* wanted a reason not to stand for parliament, fighting an election campaign, like the 2005 one, would be it. After the preliminary votes were in on the 17th, it took me a few days to find an emotional equilibrium. Once recovered somewhat I had an overwhelming respect for those politicians who have fought election after election. Either they are totally committed or completely bonkers, I decided. Why would they keep doing this to themselves? Perhaps, I mused, elections are just like childbirth. You anticipate the day for months and work very hard to prepare for it. In the last few weeks, excitement and anxiety builds in equal measures. Preparations are feverish and exhausting.

On the day itself, you realise with horror that despite all the planning, campaigning and cajoling, you have no control over anything, not the birth, not the result. You remain impotent, subject to forces out of your control. At that point all you can do is wish for it to be over. 'Get it out! Make it stop!' you shriek, beg, plead, threaten. There are tears and shouting and the ingestion of large quantities of soporifics.

And then it is over, the results are in and, drenched in sweat, you swear, absolutely totally and utterly that you will NEVER DO THIS AGAIN! But then, a year or so later, the stitches are out, the wounds healed and in the flush of political hubris you think, perhaps just one more?

That's why they do it and that's why I'll do it again too.

But why was this particular campaign so difficult, so painful? There is the obvious loss of votes and loved MP's from the two party squeeze and inequitable distribution of money to compete for media time. Previously Green voters, in the midst of the political panic, voted Labour to keep National out of power and Maori Party to express their support/discontent. And this despite our clear tactical vote splitting messages and good policy platform. So there are forces in the final voting process over which a party and its campaigners have no or very little control. What of my own campaign then?

My campaign focused on the whole country though I stood in the Te Tai Tonga electorate. Despite the criticisms about this, the numbers prove that a party gains more party votes when it stands a candidate. And the Greens party vote in Te Tai Tonga was double that of the other Maori electorates. I was able to manage much of the public criticism levelled at me for standing in a seat ostensibly against a Maori Party candidate.

I had great meetings. Meetings with the Maori Party helped to demonstrate our mutual respect for each other. Meetings with Maori Party and Labour helped to show the Greens as potential bridge builders if the other two could put their respective hurts behind them. Even the Exporters Association meeting, which I attended but know nothing about, appreciated the Greens position that international trade need not destroy manufacturing and exporting industries. My, and the Greens, campaign was well done and pretty successful.

What interests me most about my campaign is the kindly comment I heard often: 'I think that you truly believe in what you're saying.' Surely the point is for *them* to believe in what I am saying! I remain surprised how important it was to voters that *I* truly believed in the policies I described. Which leads to the strange incongruence between an MP's personal integrity, the policy platform on offer and the voters decision on how to vote.

Because despite the good campaign and clear personal support, it did not turn into actual votes, which is, of course, a large part of the point. Perhaps it is just that politics is as vulnerable to fashion as any self-conscious teenager. Some theorists say that people vote according to their family's political loyalties, some say it's based on the structure of their family life, others argue it's the back pocket. Could be just whatever takes the fancy of the voter at the very moment they make the orange tick.

I have certainly learnt that the investment is in the fight, in the campaign and not in the outcome. And despite the fancies, fashions and vagaries of the final decision-makers, it is 100 percent worth it.

As I write this we are coming to the end of the final days of the long and painful confinement of negotiations. Despite all the nesting, the pushing, the sweat and the drugs, it seems we are to have a caesarean after all. Mother and baby are doing ... well, let's just wait and see.

*Dianne Yates*
*Labour Candidate for Hamilton East*

*Not much bread, and very few roses*

Having two rows of people calling out that one is a lesbian at a public meeting was just part of the nature of the 2005 election. I am not, but if I were, I believe the behaviour of the audience would have been even more deplorable.

This was my experience as a woman candidate at a public debate in Hamilton. The Prime Minister faced even worse abuse at the Canterbury student meeting where an orchestrated group came out with really petty and despicable comments about her appearance. Men, in general, do not receive such abuse – though in Hamilton, the Act candidate abused a prominent Maori leader in the audience.

The fact that I am a divorced woman who lives alone seemed too much for the new fundamentalist right – not only at Maxim Institute meetings but at a media organised debate.

The National candidate, mid-thirties, balding and single, faced no such barrage of hecklers accusing him of being gay – but of course we don't have any double standards in New Zealand and we are all equal before the law! That's what he maintained at any rate.

I did comment in one debate that the people who vociferously called for law and order at public meetings tended to be the ones who displayed the most disorderly personal and mob behaviour.

A debate organised and attended by the more mainstream religions proved more tolerant, especially on such issues as the repeal of section 59 of the Crimes Act (the defence available to parents using force against children).

This was an election in which prejudices and bigotry hung out – against women, against Maori, against Muslim, against Asians, against the disabled, against Pacific Islanders, against students, against union members, against low earners and the poor. I constantly kept reminding myself of the inscription on the Statue of Liberty:

'Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses, yearning to breath free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest tossed,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.'

The Don Brash Orewa Speech gave licence to the disaffected to voice their prejudices – and, I believe put us back, as Sam Neill said at the Labour Campaign Launch – at least 20 years. I would say it put us back at least 50 years.

Women's policy and women's issues as such did not come to the fore often. Unless of course one assumes, as many did, that prostitution was a women's issue, or that 'the family' in broad terms, means women. When I dared to refer to my Swedish amendment to the Prostitution Bill – that we prosecute the client rather than the prostitute – even at a Maxim Institute meeting, there was a deathly silence. Of course prostitution is all the fault of the prostitute! This despite the fact the 85 percent of the clients are married men and the existence of the capitalist laws of supply and demand!

At a meet-the-candidates meeting in Hamilton organised by the National Council of Women the audience, apart from supporters of candidates, was largely women over fifty and was under fifty in number. It was badly advertised, and the media did not bother to attend.

As the Labour candidates, Anjum Rahman – Labour list candidate – and I were the only speakers who had a party policy on women and knew what it was, and distinguished women's policy from family policy.

Other parties were seemingly unaware of issues of pay equity, the Action Plan for NZ Women (Ministry of Women's Affairs), the incomes of women, the proportion of women in business and positions of responsibility, paid parental leave, women's health issues such as breast screening, women and student loans. Labour's Family Allowance package did, however, appeal to women, as did the student loan policy. No interest on student loans was of more interest to women than National's promise of a tax cut to ex-students who were in paid employment.

National's lack of a comprehensive housing policy – that Brash had not comprehended – was also a turn off for many women – especially those in rental accommodation. The other candidates were unaware of their parties' policies on the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

Older women were concerned that their pensions would continue along with cheaper doctors visits and prescription charges.

Other candidates also did not seem to be able to envisage women in society other than as part of the family – a problem experienced by Sir Julius Vogel in the nineteenth century in his novel Anno Domini – and surprisingly, political aspirants seemed not to have acquainted themselves with a century of ideas, events and literature regarding the status of women. The 'kinde, kuche, kirke'[1] – syndrome was back with a vengeance in 2005.

Despite the revision of the old hackneyed attacks on Helen Clark, New Zealanders, narrowly still voted for public service over private greed and the need for health, education and assistance for lower income families. Women voters, in particular, seemed to have a more highly developed social and collective conscience and understanding that 'we' is more important than 'me'.

After the 2005 special vote count there are 39 women in Parliament – 32 percent. This is up on 2002 when we had just over 28 percent. Labour has 19 women, National 13, the Greens 4, United Future 1, New Zealand First 1, Act 1, and the Maori Party 1. The Prime Minister charged with forming a government is, again, the Rt Hon. Helen Clark - New Zealand's first elected woman Prime Minister and first third term Labour and woman Prime Minister.

**Notes**

[1] Children, Kitchen, Church

## Women and the 2005 General Election

*Jean Drage*

Well, what a difference three years can make. While Labour may be celebrating a third term in government, the 2005 elections saw a knife-edge result caused by the revival of support for the National party and considerably less support for the minor parties than we saw at the last election in 2002. One result of the increased number of National party politicians in this new

parliamentary term is an increase in the number of women. Thirty-nine women MPs is the highest number ever elected.

**The Election Results – 2005**

The 2005 general election results resulted in eight political parties being elected to New Zealand's Parliament for this next parliamentary term. The final vote count showed that the Labour party gained 41.10 percent of all party votes, National 39.10 percent, NZ First 5.72 percent, the Greens 5.30 percent, United Future 2.67 percent, the Maori Party 2.12 percent, Act 1.51 percent and Jim Anderton's Progressives 1.16 percent.[1]

When we add in the electorate seats won by six of these eight parties we see that the result for the two major parties is that Labour has 50 seats in Parliament to National's 48. Of the smaller parties, New Zealand First and the Greens have seven and six seats respectively while United Future has three, the Maori Party four, Act two and Jim Anderton's Progressives, one.

**2005 Election Results**

| Party | Electorate | List | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Labour | 31 | 19 | 50 |
| National | 31 | 17 | 48 |
| NZ First | 0 | 7 | 7 |
| Greens | 0 | 6 | 6 |
| United Future | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Maori Party | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Act | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Progressives | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| **Overall Total** | **69** | **53** | **121** |

The most notable change in New Zealand's parliament in this next term is the increased number of National party MPs (48 as opposed to 27 in 2002) and the decrease in the number of small party MPs (23 in contrast to 41 in 2002). The only small party to gain in 2005 was the newly formed Maori party elected in four of the seven Maori seats.

**Women in Parliament – 2005 Election**

The good news is the increased number of women elected. While the provisional count of party votes on election day appeared to give us 40 women MPs, the final count of party votes resulted in National losing one of its list seats. As number 46 on the National party list, newly elected MP Katrina Shanks lost her seat.

With 39 women (32.23 percent) now in New Zealand's Parliament we can see the significance of MMP in this success. 23 of these women are list MPs whilst the other 16 are electorate MPs. And 10 of these women MPs are new to Parliament.

**Women in Parliament - 2005**

| Party | Electorate | List | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Labour | 10 | 9 | 19 |
| National | 5 | 7 | 12 |
| NZ First | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| United Future | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Greens | 0 | 4 | 4 |
| Act | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Progressives | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Maori Party | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| **Overall Total** | **16** | **23** | **39** |

The majority of women elected are Labour party MPs: a reflection of the now established pattern we have in New Zealand of considerably more electoral success for women in left-wing parties.[2] Of the 19 Labour women MPs the majority are incumbents with considerable parliamentary and Cabinet experience. In fact, of the 17 Labour women MPs who stood for re-election in 2005 only one missed out. Lesley Soper, who missed out on a party list seat by only 2 places, had a very brief period in Parliament as she took Jonathan Hunt's seat earlier this year after he retired to become New Zealand's commissioner in London. The three new Labour women (Sue Moroney, Darien Fenton and Maryan Street) are all list MPs. Maryan Street follows on from Ruth Dyson and Margaret Wilson in having previously been a Labour party president.

The National party has 12 women MPs, twice the number they had in the last parliamentary term. Five of these women are incumbents and seven are new MPs although one (Anne Tolley) was previously in Parliament in the 1999–2002 term. Four of the new women (Nicky Wagner, Kate Wilkinson, Jackie Blue and Paula Bennett) are list MPs while the other three (Jo Goodhew, Jacqui Dean and Anne Tolley) are electorate MPs.

It has been interesting to observe media debate about the new talent in parliament, a debate that has largely focused on the men. Because, when we look at the new women we find a wealth of experience that includes local government and our legal, health and education systems. For example, in National's ranks alone Jacqui Dean and Anne Tolley have been deputy mayors in Napier and Waitaki respectively, Nicky Wagner is a regional councillor and Jo Goodhew and Jackie Blue have district health board experience. Kate Wilkinson is a solicitor and long-term partner in a legal firm while Jackie Blue is a breast surgeon.

Women MPs in the small parties are all incumbents and all list MPs except for Tariana Turia who was re-elected in the Te Tai Hauauru electorate.

***MMP and Women***

The list system is the key to the significant increase in the number of women MPs that we have seen since MPP was introduced. In 1996 when the first MMP election was held, the number of women MPs jumped from 21 to 35. The importance of the list can be seen when we look at the four elections held under MMP. In 2002 when the number of women fell to 34 there were fewer women elected on the list. This was partly due to the low ranking of women on some party lists and partly due to the Labour party gaining considerably more electorate seats than list seats.

**Women Elected since 1996**

| Year | Electorate | List | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1996 | 10 | 25 | 35 |
| 1999 | 16 | 21 | 37 |
| 2002 | 19 | 15 | 34 |
| 2005 | 16 | 23 | 39 |

While much has been written about the difficulties women have always had in being selected to stand for winnable electorate seats, the number of women prepared to stand as candidates for election also influences the number of women elected. In 1996 the percentage of women candidates (list and electorate) was 26.8 percent of all candidates, in 1999 it was 32.9 percent, in 2002 it fell to 28.7 percent and for this election in 2005 it rose again to 31.1 percent.[3]

***Women Candidates in 2005***

Further evidence that parties on the left of the political spectrum are more likely to support women candidates can be seen when we look in more detail at those selected to stand in electorate seats and on party lists in 2005. As can be seen in the following table, the Maori Party, the Greens and Labour had the highest percentage of women candidates.

**Women Candidates - 2005**

| Party | Women Candidates | Total Cand. | % of total | Women in top 10 list |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lab | 30 | 80 | 37.5% | 4 |
| Nat | 18 | 65 | 27.6% | 1 |
| NZF | 6 | 40 | 15.0% | 2 |
| U F | 17 | 67 | 25.3% | 2 |
| Green | 23 | 57 | 40.3% | 5 |
| Act | 14 | 59 | 23.7% | 4 |
| Prog | 17 | 54 | 31.4% | 3 |
| Maori | 23 | 53 | 43.3% | 4 |

The newly formed Maori Party, in particular, had 23 women on its party list (43.3 percent), 17 of whom also stood for electorate seats. The Green party also had 23 women candidates on its party list (40.3 percent) with all but one also standing in an electorate seat. Labour had 30 women candidates overall (37.5 percent), 26 of whom were on the party list of 65 and four who were selected among the 15 candidates to stand in electorates only.

These three parties all had women in the Number One position on their party list – Tariana Turia for the Maori Party, Jeanette Fitzsimons for the Greens and Helen Clark for Labour. They also had a greater number of women in the top 10 list placings. The Greens had five women in their top 10, four of whom were re-elected, and both Labour and the Maori party had four women in their top ten list positions.

In contrast, New Zealand First, only selected six women for its list of 40 candidates (15 percent), two of whom were ranked in number 6 and 8 on this list. The next woman on the list was number 19.

A quarter of the candidates selected by the United Future party were women, 14 on the list of 57 and three of the ten who stood in electorates only. It is of note that one woman originally selected for the number 17 placing on United Future's list, Sharee Adams (a former Miss New Zealand), resigned when her father, Paul Adams, also left to stand as an independent. Sharee was reported to have resigned to help her father with his campaign.[4]

The first woman on the National party list was Katherine Rich at number ten. And, of the 18 women on National's list of 65, ten were placed in the lowest 25 places – between numbers 40 and 65. Such low rankings on party lists highlights the vulnerability of women candidates to shifts in voter support as we saw in the final vote count when Katrina Shanks lost her seat at number 46.

***To conclude***

With 39 women MPs (32.23 percent) now in New Zealand's Parliament we have finally crossed that line drawn in the sand in the 1970s: the critical mass of 30 percent. Many envy the success New Zealand women have had at attaining electoral success, particularly at a time in which we also have a woman Prime Minister. However, a cautious view of this latest increase, particularly in the number of National party women being elected, suggests it was related more to the electoral swing to the right rather than increased support for women candidates in this party. A similar swing in the 1990 general election did not lead to a demonstrated increase in this political party's support for women candidates in subsequent elections.

**Notes**

[1] Final Count 1 October 2005. See www.electionresults.govt.nz

[2] See Rae Nicholl's PhD thesis, 'The Woman Factor – Candidate Selection in the 1990s: New Zealand, Guam and South Africa', 2000, for an in depth analysis of the relative electoral success of women.

[3] See Elizabeth McLeay (2003) 'Representation, Selection, Election: The 2002 Parliament', in *New Zealand Votes. The General Election of 2002*, Jonathon Boston, Stephen Church, Stephen Levine, Elizabeth McLeay and Nigel S Roberts (eds), pp. 296 - 300

[4] Haydon Dewes, 'Adams quits but keeps pay' *The Press*, 16 August 2005, p. A6

## The 2005 Gender Imbalance

*Claire Robinson and Amy Revell*
*Institute of Communication Design, Massey University*

One of the interesting features of recent elections has been the gender imbalance in voting behaviour, with Labour as the party likely to get the support of more women than men. Explanations for the imbalance have included women's general leaning towards the centre-left of the political spectrum, as well as women being attracted to a strong female leader in Helen Clark.

The 2005 election was no different. In the Fairfax/AC Neilsen political poll published four days before the general election 42 percent of female voters and 32 percent of male voters supported Labour; while 45 percent of male voters and 40 percent of female voters supported National. In other words, while women were almost as likely to vote National as they were Labour, men were far more likely to vote National than Labour.

An examination of the two major party's opening night broadcasts (screened on TV One on 19 August 2005) gives insight into each party's sensitivities towards the needs of male and female voters, and suggests further reasons for the gender imbalance.

Television advertisements provide graphic evidence of a party's market orientation, or its voter-centredness (a quality parties need if they are to survive in the competitive environment that is MMP). Television advertisements frequently contain visual evidence of the consumers with whom a product, service or information source wishes to connect– their target audience. This is because advertising relies upon consumers' (in this case voters') identification with advertising images to strengthen the emotional resonance of a message. If consumers see images of people in ads they recognise, can identify with, or who they have aspirations to be like they are more likely to pay attention to the message presented, remember it, and have it affect their consumption (in this case voting) behaviour.

Most of the target audience in Labour's 12 minute opening night broadcast was aged 25 to 55. Only one elderly woman featured, in a segment on Labour's health promises (recall the elderly couple sitting on their porch drinking tea, and the old woman booting a football). Labour's women were portrayed as active and in work (for example, a vet, a couple of medical workers and primary school teachers, a hairdresser, a shop worker, market worker, a radio dj, an advertising executive); featured also was a busy working mother (seen working at home, collecting children from school, hanging out the washing and sitting down on the couch with her husband and children at the end of the day). Most of them were Pakeha New Zealanders. Helen Clark, both recognisable and female, featured throughout the broadcast, answering questions off-camera.

Labour's male target audience featured predominantly manual workers and creatives (an electrician, a boat builder, apprentices and factory workers, road workers, carpenters, a market worker, a truck driver, actors, architects, a wine maker). Male celebrities were included: actor Orlando Bloom, film director Peter Jackson and golfer Michael Campbell. Also featured was an electrician-come-soccer dad, firstly at work than coaching a team of boys, who was later seen serving dinner with his wife and daughters. The only elderly man to feature was the one watching on as his wife boots the football (described earlier).

Although men featured in a variety of roles in Labour's broadcast the dominant message was of Labour's support for the health, education and welfare of families – issues that have traditionally been the primary concerns of women. With the inclusion of Helen Clark, images of women and their concerns dominated Labour's opening night broadcast.

It was the obverse with National. National's concern was to establish the credibility of its male leader Don Brash and so its opening night broadcast mostly featured Brash speaking off camera and answering questions about his life. Only in the final minute of the 12-minute broadcast did any voters feature. National's female target audience were depicted in passive roles: in an audience clapping for Brash; Brash's wife Je Lan kissing him and standing by his side on stage after a speech; and Brash's daughter seen with her family and sitting on the floor below Brash on a couch. The male voters featured included men in an audience clapping,

and in slightly more active roles than the women. Brash is seen walking through an agricultural show with MP Shane Ardern (farm equipment and trucks in the background), shaking the hands of farmers and well-wishers, and walking in the halls of parliament with his deputy, Gerry Brownlee. It was a broadcast dominated by images of men and largely devoid of women.

We are not claiming that these broadcasts by themselves had an impact on voting behaviour. Television advertisements are but one form of political communication that voters are exposed to in election campaigns, and may affect some voters in some circumstances. What this examination has identified, however, is evidence of a gender gap in the depiction of female and male target voters in the two major parties' opening night broadcasts that may be seen as a reflection of those parties' sensitivities towards the needs of female and male voters, and which is interestingly similar to the gender gap in voter support for the two parties.

## A Gendered Campaign? Media Coverage of the 2005 Election[1]

*Heather Devere and Sharyn Graham*
*School of Social Sciences, Auckland University of Technology*

In 1999 Helen Clark, the Leader of the Opposition Labour Party was campaigning against the National party's Jenny Shipley, incumbent Prime Minister of New Zealand. According to Susan Fountaine (2000) the media coverage of the campaign employed the usual 'political game frame' that is applied to most elections, despite the unusual element of having two women competing for the leadership of the country. So the language of war, games and competition, with boxing, horse racing and battle metaphors were used. The two women were described as being engaged in a 'direct contest', about 'even on points', but neither able initially to score 'a knockout blow' (Fountaine, p.3). It appeared, however, that the commentators and the media were 'disappointed that the women had been so well-behaved.' The gendering of the fighting motif was attempted, even when there was no evidence of overt competitive behaviour. For example, the *Sunday News* reported that 'Clark kept her claws in, opting to avoid the catfight expected of the two women leaders.'

There were some other 'gendered' sub-themes evident, in particular focussing on appearance and motherhood. For example, Helen Bain of the *Dominion* reported as follows:

> The difference appearance can make was apparent in Parliament's adjournment debate last month. Mrs. Shipley was radiant in a stunning new cobalt blue suit, while Miss Clark was drab in olive. Miss Clark's speech was well-focused, strong on content and confidently delivered, but it was the visual impression left by Mrs. Shipley on the television news that was more striking (1999, Nov 9, p.9)

The motherhood theme was also played out in the media. Both leaders had positioned themselves as family friendly, rather than focussing specifically on gender equity issues (Fountaine p.14). Jenny Shipley, often accompanied by her husband, Burton, made constant reference to her own children, as for example, telling reporters that her children had bestowed the name 'Lipstick One' on her campaign bus (Fountaine p.14). On the other hand, there were only two articles that mentioned Helen Clark's husband (referred to has 'her partner') and the main references to Clark's family 'were related to her childlessness' (Fountaine p.14). But rather than this being set by a media agenda, the evidence is that this was a deliberate part of the National Party campaign. A leaked memo from the National party's women's vice-president to party members, recommended that Shipley's mother role should be contrasted with Clark's lack of children (Fountaine, p.15).

In 2005, National was responsible for setting the agenda of the election campaign. The early billboard advertisements which launched National's campaign emphasised the contrast between Labour and National, with a split red and blue background, featuring head and shoulder images of Helen Clark and Don Brash, on separate sides, with a pithy slogan indicating some fundamental difference in approach. This format characterised the campaign, with a focus once again on the two leaders, described by Phil Harris as the two major brands, the Brash versus Clark brands.[2] Despite gender being an obvious key point of difference, however, there was initially no attempt in either the marketing campaigns or the media reporting to make any overt reference to this distinction.

This is in keeping with international research which indicates that since the late 1990s the media have been treating female and male political candidates more equitably (Banwart et al 2003, p.147) and that there is less evidence of gender role stereotyping in terms of appearance, traits or issues (Norris 1997). This is confirmed by the results of the Second Global Media Monitoring Project conducted on 1 February 2000. According to this research, there

was a 'marked reduction in simplistic, sensationalist and sexist coverage' of world women's conferences (Gallagher 2004, p.154.)

However, after the first leadership debate aired live on TV One on 22 August 2005, Brash made these comments in response to the domination of the speaking time by Clark:

> I think it is not entirely appropriate for a man to aggressively attack a woman and I restrained myself for that reason. Had the other combatant been a man, my style might have been rather different (cited in Thomson and Berry, 2005).

The 'Gentleman Don' headline set the scene for a gender frame to be imposed on the campaign as the media seized the opportunity to present it as a contest between the courteous, chivalrous, slightly old-fashioned, but polite gentlemanly Brash, and the strident, unladylike, aggressive 'rottweiler'[3], feminist Clark. Questions were asked as to whether Brash could also be seen as patronising, sexist and chauvinist, but generally he received support for his 'adherence to a code of good manners that has become sadly dated but can still be admired' (The Editors, 2005). The editorial, entitled 'Our View: Fairness not Gender the Issue' did go on to say, however, that his attitude to Clark and women in general was disrespectful.

On the other hand, this debate dovetailed nicely with a long-standing media portrayal of Helen Clark as a domineering, unfeminine, arrogant control freak, and the Labour government as a social engineering, 'nanny state' ruled by a feminist cabal. Van Zoonen (1996) notes that the gendered discourse of the media includes equating feminist with non-femininity, thus creating a division between 'ordinary women' and feminists.

Despite the fact that Helen Clark has been acknowledged as a superior debater,[4] there is evidence that the qualities expected in a leader, such as assertiveness, ambition and strength, are perceived as inappropriate for a woman. A study of over 30 empirical investigations in 16 languages found that:

> …traditional expectations regarding the communication behaviour of men include characteristics such as strength, ambition, aggressiveness, independence, stoicism and rationality. However, the expectation for the communication of women is almost exactly a polar opposite. When women speak, they are expected to exhibit characteristics such as sensitivity to the needs of others, concern for family and relationships, compassion, emotionality, affection and nurturing (Trent and Friedenberg 2004, p.166)

It has also been found that 'language that negatively violates normative expectations decreases the effectiveness of persuasive attempts, while language that conforms more closely to expectations than anticipated increases persuasive effectiveness' (Trent and Friedenberg, p.166).

While the more overt gender reporting of the leadership contest during the 1999 election campaign is not so evident, the framing of Helen Clark as strident feminist, with a sub-text relating to her childlessness and masculinity, marks her out as a strong, but dangerous leader. The qualities of leadership are still portrayed within a gendered frame. As linguist, Deborah Tannen referring to female public figures, states:

> Everything she does to enhance her assertiveness risks undercutting her femininity, in the eyes of others. And everything she does to fit expectations of how a woman should talk risks undercutting the impression of competence she makes (cited in Trent and Friedenberg, p.167).

**Notes**

[1] A longer version of this article will be appearing in a special issue on Contemporary Gender Issues in *Pacific Journalism Review,* April 2006.

[2] Phil Harris was part of a panel on Leadership at the Australasian Political Studies Association conference hosted by the Politics Department, Otago University, Dunedin, 28-30 September, 2005.

[3] Armstrong's article concluded when a 'rottweiler is biting your head off, pondering its gender would seem to be of rather secondary importance.'

[4] See, for example, Wayne McDougall, Auckland Debating Association President's comments cited in Thomson and Berry, 2005)

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## Women and the Election: Policies and Perceptions

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Issues and media debates in the 2005 election year show how little women have progressed in the last decade. For some time the media have encouraged a national mood of complacency, regularly repeating the mantra that feminism has become irrelevant in New Zealand because "all the top jobs are held by women". Limited high profile success masks the reality of a widening income gap between women and men,[1] as revealed by a recent pay figure report, is that women have fallen further behind.

This illusion of "women on top" has, however, encouraged a backlash perhaps most disturbingly represented in Labour MP John Tamihere's astonishing homophobic and misogynist outburst in April.[2] It earned him little more than a reprimand and was a woeful start to election year discourse.

The revival of the religious right in the MMP political mix has revealed a split in women's ranks and created a higher profile for traditional attitudes about a woman's place. Helen Clark's remarks in February that Labour's child care support would encourage women back to work and strengthen the nation's economy met a storm of protest from women who said they did not want to return to work a number of whom said that Clark did not understand their situation because she did not have children.

Despite this, the gender gap that had developed over recent elections remained a constant feature of the otherwise variable 2005 political polls, with more women favouring the parties of the left and more men favouring the parties of the right. It is interesting that, after the election, some National party internal critics linked the relative absence of women in its top ranks with its inability to attract the preponderant share of women's votes. As well as associating women voting against National with that party's Maori and Treaty of Waitangi policies, one National activist said, 'The public also sees the reduced place of women in the National Party, either in leadership or policy formation, as an indication of a certain culture within National not in sympathy with minorities, exacerbated by the coining of its campaign phrase "mainstream New Zealanders"'.[3] Earlier, women's lack of support for the Act party had also been linked absence of women in its hierarchy. Dr Muriel Newman, during her unsuccessful bid for the Act leadership, argued the new leader should be female because too few women voted for the party, and polls showed that women tend to support women leaders. But, 'With Don Brash as leader of the National Party, and me as leader of ACT, the centre right will attract support from both genders'.[4]

While the two parties on the right brought gender issues into the spotlight by focusing on women as political actors, neither the National party nor Act produced specific women's policies in 2005. That they did not is consistent with their individualistic views of politics and society: women are not viewed as a group that should be separately considered. Their framework is one of equal opportunities rather than positive discrimination. Also in this camp was the Maori Party, although its lack of women's policy probably reflected its very recent origins and lack of time to develop a full manifesto, although it might also have reflected its primary focus on ethnicity, with gender seen as less important than the issues facing Maori generally. New Zealand First and United Future, on the other hand did not have either of these excuses for not developing women's policies. The latter party talked about 'mothers', and both parties had extensive policies on health and families that also related to women, mentioning breast cancer, for example. United Future disapproved of the legalisation of prostitution and of the numbers of women seeking abortions.

One policy difference that did emerge as an overt but subdued issue concerned the continued existence of the Ministry of Women's Affairs. In 2003, the National women's affairs spokeswoman, Georgina te Heu Heu, advocated its abolition and called the Ministry 'PC'[5] — a phrase that undoubtedly became the most overworked, lazy and vacuous label of the 2005 campaign. Act also endorsed the abolition of the Ministry, portraying the Ministry as part of Labour's 'extreme agenda' that is 'deeply embedded within Labour's radical feminist and lesbian factions'. Over the years it 'has focussed exclusively on women's rights and if those rights have been achieved at the expense

of family wellbeing and the rights of men, then that is the price we have to pay for giving the radical activists within Labour who were driving the driving force, a free reign [sic]'.[6] The Labour party (despite John Tamihere, who wanted the Ministry to disappear or a Men's Ministry created), the Greens and the Progressives advocated both its retention and strengthening. There appeared to be no mention of the Ministry in the policies of United Future, New Zealand First, and the Maori Party.

So which parties had policies designed expressly for women? The Green Party had a wide range of policies, including equal pay for equal work, policies to reduce domestic violence, reintroducing a Universal Child Benefit, developing a debate on a Universal Basic Income that would recognise the value of caring for children and other dependants as well as voluntary community work, the extension of the Working for Families package to 'provide the same level of support to children regardless of whether their parents are in the workforce or on a benefit,' improving women's health, and workplace policies to help parents with families. There was also policy to help Maori women.[7] The Progressives naturally celebrated their achievement of paid parental and extended annual leave. Their 2005 policies included the capitalisation of family support, free prescriptions for pregnant women, and measures to improve women's mental and reproductive health. The Progressives opposed the decriminalisation of prostitution. Some of its policies on women were explicitly linked with Labour's. That party also had an extensive range of women's policies. After advertising its achievements, Labour's new policies covered the inclusion of self-employed mothers in paid parental leave and increasing leave entitlement for eligible parents from 13 to 14 months. It also said that it would extend free early childhood education for three and four year olds to private sector providers and extend tax relief to a further 60,000 working families through the Working for Families package. Labour also targeted women's health, violence to women, and issues surrounding women's retirement.

Given the asymmetrical nature of support for women's policies, it was perhaps unsurprising that there was no overt debate in the campaign about them. An exception was the debate between Labour and National over whether support for pre-school education should be through the tax system or via the supply of free places, although these policies related more closely to educational and family policies than to women's policies. Overall, in 2005, the politics of family and children's issues prevailed. Nevertheless, the differences revealed in women's voting preferences can be interpreted as their responses to the pronounced ideological gap that was particularly apparent at this election.

Although last year the Prime Minister's press secretary Mike Munro[8] asserted that gender was no longer an issue for Clark, the campaign showed old stereotypes were still current. After TVNZ's first leaders debate in which Clark strove to be heard over an audience of noisy hecklers (who she claims called her a 'no kids lesbo'[9]) Brash was asked why he had not matched Clark's aggressive debating style. He claimed it 'was not entirely appropriate for a man to aggressively attack a woman… . Had the other combatant been a man, my style might have been rather different'. Helen Clark responded that women expect to be treated as equal, and the remark was 'quaint, a little old-fashioned—patronising'.[10] This subsequently led to Brash publicly pondering on who was and was not a 'feminist', and whether he as a man could indeed be a feminist. Brash was both condemned as chauvinist and hailed as chivalrous, but his dated remarks chimed in with his refrain that his party stood for 'mainstream' New Zealanders, who were perhaps best identified as a mirror image of himself: male, white, moderately prosperous, and certainly middle-aged or older. During the last television leaders' debate just a few days before the election, Brash made it clear that Clark did not qualify as a mainstream New Zealander. It was this gendered focus on 'normal' values that informed the Paul Holmes special on Prime, 'At Home with Clark and Brash' with its focus on Clark's 'ambiguous marriage' and questions like: 'You found Helen sexy?' 'Are you very physical with each other?'

Brash's 'mainstream' appeal with its connotations of a 'decent' gentler era jarred with National's hard hitting, tongue-in-cheek advertising campaign. The adverts, however, captured the underlying philosophical fault-line that differentiated the right from the left. This was marked most dramatically through different attitudes to property rights: individual rights and responsibilities versus the rights and responsibilities of groups, including Maori, the community and the state. The debate about the two alternatives placed before voters, tax cuts versus redistribution to poorer families, encapsulated this difference. Since its inception the Act party had of course stressed the rights of individuals against what it sees as an authoritarian and interfering state. National, on the other hand, while historically arguing that its philosophical basis lies in protecting individual rights, in reality has roller-coasted from one election to another, at one time overtly stressing individual property rights in its policy platforms and at another time taking a more moderate

line. This election saw it again stressing the individualist perspective on rights and responsibilities and attacking the 'nanny' state. At the same time, National adopted wedge tactics aimed at particular groups in societies (Maori, feminists, gay people, state house tenants) with its rhetoric identifying itself with the mainstream. This attack was only partially, and rather ineffectually, deflected by Labour and its possible governing parties, the Greens and the Progessives.

The ideological divide revealed is significant for women who are more likely to be in caring roles, are still paid less on average than men, and who dominate the state-paid labour-force in areas such as nursing and teaching. These groups, added to those women who are reliant on state-transfers to support themselves and their families, add up to significant numbers of voters.

So the 2005 general election showed a marked difference between the parties of the left on one side and those of the centre and centre-right on the other insofar as their identification with, and response to, women were concerned. This was part of a more radical ideological differentiation that may perhaps be a sign of future demarcation between the two main blocs of parliamentary parties. Much will depend on whether National continues to move to occupy Act's policy space, also removing a potential coalition partner, or whether it decides to contest Labour on its ground. The new women entering National's caucus might make a difference to the shape of party policy. Either way, the whole area of women's presence, and even more so, women's policies, has become a contested policy domain, and the continuing gender gap in voting behaviour will help to ensure that this continues to be the case.

**Notes**

[1] Hans Schouten and NZPA, 'Pay rises for men widen income gap', *The Dominion Post*, 14 October 2005, p. A6.
[2] See for instance, Tracy Watkins, 'Tamihere burns his bridges', *The Dominion Post*, 5 April, 2005, p.A1.
[3] Ruth Berry, 'National members bid to soften race policy', *The New Zealand Herald*, 29 September 2005. At: http://www.nzherald.co/nz/, downloaded 10 October 2005. The speaker was Dr Michael Kidd.
[4] Muriel Newman, 'Act Leadership Primary', 28 May 2004. At: http://www.act.org.nz/, downloaded 10 October 2005.
[5] Georgina te Heu Heu, 'Labour's PC double standard in agency review', Press Release, the New Zealand National Party, *Scoop*, 12 August 2003. At: http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories, downloaded on 11 October 2005.
[6] Muriel Newman, 'Labour Government's feminist agenda undermines the family', 24 June 2005, at http://.act.org.nz/, downloaded on 11 October 2005.
[7] All the material on the parties' policies has been taken from their websites: http://www.act.org.nz/; http://www.greens.org.nz/; http://www.labour.org.nz/; http://www.maoriparty.com/; http://www.national.org.nz/; http://www.nzfirst.org.nz/; www.progressive.org.nz/; and http://www.unitedfuture.org.nz/
[8] Personal interview with Mike Munro, chief press secretary for Helen Clark, 31 August 2004
[9] Colin Espiner, 'Quiet night for party leaders at debate', *The Press*, 9 September 2005, p.1
[10] Colin Espiner, 'Clark scorns Brash's claim to have "gone easy" on her', Fairfax New Zealand Ltd., 24 August 2005. At: http://www.stuff.co.nz/, downloaded 10 October 2005

## Conference Report: Network for European Women's Rights (NEWR), School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, United Kingdom, June 30–July 1, 2005

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The Network for European Women's Rights (NEWR) project was designed to generate interest in women's rights as human rights in the countries of Eastern and Western Europe. With a finite amount of funding from the European Commission, the three-year project began in October 2002 with four specific themes - trafficking in women; reproductive rights; political participation; and social entitlements. The strangest aspect of these themes was that the subject of HIV/AIDS was never researched or raised by the conference participants.

The conference was the finale to the project and key speakers presented NEWR State of the Art Reports on the four chosen themes. The 100-plus participants came from all over Europe, with a strong representation from the former Soviet states such as the Czech Republic, Romania, Estonia and Ukraine, as well as from Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. The women represented a wide range of organisations including universities; women's rights groups; anti-trafficking and anti-slavery centres; and peace and justice organisations. I was there representing the University of the South Pacific and, by default, New Zealand.

The conference was divided into plenary and parallel sessions, aligned with the NEWR themes. The final State of the Art Report on Political Participation, which was presented at the political participation plenary session, included some issues that were relevant only to women living in European Union countries, but other themes were universal. The issues that concern those of us who live in the South Pacific included:

- Equality discourses and the importance of a normative debate
- Globalisation and state transformation
- Forces of resistance
- Accountability and implementation strategies

- Impact of changes in representation of women in the political/policy agenda
- Generation gap in the feminist movements in the 2000s
- Access to resources; economic and power structures

The conference was held just weeks after the United Kingdom General Election, so many participants in the political participation stream were eager to hear the paper by Dr Julia Childs from the University of Bristol on 'The 2005 Parliament: A More Diverse House?' Under the First-Past-the-Post electoral system, British women have yet to make up 20 percent of the House of Commons: in 2005, they won 19.8 percent (128) of the seats. Julia explained that, in an effort to increase the number of women candidates, the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002 had been introduced as a tool, which would allow for the lawful construction of all-women short lists. The British Labour Party had agreed to an internal quota of 35 percent women candidates but had failed to reach this target. The Conservative Party had selected women candidates but a large number of them had to contest for unwinnable seats.

My own paper was accepted by NEWR because I promised that it would show how women could succeed in winning seats even under adverse electoral systems. Titled 'Lessons from the Antipodes – How Women Succeeded Under First-Past-the-Post', my paper was a celebration of New Zealand women's success at the polls prior to the change to the Mixed Member Proportional System in 1996. The main 'lesson' in the title was that all political parties need a powerful women's organisation like the New Zealand Labour Women's Council, otherwise their chances of influencing the candidate selection process are slim.

One of the highlights of this conference was hearing from women whose political experiences were different to those found in our part of the world. Currently, many Pacific Island states are considering introducing quota systems to improve the level of female representation yet to women from the some post-socialist countries, quotas are seen to do more harm than good. Dr Alexandra Bitusikova from the Research Institute of Matej Bel University in Slovakia presented a paper on 'What Women (Don't) Want: Mechanisms to Improve Women's Political Representation in Slovakia'. When Slovakia was part of Czechoslovakia in Soviet times, a 30 percent quota secured the participation of women in the legislature. As the Communist Party chose all the candidates, no one took the quotas seriously as the elections merely served to endorse the party's choice. 'The memories of obligatory quotas given to women in a top-down process have remained alive and have negatively influenced public opinions in the later post-socialist development', Alexandra said.

Yet without a quota system, women's representation in Slovakia dropped from 29 percent to 12 percent and, as of July 2005, there were no women in government. This dramatic loss of female representation has led to a reconsideration of quota systems - but familiar barriers remain. Alexandra's research showed that women politicians do not support the reintroduction of quotas; many women do not vote; there is no solidarity among women; and many women deny that barriers to female representation exist. Alexandra concluded that, with the end of Soviet rule, the Catholic Church has become strong and forged links with political parties. Church teachings are reinforcing the traditional belief, especially in the rural areas, that the family takes prime place in Slovakia. Women should be at home with their children, and not in the public sphere.

Helen Biin, a young political scientist from Estonia, spoke on 'Women's Political Participation in Estonia: The Influence of Political Parties'. She had interviewed a number of political party gatekeepers, and her results painted a gloomy picture of the state of women's representation in another post-Soviet state. Besides the interviews, she examined the placement of women and men on party lists. Despite women invariably being better educated than men, men nearly always filled the highest rank positions on the electoral lists. Helen's research revealed that the recruitment of candidates in Estonia was male-biased; that the country was considered to be 'not ready' for equality; and quotas were considered by many gatekeepers and politicians to be 'bad, neo-liberal ideas'.

Every person I spoke to at this conference was envious of the level of representation achieved by New Zealand women. Many of them, especially the women from the post-socialist countries, face enormous challenges, not only with political representation but also in all facets of their lives. The stories about the trafficking in women and children were especially pitiful.

Besides the main reports, a major objective of NEWR was the production of an up-to-date directory to facilitate the exchange of experience and knowledge between individuals and organisations working in the women's rights area. Reports from previous conferences and other information can be accessed on the NEWR website: http://www.NEWR.bham.ac.uk.

## Book review

*My Life,* David Lange, Viking, Penguin Group, Auckland, 2005. 316 pp. illustrations, index. ISBN 0 67 004556 X (hard cover)

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On 13 August 2005, New Zealanders received the not unexpected news that after many years of ill health the former New Zealand Prime Minister, David Lange, had died at the age of 63. For many people, the sadness at his death was coupled with the pleasure of knowing that only a matter of days before he died his long-awaited autobiography was published.

In the Preface, Lange claims he wrote the book because he 'thought it was time to say something for myself about my political career instead of having other people make it up' (p. 7). This is an encouraging beginning for the reader, who is keen to gain a deeper understanding of leadership and the role of leaders. Led by Lange from 1984 to 1989, the left-wing Labour Party broke every political convention and brought about a neo-liberal revolution that changed New Zealanders' way of life forever. Many New Zealanders are still unsure about how a brilliant and witty Prime Minister found himself heading a party so dysfunctional that he resigned from his position because he believed he had lost control of his cabinet.

The memoir traverses the history of those momentous events in broad sweeps. Amusing anecdotes fill the pages; but there are large gaps in the chronology. Readers seeking answers to the hot political topics that plagued the Fourth Labour Government may feel frustrated by the time they reach the last page. Lange appears to have retained almost no documentation from his political career and relies on his memory, leading to a certain vagueness about dates, times and places. For a greater depth of analysis, his own book, *Nuclear Free – The New Zealand Way*, recounts the events leading up to the establishment of a nuclear-free New Zealand.[1] Others involved in the politics of the time have also recorded their insider views of how many historical events unfolded. Two examples are Margaret Wilson's account of her tenure as party president, recalled in *Labour In Government: 1984-1987*[2], and Harvey McQueen's book, *The Ninth Floor: Inside the Prime Minister's Office – A Political Experience*, which detailed the gestation of Tomorrow's Schools when Lange was the Minister of Education.[3]

*My Life* offers some insight into Lange's thinking when he allocated portfolios to his first crop of new ministers in 1984.[4] Finally, the question why Ann Hercus was given the police portfolio is answered. Did she ask for the job? Did the police ask for Ann Hercus? Or, as it now appears, was the appointment made on the whim of the Prime Minister? Ann Hercus became the first woman in the Commonwealth to become the Minister of Police, but the appointment was also a significant milestone for New Zealand women. Up until that point, women cabinet members were given the so-called soft ministries relating to the welfare women and children while the hard ministries like police went to men. Reflecting on this historical moment, Lange wrote 'The only appointment that was out of the ordinary in those days was Ann Hercus's appointment as police minister; I thought it might be an education for both police and minister' (p. 178).

A less quixotic decision was made in his fight against many of the excesses of the far right in his party when he gave Helen Clark the housing portfolio in 1987. Lange saw her as a pragmatist, and believed that she would be strong enough to withstand the neoliberal onslaught and keep that particular social service intact (p. 244). Later on, he appears to have shown confidence in her leadership potential as he voted for her when she replaced Mike Moore as leader in 1994 (p. 281).

While Lange's dealings with individual Labour women appear to have been cordial, he had no understanding of feminism or its goals. In the 1980s, the party enjoyed an influx of feminists but they were, he felt, 'shock troops, out to claim new ground, and they had no reason to be polite to me' (p. 140). While he acknowledged the growing influence of the Labour Women's Council, he approached the organisation with perplexed amusement. At one stage, he insisted that the military should not discriminate between women and men and was bemused when he was told by a member of the Labour Women's Council that feminism's goal was 'the peaceful resolution of conflict and not the equal right to kill and be killed (p. 226).

Throughout this memoir, Lange makes it clear that he was not one of the boys and had no close friends in Parliament. Like most women MPs, at the end of the working day, he was not interested in socialising over the whiskey bottle, preferring instead to go home to bed. Yet a general inability to communicate with his team must have resulted in lost opportunities and lost support from his fellow MPs, party members and

supporters. A good example of this failure to connect with colleagues came to light years after the event, when Lange finally found out that Margaret Shields would have voted with him against Roger Douglas's flat tax proposals had she been in the country (p. 253).

*My Life* makes interesting and entertaining bedtime reading and New Zealanders will be pleased that this book exists. Lange was larger than life and his brilliant rhetoric was the envy of most politicians and public speakers. He could sway large crowds and he mastered the art of communicating through television. He had a good feel for what people wanted and needed. But he found lobbying within the Labour Party in his own favour impossible and his inability to communicate on a personal level meant that the opportunities to gather the support of sympathisers especially Labour women, who would have supported him in his fight against neoliberalism, were missed.

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**Notes**

[1] David Lange (1990), *Nuclear Free – The New Zealand Way,* Penguin Books, Auckland

[2] Margaret Wilson (1989), *Labour in Government: 1984-1987,* Allen & Unwin and Port Nicholson Press, Wellington

[3] Harvey McQueen (1991), *The Ninth Floor: Inside the Prime Minister's Office – A Political Experience*, Penguin Books, Auckland

[4] The landslide victory in 1984 resulted in Labour women winning 12 seats, which increased to 14 when the party won a second term in government in 1987. From 1984 to 1987, Margaret Wilson was the first woman President of the Labour Party. A total of six women became ministers at some stage between 1984 and 1990: Margaret Shields, Ann Hercus, Helen Clark, Fran Wilde, Annette King and Margaret Austin.