



NSW TEACHERS FEDERATION

women's newsletter november 2010

Women's Coordinators report

The end of the school year is almost upon and I am left wondering where the year went.

The Federation has recently elected its second female General Secretary in 94 years. Jenny Diamond was a City Organiser for 14 years prior to her election as General Secretary. As a past Anna Stewart Officer, Jenny understands the importance of the Federation Women's Program and has a long history of active involvement with the program. She has been a member of the Federation Women's Committee, Anna Stewart Committee and a regular attendee at Women's Caucus.

Times they are a changing. Australia has its first woman Prime Minister and despite what we think of Julia Gillard following the NAPLAN dispute, it is a historic and significant moment in Australian history to have our first female Prime Minister.

While in Australia we have two women premiers and

a woman Prime Minister, women are still very much underrepresented in parliaments across the nation.

In the last federal parliament, of the 76 senators 27 were women and in the House of Representatives, of the 150 members were 41 women.

In the NSW parliament of the 42 members of the Legislative Council 13 are women and of the 93 members of the Legislative assembly, 25 are women.

Despite having some women shattering the glass ceiling in politics, women account for just over a quarter of politicians at both state and federal level. Is this good enough?

Charmaine O'Sheades



Women and democracy

Margot Wallstrom, a Swedish Social Democratic politician and UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, said in an article for the Harvard International Review:

"Fair representation of women in politics is not only a female concern. Rather, increased gender equality is a question of democracy. Societies or institutions in which women are not fairly represented suffer from a democratic deficit, as half of their citizens are not properly taken into account in public debate and decision-making."

Margot goes on to say it is not about having one woman at the top for every man or indeed that women are better human beings and hence better decision makers. Margot believes:

"It is about creating a more balanced society, and about taking decisions that better represents the people, for women are different, with different experiences, ideas, and points of view. We have to realise that there can be no sustainable development without equitable development, and there can be no equitable development without gender equality."

There are some countries which have mandated quotas for women in parliament.

Rwanda is the world leader when it comes to women in parliament with 56.3 per cent of parliamentarians being women followed by Sweden at 47.3 per cent.

According to the OCED the ten countries with the highest share of women in parliament are:

1. Rwanda
2. Sweden
3. Cuba
4. Iceland
5. South Africa

6. Finland
7. Norway
8. Netherlands
9. Denmark
10. New Zealand

Australian state and federal parliaments are not the only place where women are significantly underrepresented, women are significantly unrepresented in Federation decision making forums.

When we examine the Federation Executive, of the 15 members elected from Council six are women. Until the election of Jenny Diamond there was only one woman Senior Officer (of the four positions available) and only one of the four Assistant General Secretaries is a woman.

There was a time when the figures were more representative of our membership, when there were three female Senior Officers and three out of the four AGS positions were held by women.

Women make up about 74 per cent of the Federation membership but only 50.3 percent of the Federation Council are women. An increase in 23.3 percent or an additional 71 women need to be elected for Council to be reflective of its membership.

The Australian Education Union Women's Conference has encouraged state branches "to consider policy in relation to proportional gender representation within union structures". This is certainly food for thought and indeed

discussion. Should the Federation look at proportional gender representation in our structures?

The issue of women being underrepresented in our decision making bodies is not new but perhaps this can be the generation which will make a difference. I believe the responsibility to address the situation of women being under-represented in our union lies at the feet of every member. For the women's program to continue to work, we need to support and encourage women of all ages and cultures to become active in our union, thereby creating a truly inclusive Federation. We need to develop succession plans for women to move into leadership roles.

AEU Women's Conference

The AEU Women's Conference was held in Melbourne over the October long weekend. The theme for the conference was "Making a World of Difference".

The speakers at the conference were fantastic and provide the participants with much food for thought. New ACTU President Ged Kearney addressed the conference. In her address she highlighted the issue of women in leadership within the union movement and her commitment to hold governments of all political colours accountable. Ged made it clear

that it was the workers' agenda that she would be pursuing.

Sandra Dan of the South Australian Working Women Centre provided an insight into the issues which are facing women workers in Australia and provided some shocking examples of women being exploited in the workforce and the vulnerability of women workers who are not members of unions.

The highlight of the conference was the presentation from Nina Funnell, who is an amazing young woman. Nina is a lecturer at the University of

NSW, freelance journalist and a PHD student. Nina provided an insightful presentation about young people and the importance of sex education.

The workshops at the conference were:

- Lobbying and Activism
- GLBTI- engaging women and supporting students
- Recruitment
- AEU Five Year Plan.

Each of the workshops presented recommendations to the plenary session of the conference and these will be presented to the AEU executive.

Domestic violence is union business

According to Victorian Health, domestic violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in women aged 15-44.

The Australian Services Union (ASU) was recently successful in having the Surf Coast Shire in Victoria agree to the inclusion of a clause in their enter-

prise bargaining agreement which provides support for victims of domestic violence.

The clause is now world best practise and gives employees of the Surf Shire access to 20 days paid leave per year if they are victims of domestic violence. This will provide women with the time

required to escape an untenable situation and ensure the safety of themselves and their children without the fear that they will put their paid employment in jeopardy because of leave. The leave provision will allow women the time needed to find safe accommodation, seek legal advice, or access counselling.

Two thirds of domestic violence victims are employed and there is no doubt that there are women members of the NSW Teachers Federation who have been or will be a victim of domestic violence. This alone should be reason enough for it to be our union business, particularly as we pride ourselves on our social justice principles.

If an economic argument is required to support the inclusion of a domestic violence clause in agreements, the ASU estimates that “the annual direct cost of domestic violence to employers from absenteeism, staff turn over and lost productivity” totals “at least \$500 million”.

The Federation will seek negotiations with the DET to have a similar leave provision for our members.

Links

SMH article: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/victims-of-domestic-violence-suffer-at-work-20100909-153b0.html>

The Age article re leave provisions: <http://www.theage.com.au/national/leave-deal-for-victims-of-domestic-violence-20100923-15or9.html>

Australian Domestic Violence Clearinghouse:

http://www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au/PDF%20files/Newsletter_41.pdf

NSW Police Website with information about domestic violence http://www.police.nsw.gov.au/community_issues/domestic_and_family_violence

NSW Department of Human and Community Services. Domestic Violence Line 1800 656 463 http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/parents_carers_and_families/domestic_and_family_violence/dv_line.html

Another Closet. Domestic Violence in

Heteronormativity and women

Kat Hand

Anna Stewart Officer Term 4

Heteronormativity put simply defines heterosexual relationships as normal (and so non-heterosexual relationships as not). This impacts on women and members of the GLBTI community as it assumes that two genders exist, male and female, and that these genders are complementary. That each has “opposite” characteristics that when put together make a “whole”.

This has a number of consequences. Firstly it assigns characteristics to each gender that are considered “normal”. For example, women are defined as being “nurturing” and so there is the cultural expectation for us to do the majority (if not all) of the caring for children and/or sick family members. In a heterosexual couple it is still most often the woman who takes leave from paid work to do this caring.

How many women are still asked “so what does your husband do?” This question is heteronormative and sexist. It assumes that a woman should not only be in a relationship with a man, but that she should be married to him. It can also imply that the occupation of the male in a couple is the defining characteristic of the status of that couple. Which given the disparity of pay between men and women, in terms of income, it generally is.

As the Anna Stewart Officer I have been asked to do some work on some GLBTI (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex) issues. You may well ask: Why should a feminist position be used to do work on “queer” issues? The answer lies in the fight against heteronormativity.

For same-sex attracted people heteronormativity immediately defines their relationships as “less-than”. This is seen both legally (same-sex couples are not allowed to marry in Australia) and culturally (terms such as “that’s so gay” still in use; the absence of same-sex couples in mainstream media).

There is therefore an overlap in the campaigns for an equal society for both women and same-sex attracted people (of course including the fact that some women are same sex attracted).

Heteronormativity, sexism and homophobia are linked, and so to fight against any one of these things we must fight them all.

Gay and Lesbian Relationships: <http://nswdsv.acon.org.au/>

Respectful Relationships Education
Violence prevention and respectful relationships education in Victorian secondary schools [\[nationandViolence/ViolenceAgainstWomen/respectful-relationships.ashx\]\(http://nationandViolence/ViolenceAgainstWomen/respectful-relationships.ashx\)](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ProgramsandProjects/MentalHealthandWellBeing/Discrimi-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

NSW Rape Crisis Centre <http://www.nswrapecrisis.com.au/>

Women Educating Each Other. Women in safe and equal relationships. <http://www.weeowiser.org.au/>

Women's Conference 2011 "Where to Next? A celebration of the Centenary of International Women's Day"

Planning for the 2011 Women's Conference is well underway and will be held on Saturday April 2.

The 2011 Women's Conference will not only be a celebration of the centenary of International Women's Day but look at to the future and examine where to next.

The conference keynote speaker

Eva Cox — a highly esteemed feminist and academic — will be looking at where the women's movement needs to go and how we might get there.

While the conference will focus on the future it is important that we remember the past and the lessons learnt. The Federation's oral history project will form the bases of

the reflective session of the conference. We will hear from members about the battles from the past and the lessons we need to take with us into the future.

As with previous years there will be an array of workshops covering topics such as bullying, your rights, Aboriginal education and many more..

Women and super

First State Super has launched a great new website aimed at helping women navigate the issue of superannuation. It is easy to use and all women are able to access the site, which is full of helpful information. The site pro-

vides information about what to do when you're expecting a baby, going through a divorce, changing jobs or getting ready for retirement. The website provides an array of forms which you may need in relation to

your super all in one stop. Now there is no excuse for not taking control of your superannuation.

The site can be found at <http://www.womenandsuper.com.au/>

Trade Union Training

This year there have been a number of Trade Union Training courses held in both Surry Hills and regional NSW. There are more planned for

next year and I encourage you to look out for further information either from your Federation Rep, Women's Contact or on the Trade

Union Training page on the Federation's website, which can be found at <http://www.nswtf.org.au/tuta/>

Reminders

The Federal Government Paid Parental Leave Scheme starts on January 1, 2011. For more information about

the scheme head to the Family Assistance website <http://www.familyassist.gov.au/news-and-updates/>

[paid-parental-leave-scheme.html](http://www.familyassist.gov.au/news-and-updates/paid-parental-leave-scheme.html)

Dates to remember

November 25, 2010	UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.
December 1, 2010	World AIDS Day
February 28–March 1, 2011	Women's Contacts Fundamentals Course Surry Hills
March 8, 2011	International Women's Day
April 2, 2011	NSW Teachers Federation Women's Conference