

THE THIRD WAVE

A memoir by Barbara Cameron on WEL Victoria 50th Anniversary

From Mary Wollstonecraft ("*Vindication of the Rights of Woman*", 1792) to Melbourne-based Vida Goldstein (1920s suffragist and first woman to stand for parliament) to Germaine Greer ("*The Female Eunuch*", 1970) women have been standing up for women's rights. That's three waves of struggle and 230 years!

So, Women's Electoral Lobby (Victoria), known as WEL, was inaugurated on February 27, 1972 when the late Beatrice Faust AO invited nine Victorian women to her home to plan action for women at the 1972 Federal election. They were journalists, a psychologist, a sociologist and a librarian.

That action came fast as membership expanded. All candidates for the election were interviewed on women's issues by WEL members, with the results of this ground-breaking survey published in *The Age*. The Whitlam government would eventually implement practically every reform raised in that WEL survey.

Within months, WEL Victoria had hundreds of members. Branches were established in other Australian states and territories, creating the national WEL Australia. Women's voices and votes became a new force to be listened to and an important part of politics in Australia.

Then, in May 1973, WEL held a public forum for the State election where the four male leaders of all political parties sat up on the stage at Dallas Brook's Hall, Melbourne, trying to answer questions from the audience of 2000 energetic and noisy feminists (I was there!).

Over the years, major WEL policies for women have included abortion, equal pay, education, discrimination, child care, paid parental leave, sexism, domestic violence and more women on boards and in government. These policies have resulted in extensive submissions from members of WEL all over Australia. There were large national WEL conferences and delegations to governments and official inquiries that brought women from around Australia to all capital cities to further the aims of the feminist movement. WEL became a stepping stone for many women who have become prominent in Australia and WEL Australia affiliated with the International Alliance of Women. The numerous successes have been

shown by later improvements in women's lives, employment and the law, with more women in all levels of government.

WEL members have also helped to establish other organisations in Victoria, including the ACTU Working Women's Centre, the Queen Victoria Women's Centre, Victorian Women's Trust and WIRE, the Women's Information and Referral Exchange. I have had great pleasure in developing the WEL Victoria website for more than 15 years.

So, on our 50th anniversary I like to remember Beatrice Faust, and also Vida Goldstein, who stood for election in 1903 and later, and never got elected in any parliament, but gave her name to the Federal electorate of Goldstein.

Barbara Cameron, B.A. Women's History, La Trobe University.

WEL Victoria member for 50 years.

Administrator welvic.org.au