

Rules reform and Cultural Change – the role of women in shaping party, policy and people.

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What an announcement we have had this morning from Daniel Andrews. A Royal Commission into Family Violence is long overdue and is a brave way of investigating and resolving a complex social problem. Labor uses Royal Commissions to protect women and children from sexual abuse and the risk of violence. Compare that to the Coalition's investigations into pink batts and the union movement, both of which have only one aim – to undo Labor in bloody-minded political point-scoring.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Family Violence Royal Commission, which seeks to address the leading contributor to death and disability of women under the age of 45, would have been unthinkable 20 years ago without the participation of women in the ALP. Policy announcements with a strong gendered hue, like this announcement was, is only possible because of inroads women have made shaping the labour movement.

A Family violence royal commission is built on the foundation of women's leadership and power. That power began with structural rules reform - Affirmative Action – and twenty years later we are working to strengthen its role to safeguard the future.

Party, Policy, People.

This was Gough's mantra and now Bill Shorten is adopting it as his own, too. The three P's also underpin the work of EMILY's List Australia too.

Party, Policy and People is a Labor recipe for delivering incremental social change. Social change – like that being affected by the ALP in the sphere of family violence - is not easy. It takes a time to build community consensus. You need strategic thinking to plan out a way forward, to position people and ideas in the right places as well as a focussed determination to get things done for the common good, rather than for individual prestige.

The National Plan for tackling violence against women & children is the fruit of such labour. Women have worked hard for this issue to become a central tenet of policy making. Party, policy and people.

Incremental social change is not the sort of work conservatives do. In fact, their very name hints that they do very little. They depend, instead, on the maintenance of a status quo; a stasis of business, community and fourth estate interests who all rely on the same thing being done year in and year out to maintain privilege.

Nor does a strategic plan for social change appeal to The Greens because it looks too much like work. Much easier to enjoy the pageant of a good protest than to do the hard yards of bringing people with you on a journey of transformation. It's all pretty easy to sell the idea of a revolution when you never have to deliver on it.

Sensible, strategic long term community alliances that build commitment to social change over a sustained period and deliver on it. This is the work of labor party. And it is the work of women within it.

At this conference, women are working again on strengthening the structural reform of affirmative action which we believe is so essential to keeping the party fresh and responsive to the community. Whether we are successful or not, what we have learned about reform within the party during the last six months and the intensive last four weeks, is significant for our role in the future. It is also significant for others committed to reform within the party and worth reflecting on.

To achieve reform within the ALP, firstly you need focus. Too many reform motions and amendments; too many ideas and counter-ideas leads to too much work to do and the risk of confusion and inertia. The AA reforms have a prospect of success at this conference because of the focus on only two motions; with largely similar parameters. Productive reform is a focussed endeavour.

Secondly, you need lawyers. The ALP rules are a legal document; a compact between individual members and union affiliates; a partnership between the parliamentary, party offices and trade union wings of the movement. As such, having a sound legal understanding that gives effect to these important interests is paramount.

Even the best intentions in any partnership negotiation – whether it is a business or a personal one – will breakdown if the rules and arrangements are not transparent, open and clear for everyone. All parts of the party rely on trusting each other that commitments will be honoured and rules complied with. Lawyers can help with drafting the parameters of the relationships while also refining the notion that the compact – once agreed – must be followed.

Thirdly, you need a strategy. It's not enough to hope to wing it at the last minute of a conference. You need to have a goal in mind and a process for how you are going to deliver on it.

Lastly, you need groupings. This may be a hard thing for people committed to party reform to accept. But groupings – left, right & independent – will always exist within an organisational structure like the ALP. Doing away with them will not advance party reform, only undermine it.

Strong, intelligent, thoughtful and passionate reformers of the party exist within each grouping. This committed centre must communicate and collaborate. These are the leaders of Labor's tomorrow. Only their shared belief in the future of Labor will get the party through this stage in its history. And that centre must hold; working confidently and resolutely through the tough work to create a new compact.

This is not a thing for last minute negotiations; a style learned in student conferences. This is the work of strategic planning and consultation over a sustained period. A strong centre of the party can create the environment for this kind of reform and maintain it. A weak centre; weakens the whole outfit.

This is what I have learned about achieving reform.

But what are the reforms that we need to achieve?

Whatever structural rules are adopted at this conference or into the future, they will be meaningless without cultural change. We need the culture of the party to change so that it enables party, policy and people to achieve deep, lasting consensus. We need to find ways to efficiently and respectfully contest ideas within our own tent so that we can move quickly and nimbly into the electorate to win the hearts and minds of voters. And get elected and re-elected.

I think there are two important cultural changes we can make.

1. **Labor must become a labor of love.** The factional and fractional hatreds which have been allowed to pollute the party must be confined to the past. If we are to wrest elections from the conservatives and The Greens, all parts of the labor tribe will need to feel valued and appreciated. Only love and respect will counteract the old edifices of distrust and destabilisation. Labor conferences – from now and into the future – need to be times to foster deep, un-abiding camaraderie between fellow fans of the labor movement and to establish relationships of cross-grouping consensus.

We need to care about each other – everyone of us – and find ways to nurture talent, reward loyalty and to treat party faithful with kindness and civility. For if we cannot love each other, what right do we have to expect the electorate to love us anymore?

This is why party reform depends on sidelining childish hatreds, grudge-holding and distrust to the playground of Labor's political history. It is behaviour that no longer befits a multi-million dollar NGO aspiring to elect people to run the nation.

2. We also need to put the party back in the ALP.

There is a party etiquette crisis within the ALP.

If Labor were a 21st birthday celebration, you'd have to think seriously about whether or not to attend. We're not that welcoming or nice to each other.

We don't send out our invitations to join properly nor do we process and address the RSVP's when they come in. If you manage to make it to party in spite of these things, there is little nourishment or entertainment available to you. Sometimes the space can be downright miserable and unfriendly.

It doesn't have to be like this. Membership options, branch structures and other gathering of Labor people need modernisation now. These gatherings all need to be places where we can feel good about ourselves; for wanting to care for the community and share the nation's resources. This will require hosts that are open and transparent; who feel obligated to make everyone welcome and to have a good time.

If we can achieve these cultural changes – love, collaboration and care amongst us; and a celebration of our belonging to the same party and the same principles – then we can have respectful contests of ideas and long-term strategic plans to implement our parliamentary agenda.

A Labor of love and a party where everyone has a chance to have a good time; this is what the ALP needs now and into the future. Cultural Change, Rule Change, Policy Change and Social Change. Party, Policy and People.

It will be women's work and men's work to create cultural change that leads to party reform, policy people believe in and candidates worth voting for.

Affirmative Action started as cultural change, became a rule and then a policy, which even conservatives are feeling pressured to adopt. It's a reform EMILY's List is committed to strengthening at this conference and in the lead up to National Conference 2015.