



Archived at the Flinders Academic Commons:
<http://hdl.handle.net/2328/27231>

This is a scan of a document number DUN/Speeches/2707
in the Dunstan Collection, Special Collections, Flinders University Library.
<http://www.flinders.edu.au/library/info/collections/special/dunstan/>

Title:

Speech opening International Women's Day, Adelaide Festival Centre

Please acknowledge the source as:
Dunstan Collection, Flinders University Library.
Identifier: DUN/Speeches/2707

© Copyright Estate Donald Allan Dunstan

Thank You, Jean Wenham,

Friends, Roma, Countrywomen,

We are today here involved in a revolution - it is nothing less than that. Six thousand years of male-dominated and determined culture is now fundamentally and properly under attack. Events like International Women's Day are symbols of this process and change.

But this revolution is, in relation to those six thousand years, merely a fleeting shadow. It is less than a century old and at times still arouses the most primitive and prejudicial reactions.

But so fundamental is the change of cultural focus the women's movement seeks to achieve, that I do not believe the campaign will end in our time.

Complete sexual equality and respect will be ultimately achieved only after a continuing campaign extending over a number of generations, even though some of the great battles have already been won, and others will shortly be.

To talk in terms of revolution, or battle in relation to the Women's Movement is not to unnecessarily dramatise the issue. Rather it is to be accurate. Most societies by and large still cast women in largely secondary positions, even those which give lip-service to ideals of sexual equality. In Australia there is our boozed, rough-necked, garrulous tradition which recognises women as either young scrubbers or old ducks.

This process relegates a massive sector of the female population to that kind of vapid, contingent role most effectively satirised by Barry Humphries' Edna Everage. The Australian media effectively reinforces the Nation's sexist bias.

Every journalist is taught that "a bit of tit" on the front page sells a paper.

Edna Everage, Miss Crumpet, and the Snake Gully Beauty Queen are the three most recognisable faces of Australian women.

In relation to this I think that we should recognise that many Australians have highly biased racial and sexual attitudes, and nothing short of an internal cultural revolution can change the situation.

Unfortunately, there is in this very little properly-motivated Governments can do in the short term. The main thrust of the campaign must come from the women's movement itself, acting as a catalyst and pressure group within the community and on Government. This process is, of course, already under way. In South Australia, the women's movement has drawn the attention of Parliament to the issue of sexual equality. This session of State Parliament will see a bill before it prohibiting discrimination against persons by reason only of their sex. The precise details of the legislation have not yet been finalised - in fact, we are presently waiting for a British Bill with the same object to be presented to the House of Commons next week. We expect that some of its provisions will be incorporated in the South Australian legislation.

Then there is the Public Service. The Committee on Enquiry into the South Australian Public Service will next month be reporting to Cabinet in detail on the role, status and opportunities of women in the Service. I do not know precisely what the Committee will recommend. But may it be sufficient to say here that it is the intention of the Government to end sexual discrimination within the Service and we expect the Committee to propose radical steps to achieve this.

In addition, the membership composition of State Government Boards, Committees and Commissions is progressively being changed.

Until very recently, these bodies tended to be male-only preserves - a proper balanced membership of men and women is now being achieved.

Then again, the matter of titles and marital status has been raised. On Government documents it has been rare for men to be required to be required to give their marital status, but common for women to be required to do so. Accordingly, I am instructing all Government Departments and stationers to adopt the 'Mr' and 'Ms' titles in their documents and correspondence and to cease officially describing women as either 'spinster' or 'married' when in equivalent places males are described only by their occupation.

In schools, again under the thrust of the women's movement, the elimination of sexually biased text books is to be undertaken progressively as text books are renewed. This is likely to be a lengthy project as the State cannot finance a crash programme of replacement.

In addition, the Minister of Education is currently commissioning a pilot study into the community and educational procedures needed to be followed in eliminating sexist bias in primary school areas, using in this several schools and communities in the Adelaide metropolitan area.

And then, again, the pre-school education programme, funded by the Australian Government, is well under way with, currently, more than fifty separate main projects, some of which are in full operation, others of which are still in the planning stage. The Australian Government's first objective is to give all children access to one year of pre-school education by 1980. The South Australian programme accordingly covers integrated child-care and pre-school centres, traditional kindergartens, and Education Department pre-school centres. It is a massive multi-million dollar programme and one which will eventually properly provide for the working mother.

But none of these moves by Government will necessarily fundamentally change the sexist bias in our culture. This can only be achieved by the women's movement itself and specifically by its actions in raising the consciousness of both men and women and encouraging women to reject a passive role in society.

For the fact is that women have not properly penetrated major areas of Australian society - neither our political parties and Union Movements, nor our industry, commerce, higher education and the professions. And it is not until they do - not until they are seen as deeply involved in non-domestic social and community activities and occupations that some of Australia's more rough-necked sexist social attitudes will fundamentally change.

But I think we all recognise that in endeavouring to eliminate sexist bias in our society, we are dealing with an almost endless series of children-and-egg situations. The raising of consciousness among women and the advancement of their participation in society can be assisted by events such as International Women's Day - and International Women's Year. Accordingly, I have great pleasure in declaring this day's events under way.

Thank You, Jean Wenham,

Friends, Roma, Countrywomen,

We are today here involved in a revolution - it is nothing less than that. Six thousand years of male-dominated and determined culture is now fundamentally and properly under attack. Events like International Women's Day are symbols of this process and change.

But this revolution is, in relation to those six thousand years, merely a fleeting shadow. It is less than a century old and at times still arouses the most primitive and prejudicial reactions.

But so fundamental is the change of cultural focus the women's movement seeks to achieve, that I do not believe the campaign will end in our time.

Complete sexual equality and respect will be ultimately achieved only after a continuing campaign extending over a number of generations, even though some of the great battles have already been won, and others will shortly be.

To talk in terms of revolution, or battle in relation to the Women's Movement is not to unnecessarily dramatise the issue. Rather it is to be accurate. Most societies by and large still cast women in largely secondary positions, even those which give lip-service to ideals of sexual equality. In Australia there is our boozed, rough-necked, garrulous tradition which recognises women as either young scrubbers or old ducks.

This process relegates a massive sector of the female population to that kind of vapid, contingent role most effectively satirised by Barry Humphries' Edna Everage. The Australian media effectively reinforces the Nation's sexist bias.

Every journalist is taught that "a bit of tit" on the front page sells a paper.

Edna Everage, Miss Crumpet, and the Snake Gully Beauty Queen are the three most recognisable faces of Australian women.

In relation to this I think that we should recognise that many Australians have highly biased racial and sexual attitudes, and nothing short of an internal cultural revolution can change the situation.

Unfortunately, there is in this very little properly-motivated Governments can do in the short term. The main thrust of the campaign must come from the women's movement itself, acting as a catalyst and pressure group within the community and on Government. This process is, of course, already under way. In South Australia, the women's movement has drawn the attention of Parliament to the issue of sexual equality. This session of State Parliament will see a bill before it prohibiting discrimination against persons by reason only of their sex. The precise details of the legislation have not yet been finalised - in fact, we are presently waiting for a British Bill with the same object to be presented to the House of Commons next week. We expect that some of its provisions will be incorporated in the South Australian legislation.

Then there is the Public Service. The Committee on Enquiry into the South Australian Public Service will next month be reporting to Cabinet in detail on the role, status and opportunities of women in the Service. I do not know precisely what the Committee will recommend. But may it be sufficient to say here that it is the intention of the Government to end sexual discrimination within the Service and we expect the Committee to propose radical steps to achieve this.

In addition, the membership composition of State Government Boards, Committees and Commissions is progressively being changed.

Until very recently, these bodies tended to be male-only preserves - a proper balanced membership of men and women is now being achieved.

Then again, the matter of titles and marital status has been raised. On Government documents it has been rare for men to be required to be required to give their marital status, but common for women to be required to do so. Accordingly, I am instructing all Government Departments and stationers to adopt the 'Mr' and 'Ms' titles in their documents and correspondence and to cease officially describing women as either 'spinster' or 'married' when in equivalent places males are described only by their occupation.

In schools, again under the thrust of the women's movement, the elimination of sexually biased text books is to be undertaken progressively as text books are renewed. This is likely to be a lengthy project as the State cannot finance a crash programme of replacement.

In addition, the Minister of Education is currently commissioning a pilot study into the community and educational procedures needed to be followed in eliminating sexist bias in primary school areas, using in this several schools and communities in the Adelaide metropolitan area.

And then, again, the pre-school education programme, funded by the Australian Government, is well under way with, currently, more than fifty separate main projects, some of which are in full operation, others of which are still in the planning stage. The Australian Government's first objective is to give all children access to one year of pre-school education by 1980. The South Australian programme accordingly covers integrated child-care and pre-school centres, traditional kindergartens, and Education Department pre-school centres. It is a massive multi-million dollar programme and one which will eventually properly provide for the working mother.

But none of these moves by Government will necessarily fundamentally change the sexist bias in our culture. This can only be achieved by the women's movement itself and specifically by its actions in raising the consciousness of both men and women and encouraging women to reject a passive role in society.

For the fact is that women have not properly penetrated major areas of Australian society - neither our political parties and Union Movements, nor our industry, commerce, higher education and the professions. And it is not until they do - not until they are seen as deeply involved in non-domestic social and community activities and occupations that some of Australia's more rough-necked sexist social attitudes will fundamentally change.

But I think we all recognise that in endeavouring to eliminate sexist bias in our society, we are dealing with an almost endless series of children-and-egg situations. The raising of consciousness among women and the advancement of their participation in society can be assisted by events such as International Women's Day - and International Women's Year. Accordingly, I have great pleasure in declaring this day's events under way.