

Whither radical politics?

A feminist lament on the 'mainstreaming' of the Greens by Robin Tennant-Wood

If, as Aristotle contended, "man is by nature a political animal", then politics is inherent in all our interactions. When the proto-Green parties emerged in 1972 in the form of the United Tasmania Group and the New Zealand Values Party, they promised to give a political voice to nature. They intended to challenge and redress environmental exploitation by the government-corporate machine by taking them on at their own game: politics.

Politics is about only one thing: power. Who has it, who doesn't, who wants it, and how they intend to get it. By throwing their hat into the political arena, these new groups, which later evolved into the Tasmanian Greens and the Green Party of Aotearoa New Zealand, were tacitly agreeing to long-held rules of engagement.

Some years ago I worked on a research project that included a statistical analysis of the gender breakdown of candidates for political parties. Yes, I know, I need to get out more. At the time the project leader, a well-known feminist academic, said to me, "minor progressive parties have more women as candidates than men because women are mugs — they'll always put up their hands for a good cause. Watch though, as soon as a party starts to look publicly saleable, the blokes will arrive and take over." Not surprisingly, we found that the majority of candidates for the Greens in the early days were women.

There is an historical and spiritual connection between women and nature. We refer to Mother Earth, or the goddess Gaia. Traditionally women are 'of' nature while men are 'above' nature. The late philosopher and Palerang resident, Val Plumwood, wrote about this in terms of 'dualisms', in her seminal work, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Dualisms are pairs of opposing terms such as: technology/nature; outdoor/indoor; tamed/wild; manmade/natural; political/personal. A gender can be ascribed to each term in the pair: the

first in each of these is masculine and the second is feminine. Val went further to say that the masculine term is given social precedence over the feminine. Thus, technology is perceived, socially, as superior to nature, outdoor work (meaning where one leaves the home to go to work) is superior to indoor (house) work, tamed animals are more valued than wild, and so on.

Taking my lead from Val Plumwood, I would add another dualism to the list: mainstream/radical. For the first 20 years of green politics, they — the parties and their supporters — were radical. They were breaking new political ground. Yes, they were ridiculed, stereotyped (one cartoonist regularly depicted the first Greens senators, Dee Margetts and Christobel Chamarette, as the Gumnut Twins), abused and derided.

The media mocked them, the major parties dismissed them, the public ignored them. They were radical.

Most of their elected representatives were women and while they were dealing in power politics, their aim was not personal power. It was to gain the best possible outcome for the environment. In a game where gaining power is the ultimate goal, to use power for another purpose was radical.



While we were all distracted by the prime ministerial revolving door, the Greens quietly hammered the final nail in the coffin of radical politics. Greens leader, Richard Di Natale, reshuffled the portfolio responsibilities of his team in an ongoing push to 'mainstream' the party. In so doing, New South Wales senator, Lee Rhiannon, was dumped from her higher education responsibilities. This portfolio and the politically crucial equal marriage one, have both been assigned to incoming South Australian senator-designate, Robert Simms, who will be replacing retiring Senator Penny Wright. In a nutshell, all the heavy duty portfolios for the Greens are now held by men: prime minister and cabinet, health, foreign affairs, treasury, employment and workplace relations, finance, trade, defence, attorney general, schools, higher education, and LGBTI and marriage equality. The blokes have arrived to take over.

Why 'mainstream' a party? In order to attract a wider pool of voters. How is this 'doing politics differently'? It isn't. This is a cynical exercise in power-grabbing. The Greens are playing by the established rule that their rusted-on supporters, while they may be disappointed, will stick with them, while more moderate voters will see them as a viable alternative to the major parties. Electorally it will probably work. Ethically, they have sold the radical principles on which the party was founded for 30 pieces of electoral silver. With the male domination of the party comes a masculine view — and use — of power.

I do not believe that this 'mainstreaming' would have happened under female leadership. There is still a place for radical politics but it is a feminine domain.

On several occasions while he was leader I heard Bob Brown say, "we don't want to keep the bastards honest, we want to replace 'em!" The tragedy is that they are not replacing, but becoming, the mainstream parties they once opposed.



Would you like to know how babies are made? [laughs Jo] Well, it didn't happen the usual way. This baby was made with lots of love, effort and kilometres on our car with the assistance of a donor from the U.S.

[K] This process has taken several years. To start with there was the promise of a donor friend and that didn't work out. Then we tried with one of our friend's family members, but after nearly a year that didn't work out either. In the end we decided to go to the Canberra Fertility Clinic because we didn't want to waste any more time. Having already invested considerable time trying to make a bubby, we wanted to try and preserve as much of Jo's youth as possible. We decided to act a little bit more quickly and went with an American donor through a corporation known as XYTEX.

The donor is a paramedic, a fireman

Mum'n'mum

Jo and Kristy talk to BWD about the birth of their daughter Indigo.

and has lots of wonderful characteristics that we both identified with. We did try via IVF using Jo's eggs and the donor's sperm a couple of times, but that wasn't entirely successful and we didn't get a bubby that way.

The great thing is, that although we don't have a producer of sperm in this relationship, we've got two producers of eggs. When Jo's eggs weren't plentiful enough to provide the necessities for a bubby I was able to step in and undergo the hormonal processes involved in producing eggs — I became Jo's egg donor. It was quite entertaining in many ways and could be quite harrowing in others.

[J] Indigo has the right to access the sperm donor's information when she is 18. He consented to abide by Australian laws, which state that when a child turns 18, legally they are able to access information about the donor. In Australia you can only use donor sperm from somebody who consents to this process. It is interesting, because it actually limits the number of donors available. There are quite a few men who are happy to donate their sperm but they don't want to be contacted when the bub is 18. And in Australia, there just aren't that many donors out there.

When we got pregnant we informed