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# Femocrats and Ecorats: Women's Policy Machinery in Australia, Canada and New Zealand

Marian Sawer

Occasional Paper 6, March 1996

United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
United Nations Development Programme

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# Preface

In preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995, UNRISD initiated an Occasional Paper Series reflecting work carried out under the UNRISD/UNDP project, **Technical Co-operation and Women's Lives: Integrating Gender into Development Policy**. In view of the intensified efforts in the aftermath of the Conference to integrate gender concerns into policy analysis and formulation, and the progress of the UNRISD/UNDP project, the Institute intends to publish several additional papers in this series to facilitate dissemination of the project's findings.

The activities of the project have included an assessment of efforts by a selected number of donor agencies and governments to integrate gender issues into their activities (Phase I); participating countries included Bangladesh, Chile, Jamaica, Mali, Morocco, Uganda and Viet Nam. The current action-oriented part of the project (Phases II and III) involves pilot studies in five of these countries (Bangladesh, Jamaica, Morocco, Uganda and Viet Nam), the goal of which is to initiate a process of consultation and dialogue between gender researchers, policy makers and activists aimed at making economic and social policies more accountable to women.

This paper focuses on one of the themes that has been extensively explored in the UNRISD/UNDP Occasional Paper Series: the institutionalization of gender concerns within international and national policy machineries. During the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) most member states of the United Nations adopted some form of governmental machinery to ensure that all government activity was monitored for its impact on women. This paper provides case studies of women's policy machinery in Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The title derives from the uneasy relationship between feminist bureaucrats (femocrats) and a new generation of decision-makers guided by principles of "economic rationalism" (ecorats). The concern of femocrats for gender equity has come up against the belief of ecorats that public intervention in markets is counter-productive.

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March 1996

Dharam Ghai
Director

# Executive Summary

During the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) most member states of the United Nations adopted some form of governmental machinery to advance the status of women. Although there were wide variations in the nature and effectiveness of this machinery, it derived from the feminist insight that, given the different locations of women and men in the workforce and in the family, no government activity was likely to be gender neutral in its effects. For this reason, it was important to go beyond specific "women's programmes" to ensure that all government activity was monitored for its impact on women.

This paper provides case studies of women's policy machinery in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, focusing at the national level. It is partly based on interviews conducted over the last decade with people associated with such machinery — whether as bureaucrats, politicians or community activists. The title derives from the uneasy relationship between feminist bureaucrats (femocrats) and a new generation of decision-makers guided by principles of 'economic rationalism' (ecorats). The mandated concern of femocrats for gender equity has come up against the belief of ecorats that public intervention in markets is counter-productive.

The author examines the genesis of women's policy machinery and the specific political traditions and political opportunity structures which favoured its development in the three countries. In the countries concerned there was a historic orientation on the part of social movements towards state action, despite US-influenced anti-state positions adopted by women's liberation in the early 1970s. The election of governments committed to broadening the policy agenda and fostering citizen participation presented opportunities to translate women's movement slogans into policy and policy structures. Another enabling factor was a desire on the part of governments to be viewed as good international citizens. This was a significant policy resource for feminists operating both at international and domestic levels, as illustrated in the Canadian case study.

Women's policy machinery is the daughter of the women's movement and there is an in-built tension in this relationship. Women's policy units are accountable to government and not just to the women's movement, meaning that conflicts of interest and perspective are inevitable. Femocrats must demonstrate loyalty to government in order to be credible in their policy advice; policy brokering involves compromises even if this leads to accusations of co-option. The New Zealand case study suggests that labels such as "liberal feminist" and "radical feminist" may be less relevant than the different structural constraints on feminist action inside and outside government.

Issues examined here include the degree to which femocrats can assist in the resourcing of the women's movement and the importance of a well-organized women's movement outside government as an effective political base for feminist policy.

The significance of bureaucratic location is explored in each case study, as is the importance of bureaucratic entrenchment of accountability for gender outcomes. The linkage of gender expertise with bureaucratic clout was

found to be crucial in the Australian case study, although it meant a trade-off in terms of feminist process. It was hardest to model feminist process at the centre of government where policy co-ordination took place. Such locations also exacerbated the tension perceived by ecorats between the role of providing "objective" policy advice on Cabinet submissions and the "advocacy" role of attempting to ensure equal benefit for women.

In all three cases women's policy machinery has survived changes of government as well as the increasingly unfavourable environment provided by gender blind economic rationalism. Cross-party support has been garnered for women's policy machinery despite occasional threats from conservatives to replace it with machinery which will conduct "impact on the family" audits. Strategic changes in discourse have been required which have their own side effects — for example the presentation of childcare or domestic violence as economic issues. There have been intermittent claims that accountability for impact on women can be mainstreamed without expert mechanisms for this purpose. Ultimately, the preservation of equity agendas requires not only routinized accountability mechanisms within government but also strong pressure from outside. It is the combination of women working from inside and outside government which has proved most fruitful — even when it has amounted to achieving least worst outcomes.

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# Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| CAPOW | Coalition of Actively Participating Organisations of Women (Australia) |
| CEDAW | United Nations Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women |
| CIDA | Canadian International Development Agency |
| CRIAW | Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women |
| EEO | equal employment opportunity |
| ILO | International Labour Organization |
| IWY | International Women's Year |
| MP | Member of Parliament |
| NAC | National Action Committee on the Status of Women (Canada) |
| NWCC | National Women's Consultative Council (Australia) |
| OECD | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| OSW | Office of the Status of Women (Australia) |
| WEL | Women's Electoral Lobby (New Zealand and Australia) |

# Introduction[1]

The idea that governments need specialized policy machinery for the advancement of women and to ensure that women receive equal benefit from government activity as a whole is relatively new.[2] It first received widespread acceptance as a result of the priority given to it in the World Plan of Action adopted at the World Conference of the International Women's Year held in Mexico City in 1975. Over two thirds of the member states of the United Nations adopted some form of it during the subsequent United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985), although there was great variation in the government agendas involved and in resourcing and effectiveness, particularly in developing countries. Nonetheless, by the end of the Decade there had been a general shift from reliance on advisory bodies to the creation of government units among 137 reporting countries (BAW, 1987).

The new machinery stemmed from the feminist insight that no government activity is likely to be gender neutral, given the different location of women and men in the workforce and in the family and the predominant role taken by women in social reproduction. Therefore, it was important to go beyond specific "women's" programmes to ensure that all government policy was monitored and all government activity audited for gender-specific effects. This insight was underpinned by work by Ester Boserup (1970) and others, showing the unintended effects of development policies on women. The practice of feminist interventions in the state outstripped feminist theorizing about the state which was largely generated in the United States and the United Kingdom, the two countries where such interventions were least developed (e.g. E. Wilson, 1977; Ferguson, 1984).

To take a relatively simple example of gender-specific effects of purportedly gender-neutral policy, of the kind the new women's machinery was intended to highlight: a proposal might be made to effect savings in public transport by cutting back on services other than the most profitable peak commuter routes. The relevant women's unit would draw attention to the disparate impact of such a proposal on women, who characteristically have less access to private transport than men and are more likely to need public transport for purposes other than the journey to work. Similarly, a proposal to introduce time charging for local telephone calls could readily be shown to have a disproportionate impact on women, who make fewer purely instrumental calls and spend more time on the telephone as part of their invisible welfare work in sustaining kinship and other networks.

This paper looks at how such machinery came into existence in, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, three countries which are generally rated highly in terms of gender equity. It raises issues concerning the location of such machinery and the trade-offs involved in the brokering of feminist policy insights within a bureaucratic environment. It also looks at how women's policy machinery relates to other forms of institutionalization of the women's movement — to what extent such machinery assists in resourcing the women's movement and in so doing creates an effective political base for feminist policy (cf. Stetson and Mazur, 1995).

It should be noted that the creation of women's policy machinery in Australia and Canada was assisted by a political opportunity structure which

included both reforming governments eager to expand the policy agenda and the economic prosperity of the early 1970s. Greater citizen participation was another watchword of this period which favoured the entry of new groups into the policy process. Australia and Canada have federal political structures and this helped maintain some momentum even when conservative governments had been re-elected nationally. When the political opportunity came 10 years later, in New Zealand, the economic context was much less favourable. All three countries have Westminster systems of government characterized by majority party rule. The periods of "conservative" government have been less favourable to women's policy initiatives than the periods of more left-wing government. This paper is also concerned with a more general shift in public agendas in all three countries which have created a difficult environment for women's policy machinery and which have made the old distinction between left and right much more problematic. In both Australia and New Zealand, Labour governments initiated economic reforms in the 1980s which reduced the kind of intervention in the economy practised by their "conservative" predecessors.

The political tradition of Australia and New Zealand was shaped by the social liberalism of the 1890s with its idea of the state as a vehicle for social justice (see Sawer, 1993). This provided the discursive framework within which both the first and second waves of the women's movement placed their claims on the state and within which these demands were accorded legitimacy. Social liberalism has also been important in Canada, but most strongly after the Second World War (Vickers, 1992). In seeming contradiction to this tradition, in all three countries the early days of women's liberation at the beginning of the 1970s were strongly marked by anti-state influences from the United States — "women and revolution" not "women and bureaucracy".[3] This meant an initial gulf between anarchistic women's liberation groups and the existing "polite" women's organizations. As the tradition of social liberalism reasserted itself, so did co-operation to achieve common goals, although second-wave organizational philosophy had a continuing influence in the structuring of women's organizations and women's services.

Historically in the three countries, women had been policy shapers as well as policy takers in relation to the development of the welfare state and there had been recognition that women had a special interest in the increase of social provision rather than, for example, lower taxes. New Zealand, which in 1893 had become the first country to give women the vote, in 1938 established what was then the most comprehensive welfare state in the world. By the 1980s social liberal traditions were being challenged in all three countries by the increased policy influence of what in Australia and New Zealand are usually referred to as economic rationalists ("ecorats" ).

It was paradoxical that, as mechanisms for gender audit within government were being developed or strengthened, government policy making was increasingly coming under the sway of economic views hostile to public provision and based on androcentric paradigms of human behaviour (economically rational man). For the ecorats, the welfare state is basically the problem and greater reliance on market forces is the solution. This conversion to economic rationalism, which was perhaps most striking within the New Zealand Labour governments of the 1980s, was somewhat more restrained by the Australian Labor[4] government's Accord agreement with

the union movement, and was less surprising within the Progressive Conservative Canadian governments of 1984-1994.

The mandated concern of femocrats for gender equity brings them into an uneasy relationship with economic rationalism. Ecorats believe that public intervention in markets in the name of equity or social citizenship rights is counterproductive and leads to economic inefficiencies. Femocrats had to shift from social justice discourse to market discourse (stressing human resource and efficiency arguments for gender equity) in order to be "heard".[5] Even in relation to the basic human rights issue of domestic violence, femocrats increasingly had to stress the economic costs of gender-based violence. However, at the end of the day, femocrats still needed to defend the welfare state on which women were disproportionately dependent but which economic rationalists viewed as standing in the way of international competitiveness.

Another point of conflict in both Australia and New Zealand has been the shift away from historic systems of centralized wage-fixing which provided a greater degree of protection for more feminized sectors of the labour market than is available in decentralized wage-fixing systems. While some safeguards have been secured for women in Australia, such as the legislating of International Labour Organization standards as minimum conditions, the general direction of change is likely to result in wage disparities more like those obtaining in Canada under its decentralized wage-bargaining system.

New Zealander Prue Hyman has described the "likelihood that general economic policies, including fiscal, monetary, labour, industry, government sector and international trade policies, have far more impact on the economic and social status of most women than specific policies aimed at improving that status" (Hyman, 1994:14). This was recognized in the mid-1980s by large-scale mobilizations by women to oppose the introduction of a broad-based consumption tax in Australia and to oppose free trade agreements in Canada. The disparate impact of free market policies on men and women has been reflected in wide gender gaps in opinion polls on such issues in both Canada and Australia (see Bashevkin, 1989:370; Sawer, 1994:55). Nonetheless, it is when women's policy machinery in government attempts to intervene on such economic issues that it meets most resistance — both because of traditional views that these are not "women's issues" and because of the economic rationalist view that interventions in the name of social equity are invariably "rent-seeking" in nature and hence illegitimate.

Where not otherwise indicated, material in this paper derives from interviews conducted by the author over the last 10 years with women who have worked in women's policy machinery in Australia, Canada and New Zealand or have been associated with it in other ways (for example as Minister or as community lobbyist).

# Australia

Australia has become increasingly well-known for the role of its feminist bureaucrats or "femocrats" — a word invented to describe feminists who went into the women's policy positions created in Australia in the 1970s. The word is now in common usage, both by friends and enemies as well as more neutral observers (e.g. Yeatman, 1990). In September 1995 the President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions was awarded a prize for the most sexist remark of the year for referring to a group of women unionists as "hairy-legged femocrats" (**Sydney Morning Herald,** 9 September 1995). Other vocal critics include "pro-family" organizations which claim that femocrats do not represent the interests of women in the home — despite their efforts on issues such as the inclusion of unpaid work in national accounts.

The origins of Australian femocrats go back to 1972, the year a highly effective non-party organization called Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) was created and succeeded in placing the policy demands of women centre-stage during the federal election of that year. WEL was regarded as the "reformist" wing of the new women's movement but attracted many women who believed, like its founder, that it was time to move on from talk to practical action.

It was the successful intervention by WEL in the 1972 federal election (and the key role in the new Labor administration played by Peter Wilenski, the husband of a WEL Convenor) which was the trigger for the appointment of a women's adviser to the Prime Minister in 1973. From her very first press conference this adviser[6] articulated what was to be the characteristic Australian emphasis on the need to audit all Cabinet submissions for impact on women.

The election of a federal government bent on reform and eager to take on new areas of social responsibility plus the context of a buoyant economy provided a favourable opportunity structure for experimenting with the machinery of government. The fact that the Women's Adviser took on a quasi-ministerial status and received more letters than anyone except the Prime Minister led to the establishment of the forerunner of the Office of the Status of Women (OSW) in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to provide support for her. A separate secretariat, also under the aegis of the Women's Adviser, was set up in another department to administer the large programme undertaken in Australia for the International Women's Year, which funded an enormous amount of consciousness-raising both at community and national levels.

Meanwhile WEL members inside and outside government worked on a model for women's machinery which they presented to the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration set up by the Labor government. The model consisted of a women's co-ordination unit within the central policy co-ordinating agency of government linked to a network of departmental women's units responsible for monitoring policy at the point of initiation. Australian feminists decided against a self-standing bureau or ministry on the grounds that it might simply become a "waste-paper basket for women's problems".

The emphasis was on policy audit and policy co-ordination rather than on separate women's programmes. In order to have sufficient clout to perform the policy co-ordination role effectively and to have unfettered access to Cabinet submissions and Cabinet processes, Australian feminists believed it necessary to be located within the chief policy co-ordination agency of government (see Sawer and Groves, 1994a:chapter 2). In Australia this is the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet at federal level, departments of Premier and Cabinet at state level and Chief Ministers' departments at territory level. Experience has also suggested the importance of having at least one adviser with gender expertise located in the Prime Minister's office in parliament, which provides policy support of a more "political" nature to the Prime Minister.

In a speech to an International Women's Year Conference in Canberra, Sara Dowse, an early member of Women's Liberation and the first head of what was to be OSW, spoke of the importance of location.[7] She also suggested that the proposed matrix or centre-periphery structure was particularly compatible with women's movement philosophy and the preference for networking over hierarchical arrangements (Dowse, 1975). Nonetheless there was a price to pay for location at the centre of government, most notably the need to conform to existing hierarchical structures and organizational culture which were here at their most rigid. Hence the paradox that it was "sisters in suits" who acted as the internal advocates for the funding of the quite unconventional models of service delivery developed by the women's movement.

Internal femocrat advocacy was effective in brokering government funding for a very wide range of women's services run by women for women in accordance with collectivist principles. For example, the forerunner of OSW was responsible for finding a bureaucratic home for refuge funding at the federal level for ensuring that political opposition at the state level was circumvented. Mediation by femocrats both in co-ordinating and line departments contributed to the ability of women's services to resist pressure to become conventional service deliverers and to persist in modelling feminist organizational forms.

Traditional bureaucrats distrusted, however, the insertion of what was seen as an advocacy body into a department regarded as providing "objective" advice on cross-portfolio submissions. In the memorable image provided by Anne Summers, femocrats were suspected as "missionaries" by traditional bureaucrats, while at the same time women in the women's movement often believed they had sold out to become "mandarins" (Summers, 1986).

In 1977 the bureaucrats had their revenge when it was announced that the Office was to be moved to the newly created Department of Home Affairs, the minister of which ranked 26th in seniority out of the 27 ministries. Sara Dowse went public, resigning her position and making the location of the Office into a political issue. She explained that the Office could not be effective in its policy co-ordinating function from a position of great weakness "thrown in with war graves and museums" (**Daily Mirror,** 22 December 1977). After leaving the economic security of the public service, she led an at first penurious but then increasingly successful life as a writer. Her first novel, **West Block** (Dowse, 1983), was about her experiences as a femocrat.

The politicization by Dowse of the location of the Office helped make it a priority in the Labor opposition's women's policy. Labor feminists were able, after their party's electoral failure in 1977, to exploit the "gender gap" they discovered in Labor support to argue the case for a strong women's policy. As we shall see, an apparent historic shortfall in support for Labour among women voters was also exploited by Labour women in New Zealand in the 1970s to make gains in the party.

Meanwhile the Office was able to consolidate its base among traditional women's organizations through the outreach work of the National Women's Advisory Council, in particular the national process of developing a Draft Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade for Women. The Council and its successor body, the National Women's Consultative Council (NWCC), were intended to provide the government with a means of consulting with women in the community. Members were appointed by government both from national women's organizations and other significant bodies such as the Australian Council of Trade Unions. Although serviced from the Office, the Councils were able to speak out on issues in a way that bureaucrats could not — for example, when there was a threat to public health insurance cover for abortions. The Councils also helped protect the Office, broadening its political base and deflecting anti-feminist criticism (this was also true of some state Councils, particularly in Tasmania).

With the return of Labor to government in 1983, OSW returned in triumph to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and was able to reassert its role in co-ordinating a network of departmental women's units. One of its first victories was the requirement for "impact on women" statements to be attached to Cabinet submissions, a requirement which stayed in place until the "streamlining" of submission format in 1987. The Prime Minister resumed portfolio responsibility for the status of women, assisted by a senior woman cabinet minister. Like almost all ministers who have held this portfolio at federal level, the latter had a background in Women's Electoral Lobby.

The fact that the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women was a senior Cabinet minister was important in ensuring that debate on the impact on women of major economic decisions was actually carried into Cabinet. This was not the case between 1988 and 1993 when junior ministers held the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister portfolio (attending Cabinet only for "their" issues). Bureaucratic monitoring of policy for impact on women was also reinforced at the political level by a Caucus (Parliamentary Labor Party) Status of Women Committee, open to all Labor women MPs, which met weekly during sitting weeks to focus the minds of ministerial colleagues on the gender dimensions of their policy proposals.

OSW was still not totally accepted and during the first year its files were kept separate from those of the rest of the department to facilitate an early departure. There was still resentment of the "feminist eye" being cast over policy proposals, particularly when they were not regarded as women's business: "Given the role of heading off any proposal that wasn't woman-friendly, we haven't been regarded too kindly by the traditional bureaucrats. We made ourselves very unpopular as we poked around in other people's policies and wrote comments on their Cabinet submissions" (Anne Summers in Sawer and Groves, 1994a:30).

During the 1993 review of OSW, the option of a self-standing Ministry, as in New Zealand, was canvassed. As for the previous 20 years, the conclusion was, however, that a free-standing ministry could easily be marginalized and would lack the access to Cabinet information provided by location in the Prime Minister's Department. The review suggested that stronger support from the Departmental Executive and from the Prime Minister's Office would be a better guarantee of effectiveness.

Under the federal Labor governments of the 1980s and 1990s, OSW and femocrats elsewhere in government were to influence policy over a range of sectors — such as the quintupling of the national childcare programme, increased funding of women's services, legislation requiring private sector companies to develop equal employment opportunity programmes, shifting of family support to primary carers, national programmes on violence against women, programmes to promote equal opportunity for workers with family responsibilities, etc. Many of these new programmes, such as the National Women's Health Policy, were developed through an elaborate and exemplary process of consultation with women in the community. There were also a few successful interventions in what were seen as "mainstream economic policy issues". For example, feminist mobilization played an important role in defeating proposals for a broad-based consumption tax and later in ensuring that low income earners (the majority of whom were women) were not excluded from tax cuts (Sawer, 1990:93-96; Sawer and Groves, 1994a:12).

Success on issues was most likely when there was joint work from inside and outside, as on the tax cuts and as with the eventual ratification of ILO Convention 156 on Equal Opportunities for Workers with Family Responsibilities. Labor had been committed to ratification since 1983, but it took a great deal of strategic work by OSW, with the help of its Consultative Council "voice" and of feminists within the Australian Council of Trade Unions, as well as the exploitation by the Caucus Status of Women Committee of another federal election where Labor needed to woo women's votes, to achieve ratification in 1990. This Convention has not been ratified in either Canada or New Zealand.

Relations between the women's movement and OSW reached a low ebb during the 1980s when the Office was headed by an economist without a background in the women's movement who was blamed for failure to mount internal resistance to a series of cost-cutting decisions detrimental to women, including the means-testing of family allowances. (In New Zealand and Canada more successful resistance, at least for a time, was mounted to the means-testing of what for many women was their only independent income.)

One aspect of Australian women's policy machinery which is not replicated in Canada or New Zealand consists of government funded "women's information services". These are located in all capital cities and some regional centres and provide an accessible bridge for women in the community to government or community resources. The policy is to "take every woman seriously" and the services are usually organized on semi-collectivist principles. They are sometimes used for "phone-ins" on specific issues of concern to women, and these feed into policy development work. During the 1980s OSW ran services for a time in two state capitals with

conservative governments, but these were later taken over by state-based women's policy machinery. OSW lost its own women's shopfront when the Australian Capital Territory became self-governing and took over the service — which meant that OSW lost this direct link with women in the community.

Inside the bureaucracy OSW was responsible for significant new co-ordination exercises such as the Women's Budget Program (later Women's Budget Statement) which required all departments and agencies to account for the impact of their activities on women in a Budget document. This radical departure was introduced with the assistance of the "Secretaries' Taskforce on the Status of Women" — a co-ordinating body made up of departmental heads which also oversaw the preparation of Australia's National Agenda for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000 before lapsing for lack of interest. The Women's Budget Program was a world first in terms of educating bureaucrats to disaggregate the impact of their "mainstream" programmes rather than simply highlighting programmes for women. It was an initiative subsequently copied at state and territory levels of government and had considerable influence at the international level. For example, in 1994 the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women was recommending to the Finance Minister that it be adopted in Canada (MacDonald, 1995:2008).

OSW continued, however, to have difficulty in influencing macro-economic policy, an area dominated by men schooled in "gender-blind" neo-classical economics. While the relationship between the central co-ordinating unit and outlying units, such as those in economic departments, may be an important source of support for officers marginalized in their own departments, there are limits to this relationship posed by the need for women's units to demonstrate that their primary allegiance is to their department. There were also some frictions between OSW and the long-standing Women's Bureau, with the latter seeing their concerns with industry policy and outworkers (workers working from home, an increasing phenomenon with industry restructuring) as of more relevance to working class women than affirmative action programmes.

The increased influence of economic rationalism in the 1980s was one adverse feature of the policy environment. Another was the difficulty displayed by the women's movement in coming to terms with the increased sophistication of policy development processes and the increased professionalization demanded of participants, regardless of their sectoral base. The Australian women's movement was increasingly diverse and fragmented and lacked the kind of national presence which would provide a strong political base for embattled feminists within government. While there was considerable interaction between specialized women's organizations and relevant government agencies, there was no community-based "peak" body equivalent to, for example, the Australian Council of Social Service or the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia. These are umbrella organizations independent of government but in receipt of government funding to represent constituents in policy development processes. Government advisory bodies, with their limited independence, are no substitute for the professionalized advocacy of peak bodies and neither are the largely volunteer organizations found in the women's movement. As in other countries, issue-based coalitions arose out of the

women's movement in response to perceived threats or opportunities, but found it difficult to sustain themselves over time.

A networking structure linking national women's organizations, the Coalition of Actively Participating Organisations of Women (CAPOW), was created in 1992, serving mainly to improve communication flows though some co-ordinating work was undertaken, particularly in preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women and before ministerial round tables. There was a self-denying ordinance preventing the network structure taking on a representational role as a "voice for women". Many national women's organizations were themselves "networks", indicating the philosophical preference for non-hierarchical structures. Many of these national networks had been brought into being by government grants aimed at building up more coherent policy input from the women's movement and a more effective political base for programmes endangered by creeping economic rationalism (Sawer and Groves, 1994b). This government role in fostering organization at the national level was particularly important in relation to groups such as women from non-English speaking backgrounds and women with disabilities, who previously had little voice at this level. In 1994-1995 the Minister was attempting to push the women's movement along to the creation of a peak body through the funding of a large feasibility study and other pressures.

As we have seen, one impetus to closer co-ordination of women's organizations was the preparation for participation in the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in 1995 in Beijing. Australia has a long tradition of working to promote the status of women through the United Nations, starting with Jessie Street at the San Francisco Conference and including an important role in the preparatory work for all four world conferences on women. The international work of OSW has been of particular importance during periods of frustration at the domestic level, as in the early 1980s. Work towards strengthening international instruments has been seen as an important lever for gains at home and the other side of work to strengthen the organizational capacity of the women's movement. The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies provided the justification for the Australian National Agenda for Women of 1988 (updated in 1993), which was in turn preceded by an extensive consultation process including the funding of National Agenda conferences organized by NGOs.

In Australia the ratification of the United Nations Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was of particular importance as it provided the federal government with the constitutional basis (through its external affairs power) to legislate against sex discrimination. While ratification had taken place in Canada in 1981, before the election of the Conservative government, it had to wait in Australia and New Zealand until after the election of Labour governments in 1983 and 1984 respectively. Australian expert Justice Elizabeth Evatt was to play an important role, as a member and then Chair of the CEDAW Committee, in developing the interpretation of the Convention to cover issues such as violence against women. Together with New Zealand, Australia has promoted CEDAW in the South Pacific and, together with the Netherlands, has helped fund an Expert Group to draft an Optional Protocol for the Convention providing right of petition. Australia and Canada were co-sponsors of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of

Violence against Women and New Zealand worked closely with them in its development.

Australia was the leading donor for the Fourth World Conference on Women, funding attendance of one government and one non-government delegate from each Pacific country. OSW also put considerable resources into helping the Australian women's movement prepare for participation. This included resourcing nation-wide consultations and co-ordination work in the two years leading up to the Conference and training sessions to enable non-government delegates to participate more effectively in multilateral forums. At Beijing, Australia was regarded as noteworthy for the very close co-operation between government and non-government delegations, which included meetings every evening organized by CAPOW.

The large non-government delegation gave strong support to the official Australian initiative in trying to make it a conference of commitments[8] and was significant in getting the concept accepted (Townsend, 1995:9). According to an NGO perspective prepared by a representative of the Coalition of Activist Lesbians: "The close co-operation and good working relations between the two groups was noted with envy by NGOs from many other countries" (**CAPOW Bulletin,** November 1995:27).

Sixty-five countries made new domestic commitments. Due to opposition, the United Nations was not given responsibility for documenting and monitoring these commitments; responsibility was taken up by NGOs, however, and a World Wide Web site was promptly prepared. This close co-operation between official and NGO delegations was not inspired by the Australian government's own commitments which, despite the efforts of OSW, were notably weak on this occasion — too long before an election to be seen as having much domestic pay-off.

As this negative example illustrates, it is the skilful exploitation by feminist insiders of the "gender gap" in voting intentions which has been largely responsible for recent domestic wins. This has counterbalanced the increasingly adverse ideological context and the relatively low level of institutionalization of the Australian women's movement outside government (at least compared to Canada, as we shall see below). While the Labor Party's efforts to attract the female vote appeared to have paid off in the early 1980s, with the closing of the gender gap delivering government to the party, later in the 1980s the gap reappeared, particularly between elections. Women appeared to have become more "volatile" voters and were also more likely to be among those making up their minds very late in campaigns. This provided welcome political opportunities, particularly when the femocrats had political as well as bureaucratic credibility and ready access to the Prime Minister and his Office. Dr. Anne Summers was able to gain large child-care commitments before the 1984 and 1993 federal elections in this context, as well as action on other long-standing feminist demands.

## Canada

In Canada, the setting up of the historic Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1967, inspired by President Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women in the United States, was the first step towards the present national machinery for women (see footnote 2 on the pre-existing Women's

Bureau). A coalition of 32 traditional women's organizations, headed by Laura Sabia of the Canadian Federation of University Women, had campaigned forcefully for the Royal Commission together with the newly created umbrella group, the Fédération des Femmes du Québec (Morris, 1980; Bégin, 1992). The process of hearings and submissions, involving thousands of Canadian women all over the country, became a major consciousness-raising exercise for the Commissioners, for the traditional women's organizations and for Canadians more generally. A comparable process did not take place in Australia and New Zealand until the International Women's Year (1975).

Once the Royal Commission had reported in 1970, Sabia again took the lead in lobbying for government action. She persuaded the government to fund the "Strategy for Change Conference" which brought feminists from all over Canada together for the first time. It led to the setting up of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women to push for the implementation of the 167 recommendations made by the Royal Commission (Heitlinger, 1993:82).

The first step in implementation on the government's part had been the appointment of a Co-ordinator for the Status of Women reporting to a Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, in accordance with the machinery recommendations of the Royal Commission's report. Initially, the Co-ordinator was located in the government's chief policy co-ordinating body, the Privy Council Office, from where she chaired an Interdepartmental Committee and associated working parties.

The later adding of programme responsibilities to the Co-ordinator's role, in the form of a Secretariat for International Women's Year (IWY), appears to have been partly responsible for the loss of this prime location. The move of Status of Women out of the co-ordinating body and its establishment as a separate agency was not the subject of feminist debate and analysis in the way that happened around the options for women's policy machinery in Australia and New Zealand, and is thus difficult to reconstruct.

Apart from the IWY programme responsibilities, there were other frictions — including uncertainties over the lines of accountability between the Co-ordinator, the Clerk of the Privy Council and the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women. On the other hand, it was recognized that as a separate agency Status of Women might be more visible but at greater risk of being marginalized or isolated. The "paper track" is not clear but these points were made in letters and memos by officials in the two-year period leading up to the Order-in-Council of 1 April 1976, which designated the Office of the Co-ordinator as a free-standing department. Ministerial responsibility was rotated among ministers of varying seniority and with varying portfolios. As in Australia, these were initially male ministers.

Despite its brief to monitor all federal policy, and despite the formal requirement for departments to attach "impact on women" statements to proposals, Status of Women Canada suffered in terms of access to Cabinet submissions and lost policy influence, particularly during the decade of conservative government from 1984. Nor did it have access to Budget processes. It was neither located within the chief co-ordinating agency nor, because of its free-standing character, did it have a powerful department behind it; nor, because a number of functions were located elsewhere (in the

Advisory Council and the Women's Program discussed below), did it have significant community outreach or base in the women's movement. One significant initiative, the Employment Equity Act (mandating affirmative action in federally regulated corporations), was negotiated by the Women's Bureau in Labour Canada, not by Status of Women Canada, unlike the case with comparable legislation in Australia or New Zealand.

The 1976 Cabinet decision also required all federal departments to establish "integration mechanisms" to ensure that policy relating to the status of women was integrated into general departmental policy development. This was the same year as the network of departmental women's units was established in Australia. There was a similar structural concern in both countries to separate mechanisms concerned with impact on women in the community from those concerned with equal opportunity for government employees. (In both countries departments continued to confuse these functions.)

As in Australia, the largest of the integration mechanisms outside Status of Women Canada was the Women's Bureau in Labour Canada established in 1954 (now part of Human Resources Development Canada). The interdepartmental committee on integration mechanisms, and departmental units such as the office of the women's adviser in Health and Welfare Canada, were set up in 1976. According to a former head of the Women's Bureau, there was too much resistance to the idea of internal advocacy, within the Westminster model of a neutral bureaucracy, for the "integration policy" to be generally a success in Canada (Geller-Schwartz, 1995:49). In 1987 the Nielsen Task Force found that the co-ordination function was hampered by the fact that, with the exception of Labour Canada, no federal department systematically reviewed its policies to determine their impact on women (Burt, 1990:200). As in Australia, the women's units tended to be appointed at too junior a level and to be either sidelined in policy development or "mainstreamed" out of existence.

In Canada, as a federal system, it is important to note the existence of women's policy machinery at the provincial and federal levels and the powerful nature of this machinery, for example, in Quebec. There has been greater diversity of machinery in Canada than was true in Australia until very recently. In Australia, WEL lobbied for the replication of the original model at state and territory levels and the quarterly meetings of federal, state and territory women's advisers also helped to ensure that best practice (irrespective of the level it emanated from) was picked up and reproduced. These meetings were off-the-record exchanges of strategic information by feminists and, at least for the first decade, were unlike other intergovernmental meetings.

The Canadian equivalent appears to have been much more like intergovernmental meetings in other policy areas. Canadian femocrats were less likely to be recruited from the women's movement than their Australian equivalents, apart from the early days of the Women's Program, because civil service unions prevented direct recruitment to such positions from outside. (In Australia specialist expertise arguments were mounted to overcome such union objections.) Despite the more bureaucratic style of the Canadian intergovernmental meetings, the 1987 Nielsen Taskforce concluded that the intergovernmental function of Status of Women Canada

was its main success — "pulling the provinces together for national awareness of issues relating to women and for consensus building" (quoted in Burt, 1990:200).

Of the women's units in other federal portfolio areas, it is notable that women's policy has had a higher profile in External Affairs in Canada than in Australia or New Zealand, and that the Canadian Women in Development programme within the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) served as a model elsewhere in the 1980s for integration of gender analysis into the project cycle. Canada has taken a lead role in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, in the OECD and in the British Commonwealth as an advocate of the integration of adequate gender audit into the forward planning of multilateral bodies.

Despite similarities between the network model of women's policy machinery in Australia and Canada, there have been some significant differences apart from the location of the central agency. While the staffing of the central policy body in Australia, Canada and New Zealand has been comparable (about 50 in Australia and Canada and about 35 in New Zealand in 1993) Canada put far more resources into two other areas. The first was the large funding programme called the Women's Program, one of the recommendations of the Royal Commission and administered by the Secretary of State from 1973 until 1993. In 1989-1990 this had a budget of over C$13 million, distributed to over 750 women's groups. These included women's services run by voluntary organizations — the refuges and rape crisis centres funded through mainstream programmes in Australia and New Zealand.

When the Women's Program was first set up the feminists recruited into it tried to model feminist process in terms of collectivity and empowerment and held themselves responsible to the women's movement rather than to government priorities (Findlay, 1987). The attempt to model feminist process within government and to work very closely with the women's movement was similar to that of the New Zealand Ministry of Women's Affairs a decade later. Eventually bureaucratic hierarchy was reimposed through, for example, performance evaluations stressing supervisory skills and warnings against being client-driven (Schreader, 1990:191-192).

There is much more feminist analysis of the Women's Program than of the policy co-ordination function in Canada. Much of it has been inspired by the first director, Sue Findlay, who has described how it was set up strategically by feminists who had decided that the resources of the state could be used to support the development of the women's movement (Findlay, 1987:39-40). Findlay became disillusioned with increased government interference and concluded that the real aim all along had been to shape and control the agenda of the women's movement (Findlay and Randall, 1988).

A different interpretation of the rationale for the Women's Program has been provided by Leslie Pal (1993), who links the relatively generous funding of the Program with the belief of the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau that the women's movement represented a cross-cutting cleavage that could help ward off Quebec separatism.

Under the Conservatives, the Program came under sustained attack from the anti-feminist organization REAL women, as a result of which REAL itself

received funding in 1989 despite its lack of support for CEDAW, usually the threshold for women's group funding in all three countries. At about this time the Conservative government started to move against the funding of advocacy organizations and to substitute project funding for operational grants (Heitlinger, 1993:90). One significant organization funded under the Women's Program had been the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW), founded in 1975. CRIAW lost its core funding in 1990 although it continued to attract significant project funding. The Women's Program is now located in Status of Women Canada after a short period in Human Resources Development. Its current budget (1995) is C$ 8.6 million, distributed among some 500 organizations.

A second distinctive feature of Canadian national machinery was the importance given to the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, which was structurally independent and had staffing comparable to Status of Women Canada. Again the creation of the Council flowed from the Royal Commission's machinery recommendations. The significance attached to the Council flowed from the historic suspicion of political parties on the part of the English Canadian women's movement (Bashevkin, 1993) which resulted in a recommendation that there be an independent Council reporting directly to Parliament. The Council as actually established was an advisory body to the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women and the issue of political independence was to be an ongoing one.

There seems to be general agreement that whereas the Council produced good research (and also was able to use its Ottawa base to monitor government) it had no significant impact on policy and its research was not tied in to policy development. Its independence of government was a negative factor in terms of the policy process, while on the other hand the Council tended to be distrusted by the women's movement for not being sufficiently independent of government. In 1981 Council members supported ministerial intervention to cancel a constitutional conference which had turned out to be politically inconvenient (the President resigned over this issue). In the late 1980s several researchers claimed that their reports were altered by the Council and that it was dominated by patronage appointments (Vickers, personal communication, January 1996). In March 1995 the Liberal government announced the abolition of the Council as a deficit-cutting measure, and there was little in the way of repercussion. Its research and communication functions were to be taken over by Status of Women Canada. Fears were expressed over loss of independence of the research function, although the minister promised that C$ 2 million would be reserved for some form of research grants programme.

In Australia the less independent and less well-resourced National Women's Consultative Council had also been disbanded by this time, replaced by periodic Round Table meetings between the Minister and representatives of national women's organizations. As we shall see, the New Zealand machinery created in the 1980s did not include an advisory council at all. It is a matter for debate whether resources put into such councils might more usefully be directed to community-based umbrella (or "peak") organizations and depends in part on access of the latter to ministers and capacity to defend or promote feminist initiatives within government.

Canadian feminists have provided a generally negative evaluation of the achievements of Canadian femocrats at the federal level — partly reflecting the increasingly conservative climate of the 1980s, partly the complexities of trying to achieve change within a federal system where provincial governments were successfully challenging the balance of power. This resulted in frustration, for example, of attempts to achieve a national childcare programme. The Canadian accounts are more pessimistic than those provided by ex-femocrats in Australia, who tell stories of battles won as well as lost (e.g. Eisenstein, 1995). Geller-Schwartz does suggest, however, that Canadian femocrats have been effective when they have been able to exert pressure for compliance with international obligations or when they have fostered pressure from non-government lobbies through resourcing and information, or both, as with equal pay legislation.

It is in the area of its national non-government women's lobby that Canada has a remarkable record. It has sustained an umbrella organization — the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) — for more than two decades (see Vickers et al., 1993). As noted above, NAC was created to push for the implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations. By the time of its creation second-wave organizations had also appeared and played a lively role, sometimes startling the long-standing women's organizations. Women's Liberation (Toronto) was one of the groups on the first steering committee — along with the Catholic Women's League, the Canadian Federation of University Women and the YWCA (Bashevkin, 1989:364). This kind of co-operation between traditional and the more organizationally radical new-wave organizations has been characteristic of Australian and New Zealand women's movements as well — but the latter have not yet institutionalized this co-operation to the same degree as in Canada.

NAC has some 600 groups affiliated to it, ranging from national bodies and provincial umbrella organizations to local groups with a minimum of 10 members. This has been achieved despite tensions and conflicts over organizational and other issues. Jill Vickers has argued that the umbrella structure "can tap the energy and views of women in grassroots collectives largely without requiring them to change their internal norms and modes of operating" (Vickers, 1988:3). Nonetheless, the size and diversity (as well as geographical spread) of NAC meant that it was forced to adopt relatively formal structures which were viewed as antithetical to feminist process by many of the collectives which were affiliated to it. Increased functional specialization was also required in order to develop its policy capacity, and this again was often viewed as élitist. As the Executive Co-ordinator said in 1992: "When we are able to focus on issues there is lots of unity; when we try to talk about structures and philosophy there is lots and lots of division" (Alice de Wolff, personal communication, July 1992).

In order to have credibility with the federal government as a "parliament of women", it has been important for NAC to try to retain the well-organized Quebec francophone women under its umbrella. There have, however, been fundamental differences between the latter and anglophone feminists on vital constitutional issues. Anglophone feminists have favoured the federal government over provincial governments as the custodian of women's legal and social rights while the francophones put more trust in the Quebec government. Because of these internal divisions NAC was unable to take a

leadership role in the successful feminist mobilization over relevant clauses in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Subsequently in the 1980s groups representing visible minority and immigrant women and disabled women became more active in NAC, increasing its claims to "representativeness" but making compromises over constitutional matters with the Quebec women more difficult (Vickers, 1988:64). The Quebec women withdrew for a second time at the end of the decade, leaving NAC as the "nodal point" of the anglophone women's movement (Phillips, 1991). NAC now has a "three nations" approach to constitutional issues, recognizing the special status of both francophone and indigenous peoples. The current NAC President is a recent immigrant from Tanzania and there is now a policy that 50 per cent of office-bearers be from minorities and that committees have majority/minority co-chairs.

It is interesting that, despite the organizational differences between the Canadian and Australian women's movements, there have been some remarkable parallels in policy evolution — for example, the attempts to move from "margin to mainstream" of economic policy debate in the mid-1980s. In Canada the lead role taken by NAC in 1985-1988 in mobilizing women against the free trade agreements (with the help of the impressive briefs of feminist economist Marjorie Cohen) also brought it into direct confrontation with the government on a cornerstone of government policy (Cohen, 1992). It meant participating in coalitions with the churches and unions and forms of protest such as nation-wide rallies and pickets. Tensions between Status of Women Canada and the women's movement were exacerbated by the fact that at least one Minister Responsible for the Status of Women also had portfolio responsibility for privatization.

Subsequently, government ministers boycotted NAC's annual lobby day and NAC's funding was cut in half between 1990 and 1992, causing severe disruption to an organization heavily reliant on government grants. NAC gradually restructured its financial base, raising significant amounts through direct mail appeals (Vickers et al., 1993:293). Relations with the government improved with the appointment of a more sympathetic minister, and government attendance at the lobby day resumed (the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party attended in force). Today NAC is held up as a model in terms of providing a strong and independent voice for women on public policy issues.[9] It continues, however, to face serious funding problems as well as the structural problem of being a centrally focused organization in an increasingly decentralized federation.

# New Zealand

In New Zealand women's policy machinery had not been established by the time of the defeat of the Labour government in 1975 and was delayed until Labour was next elected in 1984, although there had been previous advisory bodies. Labour women had pressed for a separate Ministry of Women's Affairs with its own Minister in Cabinet which would enable the modelling of feminist structures and processes as well as the direct representation of feminist perspectives in Cabinet.

As in Australia and Canada, there had been a turning point in the 1970s when the demands of the women's movement became part of the public

agenda in New Zealand and something to which political parties needed to respond (see Devere, 1990:1; Sawer and Simms, 1993). As in Australia, WEL played a significant role in this process in New Zealand (Preddy, 1985). In New Zealand, however, WEL was fairly quickly displaced as the most prominent women's lobby by the long-standing National Council of Women.

More important in New Zealand, however, was the rapid progress made by feminists in the Labour Party from the point in 1974 when Labour women picketed their own party's annual conference demanding that women's issues be given greater priority. As in Australia, Labour women were able to argue that their party had to do something to attract women voters and to close the "gender gap" which stood in the way of electoral success. They were aided by the fact that the structures of the New Zealand Labour Party were relatively favourable to women. There was an absence of the Irish Catholic machine politics found in Australia and affiliated unions also had much less power in the party structure. Absent as well was the institutionalized faction system of the Australian Labor Party (intra-party organizations with formal membership), which pitted women against one another. Women in the New Zealand Labour Party were able to act to a much greater extent as their own, gender-based informal faction (Curtin and Sawer, 1996:152-3). All this led to a rapid increase of Labour women in parliament and on the front bench, and to a series of women holding the position of Party President (including an "out" lesbian).[10] The influence of Labour women ministers and of the Labour Women's Caucus in parliament were to be an important adjunct to the women's policy machinery described below.

By the 1984 election in New Zealand a substantial collection of policies for women had been put together, after extensive consultation with Labour Party members (Curtin and Sawer, 1996:154). The content was similar to that of the women's policy on which the Australian Labour Party campaigned in 1983, although there were differences in detail, particularly in relation to bureaucratic machinery (discussed below). Commitments included CEDAW ratification, affirmative action, and increased funding of childcare, labour market re-entry programmes, women's health, refuges, rape crisis centres and other services.

Approved by Cabinet in November 1984 and officially established in March 1985, the Ministry of Women's Affairs began with a staff of 20 women and a mandate to advise the Minister on the implications of government policies for women. The Ministry would have significant outreach functions with women in the community and the Minister would ensure that women's perspectives were taken directly into Cabinet (Nathan, 1989:30). With its free-standing character it was a radical departure from existing machinery across the Tasman. It was thought that the creation of a new organization, with no institutional baggage, would enable it to model feminist processes for the benefit of the rest of government (O'Regan, 1992:199). All of its initial staff had backgrounds in community organizations and were familiar with non-hierarchical ways of working.

In addition to attempting to incorporate feminist organizational principles, the new ministry was committed to working towards biculturalism "before any other government department had seriously addressed that issue"

(O'Regan, 1991:165). A Maori Women's Secretariat (Te Ohu Whakatupu) was established, responsible for seeing that the specific needs of Maori women were included in all areas of the Ministry's work. All non-Maori staff of the Ministry were required to undertake anti-racism training.

The biculturalism of the Ministry makes it significantly different from its Australian counterpart. OSW helped achieve the creation of an Office of Indigenous Women elsewhere in government through the painstaking organization of the first nation-wide consultation with Aboriginal women in 1983-1984, but has had little further specific responsibility in this area. OSW shares responsibility for issues relating to women of non-English speaking backgrounds with the Office of Multicultural Affairs, but this too has had relatively little impact on its operating style. Status of Women Canada is bicultural and bilingual, but again in the mainstream fashion of Canadian government rather than in this more radical early style of the New Zealand ministry.

The first head of the Ministry of the Women's Affairs, Mary O'Regan, tried to minimize hierarchy to encourage collective decision-making and open government. Decisions were talked through until consensus was reached and at the weekly staff meeting time was allocated for staff to mention issues in their private lives, such as teething children, which were impinging on their public role (Nelson, 1989:21). The Ministry was to be accessible to all women and so included a playpen at the entrance and greeted callers with "*kia ora*". Initially O'Regan contemplated all staff having the same status and the same salary. This idea was quashed, however, since it was likely to harm the future career prospects of the women involved (O'Regan, 1992:200).[11]

Considerable effort was put into consultation with women in the community, including a massive programme of open forums or *hui* around New Zealand in 1984 to establish priorities for the Ministry within the framework of the Labour government's women's policy. These consultation processes continued, both with special interest groups, such as lesbian women or Pacific Islanders, and on specific policy issues. A monthly Newsletter/Panui was distributed along with updates published in the **New Zealand Women's Weekly** (parallel to the zip-out Status of Women Reports placed by OSW in the **Australian Women's Weekly** at this time). Women with diverse experience and expertise were included in Ministerial working parties, such as the Ministerial Committee of Inquiry into Pornography, and they undertook wide-ranging community consultation.

New advisory bodies were created in other portfolios, such as a Women's Advisory Committee on Education, in addition to the long-standing National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women. As we have noted, the new machinery differed from that in Australia and Canada, however, in that it did not include any generalist Advisory or Consultative Council to provide public advice to government on the status of women.

Within the bureaucracy the Ministry initiated measures to ensure women's interests were accounted for by other government departments — being wary of becoming the dumping ground for women's issues. Each department was asked to appoint a senior liaison person to act as a link with the Ministry of Women's Affairs. As in Australia and Canada, departments often initially confused this function with equal employment opportunity

functions and appointed people from personnel areas. Training workshops were held and examples were provided from each department of policies which had failed to take impact on women into account. A checklist was later provided to help with better policy analysis and consultation procedures (Washington, 1988:11).

No formal women's units or women's adviser positions were set up in other departments, and there was no direct equivalent of the Australian and Canadian Women's Bureaux, although there was a National Advisory Committee on the Employment of Women serviced by bureaucrats with specialized knowledge. There was an absence of the kind of high-level co-ordinating mechanisms represented by the Australian Secretaries' Taskforce on the Status of Women of the 1980s. Because the Ministry was not a control department, there was no formal obligation on the part of other ministers and their departments to consult it. Formal obligation did not come until 1991, when departments were required to certify that they had consulted with the Ministry of Women's Affairs over all Cabinet or Cabinet Committee submissions "which relate to the economic or social status of women, especially Maori women" (according to a Cabinet Office manual). Prior to the introduction of this formal requirement, the political clout of the Minister was of utmost importance. The first Minister of Women's Affairs had high political credibility and was able to push her agenda effectively in Cabinet. Her successor, although having impeccable feminist credentials, had less political weight.

Meanwhile, the 1988 New Zealand State Sector Act signalled an end to the Ministry's attempt to create an alternative feminist model of government machinery. Mary O'Regan threatened to go on strike over this, an unusual step for a permanent head, and by June 1988 had resigned (Nelson, 1989:47). The Ministry was restructured in accordance with the new precepts of cost-effectiveness and economic efficiency, no longer emphasizing the kind of flexible, non-hierarchical modes of operation of the early days. Judith Aitken, a recent convert to economic rationalism, was appointed Chief Executive. Under the new State Sector Act this was a performance-based contract position and Aitken replaced feminist collectivism with a more managerialist style of decision-making — although decision-making still remained much more open and less hierarchical than in other government departments.

The Ministry was now formally accountable only to the Minister (through the Chief Executive) rather than acknowledging a more diffuse accountability to women in the community. The Ministry was refocused on its policy advisory function and the need to achieve definable outcomes (Curtin and Sawer, 1996:159). It had become conventional wisdom in the Labour Party and in the bureaucracy that the Ministry had been too preoccupied with process. There were some parallels with the review of the Australian OSW which took place in 1993 and also resulted in a cutting back of community outreach functions and a refocusing on strategic policy advice. In both cases the restructuring was accompanied by an increase in resources (to 35 staff in the Ministry and to about 50 in OSW).

In addition to its monitoring function and its attempt to model alternative feminist processes, the Ministry, like OSW, had been involved in the initiation and support of policies specifically designed to increase women's

equality. In New Zealand, as in Australia, there was a marked increase in funded childcare places under Labour in the 1980s, as well as increases for a range of women's services, despite the constant pressure for reductions in public expenditure. Discursive strategies were required to demonstrate the economic rationality of increased expenditures in these areas.

The Employment Equity Act of 1990 was also achieved in the face of the Labour government's conversion to labour market deregulation. Compulsory arbitration had been abolished in 1984 and the Labour Relations Act of 1987 had paved the way for industry — or enterprise — based awards. The lack of concern for equity issues meant "women had to develop their own strategies to reinstate equitable incomes as part of the labour market policy" (Wilson, 1992:120). One strategy was to seek separate legislation to cover equal pay for work of equal value and equal employment opportunities (EEOs).

The preparation of New Zealand's employment equity legislation (requiring organizations with more than 50 employees to prepare EEO programmes and making provision for pay equity assessments) was a protracted process, opposed at every step by the Ministers of Finance and of Labour who believed that pay equity should be left to the market. The Ministry of Women's Affairs, strategically placed women MPs and Ministers were crucial to the eventual passage of the legislation in 1990 (Wilson, 1992). The repeal of this landmark Act was one of the first steps of the new National Party Government.

Another Ministry initiative related to the measurement of unpaid work through time-use surveys. Time-use surveys and campaigns based on their findings had a number of strategic objectives: to increase awareness of the "double load" being carried by women as they increased their participation in the paid workforce; to alert employers to the impact of family responsibilities on employees and the need for these to be accommodated in the design of paid work; to strengthen the argument for parental and family leave, as well as workplace flexibility, to enable men to take up a greater share of family responsibilities; to increase awareness of the contribution of unpaid work to the economy and hence to strengthen the case for increased expenditure on infrastructure to support it.

It is a former New Zealand National Party MP, Marilyn Waring, who has done most to promote the inclusion of unpaid work in national accounts whether in Australia, New Zealand or at the international level. Her tireless advocacy has been important both in mobilizing the large traditional women's organizations on the issue and in achieving its inclusion in international instruments such as the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies which could be used by femocrats at home. In addition, the second New Zealand Minister of Women's Affairs, Margaret Shields, was also Minister of Statistics. Shields had worked in the Department of Statistics as a statistician in the mid-1970s and had then pushed for time-use surveys. Holding both portfolios provided the perfect opportunity to achieve this goal (Curtin, 1992:101).

In both Australia and New Zealand Labour governments undertook pilot time-use surveys to measure the extent and distribution of unpaid work, and this was followed in Australia by the first regular national survey in 1992. In Canada questions on unpaid work will be included in the 1996 census,

thanks to pressure from women's groups and from Status of Women Canada and the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women. The Australian Bureau of Statistics survey of 1992 found the value of unpaid work to be 58 per cent of GDP, using the replacement cost method (ABS, 1994:88). Information generated by the time-use surveys was used extensively in Australia in programmes related to implementation of ILO Convention No. 156. As noted above, New Zealand has not ratified this Convention and the current National Party Government has informed the ILO that "no formal consideration had been given to developing a national policy committed to the delivery of effective equality of opportunity for women and men with family responsibilities" (ILO, 1993:91).

The National Government elected in 1990 also cut state spending on child care, abolished the universal family benefit successfully defended under Labour, cut the Domestic Purposes Benefit, undid initiatives in women's housing policy, repealed the Employment Equity Act and introduced the Employment Contracts Act (for criticism of the effects of these policies on women see, e.g., National Council of Women, 1992 and Hyman, 1994). Instead of the Employment Equity Commission, an Equal Employment Opportunities Trust was set up as a joint venture between employers and government, to promote equal employment opportunity on a voluntary basis. The first head of the Ministry commented: "My experience with the Ministry is another very stark reminder of just how easily any gains can be swept away…every single thing that we achieved is now either gone or going" (O'Regan, 1992:166).

The new National government did not, however, refocus the Ministry into a Ministry of Family Affairs as had been mooted — perhaps because of the active constituency the Ministry had created within the women's movement during its early years. Within the new set of constraints the Ministry undertook some significant initiatives such as those relating to promotion of Maori women's enterprise. (Maori women are now increasing their involvement in business at a faster rate than either Maori men or any non-Maori New Zealanders, although starting from a low base.) In 1993 a new Human Rights Act extended the grounds on which discrimination is prohibited in New Zealand and resources were increased for the Human Rights Commission as a consequence. The grounds now cover sex (including pregnancy, childbirth and sexual harassment), marital and family status, sexual orientation, disability, age, race, religion, employment status and political opinion. In the same year controls over the circulation of violent and pornographic material were tightened, in response to widespread campaigning by women's groups. The National Government has also continued the community-based approach to HIV-AIDS education, including the funding of the New Zealand Prostitutes' Collective for this purpose.

Throughout 1993, events were held to commemorate the centennial of women's suffrage in New Zealand and many significant projects of either a practical, symbolic or historical nature were funded through a semi-independent Trust housed in the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Feminists participated enthusiastically in these government-sponsored events — even though the women's movement was in other respects, as we have seen, extremely critical of continued cuts to social provision and of the effects on women of labour market deregulation. Under the National Government there

were two Ministers of Women's Affairs, the senior minister being noted for her "dry" agenda in her other portfolio of Social Welfare while the Associate Minister had stronger feminist credentials as the former electorate secretary of Marilyn Waring, one of New Zealand's best-known "big sisters".

As in Australia and Canada, there has been a significant level of co-operation between traditional and second-wave women's organizations. For example, it was a combination of work by women from inside and outside government that saved the universal family benefit from the economic rationalists in New Zealand in 1987 and 1990. The Labour Minister for Women's Affairs played an important strategic role in asking her Ministry to consult with women's groups on the issue, the **New Zealand Women's Weekly** canvassed women's views and the National Council of Women, active in New Zealand for 100 years, played a major part in mobilizing resistance (Curtin and Sawer, 1996:164). In Australia, by contrast, the economic rationalists were able to move with much greater stealth on the issue.[12]

Other issues which have brought traditional and newer organizations together have included pornography, the treatment of cervical cancer patients at an Auckland hospital and the attempt to save the pay equity legislation: "It was wonderful to see the president of the National Council of Women and a radical feminist trade unionist standing together in parliament grounds leading the 'pots and pans' protest rally against the impending repeal of the pay equity legislation" (O'Regan, 1992:168).[13] As in Australia and Canada women working in government were very aware of the importance of organized pressure from outside in achieving feminist agendas in government: "I don't feel threatened by those women outside who say we aren't doing enough" (McKinlay, 1990:84). Again, getting information and resources out to women in the community was important in fostering this pressure. McKinlay says of one of her interviewees: 'Part of her strategy is to raise the awareness of women in the community on a particular issue she is working on through seminars and workshops, to stimulate a demand for change' (McKinlay, 1990:84).

New Zealanders have voted for the introduction of a new electoral system which will mean that governments are much less likely to have a clear majority of seats or to be able to push through the kind of radical changes witnessed in the last 10 years in New Zealand. A mixed member proportional system (similar to that in Germany) will be introduced in 1996 and will probably increase the amount of bargaining needed over policy changes as well as further increase the number of women in parliament (the present 20 per cent is very high for a single-member electorate first-past-the-post system).

There have been close links between Australia and New Zealand on women's policy matters, with the head of the New Zealand Ministry attending the regular Commonwealth/State Women's Advisers meetings, and the New Zealand Minister attending the more recently established Commonwealth/State Ministers' Conference on the Status of Women. As we have seen, New Zealand is also to be found co-operating with Australia and Canada on status of women initiatives in the United Nations and in

other international forums. New Zealand is currently represented on CEDAW by Dame Silvia Cartwright, a respected feminist High Court Judge.

# Conclusion

As we have seen, the political traditions of Australia, Canada and New Zealand encouraged women to look to the state to meet their claims and significant gains were made by feminist interventions in the 1970s and 1980s. Unfortunately the very traditions of social liberalism which enabled women to make these gains were at the same time being eroded by a loss of faith in the state as a vehicle of social justice. There was increasing hostility, regardless of the political complexion of the government in power, to the kind of social provision and regulation needed if women were to have equal opportunity. This makes the achievements all the more remarkable.

In all three countries women's policy machinery has survived conservative governments and there has been cross-party support for its continued existence. It is an institutionalized acknowledgement that governments should be accountable for their specific impact on women. This institutionalized agenda has often caused friction with those parts of government more bent on deregulatory and market-driven agendas, rather than serving as a mask for such agendas. The achievements of women's policy machinery may be limited to ensuring "least worst outcomes" or damage control, but even in unfavourable environments progress can usually be made on issues such as women and small business or violence against women.

Feminists who have worked in such machinery readily acknowledge the constraints and compromises involved, the kind of bilingualism required in dominant and oppositional discourses, and the need for strong pressure from outside to be effective. Femocrats have tried to foster such external pressure through making resources available to community organizations, including funding, information and access. Attempts to make community organizations more effective have ranged from financial assistance to create national structures, advice on the pressure points in the budget cycle and training in international meeting procedures.

There has often been tension between femocrats and women in community organizations due to the constraints of government agendas on the former including, more recently, a managerialist preoccupation with quantifiable outcomes. One New Zealand study cautions us, however, against simplistic attempts to explain these differences in terms of labels such as "liberal feminist", "radical feminist", "socialist feminist" and so forth. The differences may be not so much between different groups of women or between liberal and radical feminists but between the ways the same women operate when in their official roles as contrasted to when they are working through community groups (McKinlay, 1990:78; see also Washington, 1988).

A number of other variables have been discussed in this paper, such as the location of machinery and the strength of its bureaucratic clout. Gender expertise must be backed by routinized access to policy development and Cabinet processes, and institutionalized forms of accountability for gender outcomes. While the policy brokering skills of individual femocrats and ministers may be important, bureaucratic entrenchment gives lasting returns.

The intersection of international and domestic pressure and networking, both at the multilateral and intergovernmental levels, has also been important to progress on feminist agendas. The three countries reviewed here have all been active on human rights issues at the international level and have jealously guarded their reputations as good international citizens. Femocrats have been able to utilize this sensitivity both in promoting work on gender equity at the international level and in pressing for implementation of relevant international obligations.

Political variables, such as the ability to exploit a gender gap in voting patterns, have also been important. In both Australia and New Zealand the deficit in women's votes discovered in the 1970s became a lever to push the labour parties towards more pro-woman policies. Volatility and delayed decision-making among women voters, and the way this was constructed, was later of particular importance in Australia in generating strong electoral competition on childcare policy.

In all three countries women, both inside and outside the state, have played an important role in resisting the retreat from the welfare state and preserving equity agendas within the unfavourable environment provided by economic rationalism. When ecorats dominate government policy-making and femocrats are on the defensive, the policy capacity and organizational strength of the community-based women's movement is of particular importance. It falls to the women's movement, working both through separate organizations and through caucuses within political parties, trade unions and other community organizations, to challenge economic assumptions which ignore the social economy and to promise political pain if priority is given to market forces over gender equity.

# Endnotes

[1] The author would like to thank Carol Miller and Shahra Razavi for their helpful comments on an earlier draft; Jill Vickers and Wendy Robbins in Canada; and Prue Hyman and Patti O'Neill in New Zealand.

[2] The idea of bureaux which would provide information on women's labour market participation was much older, dating back to the creation of the Women's Bureau in the United States Department of Labour in 1920 and replicated in other countries over time — e.g. Canada (1954) and Australia (1963), thanks to the lobbying of women's international non-governmental organizations. In New Zealand the body was not a bureau as such but a National Advisory Committee on the Employment of Women (1967).

[3] In all three countries the "first wave" of the women's movement welled up in the 1890s and was largely pro-state in orientation, particularly with regard to issues of moral and social reform. By contrast, the "second wave" which arrived in the 1970s (women's liberation) tended to have a more anti-state or anarchical tendency. Nonetheless, by 1973 many of the founders of women's liberation in Australia were candidates for the position of Women's Adviser to the Prime Minister and soon after became femocrats themselves.

[4] The spelling of Labour differs in Australia and New Zealand — Australia having dropped the 'u' early this century. Where the Labour parties of both countries are being referred to the 'u' will be used. The equivalent in Canada is the New Democratic Party which has been in government at provincial but not at the federal level. Women's policy machinery was initially fostered in Canada at the federal level by the Liberal government of Pierre Trudeau. The conservative parties in Australia are called the Liberal and National Parties (usually in Coalition and referred to thus), in Canada the Progressive Conservative Party and in New Zealand the National Party.

[5] For example, Australian femocrat arguments for increased childcare expenditure increasingly had to be couched in terms of macro-economic benefit. The major new childcare commitment for the 1993 federal election was announced in the Prime Minister's Economic Statement 'Investing in the Nation' (9 February 1993). The downside of the construction of childcare as an economic issue was the subsequent restriction of hours available to the children of non-working parents. For a more positive view of the construction of childcare as a macro-economic issue see MacDonald (1995).

[6] The appointee was Elizabeth Reid, a philosophy tutor active in women's liberation. She resigned in late 1975 over a government decision to move her into the bureaucracy. The public controversy which surrounded her position meant that almost all subsequent Australian governments appointed their women's advisers to head policy units within Prime Minister's/Premier's Departments rather than within the more overtly political Prime Minister's or Premier's offices within parliament (one exception was within the Northern Territory). Subsequently Reid became a senior United Nations official.

[7] One of the reasons that the story of Australian feminist interventions in the state is relatively well known is that a number of those who headed the Office were themselves important writers — such as novelist Sara Dowse, who was to write both fictional and non-fictional accounts of her experience, and Anne Summers, a high-profile journalist and editor.

[8] The idea was to go beyond a common denominator platform of action by getting in addition three or four new practical commitments from each country.

[9] NAC was described as "the model most compatible with Australia" in the 1995 government-sponsored feasibility study into the establishment of a peak women's body. As pointed out by Jill Vickers, however, NAC's increased radicalism under its minority policy may disrupt its government lobbying (personal communication, January 1996).

[10] When Helen Clark was elected Party Leader in late 1993 there was an attempt to depict her as lesbian as well.

[11] In the early days of OSW in Australia and of the Women's Program in Canada there were similar attempts to subvert hierarchy.

[12] In New Zealand, as in Australia and Canada, the universal benefit had decreased significantly in value, due to a failure to index it, and it was argued that an increase in support for low-income families would be more equitable. As noted in relation to Australia, this discounted the fact that even in relatively wealthy families the universal benefit paid to mothers was often the only income over which they exercised control. Canada was the last of these three countries to abolish the universal benefit — in 1992.

[13] As noted above, the Employment Equity Act of 1990 both required companies to prepare EEO programs and made provision for pay equity assessments at the request of employees.

**Table 1**

| INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES AND EVENTS | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Year** | **Australia** | **Canada** | **New Zealand** |
| 1960s | •Women's Bureau in Department of Labour (1963) | •Royal Commission on the Status of Women (1967) | •National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women (1968) |
| 1970s | •Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) set up (1972)<br>•Women's Adviser to the Prime Minister appointed (1973)<br>•Forerunner of the Office of the Status of Women (OSW) created in Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (1973)<br>•Network of women's units established (1976)<br>•OSW moved to Department of Home Affairs (1977)<br>•National Women's Advisory Council set up (1978), serviced, like its successor body the National Women's Consultative Council (NWCC), by the OSW | •National Action Committee (NAC) on the Status of Women composed of women's organizations formed (1971-72)<br>•Co-ordinator for the Status of Women established, located in the Privy Council Office (1971)<br>•The Women's Program set up, administered by the Secretary of State (1973)<br>•Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women set up as an independent advisory body to the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women (1973)<br>•Status of Women Canada formed as a free-standing department, ministerial responsibility rotated amongst ministers (1976)<br>•Cabinet requires "integration mechanisms" on status of women (1976)<br>•Office of the Women's Adviser in Health and Welfare Canada set up (1976) | |
| 1980s | •OSW returned to Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (1983)<br>•CEDAW ratified (1983)<br>•"Impact statements" introduced (1983)<br>•Secretaries' Taskforce on the Status of Women<br>•Network of women's units re-established (1984)<br>•Women's Budget Program introduced (1984)<br>•Australian National Agenda for Women adopted (1988, updated 1993) | •CEDAW ratified (1981)<br>•Nielsen Task Force reported on co-ordination function of the women's policy machinery (1987) | •CEDAW ratified (1984)<br>•Ministry of Women's Affairs (1984) |
| 1990s | •ILO Convention 156 on Equal Opportunities for Workers with Family Responsibilities ratified (1990)<br>•Coalition of Actively Participating Organizations of Women (CAPOW) created (1992)<br>•NWCC disbanded | •The Women's Program moved to Human Resources Canada (1993) and then transferred to Status Women Canada (1995)<br>•Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women abolished, functions taken over by Status of Women Canada (1995) | •Restructuring of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (1988)<br>•Employment Equity Act passed (1990, later repealed by National Party Government)<br>•"Certification of consultation" required for Cabinet submissions |

Figure 1
Women's Policy Machinery in Australia
February 1996

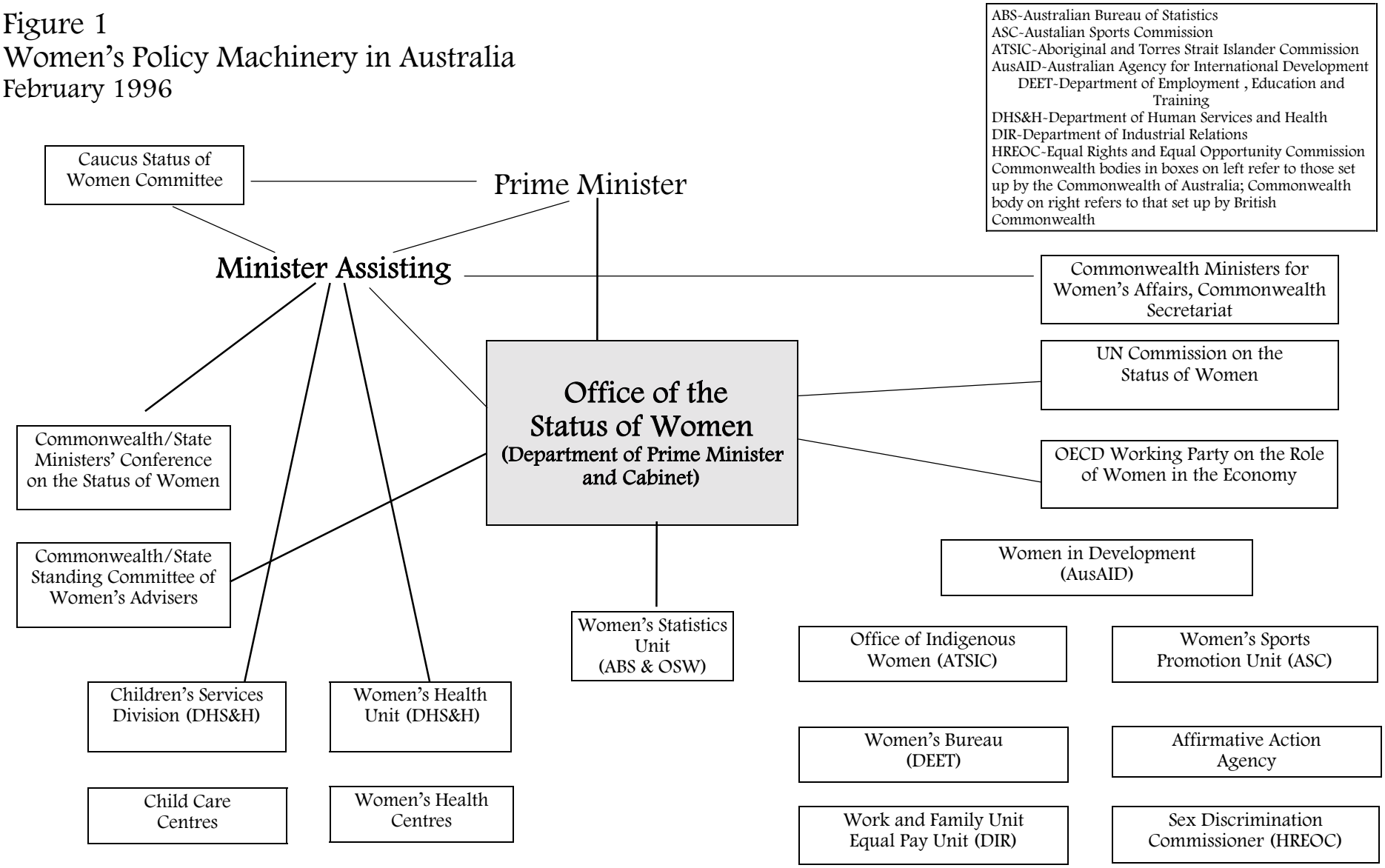


Figure 2
Women's Policy Machinery in Canada
February 1996

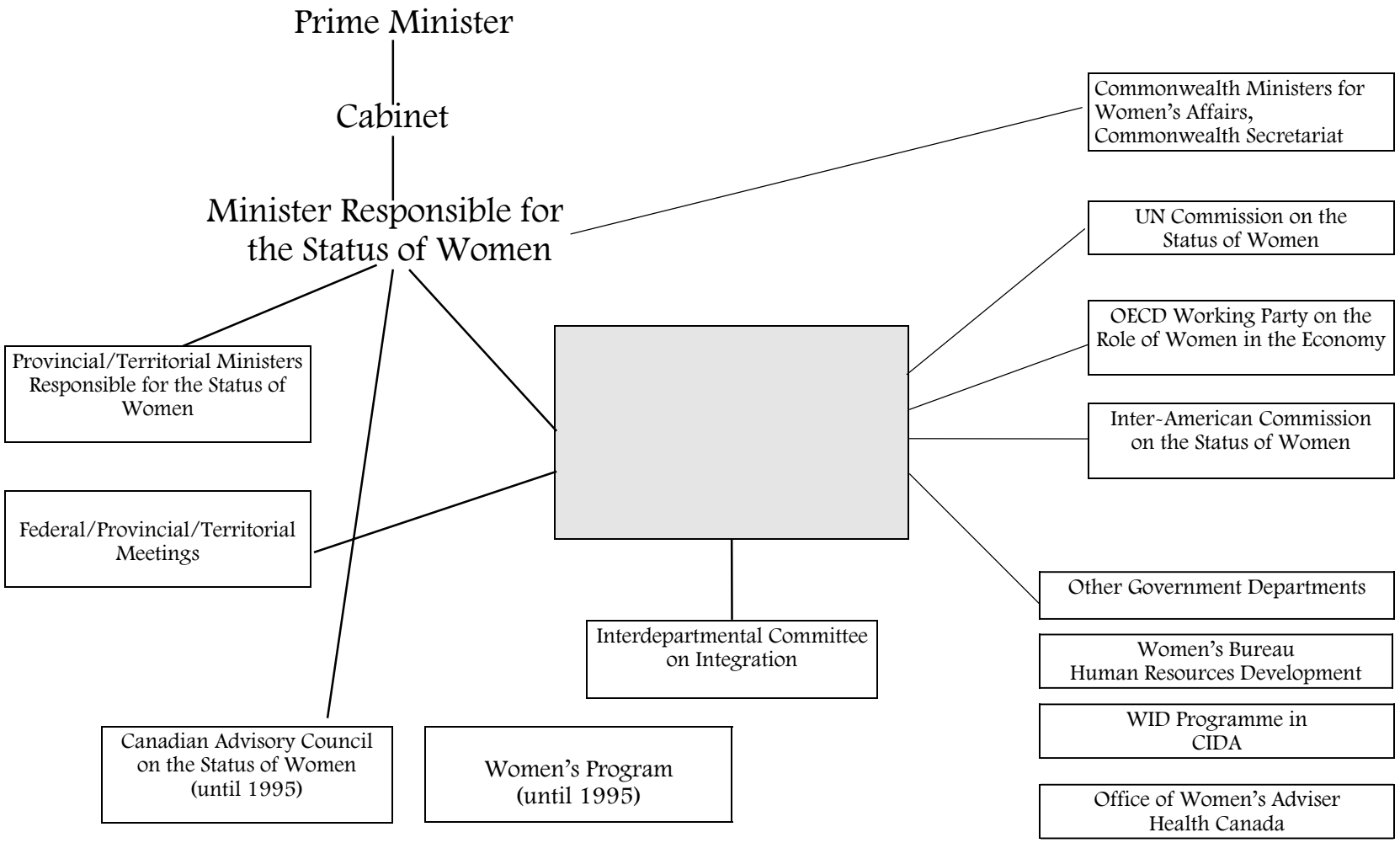
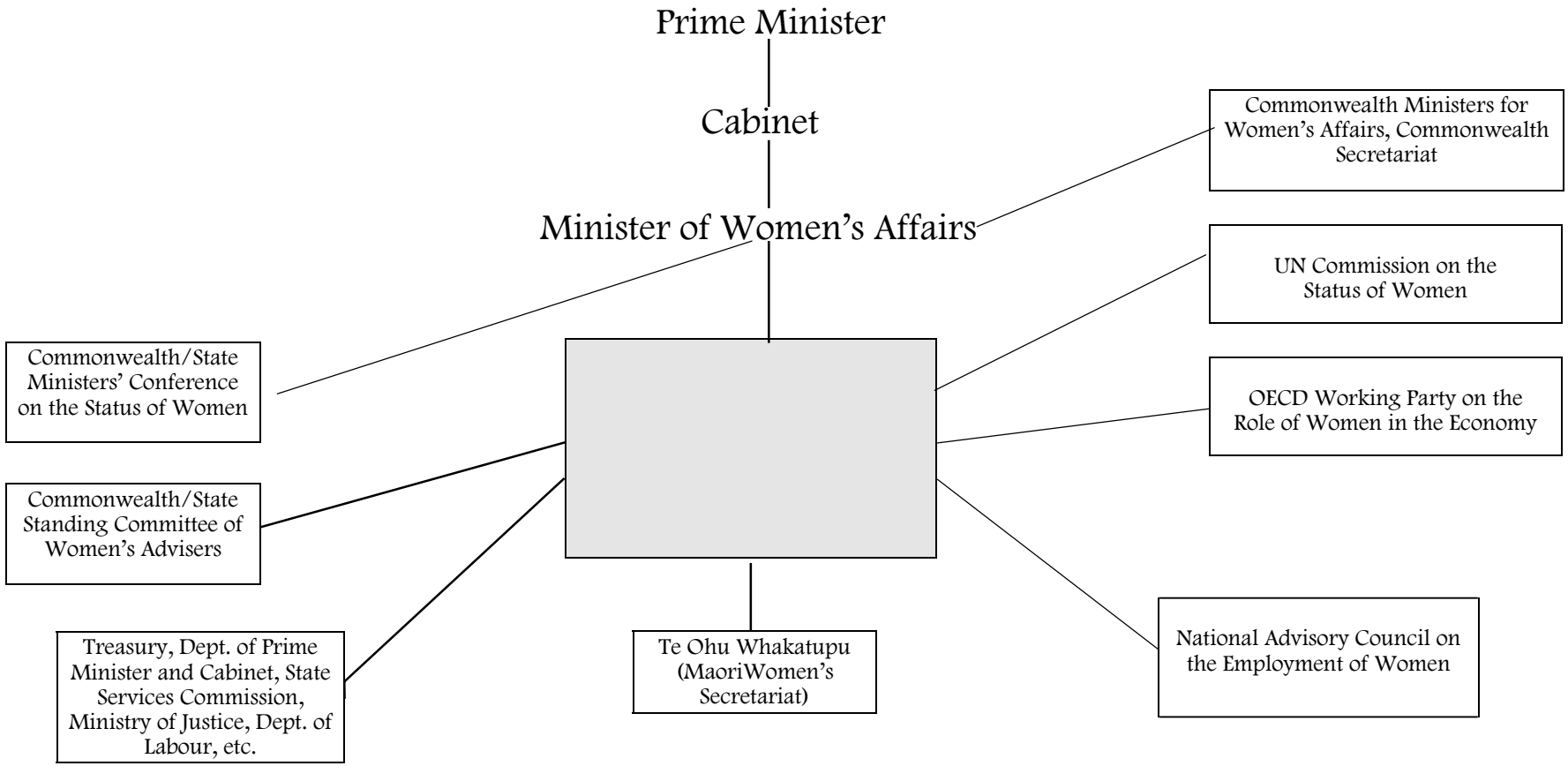


Figure 3
Women's Policy Machinery in New Zealand
February 1996



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