

**Re-Personalising the Body Politic:
EMILY's List and the Australian Labor Party**

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Introduction

In considering the establishment and operation of EMILY's¹ List (EL) in Australia, this paper asks why a group of senior Labor feminists considered it necessary to form a separate organisation outside of the political party in which they had achieved a degree of personal success in order to pursue feminist claims for greater representation in parliamentary as well as Australian Labor Party (ALP) forums. It also shows how their actions in setting up this organisation can be construed as strategic in light of Joni Lovenduski's analysis of the stages of feminist interaction with political parties (Lovenduski 1993, 4).²

Whilst constructing this examination of EL's formation, objectives and activities in Australia, I have necessarily set aside the question of whether political parties are able to be transformed by the emancipatory endeavours of feminists or whether such organisations are incapable of being reformed as parts of an irredeemably patriarchal State. I have similarly skirted the associated question of whether or not the advancement of more feminists into the political elite is an appropriate application of scarce time, energy and financial resources on the part of hard-pressed feminists with counter-hegemonic aspirations.³ I have also consciously resisted the rush to

¹ The 'EMILY' in EMILY's List is an acronym standing for 'Early Money is Like Yeast – it makes the dough rise'. This acronym was imported from the United States of America where the EL organisation began in 1985.

² Lovenduski identified four components of strategies devised and applied by such women, namely: 1) promotion of women's issues onto the political agenda; 2) transformation of women's issues into "universal issues"; 3) employment of a "dual strategy" of working in "male-dominated areas of the party" as well as with networks of women; and 4) attendance to the "rules of the game". Lovenduski, J. (1993) 'Introduction: The Dynamics of Gender and Party.' In *Gender and Party Politics*, (Eds, Lovenduski, J. and Norris, P.) London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage. 1-15.

³ Refer to Lisa Young (2000) and Amy Mazur (2002) for a reasonably current discussion of these themes and some of the main feminist theoretical proclivities in relation to them. Young, L. (2000) *Feminists and Party Politics*. UBC Press, Vancouver & Toronto, Mazur, A. G. (2002) *Theorizing Feminist Policy*. Oxford University Press, Oxford & New York.

judgement on the efficacy or otherwise of the efforts of the women who constitute this relatively new organisation. Rather, my paper considers the way in which EL operates from the perspective of its members and proffers preliminary data⁴ on the way in which it meets their various expectations as a feminist organisation with a partisan political orientation and reformist goals.

The topic stems from my current doctoral research which, as a feminist analysis of EMILY's List and the ALP, adopts an alternative approach to the mainly masculinist interpretations of the internal operations of that political party (for example, McKinlay 1981, McMullin 1991, Beilharz 1994, Warhurst and Parkin 2000)⁵. It does so by treating women as constant components (and key activists) woven into the organisation's long and colourful history rather than as occasional cameo performances. It is, therefore, a positioned paper with my standpoint being that of a socialist feminist political activist and former federal Labor MP. I have been a continuing financial member of the ALP since 1977 and became a foundation member of EL in 1997, just after the organisation was formed in Australia.

⁴ Unless otherwise sourced, all references relating to data arise from a preliminary analysis of questionnaires collected in the course of my current research.

⁵ McKinlay, B. (1981) *The ALP: A Short History of the Australian Labor Party.* Drummond/Heinemann, Melbourne, Beilharz, P. (1994) *Transforming Labor.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, McMullin, R. (1991) *The Light on the Hill: The Australian Labor Party 1891-1991.* Oxford University Press, Oxford, Warhurst, J. and Parkin, A. (Eds.) (2000) *The Machine: Labor Confronts the Future,* Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

My research is qualitative in nature, combining 330 detailed questionnaire responses (a 33% response approximating 17% of the total EL membership) with 22 in-depth interviews of key EL activists and/or ALP luminaries.⁶

Without understating the differences between many of these (mainly) women and me, I can claim to share a similar philosophy and several personal/political goals and experiences. Proximity informs my work as well as (re)forming it. Moreover, familiarity with the shared discourse of the group permits me to assess how well the organisation meets the goals of feminism and political activism to which it aspires.

As self-styled 'femocrat'⁷ Hester Eisenstein said of her own research on feminists within the Australian public service: "[E]xperience is a valid starting place – a point of departure, if not a final destination - for feminist analysis" (Eisenstein 1996, vii).

In this regard, I share with many of the EL women, a placement in (working) class, (female) gender, (ageing/Labor) history and/or often - but not always – (non-indigenous Australian)⁸ race, (anglo-celtic) ethnicity and (hetero)⁹ sexuality. After all, the personal remains the political – no matter how fragmented my/our own, or

⁶ The questionnaire recipients were a random sample of 50% of EL's membership around Australia (965 in all). By contrast, interviewees were selected for their history, experience and positioning within both EL and (usually) the ALP. Reference codes reflect Interview number followed by year and transcript page (where a transcript has been completed). So, I#3/01,2 locates the quotation in Interview No.3 of 2001, page 2. Questionnaire comments are coded with Q. plus the number allocated on receipt. They have no year or page information (e.g. Q.10) as they all relate to 2003 and are consistent in format.

⁷ 'Femocrats' means feminists in the bureaucracy. Eisenstein, H. (1996) *Inside Agitators: Australian Femocrats and the State.* Temple University Press, Philadelphia.

⁸ Despite its majority 'anglo' membership, EL has pro-actively promoted the election of indigenous Labor women MPs. In February 2001 when Carol Martin (WA) was elected as the first indigenous woman member of any parliament in Australia, she acknowledged EL as having been instrumental in her success through the provision of mentoring and money. Since then three more indigenous Labor women have been elected to State/Territory parliaments with EL's assistance. They are Kathryn Hay (Tas), Linda Burney (NSW) and Hon. Marion Scrymgour (NT) who is now the first aboriginal woman to be a Minister in any government in Australia.

⁹ Refer Adrienne Rich's article on the impact of 'compulsory' heterosexuality on women who are/may be/have been otherwise sexually inclined. For me, this text killed the myth of heterosexual universality without negating the prospect of women from diverse cultures/experience and/or sexuality working together against the patriarchy and/or other dominant paradigms. Rich, A. (1980) 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 5.

academic, understandings of that condition might have become. It is from this admittedly multi-faceted perspective that I discuss the thinking of a sample group of EL members about the organisation to which they belong and consider how it has re-personalised and re-focused the political process for them, in the course of advancing its reformist goals.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first section outlines the circumstances that led to EL's formation in Australia together with the aims and objectives of the organisation. The second section considers the reasons why (mainly) women join. The third section examines EL's feminist focus and its approach to the concept of feminist political philanthropy. The fourth section discusses EL's relationship with the ALP as a strategic initiative of some import, using Joni Lovenduski's four stages of feminist 'infiltration' of political parties as a backdrop (Lovenduski 1993, 4).

1. Origins and Objectives of EMILY's List Australia

Although the ALP's entrenched masculinism and mateship had locked women out of leadership roles since its inception in the 1890s (Simms 1981, 86; Sawer and Simms 1993, 18), the Party's adoption of limited affirmative action (AA) for women in 1981 (25% of multiple positions with parliamentary preselections being specifically exempted) did help to broaden their opportunities within its ranks.¹⁰ There was also an associated increase in the parliamentary presence of Labor women around

¹⁰ I have contended elsewhere that the activism of Labor women was crucial to the ALP's adoption of this 1981 AA target as well as the subsequent (1994) version requiring that 35% of winnable parliamentary positions be allocated to women. (This work can be accessed at <http://www.users.bigpond.com/mordottir>). Jakobsen, C. (2001) 'Engendered Equality: Affirmative Action for Women and the Politics of the Australian Labor Party.' Honours Thesis, Murdoch University, Western Australia.

Australia in the ensuing decade and this coincided with the electoral success of the ALP both federally and in a number of States.

Unfortunately, however, the improvement in the parliamentary fortunes of many of these women was reversed in the early 1990s because so many had been (s)elected in marginal seats that were lost when Labor's electoral stocks fell again.¹¹ The departure of this cohort of Labor women parliamentarians evidenced the failure of the ALP's male-dominated hierarchy to genuinely embrace the principles of AA in its preselections, especially so for safe parliamentary seats. But their loss provoked a strong response from senior Labor feminists, spearheaded by the first female State Labor Premiers, Joan Kirner and Carmen Lawrence. Together, they determined to find 'a better way' to improve women's position in the Party and the Party's position on women (I#4/01, 22). Thenceforth a small but indefatigable group set out to give teeth and targets to Labor's AA policy in relation to the preselection of women (which goal was initially achieved in 1994 with a target of 35% in all preselections) and to establish a financial and electoral support syndicate for preselected progressive Labor women candidates (which goal was achieved in 1996 with the establishment of EL in Australia).¹² The democratic principle at stake was that women's numerical supremacy in the general population was not reflected in

¹¹ This is despite widespread acknowledgement of such women candidates' prowess and ability as marginal seat campaigners.

¹² In 2004 there are 147 Labor women in parliaments around Australia (as opposed to 64 in 1994 when the 35% AA rule was introduced). EMILY's List has contributed considerably to this improvement through its financial support and mentoring of progressive Labor women candidates. The relevant rule is ALP National Rule 12c of 1994 which stipulates that: "preselections for public office at State and federal level shall incorporate affirmative action. The intention of this is to produce an outcome where 35 per cent of public office positions held by Labor or a majority of seats needed to form government, whichever is the greater, will be filled by women ..." ALP (1994) *'National Platform, Resolutions and Rules 1994.'* Australian Labor Party National Secretariat, Canberra.

decision-making bodies like the parliament: “women are 52 per cent of the community, and somehow or other, they were only 12 per cent of the parliament” (I#8/01,2).

The basic rationale for establishing EL was, therefore, to improve on that percentage (and, thus, increase women’s representation in party and parliamentary decision-making) by ensuring the election of more progressive Labor women members of parliament (MPs). But it was also thought necessary to have a group that would help them to retain their positions in parliament and empower and support them in terms of the political process. In the words of one of the early (and key) players:

[I]f you were going to do it you needed a support network for the women – the blokes had an automatic one, either the union movement or Labor Lawyers or whatever – but the women didn’t - especially if we were going to pull in community-based women as distinct from women who’d worked through the Party (and we clearly were going to do that, because that was one of the pluses of women). (I#8/01,5)

As its hard-fought-for *Labor Herald* advertisement (Spring 2002)¹³ proclaims “EMILY’s List is a national organisation that gets progressive Labor women into power to deliver Equity, Choice, Child Care, Equal Pay and Diversity”. It is, thus, assumed that EL members subscribe to all of the above policy positions and that the

¹³ There was considerable resistance from the ALP hierarchy to the inclusion of an EL advertisement in earlier issues of the publication because (amongst other things) EL had no official standing in the Party.

candidates it supports will also embrace and advocate them in the course of their election campaigns and through the processes of the Party and the parliament.

However, pro-choice is the policy that defines EL inside the ALP. Certainly, it is a prerequisite for endorsed ALP women candidates seeking EL's support. It is also the policy that distinguishes the organisation from other Labor women's groupings such as the National Labor Women's Network (NLWN),¹⁴ specialist Labor women's sub-branches, Labor women's policy committees and Labor women's caucuses that have no such policy stipulation. Within the ALP, EL's pro-choice position is a persistent point of tension and the word 'progressive' is EL 'code' for that particular policy.

In other words, in an ALP context the pro-choice policy is the key that underwrites all the other values expected of EL members, especially the EL-endorsed women candidates. No matter, for instance, if an applicant for EL support should claim to be pro-equity, pro-child care, pro-diversity and pro-paid maternity leave; if she is not pro-choice she will not be endorsed by EL. This is definitely not an unproblematic situation for the organisation, as some ALP women strongly dispute the importance that EL places on pro-choice. However, my questionnaire data indicates that a large majority of EL's members support the uncompromising stand the organisation takes on the right of a woman to have control over her own body. One eminent Labor interviewee faces this issue squarely in terms of internal ALP divisions:

¹⁴ The Labor Women's Network was initially set-up by the ALP as an intra-party group to rival EMILY's List. However, in recent years the relationship between these two organisations has matured and they have worked out ways to sidestep conflict and competition (in the main).

One of the reasons that Right Wing women don't find their way clear to become members of EMILY's List is because they can't subscribe to the object of pro-choice. So that's the defining difference between us. (I#4/01,21)

Another experienced ALP cadre reinforces this intra-party understanding, although from a different perspective, when he says, "[EL] takes a 'pro-choice' view and that alienates 'pro-life' candidates" (I#7/01,12).¹⁵ The electoral consequences of this distinction are not lost on EL's endorsed candidates either, or on some external pressure groups. For instance, EL-endorsed Labor women candidates and MPs have already had to confront political targeting and associated hustings hassle from Right-to-Life campaigners during their election campaigns.

To achieve its primary objective of assisting progressive Labor women parliamentary candidates electorally, EL coordinates fundraising activities and marshals donations for the candidates it has committed itself and its members to support. In this regard, and since its establishment seven years ago in Australia, EL has provided financial, political, practical and/or moral support to more than 91 new ALP female MPs with progressive principles (EMILY's List Australia 2004). The organisation has attracted funds for women candidates from around Australia with the slogan "when women support women, women win!" So, when women put their money, their effort and their political skills into the campaigns of progressive Labor women candidates endorsed by EL, they are choosing to invest in a feminist political community that will pursue a specific political agenda via its links with the ALP.

¹⁵ Although the term 'pro-life' was used as a way of describing people who might be opposed to a 'pro-choice' view, it is not a term that the interviewee would normally use, nor one he felt particularly comfortable with.

EL further fulfils this expectation by adopting a cross-generational mentoring role that is designed to transfer the experience of ex-MPs to younger aspirants and incumbents, as the following comment suggests:

EMILY's List's role (once women are preselected and they can subscribe to our objectives) is to train and to mentor. We are now working towards a set of modules to assist women when they become MPs, so that those support mechanisms are actually in place to help them – to give them the ideas about how to set up an office, how to campaign to get re-elected, how to actually deal with policy issues and how to progress EMILY's List objectives once they're in the Parliament. (I#4/01,22)

Although not formally affiliated to the ALP, EL does extend its support *only* to Labor women candidates who join its ranks and commit to its primary principles of pro-choice, pro-equity, pro-diversity, pro-childcare, pro-equal pay. The fact remains, however, that around 40% of EL members are not members of the ALP (and many of these women have never been members of that political party). As a consequence, EL is not, and cannot be seen as, an organ of the Labor Party. All of the organisation's decisions on policy, therefore, need to be promoted (by individuals with dual membership) through ALP policy forums if they are to be adopted as Labor Party policy. In reality, of course, a few members of EMILY's high-profile executive are able to short-circuit the system on occasion, but ALP State and National Conferences remain the arenas that must be conquered if a favourable outcome is to be achieved: one that cements key elements of EL's feminist policy into Labor's electoral

platform.¹⁶ Failing this, EL (as an organisation) maintains the capacity to make public statements concerning the policies that it supports and to exhort the ALP to remedy its oversight or fault.

But defining what is or is not a feminist policy presents a potential dilemma for EL. Indeed, a number of interviewees are adamant that the organisation must determine its core business and stick to it because a continual broadening of its policy positions could reduce the capacity of Labor women candidates to comply with EL's requirements or expectations. One EL (and ALP) member of long standing sees the politics of policy expansion in the following terms:

... I think EMILY's List has to be careful about developing policies other than on matters which are specifically feminist issues (you know, affecting women - like paid maternity leave) because it could be divisive and these should be policies of the ALP. And also, the difficulty of arriving at a policy – even when a paper is put up, and is circulated, and then questionnaires, and people voting, and so on – (a) it can take a long time to do (it can take months and months to develop a policy) and (b) EMILY's List is not a political party with its own set of policies – it is a progressive women's support group. (I#2/03,8)

Such reluctance to entertain new policy positions signifies an awareness of the danger of widening EL's function in a political context. For instance, my research

¹⁶ The National Labor Women's Conference (NLWC) has consistently pursued automatic inclusion of its decisions on the National Conference agenda. EL was an official sponsor of the NLWC (2002) and participated in the development of yet another strategy aimed at launching Conference decisions on to the ALP policy agenda (for example Affirmative Action targets, Paid Maternity Leave Provisions and Refugee Detention).

indicates that EL possesses a specific and strategic membership mandate to increase the number of progressive Labor women being elected to parliament. Pragmatically speaking, then, the organisation needs to maintain its focus so as to maximise its ability to achieve this primary objective. Thus far, EL has walked this particular tightrope by restricting itself officially to the five key policy planks previously mentioned. But the organisation has been challenged on a number of other policy questions. These have arisen out of strong feeling amongst the membership and the perceived need for a different, or stronger, political stand to be taken by the ALP (and, therefore, by EL in its 'lobbying' capacity). Such policies include provision of paid maternity leave, opposition to Australia's involvement in the Iraq War (with or without UN sanction), and opposition to the detention of refugees (especially women and children). While EL has adopted a position on these issues (and made public comment in this regard) acceptance of them does not constitute a prerequisite for membership. Paid maternity leave is not particularly contentious in a feminist context (although it is not *un*contentious), but the other policies could present a candidate or MP with cause for pause in relation to her EL membership – in the same way that the pro-choice policy might.¹⁷

At its heart, this debate concerns the nature of EL as a goal-oriented and partisan feminist political support group rather than a separate or quasi-political party.

However, a minority of members disagree with this view. They see EL as a vehicle

¹⁷ The distinction is that the pro-choice proposition would generally be considered a matter of personal conscience for individual MPs, whereas most other policy issues would not be. Given this situation, it might be self-defeating for the specific policy requirements of EL membership to directly counter the policies of the ALP (as delineated in its Platform) because Labor candidates and MPs are bound to uphold all of those policies as representatives of their Party (in the public sphere at least).

for making the ALP improve its policy position on a broad range of political issues about which women may feel strongly, but which might not be judged as strictly 'feminist' by others in the group. So, notwithstanding its primary purpose, (to raise funds for progressive Labor women and assist them into parliament) the actual objects and operation of EL encompass much more than money and it has managed to focus feminist attention on the ALP in ways that might not originally have been envisaged.

2. Who Joins and Why?

EL has a membership base across Australia that approximates 2,000. Apart from retired Labor MPs, sitting Labor MPs and aspiring Labor MPs, the people (mainly women) who join comprise a fairly tight occupational group consisting of academics, public servants (including teachers and nurses), consultants, policy makers, doctors, lawyers and managers of various kinds. There is also a mix of other semi-professionals linked to the field of industrial relations, such as union officials, together with an interestingly large proportion of lower income people like pensioners, superannuants, retirees and students who want to be involved with the organisation even though they do not have much cash to contribute.

As previously mentioned, approximately 60 per cent of EL members are coincident members of the ALP. Another 13 per cent have either let their ALP membership lapse or have actually resigned from the Party. These figures suggest that a majority of EL members have an understanding of how political parties function (for good or ill). This presumption is borne out in more detailed aspects of the questionnaire

returns, where, with few exceptions, respondents reveal an educated understanding of the organisation's role in the overall political process. There is not, however, a universal awareness of the specific difficulties EL faces in progressing its objectives and agenda via the ALP.

Members join EL for a number of reasons. Some of these relate to what the organisation stands for and others relate to how it functions (although how it functions also reflects what it stands for). Personal political aspiration (in terms of election to parliament) is the reason for only a relatively small group of women becoming members of EL. Moreover, those who join on this basis tend to become quite active in the organisation and usually donate funds regularly if they are fortunate enough to get elected. There is also a requirement now that successful EL-endorsed candidates will become Foundation members of the organisation (at a one-off cost of \$1000) as soon as they are able to do so. When men join EL, they do so as Supporting Members (a specific membership category) who are prepared to donate funds that will help get more progressive ALP women elected to parliament.

The main reasons for joining can be summarised as wanting a) more women MPs and b) cross-factional, feminist space.

(a) More Women MPs: The vast majority of EL members say they joined because they agree with the organisational objectives and want to be a member of a group that works to support the election of more 'progressive' women. Within that group, however, some members simply want to get more women into parliament, while

others specifically want to get more pro-choice, Labor women, or feminists, into parliament. One questionnaire respondent gave her reason for joining EL as: “Disgust at the continuing under-representation of women in parliament – especially in the Labor Party” (Q.5).¹⁸ Another reflected a somewhat more widespread concern when she said she had a “commitment to more women into politics” (Q.329).

Interestingly, the broad acceptance of the goal of ‘more women MPs’ by the membership (together with its essentially cross-factional and ‘feminist’ mode of operation) makes EL a relatively non-competitive forum. Accordingly, women can leave almost all of their labels at the door (most of the time) and commit their combined effort and energy to the achievement of high level change with which most members concur. Differences and tensions come to the fore only when priorities vie for scarce financial resources and precious energy inputs (especially those of other people). While not meant to imply that there are no differences of opinion, of course, the following statement by a long-term EL executive member sums up the benefits of this type of approach in terms of feminist focus and goal orientation:

One of the really brilliant things about EMILY’s List that I’ve found – having been involved at the National Committee level since it was established at the end of 1996 – is that the sort of work that we do has no conflict attached to it.

We get on with it, and it is empowering. (I#4/01,22)

¹⁸ However, respondents don’t see the Liberal Party as better than the Labor Party – rather, the ALP is the Party that they have experience with, or relate to, and therefore it is the one they feel competent to comment on or complain about. Where another Party does receive a favourable mention, it is usually the Greens.

(b) Cross-Factional, Feminist Space: In keeping with the above comment, many members say they joined EL because they are fed up with the *macho* adversarial nature of party politics in general and the ALP in particular. Others join because they are tired of having their efforts to elect more women and pursue a feminist agenda frustrated by the processes of the ALP. Still more join because they are feminists (including non-Party feminists) who like the calibre of the women already involved and relate to the objectives of the organisation and/or its policies.

Considerably more Left women join EL than do non-Left women, but the organisation has worked to prove its cross-factional credentials by supporting progressive women candidates from across the ALP's factional spectrum. A majority of the members surveyed value and appreciate the organisation's cross-factional/trans-factional status, which helps to set it apart from the ALP. As one questionnaire respondent says: "A big bonus for EL is its cross-factional approach" (Q.30). Another respondent indicates that she "doesn't participate any more" in her faction and thinks that "EMILY's List is more important than the faction" (Q.326).

Similarly, some executive members feel so strongly about the importance of the organisation's cross-factional position that they have withdrawn from their own ALP faction in order to foster EL's non-aligned status. One such interviewee declares:

We try to discourage the factional activity. In fact, when we first set up it was my mantra: "It doesn't matter what faction you belong to. We don't care about the factions in the ALP. ... This is for women. It's not about what you perceive I

am, or what I perceive you are. The reality is that it's about women!" And women accepted that. (I#1/03,11)

So, after seven years of operation, it is now evident that any person can belong to EL if s/he supports the objectives of the organisation (that is a pro-choice, pro-equal pay, pro-diversity, pro-childcare and pro-equity political agenda together with the funding and support of progressive Labor women parliamentary candidates who are also EL members). It is also clear that any endorsed Labor woman candidate is eligible to join and seek support for her election campaign under the same conditions. As previously discussed, the only deliberately exclusionary policy is that related to abortion, with all EL members being expected to support a pro-choice position on abortion, as well as all its endorsed candidates (who must also be EL members). This stipulation does mean that some women will not join EL and it is supposed that most ALP women who do not join as a consequence of this particular policy position are those from the Right faction who hold a contrary view (although women from other factions have also found themselves in this situation). Of course, it is also possible that some ALP women do not join because others in their faction would disapprove, even though they, themselves, may be pro-choice. This is a reality of party political existence, especially when EL does not get involved (as an organisation) in ALP preselections and cannot, therefore, offer a counter to the power of the factions in that context (in any formal way).

Notwithstanding this crucial distinction, I maintain that EL bridges the ALP factional divide for women who decide to join its ranks.¹⁹ It does so by providing all progressive, pro-choice Labor women and feminists (including factionally non-aligned women and non-ALP women of similar sentiment) with a separate space for agenda-setting, socialising, policy discussion, fundraising and other sorts of co-operative endeavour, as well as the pursuit of individual success and collective power. The women benefit from the space, the relationships and the feeling that they are making progress on issues of importance to them. The ALP benefits (at least electorally) because women feel that this progress is being achieved in conjunction with the Party.

In the main, EL members want to put their energy and their money into an organisation that has specific (and limited) aims to improve and advance the position of women in Australian society. They also want to own the process and see results (that is, outcomes for their inputs) in terms of the election to parliament of more progressive Labor women MPs. Many women give more money to EL now than they would previously have given to the ALP (and a significant group never gave any money to the ALP). When asked why this is so, one member responded, "I want [the money] to go to women – controlled by women" (Q.329). There is an element of accountability in this rationale, and although it may be loose it is nonetheless clear. In

¹⁹ A number of EL members have changed factions in the course of their membership of the organisation. Some have moved from Right to Left and others have gone in the opposite direction. This movement illustrates the openness of the organisation and underscores its support for progressive Labor MPs and candidates across the board.

the same vein, another questionnaire respondent states, "I can see where the money goes and I support the cause" (Q.3).

3. Feminist Focus and Philanthropy

Feminist organisations have been defined as 'the places in which and the means through which the work of the women's movement is done' (Ferree and Martin 1995, 13). Bell hooks makes the potent distinction that feminism requires a political (not simply an identity) awareness (hooks 1997, 22). Both of these views gel with EL's endeavours to co-ordinate the activities of some women (progressive Labor feminists) specifically in order to bring about a change in the position of all women in society by political means. They also fit with descriptions of EL's ethos as altering the way that women think about themselves and their capacities so that the society in which they live sees them differently too:

The whole ethos of EMILY's List is around changing the way women think about themselves and, therefore, by projection, changing the way the community thinks about women. (I#1/03,6)

My research reveals EL as a self-conscious organisation of feminists, run by feminists on feminist principles, for the benefit of feminists in the short term and for women more generally in the longer term. For instance, the stated objectives of this organisation are feminist insofar as they are patently political, reformist and emancipatory. EL focuses its redoubtable energies on the improvement of women's position (both individual and societal) via the promotion of progressive Labor feminists to parliaments around Australia. It does so in order to achieve not just a

semblance of gender equality in representation, but the implementation of specific feminist policies and the advancement of a long term feminist agenda.

This contention is based on a number of premises. Firstly, that EL's organisational leadership (the National Committee) consists entirely of progressive feminists who are also party political activists. (This is true, even though many of the women concerned are no longer MPs or executive members of one or other of the ALP's internal forums.) Secondly, that the vast majority of the members sampled identify themselves as feminists who want to see more women in parliament (preferably Labor feminists). Thirdly, that the beneficiaries of the group's primary endeavours badge themselves as progressive Labor feminists who are willing to advocate and vote for positive change for other women in society should they be elected to parliament.

A number of interviewees and questionnaire respondents indicate that the way in which EL personalises the process of donating increases their inclination to give money. The anonymous donor-recipient arrangement doesn't seem to work as well for women – many of whom are reluctant to donate to political causes in any event. The provision of personalised promotional material eliciting donations for EL endorsed candidates overcomes such reluctance by helping prospective donors 'get to know' candidates across the nation. EL's fundraising functions also help to develop personal connections, friendships and loyalties between MPs, candidates and members (as activists and donors). As a senior EL (and ALP) woman says: "It's the personalising that makes the difference." (I#2/03,5)

To this end, and in advance of each State or Federal election, EL acquaints its members with information about all the female Labor candidates it has endorsed and highlights those who require financial assistance from the membership on this occasion. This information comes in the form of a professionally produced leaflet with photographs and profiles, including the name of each candidate's mentor (as the mentor might be better known than the candidate sometimes). The forms accompanying this literature encourage the prospective donor/EL member to send money to the candidate(s) of her/his choice via EL. Individual cheques are made payable to EL and forwarded to the Melbourne office where they are combined (or 'bundled') so that the candidates get one large cheque from EL rather than a number of smaller cheques from individual donors.²⁰ Donations to EL are not tax deductible.

These solicited funds augment the 'early' money provided to candidates directly from EL's coffers shortly after they are endorsed. Indeed, in the case of some women candidates whose seats are categorised by the ALP as 'hard to win', these EL contributions might be the only external support funding they receive for their election campaigns. One senior EL/ALP member confirms this when she says, "a lot of these women that we actually support will never get money from the Party anyway" (I#4/01,22).

²⁰ More accurately termed 'directed donations' by EL Australia, the term 'bundling' is used by the US organisation to describe the practice of sending a number of individual personal cheques (made payable to the candidate) via EMILY's List. Such cheques are 'bundled' together and onforwarded to the relevant campaign. Apparently this procedure circumvents the impact of US electoral laws governing the amount of money that a Political Action Committee (PAC) is able to contribute to any candidate and/or campaign. In the US EL is considered to be a PAC. Sullivan, K. B. (1995) 'Add My Name to Emily's List: Change and Adaptation in Electoral Feminism in the United States since 1982.' Canberra, 75.

When women candidates are endorsed by EL, a prospective donor knows a good deal about them from the outset. S/he can be sure, for instance, that the candidate is pro-choice, pro-equity, pro-child care, pro-equal pay and pro-diversity – at the very least. Having also been endorsed by the ALP, all such candidates will be bound by the Party platform and/or parliamentary caucus on a raft of other issues as well.

So, these candidates do not purport to be political independents. However, their shared membership of EL increases the prospect of them being willing and able to operate in concert with one another when specific issues relating to women's advancement require advocacy or action, whether in the parliament or out of it.

Many of EL's most active members make themselves and their expertise freely available to candidates for mentoring, training and constructive support in the context of their election campaigns. The personalisation goes further by assisting successful women candidates to make the transition to parliament whenever required. But EL also helps women candidates/MPs re-focus their lives *after* an electoral defeat or retirement from parliament (involuntary or otherwise). Because of the existence and actions of this support network a number of previously unsuccessful candidates (including some MPs who have lost their seats) have been motivated to stay in the ALP and run for parliament again. Thus, EL helps to reduce the ALP's burnout rate in relation to its women candidates and keeps experienced women in the party's candidate pool.

Despite its extensive understanding of the importance of power in both personal and political terms, EL has (and wants) no role in ALP preselections. Moreover, its Constitution explicitly denies involvement in this regard. The organisation does not wish to 'take sides' against progressive feminists within the Party who are up against each other for selection as ALP candidates. Instead, EL offers conditional support to women who are already endorsed Labor candidates. Non-involvement in preselections can also minimise the potential for conflict amongst the EL membership. Obviously, however, some tension will still exist on a personal level when a woman-on-woman preselection contest occurs involving EL members from different intra-Party groupings. But many EL women have experienced preselection situations involving divided loyalties. They understand that friendships, while undoubtedly strained, can usually be maintained if the contest remains 'clean' and members are honest with the candidates concerned about who they are supporting in the tussle. It needs to be remembered, however, that EL is not an arena for preselection lobbying or discussion. While individual members of the organisation (as ALP members) can be involved in supporting specific candidates in a preselection, 'the List' itself cannot.

The decision that the organisation not be involved in preselections is, therefore, a strategic one. It simultaneously proves EL's inclusive credentials, protects intra-organisational friendships and reserves scarce energy and financial resources for actual election campaigns. Moreover, this conscientious position of non-involvement privileges EMILY's cross-factional feminist status ahead of its perceived power

and/or influence within the ALP, and thus diminishes the case for categorising EL as a faction or pseudo faction of the ALP.

4. The ALP Link

As previously mentioned, EL is not linked structurally to the ALP in any way. This is despite a more formal connection being considered (and rejected) during initial discussions with the ALP National Executive when that body was endeavouring to retain some control over both the organisation and the money it was intent upon raising (I#4/01,23; I#8/01; I#1/03; I#2/03) (Fitzherbert 1996). Notwithstanding this distinction, however, EL does share a related political philosophy with the ALP and the two organisations enjoy a degree of coincidental, if fluctuating, membership. One interviewee describes EL and the ALP as adjacent organisations:

[EL] is a feminist lobby group. Its not within the ALP at all. It stands next to the ALP. It isn't part of the ALP structure in any sense at all. We are not affected or influenced by any procedural operational activity of the ALP ... (I#1/03,12)

So, EL's links to the ALP are not structural. Rather they are embodied in its conjoint members – those women who are involved, if not always active, in both arenas – along with the Co-Convenors and National Committee members, all of whom (constitutionally) must be financial members of the ALP in order to be elected to their respective positions (EMILY's List Australia 2001, 15). Also, the modes of operation of the two organisations are quite different: EL is woman-focused and goal-oriented; it is neither a competitive nor a combative organisation.

More importantly, perhaps, the ALP, itself, is frequently the object of EL's attentions and lobbying the ALP has become a key element of its role. Such lobbying can be private (inter-organisational) or public (involving the media). Sometimes, it is a combination of these two approaches. For instance, in June 2002, EL's National Co-Convenors publicly released a summary of the organisation's submission to the Hawke-Wran National Organisational Review of the ALP, together with some of the results of the EL Member Questionnaire on Party Reform. The submission was described by Joan Kirner as "a detailed plan for a genuine partnership within the Party; a partnership to win government; a partnership when in government" (EMILY's List Australia 2002, 1). But, this mainly positive missive had a sting in its tail that highlighted the distinctions between EL and the ALP: "Half of EMILY's List members who responded to the survey feel alienated by Party structures and feel there is no room to make a difference. 26 per cent believe that the Party leadership does not reflect them or their concerns. Indeed there is a very worrying underlying cynicism about the Labor Party ever wanting to share real power with women in the Party or in the community" (EMILY's List Australia 2002, 2). The relationship appears to have improved somewhat in the two year interim and the new federal Labor leader, Mark Latham, has joined a number of his State counterparts in becoming a member of EL.

Some years ago Joni Lovenduski described gender politics within political parties as an "effect both of the infiltration of feminist ideas and the attention women influenced by those ideas have paid to the imperatives of party politics" (Lovenduski

1993, 4). Her analysis identified four components of strategies devised and applied by such women: 1) promotion of women's issues onto the political agenda; 2) transformation of "women's issues into universal issues" (to "avoid accusations of sectionalism"); 3) employment of a "dual strategy" of working in "male-dominated areas of the party" as well as with networks of women; and 4) attendance to the "rules of the game." During the 1980s Australian Labor women (consciously or unconsciously) adopted all of the strategy elements enumerated above in an endeavour to improve the position of women within the Party and to increase the number of Labor women in parliament. When those endeavours didn't produce sufficiently stable and satisfactory outcomes, some of those same women (feminists) decided to adopt a new approach – one in which they had to contend with less interference from people opposed to their feminist position, and over which they were able to exercise a greater degree of control.

With Lovenduski's original concept in mind, I see the establishment of EL in Australia as a new strategy aimed at extending the broad feminist push in the context of political parties and the reform of public policy. Instead of merely remaining within their chosen political party when it failed to deliver on their expectations, this particular group of Labor feminists moved outside of the ALP to make their political agenda more public. In this way they were able to focus their efforts on specific feminists goals (including the election of more progressive Labor women MPs) and to issue a stronger challenge to the ALP on matters they deemed to be of concern to

women as citizens. Their actions have changed the rules of the political game in Australia, at least as far as the ALP is concerned.

Many of EL's founders and activists remain politically partisan in that they are still financial members of the ALP and they still want to see Labor in government. It is this feature that makes their strategy a new one. If they had abandoned the ALP altogether (and established another women's organisation) they would have been reverting to the situation that existed in the 1960s and 1970s when a large section of the women's movement wanted no truck with political parties per se, and sought to pressure them entirely from without. Years of political experience on the part of EL's founders meant that was not a realistic option as far as they were concerned. So, now the emphasis of their effort has changed: their focus is on the ALP as a means to achieving a feminist end, not simply an electoral end. While non-party women assist in the overall EL endeavour, the activists in the organisation are primarily Labor feminists with their reformist inclination.

Conclusion

Despite the acronym that (in)forms its name, EMILY's List Australia is about much more than the provision of 'early' money to preselected progressive Labor women candidates. As an arguably feminist organisation (of, for and by feminists), EL pursues a specific feminist political agenda within the ALP and via that Party, in all Australian parliaments and Labor parliamentary caucuses, as well as in the broader society. Its objectives are clearly directed towards a more equal political representation for women (with a view to implementing policy change on issues that

feminist Labor women think are important for Australian women) and all non-campaign resources are strategically applied to the achievement of this goal.

In the first instance, EL works to change the focus of politics in and around the ALP so as to ensure the election of more progressive Labor feminists into parliament (and, thus, improve the chances of the ALP attaining Government). This strategy includes, but is not limited to, lobbying the ALP (within and without its ranks) for an increase in the percentage of the AA target. (Any such increase will improve the preselection chances of all ALP women aspirants for parliamentary office – not just EL members).

In the second instance, EL informs the ALP about the types of policies that women in the organisation and the electorate want. The basis for lobbying in this regard is EL membership surveys and specially commissioned gender gap research. In the third instance, EL is prepared to help those Labor women who are elected to settle into their new positions and operate effectively in the parliament. It also encourages them to work together to project and implement policy positions that conform to a specific, but not necessarily predetermined, feminist agenda. There are elements of this sort of agenda that will not be part of ALP policy, but neither will they be proscribed by it. Abortion law reform is one such issue, and EL is committed to legislative change in this regard wherever the need exists for improvement and certainty on women's rights with regard to their own bodies.

This paper has shown that the relationship between EL and the ALP is symbiotic in one sense and confronting in another. It is symbiotic insofar as each organisation obtains some degree of benefit from the existence of and link with the other. For

instance, EL gains input and access to a political party via which its policies can be promoted and implemented (always assuming that they are actually taken up by the Party and that the Party eventually gets into government). For its part, the ALP obtains money and dedicated, expert support for most of its endorsed women candidates as well as access to the results of specially tailored gender gap research and a rejuvenating repository for some of its disillusioned (feminist) ex-members. It also gains 'exposure' to a fair percentage of non-party members who are willing to support Labor women financially and politically if the ALP can change/improve some aspects of its policies on women. However, the relationship is simultaneously confronting for the ALP because EL exists to keep it up to scratch on issues of importance to the status of women and to pursue feminist demands for gender equality in Labor's parliamentary representation.

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