

**Working from within :  
Pat Giles and the trade union movement in the 1970s**

Lekkie Hopkins, PhD  
Centre for Social Research  
Edith Cowan University

Lynn Roarty, BA (Hons)  
Centre for Social Research  
Edith Cowan University

Sherry Sagers, PhD  
Centre for Social Research  
Edith Cowan University

**Correspondence to:**

Lynn Roarty  
Centre for Social Research  
Edith Cowan University  
100 Joondalup Drive  
Joondalup WA 6027

Phone: 08 6304 5592  
Fax: 08 6304 5866  
Email: [l.roarty@ecu.edu.au](mailto:l.roarty@ecu.edu.au)

**Short title: Working from within**

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## **Biographical statements**

Lekkie Hopkins is a feminist scholar in the School of International, Cultural and Community Studies at Edith Cowan University. She is an oral historian, archivist and literary critic, with research interests in the history of social protest, collective biography, feminist pedagogy and feminist research methodologies.

Lynn Roarty is research officer in the Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University and is currently completing her PhD in women's studies at Murdoch University. Her research interests include feminist body theories, new genetic and reproductive technologies and feminist history.

Sherry Sagers is Foundation Professor of Applied Social Science in the School of International, Cultural and Community Studies, and Director of the Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University. Her research and publications include work on mothering and child care, family diversity, Indigenous health and wellbeing, and community development.

## **Abstract**

Pat Giles is an Australian feminist activist, whose work as a trade unionist and parliamentarian has been felt locally, nationally and internationally. In a public life that has spanned five decades, beginning in her early adulthood with community based education campaigns and continuing into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with an ongoing commitment to women's health issues locally and internationally, Giles has earned a reputation as a persistent, systematic, intelligent campaigner and lobbyist. In a series of three papers we document Pat Giles' contribution to public life as a trade unionist, a women's activist and a parliamentarian. In this paper, the first in the series, our focus is on uncovering Pat Giles' work in the trade union movement during the 1970s. We argue that the strategies she has used in working towards cultural change are as significant a legacy to future generations of idealists and activists as the actual achievements for which she is noted. We read her as a policy activist in the terms used by Anna Yeatman (1998). In this paper we document the origins of Pat Giles' public contribution and focus particularly on the interventions she made in the implementation of the ACTU Working Women's Charter following its introduction in 1977, and in the introduction of Maternity Leave provisions into Western Australian awards in 1980, as a way of uncovering the practical steps she took to enact cultural change within the trade union movement and beyond.

Patricia Jessie Giles is an Australian feminist activist, whose work as a trade unionist and parliamentarian was felt locally, nationally and internationally. In a public life that has spanned five decades, beginning in her early adulthood in the 1960s with community based education campaigns, and continuing into the 21st century with an ongoing commitment to women's health issues locally and internationally, Pat Giles has earned a reputation as a systematic, persistent, intelligent campaigner and lobbyist. Feminist sociologists Marian Sawer and Marian Simms call her indefatigable (Sawer & Simms, 1993, p. 164). For trade union colleague Owen Salmon the combination of qualities she brought to the trade union movement in the 1970s meant that she was "solid gold" (Salmon, 2006). Other colleagues call her "loyal", "principled", "inspiring", "courageous" (Creed, 2006; Davenport, 2006; McGinty, 2006; Suttner, 2006; Watson, 2006). In personality she is remembered as being steady and even-tempered rather than charismatic; nevertheless, many note her quick and pithy wit (A. Giles, 2005).

Unlike Australian women from previous generations whose political activities have been "hidden from history"<sup>1</sup>, accounts of Pat Giles' activities in the public arena, though scattered, are available to contemporary commentators. Although there is not yet any systematic scholarly analysis of her specific contribution to public life, her broad role in feminist politics has been acknowledged by feminist academics in a range of publications (Grahame, 1998; Jakobsen, 2001; Murray, 2002; National Foundation for Australian Women on Australian Women's Archives Project web site, 2005; Sawer, 1990, 1998; Sawer & Simms, 1993) and a full length biography is currently being prepared. Further, such is Pat Giles' standing in her local community that she has been interviewed at regular intervals by oral historians and students of feminist politics (Giles, 1986, 1988, 1994, 1996; Giles & Fatin, 1982; Skene, 1999). What has not been uncovered in sufficient detail is the suite of activist skills and strategies she used to bridge what some policy analysts have called "that mysterious gap between hope and happening" (Kenway & Willis, 1997, p. ix).

Pat Giles joined the Australian Labor Party in 1971 and was employed in the trade union movement from 1974 until her election to the Australian Senate in 1981. Her goal was to facilitate the move towards a more just society for women and others who experience disadvantage (P. Giles, 2005). Our research indicates that her forte lay not so much in dreaming up new policies to meet this goal as in finding ways to implement them (Creed, 2006; Davenport, 2006; A. Giles, 2005; Salmon, 2006; Watson, 2006). We argue that the strategies she has used over five decades of working towards cultural change are as significant a legacy to future generations of idealists and activists as the actual achievements for which she is noted.

In a series of three academic papers we plan to document Pat Giles' contribution to public life from the early 1970s through to her departure from the Senate in 1993. We argue that in order to understand her contribution to public life during these decades it's important to look closely at the skills, strategies and capacities she brought to her political engagements in the women's movement, in the Labor Party, in the trade union movement, and in the federal parliament. We read her as a policy activist in the terms used by Anna Yeatman (Yeatman, 1998). In this paper, the first in the series, our focus is on uncovering Pat Giles' work in the trade union movement from 1974 - 1981. We focus particularly on the interventions she made in the implementation of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) Working Women's Charter

following its adoption in 1977, and in the introduction of Maternity Leave provisions into WA Trades and Labour Council (TLC) affiliated unions in 1980, as a way of uncovering the practical steps she took to attempt to enact cultural change within the union movement and beyond. Although our emphasis is on the work and achievements of Giles herself within the union movement, it is worth noting that Giles' activism occurred within the context of the extensive networks and the capacity building strategies characteristic of the women's movement of the time. For example, the ACTU's adoption of the Working Women's Charter in 1977 was itself preceded by an intense campaign by a national network of women activists from the unions and the wider women's movement which culminated in a national conference in Sydney in 1977 (A. Giles, 2006).

### **Pat Giles' contribution to public life in the 1970s: the trade union movement**

Pat Giles first emerged as a public figure in Western Australia in 1969, when her commitment to state education led to her standing as an independent candidate in the 1969 Federal election for the pressure group Defence of Government Schools. Like many women of her generation, as a young woman she had trained as a nurse and had left the paid workforce when she married. As her children started school during the early 1960s she became interested in community based education politics, discovered an aptitude for committee work, and served on the parents' and citizens' organizations of her children's kindergarten, their primary school and their high schools, often in executive positions. Although her election bid in 1969 was unsuccessful, the campaign itself achieved the aim of placing the Defence of Government Schools issue squarely on the agenda, and Pat was buoyed by the public support she received. She remained committed to the state aid for government schools campaign, and from 1971 until 1975 took on a high profile role as State Vice-President of the Western Australian Federation of Parents and Citizens Association. Her expertise and abilities were further recognised when in 1971 she received a Ministerial Appointment to the Health and Education Council of Western Australia.

In 1970, when the first of her five children was in the final year of high school, Pat Giles successfully sat for the matriculation exams as a mature aged student. In 1971 she enrolled at the University of Western Australia, and graduated at the end of 1973 with a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in politics and industrial relations. In 1974 she was appointed to the university's academic staff as a tutor in industrial relations. These years confirmed her interest in politics and accelerated her engagement with social change. She threw herself into university life. The campus was alive with radical protest, and Giles, encouraged by her two older daughters, and informed by the material she was studying, quickly became immersed in student politics. She became a member of the Industrial Relations Society, the Fabian Society, the Abortion Law Reform Association, and Women Against Nuclear Energy. She joined the university branch of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in 1971 and was one of the founders of the Women's Liberation Movement in Perth in 1972. In January 1973 she attended the first national Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) Conference in Canberra, and in March 1973 she was elected as the inaugural Convenor of the newly formed WEL group in Perth (Giles, 1994; Giles & Fatin, 1982; WEL, 1973).

At the end of 1974 Pat Giles accepted an invitation from the Hospital Employees Industrial Union Secretary Owen Salmon<sup>2</sup> and Industrial Officer Jim McGinty<sup>3</sup> to work as an organiser in that union. When Salmon himself came to the HEIU in 1970 as Industrial Officer, it was a conservative union of 10,000 members, most of whom were semi-skilled migrant women. Salmon's agenda was to make the HEIU a force to be reckoned with inside the trade union movement by pushing for improved working conditions for women and for semi-skilled workers within the arbitration system. In particular he wanted to "advance the new concepts of equal pay, maternity leave and anti-discrimination" embedded in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions that had been ratified by the Whitlam government in 1972 (Salmon, 2006). Pat Giles was one of the first women to work in an industrial position in a Western Australian union. Salmon is very clear that Pat Giles' combination of feminist activism, political influence within the ALP, tertiary education and nursing experience made her ideal for the job. Giles herself jests 30 years later that they selected her for the job because they needed "someone who could stand bosom to bosom with the matrons of these organizations, [because the matrons] just terrorised the fellas in the union" (Creed, 2006).

Pat Giles was to remain in this job until she took her seat in the Senate in 1981. So began a period of intense engagement with overlapping political systems, within the union movement, within the Australian Labor Party, and within the women's movement. Her skills and good sense as campaigner, diplomat, lobbyist, policy maker and committee member were quickly recognised, as was her capacity for thorough research and impressive speech-making (Creed, 2006; McGinty, 2006; Salmon, 2006).

Her two colleagues, Jim McGinty and Owen Salmon, speak very highly of Pat Giles' contribution to the HEIU and to the union movement as a whole. McGinty recalls:

Pat quietly got on with the job. Her work in the private hospitals and nursing homes sphere was systematic and thorough. A major part of her task was to inspect and analyse the wages records of each hospital or home to uncover systemic errors like underpayment of penalty rates. Her analytical skills were crucial here. She was subtle but she applied ruthless efficiency to the task. She came to be widely respected if somewhat feared by the employers she was monitoring. She would take her evidence to me, I would write out the complaints, then serve it to a Magistrate, and I would prosecute, with Pat as the star witness. Pat would draw on her nursing expertise to be a witness. We did that every week. Every Thursday we'd prosecute. There were dozens of prosecutions of private hospitals (McGinty, 2006).

This work, meticulous and thorough, began a revolution in private hospital and nursing home regulation that culminated for Pat Giles in her Senate work, when, immediately on taking up her Senate seat in 1981, she was appointed to the first-ever National Select Committee for Private Hospitals and Nursing Homes (P. Giles, 2005, 31 October). Helen Creed,<sup>4</sup> then a young social worker who was invited in 1981 to give evidence to this committee on the results of a phone-in on abuse of the elderly, notes that Pat chaired this committee from 1983 until it reported to parliament in 1985. Creed found Pat Giles' work inspiring:

This Select Committee's report...put in place a really different system of aged care in this country, and has set the framework for aged care for the last 20 years... That sense of how you can translate the really basic organising that she was doing in the mid 70s in that industry, through the political process to actually be the driving force behind a report that then provided

a framework for the way services were delivered – that's what I mean by inspiring (Creed, 2006).

Both Jim McGinty and Owen Salmon recognise that Pat Giles brought what they called a political dimension to the union that was to influence its status in the near future. Giles' standing in the ALP was already significant, and her appointment on 8 May 1974 by Clyde Cameron, the federal Minister for Labour, to chair the WA Committee on Discrimination and Employment, confirmed that she was well respected and well connected within Labor circles. For Giles herself this was "the beginning of a giddy rise to fame for me – I just can't tell you what that did for my self-perception" (Giles & Fatin, 1982). That she was the first woman in Australia to be appointed to chair such a committee also delighted her friends in the women's movement.<sup>5</sup> Her appointment in 1978 as Chair of the ACTU Women's Committee brought further political kudos to the HEIU.

Arguably, Giles' networks into WEL and the wider community positioned her ideally to take the lead from within her union on a whole range of community issues. One such issue centred around the Tresillian Nursing Home:

Another high point in my union career was the titanic clash in 1976 when the WA government announced its intention of moving profoundly disabled young people from the Tresillian Nursing Home in salubrious Nedlands to a location remote from transport in the foothills. The domestic and nursing staff, suddenly embroiled in a political fight, their jobs threatened if they took action, needed moral support, which was readily provided not just by the hospital unions, but by the whole trade union movement in a wonderful show of solidarity. As their organiser I was at Tresillian every day for about three weeks as the drama unfolded, helping with the usual routines, and at one stage retrieving desperately needed clean linen which had been diverted by the government. The courage of the families in taking on the government attracted wide community support, forcing it to yield to public opinion, and the move was cancelled (Skene, 1999).

It is Owen Salmon's view that this incident created an unprecedented interaction between a community group and the union movement, and, within the movement itself, significantly raised the status and influence of the HEIU (Salmon, 2006). Clearly, the combination of Owen Salmon, Jim McGinty and Pat Giles was highly successful. Working alongside one another as colleagues, the three oversaw the complete transformation of the HEIU from being a conservative union with a membership of poorly paid and disempowered migrant women, into an amalgamated union (a combination of the Miscellaneous Workers Union, the Hospital Employees Industrial Union and the Cleaners and Caretakers Union) headed up by Jim McGinty, that was to become the biggest union in the State with a growing influence and coverage (McGinty, 2006; Salmon, 2006).

Reflecting on her union work three decades later, Pat Giles emphasises the importance of Owen Salmon and Jim McGinty to the honing of her political and policy-implementation skills. From Owen Salmon she learned to appeal to international conventions and rulings when arguing for social change; from Jim McGinty, in addition to learning how to prosecute and provide evidence in the Industrial Court, she learned the disarming art of "being nice to nasty people" (P. Giles, 2005; McGinty, 2006). Both men were skilled at dealing with difficult people and difficult situations: Pat Giles recalls that working with them reinforced in her

many of the skills she had hitherto not consciously been aware of using (P. Giles, 2006, 26 October).

In addition to her absorbing and demanding work as an organiser with the HEIU, Giles worked actively on local and national trade union committees towards internal reform of the union movement itself. In 1975 she became the first woman to be elected to the executive of the WA Trades & Labour Council; in 1977 she was appointed as a member to the first ACTU Women's Committee, and, as already noted, in 1978 she became its Chair; in 1979 she was appointed to the National Labour Consultative Council Committee on Women's Employment as one of three women ACTU representatives<sup>6</sup>; and in 1980 she became the first woman to argue an important general issue (maternity leave) before the State Industrial Commission (Grahame, 1998, p. 426). In her years as a trade unionist she worked strategically to ensure that unions came to understand the needs of women workers and was centrally involved in the adoption of the Working Women's Charter by the ACTU in 1977. In particular, as Chair of the ACTU Women's Committee and as a member of the NLCC Committee on Women's Employment she was fully aware of and involved in moves to create equal employment opportunities for women within the trade union movement, and to introduce anti-discrimination policies, elimination of sexual harassment policies, discrimination in superannuation and insurance policies, the review of protective legislation, and the feasibility of promoting access of women to skilled trades (NLCC Committee on Women's Employment).

In an interview with Stuart Reid in 1988, Pat Giles reflected on the changes that had occurred for women union members locally and nationally during her seven years at the union (Giles, 1988). She stressed that a significant change for HEIU members was for improved wage rates. She had argued strenuously in the WA Industrial Commission that women should be paid a decent rate for their work, but because they were nurses' aides and nursing assistants, employers argued that this was the sort of work that women did at home and thus it had no worth. Giles recalls that she countered with the argument that a fellow who paints his own home is not going to be undervalued for his work as a painter. She notes that this was the beginning of the comparable worth approach for women workers, challenging the notion that skills that could be labelled as domestic were worthless. Clearly, this argument was very important for women workers: that it had purchase in the WA Industrial Commission reflects the force of the attitudinal and discursive shifts in relation to women's issues occurring in Australia throughout the 1970s.

Giles herself was acutely aware of the ways such attitudinal shifts were expressed within the union movement nationally: by 1988 she could claim that women in unions could now be heard; discrimination in awards had been recognised and was being addressed; women had access to maternity leave; more women were going into newer technical occupations and much more effort was being made by governments to increase work options for girls; and it was no longer extraordinary for women to be on the ACTU Executive or the Arbitration Commission (Giles, 1988). These internal changes in the union movement reflected wider social change, and the impulse to change need not necessarily be attributed to feminist activism (Summers, 1975). But the changes were also a result of policy implementation within the union movement by feminists such as Pat Giles (Franzway, 2000). As Sarah Maddison notes in a recent retrospective:

It was women in the union movement who compelled the blokes to put those issues on the agenda and it took them a long time to do it, but now the union movement is able to say we've been working really hard on these issues that really make a difference in people's lives (Maddison & Franzway, 2006)<sup>7</sup>.

This process of mainstreaming such policy reform work within the union movement is the subject of analysis in the remainder of the paper.

### **Working strategies and skills**

Pat Giles had considerable success in contributing to a culture shift in one of the most overtly masculinist of Australian institutions – the trade union movement, – without being actively confrontational and without losing her feminist ideals. How was this possible, when “Australian unionists are seen as ‘rabid feminists’ if they begin to advocate for women ‘too’ loudly” (Franzway, 2000, p.41). In an attempt to uncover the ways she worked we turn our attention now to an investigation of the strategies and skills Pat Giles brought to her work in the trade union movement in the 1970s. Specifically, we consider her working strategies in the framework of Anna Yeatman's definitions of policy activism, by looking at specific documents she created in encouraging the ACTU to implement the Working Women's Charter in August 1980 and in bringing the Maternity Leave case before the WA Industrial Commission in January 1980.

Clearly, the brief account we have provided of Giles' activities in the public arena from 1970 until she took her seat in the Senate in 1981 indicates that, unlike separatist feminists who saw engagement with existing patriarchal structures as something of a betrayal of feminist integrity (Giles & Fatin, 1982; Pritchard Hughes, 1997; Sawer, 1992), Pat Giles sought the reform of those same institutional structures through the introduction of practical policies to benefit women and the disenfranchised. The pattern set by her early engagement with the state school system in which she committed her energies to reforming and strengthening the system from within so that its excellence would benefit all Australian schoolchildren, (rather than, for example, adopting guerrilla tactics to attack it from the outside, or creating outside alternatives to challenge its hegemony), continued throughout her public life. Australian feminism is noted for its diverse approach to enacting social change (Bacchi, 1996; Bulbeck, 1997; Magarey & Sheridan, 2002; Pritchard Hughes, 1997; Sawer, 1990; Summers, 2002) and Giles was one of the women who enjoyed working inside the institutions whose patriarchal values she contested. Not surprisingly, her methods were not always appreciated by her feminist sisters. However, she stuck fast to her reformist agenda and to her engagement with existing institutional structures as a means to create cultural change. The working framework she adopted can be seen, in retrospect, to align with Anna Yeatman's (Yeatman, 1998) notion of policy activism, here articulated by Julie Nyland:

There are two features which...differentiate policy activists from other types of policy reformers. The first is their activism, in which they are driven by their values and critique of existing policy to engage in reform activities. By definition they work against a dominant agenda. The second feature is their engagement in the policy process at an informal level, but within the process rather than operating from the outside. If a policy activist is a bureaucrat they will be subversive, which will differentiate them from other bureaucrats. If they are involved in the community sector, they will have a form of access to the policy process which

will differentiate them from other community sector activists. Given their focus on reform goals, rather than the sector for which they work, they will work across sectors, and be linked to one another through networks (Nyland, 1998, pp. 232-233).

We argue that, although Pat Giles herself has never analysed her working practices in quite these ways, and has certainly never described herself as a policy activist, this accurately encapsulates her approach to enacting social change. As has been described of other women unionists, her ideals kept her working against a dominant mainstream; her networks kept her grounded (Franzway, 2000). Further, as Nyland argues must happen, our research strongly suggests that rather than being committed to the union or to the Party *per se*, Pat Giles remained committed to her goals of shifting the dominant agenda to enact policy changes that would be felt far beyond the specific committee or conference room or industrial relations courtroom in which she was speaking<sup>8</sup>. Importantly, her reform agenda was transparent to her opponents and colleagues alike.

To such strategies associated with policy activism, Pat Giles brought qualities of persistence, patience, wit, and a desire for meticulously researched information to back up any argument she might put. Scrutiny of her working practices reveals that Giles is both an idealist and a realist. By her own admission, she is an immensely practical person (Giles, 1986; P. Giles, 2005, 2006). This quality affects every aspect of her being, from her thinking processes to her responses to crises, from her framing of policy documents to her relationships, from her choosing strategies to her achieving certain goals.

Perhaps the most remarkable skill that Pat Giles brought to her political work in the 1970s was her capacity to patiently bring her (potentially hostile, sexist) audience along with her, providing them with practical strategies to implement policies designed to create social change. Even when pushing for ideological changes, she seems to have had an ability to carry others with her by offering specific practical actions. She has said repeatedly that she was never abrasive but always assumed her opponents would be swayed by good sense. A combination of patience and ironic distance seemed to allow her to deal with overtly sexist men. In discussing her experiences on the Trades and Labour Council she said:

After a few months I was beginning to hear them say things that I had been saying when they hadn't been listening to a word, or they'd been telling me I'd been wrong... It's exactly like a marriage except that there are 18 of the blighters! (Giles, 1988).

Working with insightful men like Owen Salmon and with her WEL colleagues confirmed for her the wisdom of appealing often to international trends and conventions to support the arguments she was making. She used rational and social justice arguments. She knew how to flatter without being obsequious, and was an excellent networker. She worked hard and won the respect of her colleagues and opponents alike by her thorough research and her attention to detail. Importantly, our research indicates she also had political nous of a kind rarely acknowledged. As a woman she was aware of the need to avoid being seen as a sexual threat to male colleagues. She was a generation older than many of the (male) rising stars in the ALP and the union movement: her image was maternal and competent rather than sexy – though this did not stop rumours from circulating about (fictitious) liaisons between her and particular union and ALP officials. As a unionist she understood the

politics of being seen to mix with the right people. Giles herself acknowledges that she early developed the art of going for post-meeting drinks on Monday nights at the Court Hotel in Perth, nursing a single beer while her male colleagues followed their traditional bonding rituals. (Giles, 2005; Giles, 2006). Her male colleagues note that she could win people's confidence without appearing to be a threat (P. Giles, 2005, 2006; McGinty, 2006; Salmon, 2006).

An example of Giles' capacity to bring her audience along with her is found in an address she made to the ACTU Executive, as Chairman [sic] of the ACTU Women's Committee, on 19 August 1980. The context for this address is that Pat Giles and the women on the ACTU Women's Committee had strategically and methodically worked for several years to persuade the ACTU Congress to introduce a Working Women's Charter, based on a 1947 British model. The Working Women's Charter was first mooted at the ACTU Congress in 1975, and was finally adopted at the ACTU Congress of September 1977 after intense lobbying by a national network of women called the Working Women's Charter Campaign (A. Giles, 2006). This outcome had been eagerly awaited by women around the world and was greeted with glee, as the following telegram from New Zealand indicates:

**Telegram 14 September 1977** to Pat Giles care Bob Hawke ACTU Congress Sydney  
Your sisters in NZ warmly support your statement at Tuesday's session of Congress  
congratulations Sonja Davies NZ Working Women's Council. (ACTU Congress Report, 1977).

As was its usual custom, immediately following the adoption of the Charter, the ACTU Executive set up a committee to oversee its implementation. Pat Giles was appointed to that committee. One of the first tasks of the committee was to organise a conference of trade unions' representatives to discuss ways to implement the provisions of the Charter. A welcome outcome of that conference, held on 15 March 1978, was an expansion of networks of women unionists throughout the country.

The Working Women's Charter was specifically designed to "contribute to the change in attitudes required before equality regardless of sex can prevail in practice" (ACTU Congress Report, 1977). It supported the ending of all discriminatory practices preventing women from entering paid work. Specifically, the Charter directed trade unions themselves to recruit more women and to promote the education of women workers via the Trade Union Teaching Authority. It also directed the ACTU to encourage more women to stand for office.<sup>9</sup>

The address that Giles made to the ACTU Executive on 19 August 1980, and which, we argue, exemplifies her skill in bringing a recalcitrant audience along with her, is titled: *Integration of women into trade unions*. It begins:

It is now nearly three years since the ACTU adopted (almost unanimously) the Charter for Working Women, at its Congress in 1977. The committee which was subsequently established by the Executive soon after that congress has been meeting regularly since early in 1978. From the first of these meetings, we have been able to rely upon a most gratifying degree of co-operation and enthusiasm from the officers of the ACTU. The frequencies of these meetings, the number of projects canvassed, and the ever-widening scope of our activities could not have gained such impetus without the encouragement and practical support of Bill Kelty, Jan Marsh, and more recently, Bill Richardson (Giles, 1980).

Clearly, her opening references to the "most gratifying degree of co-operation and enthusiasm from the officers of the ACTU", and her naming of particularly crucial supporters are strategies designed to invite her audience to share her dream, rather than to make them close off defensively. She goes on to locate the difficulties of integrating women into unions as a collective problem that is not specific to Australia but that is shared by other countries, so elevating the problem to the international arena and avoiding laying the blame at the feet of these particular men:

Committee members, many of whom have been with us since the beginning, have brought their skills and commitment, and much valuable experience to this new field within the ACTU committee structure. Among them, there is only one union secretary, and of those who are full time officials (about 60%) most are at the level of organiser, industrial officer, or research officer. We have regularly included representatives from all State Councils, except Queensland.

Integration of women into the trade union movement at all levels is obviously one of our longer-term concerns, and I refer you to the Charter, part 3, for the policy adopted three years ago. The international publications available, such as the 1975 ICFTU handbook, indicate that our difficulties are no different from those in other countries... that women tend to be required universally to fulfil two demanding occupations; that they are frequently less skilled and less politicised than men, that they consider their paid jobs to be secondary, or temporary; that cultural and traditional norms have ascribed to women subservient and non-public roles.

In this speech she argues for women's greater involvement in decision making within the ACTU and the unions *not* as a way of enhancing the lives of women, but rather as a means to creating a stronger and more representative trade union movement. Again, as so often seems to happen with Giles' lobbying, she positions the issue (in this case, how to create cultural change within the intransigently male dominated Australian union movement) within its international context, arguing that:

we have started a little late to redress the balance in Australia, but at least we have a strong trade union movement into which to introduce better representation of women workers, and the strength of the structure should be sufficient to allow for the flexibility which will undoubtedly be required.

In short, she's saying to her audience, 'We share a problem with other countries (eg women tend to be required universally to fulfil two demanding occupations; women are often less skilled and less politicised than men; women consider their paid jobs to be secondary or temporary; cultural and traditional norms have ascribed to women subservient and non-public roles) but we on the Women's Committee will help you to achieve these changes and goals which we all share'. It is within this context that she argues for the need for the ACTU to adopt formal or informal affirmative action to ensure that a woman is included in the ACTU delegation to the International Labour Organisation. Crucially, at no time does she ask for general attitudinal shifts: rather, she outlines quite specific changes that can be implemented:

- appoint a woman to the ACTU delegation to the ILO;
- include a woman on the committee to examine the structure of the ACTU Executive;
- include a woman on the ACTU Executive;
- identify and encourage women who show motivation and promise at each union level;
- accommodate women's double day by providing flexible hours, child care for out of hours meetings;
- develop appropriate Trade Union Teaching Association courses;
- ensure proportional representation in your unions; and

- read the “EEO Guidelines” to be issued soon by the National Labour Consultative Committee on Women’s Employment.

Of the directive to read the EEO Guidelines, she argues:

the publication of this set of guidelines is an acknowledgment of the fact that bias is so much part of all our institutions that deliberate measures are essential if it is to be corrected...if full use is to be made of all the talent previously wasted, in the union movement as in every other aspect of our still patriarchal society.

In summary, Pat Giles argues in this address, 'We in Australia have a problem that's shared internationally; we on our committee have strategies to work with you to address this problem'.

Our reading of this address, then, suggests that Pat Giles skilfully employs her most conciliatory tactics to bring these potentially hostile and defensive men along with her: she's not threatening, not trapping them into a corner, but rather holding out a hand and saying, 'Come this way into the new world we create together'. Like every good educator, she's constantly building bridges between what her audience knows and what she wants them to know.

A further example of her judicious use of flattery, this time with a sprinkling of humour, is found in an undated speech to an unspecified trade union conference. In this speech she positions herself as a witty colleague certain of the soundness of her arguments:

In such an enlightened gathering as this, I should like to feel that it's relatively safe to make a couple of assumptions: first, about the need for this conference to discuss working women; second, that we are egalitarian and fair-minded; and third, that the Commission and this conference are backed by the entire union movement. So we must go into battle together on two fronts: we must speed the industrial revolution and the domestic revolution.

To illustrate the need for an industrial revolution she argues:

A well organised union in a well paid industry discourages female apprentices by restrictive clauses, including a prohibition against using the guillotine (because of the danger to their biological differences) while in the poorly paid timber industry, women have been operating circular saws for years, without, so far as I know, the amputation of a single “biological difference”.

And in speaking of the domestic revolution she cleverly distances herself from the absurdity of media-driven feminine domestic stereotypes:

No male need feel at a disadvantage. He too has the right to deliciously soft Palmolive hands; he too can experience the hilarious delight of spraying that stuff on the frying pan before he cooks his breakfast; he too can claim the “most concerned parent of the year” award by using Fabulon on the clothes before he does the ironing.

She concludes her speech by shifting register from witty banter to serious collegial political argument, urging her audience to

build on our community of interests, acknowledging our identity of purpose to be of far more importance than our differences... We hope sincerely that the traditional union movement will see us as fellow workers and not as antagonists (Giles, n.d.).

Her methods were not always as conciliatory as this, especially when she was dealing with people outside the union movement or the ALP. One could argue that her skill lay in knowing when to be caustic and when to cajole. For example, in a curt letter dated 10 January 1977, Pat Giles wrote as a union organiser to the Secretary of the newly established National Training Council,<sup>10</sup> to complain about "the grotesque and anachronistic imbalance" of the composition of the National Training Council:

Experience has shown that the needs and potential of the great majority of women workers (the group who are unskilled and untrained) are rarely perceived by the men who employ them, and those who develop and administer government policies. There are a number of women especially in the academic, government and union fields who are competent and articulate in the areas covered by your terms of reference.<sup>11</sup>

Giles had honed her skills in gathering and presenting evidence during the previous six years of working alongside Jim McGinty to prosecute nursing home employers in the WA Industrial Court. Her aptitude for thorough preparation is also apparent in the documentation surrounding the Trades and Labour Council's Maternity Leave Case, brought by Pat Giles and Beryl Baker before the WA Industrial Commission on 21 January 1980.

Giles had closely watched the national scene before proceeding with the WA Trades and Labour Council case. On 9 March 1979, the Full Bench of the Arbitration Commission awarded maternity leave to all women employed under federal awards. Significantly, two of the five members of the bench were women – Justice Mary Gaudron and Commissioner Judith Cohen. The case was prepared by ACTU research officer Jan Marsh (a colleague of Giles' from the ACTU women's committee), the first woman to handle a major case by herself in the Arbitration Commission. Two newspaper reports illustrate the historic significance of the decision. *Women in jobs win baby battle* screamed *The West Australian* on Saturday 10 March 1979. *The Australian* of 10-11 March 1979 was more restrained, explaining:

Women in the Public Service and industrial unions already have maternity leave rights by agreement, but the new order will be written in to all federal awards, preserving for all time the right of women to have a baby, take maternity leave and find her job waiting for her at the end of 12 months.

Immediately after the ACTU decision was handed down, Giles was instructed by the WA Trades and Labour Council to prepare a case for employees governed by WA unions. The claim she made was identical to the ACTU claim. Correspondence reveals that Pat Giles prepared meticulously for the case.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, Giles had consulted for several months beforehand with the three expert witnesses she intended to call to support her case: Dr Cora Baldock, an academic from Murdoch University; and two medical practitioners expert in women's health, Dr Harry Cohen and Dr Judith Stratton. The case was heard by Commissioners O'Sullivan, Cort and Collier in the WA Industrial Commission. Years later, Giles reflected:

We were very well prepared but there was a battle there. The Commission, certainly the Chief Commissioner Mr Bernie O'Sullivan, didn't want to listen to the case. He didn't like any of it at all. We were using international conventions as a basis for our case as well as social justice

and he was very hostile in many respects. The Chief Commissioner gave us a very grudging decision. That decision, nevertheless, was favourable, and on 21 January 1980, women covered by WA awards became entitled to up to 52 weeks unpaid leave including a period of 6 weeks compulsory leave immediately following confinement, transfer to a safe job, if this is necessary, and above all security of employment during that period (Giles, 1988).

A personal letter dated 24 January 1980 from Robyn Murphy, a member of WEL WA who had recently moved to live in Darwin, is appreciative of Giles' persistence and of her meticulous work:

Congratulations on the Commission accepting, however grudgingly, the concept of maternity leave... You must be relieved it's all over and I hope you all went out and had a well deserved lunch and drink to celebrate. Suppose a stream of Letters to the Editor will begin, hope WEL women are ready to show lots of support. I have a strong feeling, Pat, without you, WA would not have Maternity Leave nor probably even be trying to get it, so it must be a personal victory for you.<sup>13</sup>

A third skill that this paper foregrounds is Pat Giles' capacity to build on policy changes in one arena and apply them to others. An undated, typed note located in her personal archives and presumably written by Giles herself in preparation for media release, is self-explanatory in its strategic linking of WA Education Department policy with the ACTU Working Women's Charter, and in turn with the WA State School Teachers Union:

The TLC of WA views with great satisfaction the statement made last week by Dr Mossensen, Director General of Education in WA on the elimination of all forms of sex discrimination from schools and from departmental employment policy. The ACTU Working Women's Charter of 1977 called, as a matter of urgency, for the eradication of sex bias from all aspects of the education system... Teacher training and its crucial role in determining teacher attitudes should be included in the overall approach to the question of equality in the education systems of the WA State School Teachers Union, and the TLC of WA backs up the women's movement in finally convincing the Education Department that such action is vitally necessary and long overdue.<sup>14</sup>

Making such connections across sectors is considered by some of Giles' colleagues to have been her greatest strength (Watson, 2006).<sup>15</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Pat Giles has been acknowledged by colleagues and commentators to have played a significant role in shifting the culture of the trade union movement in WA and Australia during the 1970s. In this paper we have argued that her legacies lie as much in the ways she worked as in what she can be seen to have achieved. We have attempted to get beneath the surface story of the activities and achievements in her public life in the union movement, to uncover some of the strategies and skills she brought to her political activism. She emerges as an immensely practical, hard working, insightful campaigner and lobbyist of considerable energy, who was temperamentally suited to the systematic routines of committee work and who applied good sense and thorough research to whatever argument she put. She brought grace, an understated style and political cunning to her interactions with intransigent men. She appeared to be unafraid of opposition, and countered misogynist arguments with wit and with rational appeals to the principles of social justice. She understood the value of being well connected and made judicious use of her networks with men and

women. Unlike many feminists working for social change, she enjoyed working within the very institutions whose values she was attempting to change, and refused to feel compromised by doing so.

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WEL Broadsheets 1972 – 2006. Battye Library, Perth, Western Australia

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<sup>1</sup> This term was coined by British historian Sheila Rowbotham (Rowbotham, 1975), and used in relation to Australian women in Sawyer & Simms, 1993, p. 233.

<sup>2</sup> Owen Salmon was a significant figure in the trade union movement for two decades and became an Industrial Commissioner in Western Australia in the late 1980s.

<sup>3</sup> Jim McGinty is currently Attorney General and Minister for Health in the Western Australian parliament.

<sup>4</sup> Helen Creed has had a distinguished career in the trade union movement and is currently Director of the Women's Policy Office in the WA Department for Community Development.

<sup>5</sup> WEL Broadsheet of September 1974 invites members to a celebration luncheon on Monday 16 September 1974, honouring Pat Giles, Dot Goodrick and Wendy Fatin: "We want to say how proud we are of them and their achievements."

<sup>6</sup> This committee met first on 11 June 1979 and met approximately every two months thereafter. It drew up Guidelines for Employers re EEO for women, with information on establishing an EEO program, examples of EEO tasks, information on interviewing applicants, and monitoring and evaluation of the EEO plan. See NLCC Committee on Women's Employment minutes, Pat Giles Archives, Battye Library, Perth, Western Australia.

<sup>7</sup> Debate about the efficacy of creating lasting cultural change via institutionalised policy change continues to rage in feminist circles. (See, for example, Franzway, 2000; Henderson, 2002; Kaplan, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, minutes of the ACTU Women's Committee 1978-1980; minutes of the NLCC Committee on Women's Employment 1979-1980. Pat Giles Archives, Battye Library, Perth, Western Australia.

<sup>9</sup> Such thinking was directly in line with the findings of the Royal Commission into Human Relationships which, in Volume 5, makes 22 recommendations concerning women and work, including that the Federal government should foster employment opportunities for women; and that the government should encourage the States to ratify the ILO Convention 103 concerning maternity leave protection, flexible working hours, child care, and re-training being open to all. In Pat Giles Archives, Battye Library, Perth, Western Australia.

<sup>10</sup> The National Training Council had been established in December 1976, to investigate the development of industrial training in all fields and levels of employment, including small business; to investigate the need for research in investigation and inquiry in occupational training, and to assess the information and publicity needs to stimulate interest in industrial training.

<sup>11</sup> Pat Giles Archives, Battye Library, Perth, Western Australia.

<sup>12</sup> For example, in assembling Exhibits demonstrating relevant ILO and UN standards for women workers, Giles located and presented every possible relevant document, including lists of countries to have ratified crucial ILO Convention 111.

<sup>13</sup> Letter to Pat Giles from Robyn Murphy, Pat Giles Archives, Battye Library, Perth, Western Australia.

<sup>14</sup> Undated note, Pat Giles Archives, Battye Library, Perth, Western Australia.