

WOMEN, MANAGEMENT AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CONFERENCE
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‘Clare Burton: Tackling Discrimination, Pursuing EEO’

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It was at the Women Management and Industrial Relations Conference in 1998 that Clare gave the last of her many conference papers, ‘Merit, gender and corporate governance’. She died a little over a month later. The paper has now been published in *Making the Link 10* as well as in the Macmillan collection *Women, Public Policy and the State*, edited by Linda Hancock and dedicated to Clare in memory of her ‘passionate commitment to social equity’. As usual, Clare was grappling with issues of fundamental importance to equal opportunity strategy, in this case the forms of accountability that should accompany transfer of functions from public to private sectors.

What I have been doing as my part of the celebration of Clare's work is to produce a bibliography of her published and unpublished. While many know some parts of Clare's work, few know its full scope or at how many different levels she was contributing to social change. One can get some idea of this from the tributes on the Equal Pay Watch website (www.users.bigpond.com/rj_gj/clare/tributes.htm), where many women expressed their gratitude for Clare's contribution to their projects and organisations as well as to their lives. Those who saw Clare wearing her splint knew that her occupational over-use injury came from occupational over-use in the service of employment equity and social justice.

Clare couldn't help herself when she saw injustice, whether in Biafra or in Australian universities or in the workplace more generally she felt she had to do something about it. And what she had the skills and training to do *par excellence* was to provide the painstaking analysis on which equal opportunity plans and pay equity strategies could be firmly grounded.

Clare's exhaustive searches of the international literature helped underpin and give additional authority to her analysis of how discrimination was built into the design and practices of institutions. But it was her closely observed ethnographic studies of what she called the ‘mobilisation of masculine bias’ that helped bring home the realities of women's work experiences. Much of this work was collected in *The Promise and the Price: The Struggle for Equal Opportunity in Women's Employment*, which brought together essays she had written between 1983 and 1989. The title says something about Clare's life, as well as about the struggle for equal opportunity.

Clare brought to all her work a very clear awareness of the different cognitive worlds inhabited by men and women - whether in the universities, the public service or the defence force. She provided the shock of recognition to those only dimly conscious of this split reality and, most importantly, she also helped persuade those in authority to act on it. For her skill in combining theoretical frameworks with close-grained qualitative work, including participant observation of her colleagues at Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education, as well as for the strategic relevance of her work, Clare was awarded the Women and Politics Prize in 1984. I had helped the Australasian Political Studies Association establish this prize in 1981, to give a higher profile to work that illuminated issues of gender and politics. I am happy to say that this year we awarded the prize, now co-sponsored by the Institute of Public Administration Australia, to Natasha Cortis for work on a subject very close to Clare's heart in the last year of her life - the NSW Pay Equity Inquiry and, in particular, the challenges involved in placing a value on emotional labour. Like Clare's earlier prize-winning essay this will be published in the *Australian Journal of Political*

Science (formerly Politics).

Clare's research continued to be distinguished by this strategic quality: her work on job evaluation became a standard reference point for equal opportunity practitioners and her monograph 'Redefining Merit' became the practitioner's Bible. Despite the practical influence of her work, Clare received less academic recognition than she merited. In part, perhaps, this was because she was taken from us too soon - the honorary degrees and so on would have followed. I believe, however, that there is another reason.

Clare's work was not conducted with an eye to academic promotion - where publication in international refereed journals or success in competitive grant rounds have become over-riding considerations. Rather Clare's work was conducted with an eye to righting wrongs and there was a seamless web between theory and practice in her life. This was what led her to become an equal opportunity practitioner and to occupy positions such as Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment in NSW. She also became Commissioner for Public Sector Equity in the Goss Government in Queensland in 1992. Although Clare was gratified by these forms of public recognition, and was immensely pleased to be appointed Chair of the Harassment and Discrimination Board of Airservices Australia not long before her death, such positions were always to her a means of working towards greater fairness and equity. When she lost faith that such positions would enable her to work effectively for her goals, as was the case in Queensland, she moved on, despite the financial and other uncertainties involved.

It was not just this unwillingness to compromise that made her unusual in the increasingly corporatised world of higher education. She also had an old-fashioned belief in the need to join academic theory with advocacy and action in the world. Although, with her searching mind, she was interested in the recent theoretical developments to which she was introduced by her daughter Kate and drew on discourse theory in her own work, she never believed that critical theory was in itself sufficient to change the world in the directions she desired. For her, the unity of theory and practice was not restricted to what Marx called being a critical critic. Instead Clare was always looking for strategies for change which would work in rapidly shifting terrain. If discursive strategies were required that emphasised the "bottom line" then Clare could provide the arguments for EEO in terms of business benefits. If functions were being transferred from the public to the private sector, then new regimes of accountability for the private sector would have to be devised, whether through requirements for share-holder reports or reports to the Australian Securities Commission or through a random audit power for the Affirmative Action Agency.

Not only was Clare always concerned with action-oriented research, with the need to get the analysis right so that it could feed into good policy, she also had an enduring belief in the value of collective action whether through her union work in the 1980s or through her role in the creation of what is now the National Pay Equity Coalition or through her work in Women's Electoral Lobby in the 1990s. Clare was firmly convinced of what could be achieved by small groups of committed women. She took on the roles of Convenor of WEL's APS Reforms Policy Group and Co-Convenor of the Policy Group on Affirmative Action, despite ill health. She co-authored major WEL submissions relating to the Public Service Bill of 1997 and the 1998 Review of the Affirmative Action Act, as well as presenting convincing evidence to an earlier Senate inquiry into performance-based pay. The later submissions can be accessed on the Women's Electoral Lobby website at www.wel.org/issues, as can the complete text of Clare's report on Gender Equity in Australian University Staffing.

In January 1998, despite her extraordinary workload in finalising her Gender Integration Audit of the New Zealand Defence Force, Clare represented the Network of Women in Further Education at the Women's Constitutional Convention. This was a new area for her to explore, the significance of the Constitutional framework for equity purposes, and she wrote a fine report

back to the Women in Further Education Network. She spoke of how much she had learned and of her lasting impressions of a community of women working beautifully together, despite different priorities and expectations; of the vitality and commitment of the young women; and the generosity of spirit combined with steadfastness of the many Indigenous participants. Later, in response to one of my postings on Ausfem-Polnet about the problems of getting an equality commitment into the new Constitutional Preamble, she characteristically wrote "I will act on it".

As part of her embrace of change Clare was an ardent supporter of Ausfem-Polnet, the electronic discussion list created by Elizabeth Shannon to link feminist policy experts and feminist policy practitioners in government, the university and the community. This electronic networking was a new way of supporting Clare's goals of uniting theory and practice and ensuring that both collective action and public policy work was informed by good research (see www.utas.edu.au/docs/humsoc/cpmp/ES6.html). Clare provided warm personal support for Elizabeth when Elizabeth encountered difficulties, recognising the courage required by this kind of pathbreaking venture. Clare provided the same kind of warm support for all she saw struggling to create or sustain collective action for change, often like her at the expense of what could have been a more comfortable career.

To conclude, Clare's published work, including her monumental reports on Women in the Australian Defence Force and Gender Equity in Australia University Staffing, reflects her clear-sighted recognition of the obstacles to change, but also her practical commitment to achieving a better world. She was part of a great tradition of committed scholarship that combines scholarly exactitude with the upholding of social values and the readiness to translate them into action. Thank you Clare.

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