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the velvet underground

Labour's quiet revolutionaries

It used to be said the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. Now, people whose hands have never been near a cradle are deciding what's best for children, and the country. IAN WISHART goes behind the Tamihere headlines to trace the roots of what he called 'The Machine'

Veni, vidi, vici. I came, I saw, I conquered. When Julius Caesar uttered those immortal words 2052 years ago, he was speaking militarily. Today, as hundreds of women from around the country gather for a national conference early next month to mark the 30th anniversary of the 1975 United Women's Convention in Wellington, Caesar's words could aptly be re-applied to an entirely different battle, a battle for hearts and minds rather than land.

At no time in the past three decades has that battle been cast in sharper relief than it is now, after Labour MP John Tamihere's decision to throw open public debate about the capture of policy and governmental power by Labour's lesbian/feminist wing.

Back in the mid 1970s, only four women were in parliament. Today, there are 34 – if you count Georgina Beyer – and as Tamihere pointed out women now have their hands firmly on the levers of political, judicial, constitutional and economic power.

But there's a twist to this Cinderella story, a quirk of irony that few have fully appreciated. Back in the 1970s, one of the primary complaints of the women's movement was the existence of a male old boys' network that didn't choose the best *person* for the job, only the best *man* for the job. Three decades later, men's groups are now making similar complaints, in reverse.

Has New Zealand lurched from one unfair power to extreme to the other? And if so, did it happen by accident?

The woman organising next month's women's conference – former Labour cabinet minister Margaret Shields – clearly doesn't think so:

"In the early 1970s a small group of women within the NZ Labour Party decided that enough was enough," Shields posted in an internet forum called "The Women-Power Network" back in 1999.

"We began the reorganization of the Women's Section of the Party so that it could become an agent of change; through organising and encouraging and training women to take a larger, more strategic role in politics.

"It is not an accident that now the Prime Minister of New Zealand and the Leader of the Opposition are both women."



John Tamihere, too, doesn't see the power shift as a coincidence.

"You see, these people think in timeframes of ten to 15 years, it's only bastards like me that struggle through the current term. So when you're positioning for high places, they're thinking that far ahead," Tamihere argues.

"They don't have families. They've got nothing *but* the ability to plot. I've gotta take my kid to soccer on Saturday, they don't. So they just go and have a *parlez vous français* somewhere and a latte, whereas we don't get to plot, we're just trying to get our kids to synchronise their left and right feet. They don't even think about that.

"I've got a fifteen year old whose testosterone's jumping and he's scrapping around at school. Now they don't have that, and because they don't have that they're just totally focused. You've also got a fully paid organization called the union movement, who can co-opt fully paid coordinators. These people just never sleep."

If Tamihere and Shields are correct, then the sweeping social policy changes manifested by Labour have their roots deep in the distant past, in "sleeper cells" of "change agents" drafted into the Party with one goal in mind.

Back in 1973, the feminist movement organized its first-ever United Women's Convention, to mark the 80th anniversary of women getting the vote in 1893. As well as today's household names – Helen Clark, Margaret Wilson, Marilyn Waring, Silvia Cartwright – nearly two thousand other women, from varying walks of life, turned up. And among those watching with more than a little interest, feminist and communist, Kay Goodger.

Goodger, who's now a senior Government adviser (and who still mixes with Marxist organisations in Europe), authored in 1973 and 1974 a series of documents for New Zealand's Socialist Action League which set out a long term plan for changing the face of New Zealand society.

"Many women, as they become interested in women's liberation,

realise that a new kind of society must be built if we are to achieve freedom from our oppression as a sex...whether this will involve a socialist transformation of society is at present a subject under discussion among feminists," she wrote.

"The new feminist movement is characterized by its deep-going challenges to every aspect of women's oppression...The once-sacred 'family' is being questioned and the philosophy that 'biology is destiny' emphatically denied."

As signaled by Goodger, an aspect of New Zealand society to come under sustained attack from the radical feminist wing over the next three decades was the traditional family. If the family could be crushed, broken down, sidelined as irrelevant or portrayed as no better than other methods of child-rearing, radical feminism could set the agenda for centuries to come.

"Where else in the world do Amazons rule?," lamented John Tamihere at his now-infamous lunch.

Goodger's plan in 1973 was for a utopian future 'Amazonia' reflecting what she believed had been a reality in the past.

"The oppression of women began with the origin of the patriarchal family, private property and the state. Anthropological evidence [not cited] has shown that in the primitive communal society, women held a respected and important position. The basic economic unit was the maternal gens or clan, in which the family as we know it did not exist. In this clan, goods were shared among members equally.

"Women...were not tied to individual men economically, nor was there any compulsion to remain with one sexual partner."

But then, claimed Goodger, the bad old days arrived when men mysteriously wrested power from the matriarchs and "introduced" the so-called "family" where "monogamy...was strictly enforced" and families had their own houses and own possessions. Thus, the world abandoned Amazonian communism, she wrote.

"Today, the nuclear family unit remains as the basic economic cell of class society...The family also serves to perpetuate capitalist rule by

inculcating in children the values of the private property system.

"Obedience to authority is first learned in the family.

"Acceptance of the hierarchical, exploitative and alienating social relations within capitalism depends considerably upon the tremendous influence of the individualistic, patriarchal family.

"With its thrust against the family institution, the women's liberation movement is profoundly revolutionary," wrote the woman now ensconced in Labour's Ministry of Social Policy.

Goodger then called on radical feminists to do all they can within political parties, government departments and communities to target and eliminate institutions like the traditional family.

In her 1973, Goodger correctly identified that New Zealand's establishment would not just throw their hands up and say "fair cop, guv", when faced with the demands of radical feminism. So instead, she argued for a series of smaller steps, none of them big enough to wake up the slumbering majority against them, but each step big enough to achieve irreversible change, particularly in the attitudes of the wider public.

Did the Socialist Action League plant the seeds now growing in Labour's social policy advice units? If Prime Minister Clark's recent call for a massive increase in government childcare facilities and more women in the workforce is any indication, the answer must be yes.

Back in 1973 Goodger wrote that the family would suffer a body blow if women could be freed from having children. Rather, as in Soviet Russia, the state should play a bigger role:

"The concept that society as a whole should take the responsibility of caring for children is embodied in the demand for government-financed, 24-hour, community-controlled childcare centres. This demand opens up the possibilities of replacing the family institution."

Goodger also reinforced that whoever rocks the cradle and educates the children defines what and how future generations think:

"The fight for equal opportunity is also taken up in the education system, around demands such as for an end to discrimination against women in the schools and universities, for opportunities to enter all fields of education, for women's studies programmes to teach the truth about women throughout history, and for birth control information and contraceptives to be freely available for all students.

"Because of the key role played by students and young women in the feminist movement

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as a whole, action on campuses and in the high schools can play an important part in helping to spark struggles by other women.

"Action to win control of university and high school facilities to benefit women, such as use of classrooms and the library for women's studies, provides an example for the general fight to win control of the resources of society away from the ruling class and its apologists.

"In addition, the campuses can serve as vital organising centres for the feminist movement."

As with much Marxist rhetoric, however, it ignored inconvenient realities. The demand for more female teachers, for example, glossed over the fact that – even back then – more than three-quarters of all teachers were women in 1972. Thirty-three years later, men are almost extinct as teachers.

Selling the message in a sugar-coated way to women was also seen as important by Goodger back then, with her comment that women pushing for the "right" to exterminate unwanted fetuses should join forces with women seeking taxpayer-funded childcare, as a means of uniting women who may have different views under a common socialist banner.

"The real meaning of sisterhood becomes clear at such times," she wrote.

Despite that, Goodger argued that merely capturing people's hearts and minds didn't go far enough, that "the sisterhood" had to take control of the Government from within.

"The deep roots the [Labour] party has in the working class, through the unions, makes it objectively an ally of the women's liberation movement. Feminists working within the Labour Party can do much to further the cause of women's liberation."

Again, John Tamihere's account of what has happened to Labour eerily reflects that 1973 plan of action.

"Oh yeah, there's definitely a 'machine' all right. It's formidable. It's got apparatus and activists in everything from the PPTA all the way through. It's actually even built a counterweight to the Roundtable – Businesses for Social Responsibility. Its intelligence-gathering capabilities are second to none."

Having those activists in place, with the

power to write laws and decide what children will be taught in schools, is a dream come true for what Opposition MPs are calling "the lesbian/feminist cabal" running the Labour Government.

Goodger, again surprisingly prescient back in the seventies, realised that more liberal sex laws would help bring down the hated family unit.

"[The family] moulds the behaviour and character structure of children from infancy and throughout adolescence, disciplining them and teaching submission to established authority. The family represses sexuality, discouraging all sexual activity which is not within marriage.

"Our goal must be to create economic and social institutions that are superior to the present family institution."

As part of the list of "demands" that the Sisterhood would work towards over the next thirty years, wrote Goodger, were:

■ Abortion to be free and on demand

■ Sex education and birth control 'integrated into the education system at all levels' and readily accessible through 'government-financed clinics. The government should initiate a public education campaign to overcome ignorance, fears and illusions...'

■ An end to coercive family laws

■ De facto marriage should be considered to have the same status, legally and socially, as marriage by legal contract

■ 'The rearing, social welfare and education of children should become the responsibility of society, rather than individual parents... All laws enforcing individual ownership of children should be abolished.'

■ 'All discrimination against homosexual men and women should be outlawed... laws should be repealed'

■ 'All laws victimizing prostitutes should be abolished'

■ 'Paid maternity leave of 12 weeks with no loss of job or seniority should be available'

■ 'The government should provide the finance for free child-care centres, open to all children from early infancy for 24 hours a day'

Thirty years later, abortion is now free and on demand. Sex education is now introduced



at pre-school level as part of the government early childhood curriculum. Laws introduced by Labour in 2002 have given de facto relationships the same legal status as marriage, and extended to gay couples by the Civil Unions Act this month. The Care of Children legislation introduced by Labour this term strips families of the 'ownership' of their offspring in favour of the wider community. Biological parents become merely "guardians".

Prostitution has been legalised and the number of children engaged in prostitution has increased dramatically – presumably a result of families no longer being "sexually repressed". Paid maternity leave is in, and Helen Clark has indicated that Labour will move full steam ahead on the childcare issue if re-elected. In short, an agenda written by an offshoot of the Communist Party in 1973 has been met in full by the women it infiltrated the Labour Party and public service with all those years ago.

As noted earlier, Kay Goodger is now a senior adviser on government policy initiatives, and is mentioned in dispatches on the website of the Portuguese Communist Party as recently as three years ago.

Which brings us back to the latest incarnation of feminism, next month's Wellington conference.

Margaret Shields is a former Minister of Customs in the 1984 Labour Government of David Lange. Shields' biggest claim to fame

back then was perhaps her insistence that she could see a phallic symbol in a glass of liquor on the rocks used in a magazine advertisement, in much the same way as kids see the shapes of animals in the clouds.

It has fallen to Shields to organize this year's conference, and although now well clear of national politics, the Wellington Regional Councillor proudly retains her membership of "the Sisterhood", based on her advice to a woman overseas recently.

"We need to find ways of "making it for a purpose", and supporting women who have made it into the executive wing. If women do not support other women we can hardly expect men to do so! Moreover, support is a two way street. The fervour with which women scrutinise and criticise women who are in positions of influence is, at times, terrifying. It says a great deal about the pent-up desires of women for a better world but fails to acknowledge the real difficulties for one woman, or a small minority of women in a sea of men.

"We need to make sure that we have mechanisms and networks to support those lonely women who are in positions of authority. They need to be kept in touch with the organisations from which they have come. Especially, if they are in the political arena, they will find their life very difficult unless they have trustworthy support networks to provide the encouragement and reinforcement to stick with some of the issues that fired them up in the first place."

In comments analogous to Tamihere's rage against the 'Machine',

Shields confirms the web that exists within Labour:

“The systems that work best to keep women leaders going are, in fact, informal networks of old friends who can be trusted to tell the truth out of kindness rather than malice and who are there when life is really tough. It is important to remember that no minority group can win without compromise and trade. Women in power are seldom a majority.

“Don’t expect the world to change overnight because one woman became a manager or a member of parliament. However, if you work with her she may be able to make a real difference over time especially if she knows which are the critical issues and has a group around her to help support a shared long term strategy.

“Yes, we can make a difference but sometimes we need patience and sometimes we need to find more subtle ways of achieving our goals.”

Those “subtle ways”, advises Shields, include disguising the real reason for taking a particular position on an issue:

“To give but one small example, I never talk about equality in decision-making as a human rights issue – although it undoubtedly is. Instead, when working in developing countries, in particular, I always approach the question of inclusion of more women in decision-making as an issue of commonsense – to avoid the problems of things not working properly because all experience has not been brought to the table. Most men (and women) accept that logic whereas they will rail against the idea of ‘human rights’.”

Writing in 1979, feminist author Christine Dann also talked of this method of persuasion, taken to a new level, and fine-tuned by the thought-police of communist China:

“Which brings me to a second major radical feminist organising method – consciousness-raising. As pioneered by radical feminists Kathie Sarachild and others, consciousness-raising is used by women as an extremely effective way of making the vital connections between their personal lives and political oppression. The technique has been used before principally by the Chinese in the ‘speak bitterness’ campaigns they conducted among the peasantry.

“In consciousness-raising a group of people who are dissatisfied with their lives as women (or workers, or blacks) meet to find out what is wrong, work out why it is wrong, and consider ways in which wrongs can be righted. Once a group establishes trust, so that everything can be discussed freely, consciousness usually rises fast. Participants come to realise that problems which the dominant ideology characterises as personal (lack of beauty, money, security, employment etc) are not a

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result of personal inadequacy at all, but are due to deliberate political manipulation.

“As each woman tells a similar story of abortion and contraception problems, as each worker repeats familiar tales of boss trouble, personal histories take on political significance. A good consciousness-raising group does not stop at the level of heightened awareness, but goes on to study and discuss the reasons for and the mechanisms of oppression, and to take part in actions and groups which aim to end it.”

Dann describes the technique as “vital” if socialism wants to control New Zealand society and thought.

Interestingly, Dann pings another woman who may be familiar to *Investigate* readers – lesbian feminist and ‘family’ psychologist Sarah Calvert, a very close friend of Speaker Margaret Wilson and the woman at the centre of a major investigation by this magazine back in December (now on our website).

It was Calvert, says Dann, who was the brains behind the last United Women’s Convention back in ’79.

“The feminist ground work of the 1979 United Women’s Convention was actually laid by a woman who is well-known as a leader inside the women’s movement and virtually unknown outside it – Sarah Calvert. Calvert was one of the few who was opposed to [Marilyn] Waring being on the 1979 UWC Committee, on the grounds that political party interests are not compatible with wider feminist interests. It is interesting to note that as the UWC came closer Calvert’s influence declined and Waring’s increased, with Waring being used as the chief UWC spokeswoman. (Thus enhancing her political mana with women the same illegitimate use of her status on the UWC Committee which Calvert and others sought to prevent.)”

It is unclear whether Christine Dann will be at this year’s Women’s Convention, but Marilyn Waring – now a social policy lecturer

at Massey University in Auckland – certainly will be: she’s one of the guest speakers.

So what will this latest convention achieve? On the face of it, perhaps nothing major. After all, society has moved a long way from the genuine unfairness and grievances that women endured in the sixties. But as Tamihere articulated so elegantly, it is not what is done in public that is dangerous, so much as what the “smarmy...queer...tossers” get up to in the back rooms as they engineer policy. Old-school feminists have long complained that today’s women don’t appreciate the politics of feminism or its goals. Given that old-school feminists like Margaret Shields are the organizers of this conference, it is not unfair to speculate that they see it as an opportunity to rekindle the flame, ready for the next battles – perhaps those already alluded to by Helen Clark. So the power of this event will not be measured by the keynote speeches, so much as by the networking and politicking that goes on behind the scenes.

While feminism has achieved some very worthwhile goals for New Zealand society as a whole, simply swapping a political patriarchy for a matriarchy doesn’t achieve balance.

On the other hand, to see what has happened to New Zealand society and politics in the past three decades as merely a ‘Marxist revolution without the blood’ is to miss a lot of the subtleties entirely. As Dann wrote before it happened, “If we learn anything from revolutionaries such as Mao it should be to break the rules of revolution as successfully as he did. To show as little respect for Mao and his ideas as Mao did for the Comintern and the theories of the Russian experts on revolution. To place more confidence on the insights and experience of the radical women of New Zealand today than in the words of 19th Century European men.”

In other words, an iron fist inside a velvet glove revolution. A very female coup.

