

SEXUAL POLITICS

Recent reports involving former Senator Cheryl Kernot have raised questions as to whether the media apply different standard to their reports on male and female politicians. In this article, *Weekend Australian* columnist KAZ COOKE looks at the reporting of Ms Kernot's move to the Labor Party.

Is there any particular reason that so many cartoonists and journalists get so utterly FREAKED by the idea of (titter) a woman (phwoaaarrrrrr) switching political parties (way-heyyyyyy) that every original idea flies out of their heads (like that scene in *Alien* when Ripley opens the side bay and the alien gets sucked out into space) and they have to draw pictures of Cheryl Kernot as Juliet, a boosie-baring Boadicea (I'll think you'll find most women leaders of history are uncontrollable exhibitionists) or a flushed, floppy sated, naked chick under the sheets who's just been thoroughly rogered by Kim Beazley AND Gareth Evans (as if) or she's described as "seduced" "wedded" "married" "wooded" and, one imagines but for the sharp eyes of a roving sub-editor, "thoroughly rogered", and "... shivering as his political manhood hardened, she ran a perfectly manicured finger dipped in chocolate crackles down the front of his briefing papers"? (That was rather a long sentence. Unfortunately the subs are too busy putting their pencil through Kernot stories with the word "love pump" in them.)

I know it's a challenge to get up a political cartoon at short notice, but some people managed to find an image that doesn't look like a slightly sanitised catalogue for mysterious bakelite material aids with hand-whiffing attachments. And hello, how come the girrrl politician is always the passive, dopey one in these scenarios? The commentators are so fixated on the idea that the former Democrats leader was a passive wall-flower who moped around until she got "seduced" they've missed the obvious "Wanton Kernot has her way with ALP: short foreplay" or "Shameless hussy puts the moves on" possibilities. Not to mention: "Kernot grabs a shortcut to Prime Minister. Crean to get stuffed".

I mean, when Mal Colston ran away from home clutching nothing but an old oxygen mask which had dropped from the ceiling in the event of an emergency, did we get cartoons of Kim Beazley sobbing with a broken heart? Or calling 11-505-RAUNCHY to fill his aching need? Was Robert Ray depicted as the crazed stalker, driven mad by a love which turned to a twisted obsession? Were we subjected to cartoons of John Howard offering Mal bunches of gerberas and a quickie on the front bench? Did we get headlines about nuptials and rooting and carry on up the sheltershed

shenanigans? Were there hilarious little drawings of Peter Reith with his hands down Mr Colston's Y-fronts? Was Mr Colston depicted as a famous nude army deserter of history? When the Prime Minister was promising Methuselah Harradine a chicken in every Tasmanian pot and an end to contraception for anybody over the age of nought, or whatever the deal was, to get him to vote for flogging off Telstra, did editorialists have Howard wearing leather chaps in a gay bar chatting up the snowy-haired Senator in a sleeveless T-shirt and hiking boots? And when the deal was done, were they any images of the two of them in the cot after a vigorous shagging, sharing a cigar and port?

Not bloody likely. That'd be offensive.

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Cheryl Kernot

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