

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN FACT FILE

CARMEN LAWRENCE

(1948 -)

Academic and Politician

- 1948 Born Carmen Mary Lawrence on 2 March, 1948, at Morawa, WA
- 1964 Matriculated from Dominican Ladies College, WA
- 1968 Graduated from University of Western Australia with a Bachelor of Psychology with First Class Honours
- 1971 Tutor, Department of Psychology, University of Melbourne
- 1973 Tutor/Lecturer Curtin Institute of Technology, Perth
- 1979 Lecturer, Faculty of Medicine, UWA
- 1983 Graduated with PhD from UWA
- 1983 Resident Psychologist, WA Department of Health
- 1986 Elected MLA for Subiaco WA (State ALP)
- 1988 Promoted to the State Government Ministry of Education
- 1989 Re-elected MLA Glendalough (following a state-wide electoral redistribution)
- 1990 Became Premier of WA and Australia's first woman Premier
- 1993 After Labor electoral defeat became WA's first woman Opposition Leader
- 1994 Elected to Federal Parliament in a by-election in the seat of Fremantle.
Minister for Human Services and Health, and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on the Status of Women
- 1996 Federal Shadow Minister for the Environment, and the Arts, and Assistant to the Leader of the Opposition on the Status of Women
- 2000 Federal Shadow Minister for Industry, Innovation and Technology
- 2001 Federal Shadow Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, and the Arts, and the Status of Women
- 2002 Resigned from Shadow Front Bench because of a philosophical disagreement with Labor Policy: Labor, in her eyes, having lost direction
- 2003 Speaker at the Canberra Inaugural Jessie Street Women's National Library Lunch Hour Talk

Carmen Lawrence grew up in a strongly Catholic family in the small northern wheat belt town of Morawa, 365 km north of Perth. She was one of seven children. At the age of six she was sent to boarding school. In an interview for the Good Weekend in 1995 she is quoted as saying ... *you learn at an early age to stand on your own two feet and to be a bit reserved...* By her own admission she is ...*the quiet one of the family, not nearly as outgoing as my sisters...* As a young woman, she rejected Catholicism.

She matriculated with Distinctions in six subjects, and two awards: a General Exhibition for Academic Achievement, and Special Subject Exhibition in Economics. At graduation from university she won five prizes, including The Most Outstanding Graduate

Throughout the Faculties of Arts, Economics and Commerce, Law, Architecture and Education. She won two scholarships for her PhD studies in Psychology, the topic of which was *Maternal Responses to Infant Crying*.

She was politically active from an early age. While at the University in WA she lobbied, successfully, to have the Campus Beauty Contest abolished. In Melbourne in the early 1970's she helped form the Victorian Branch of the Women's Electoral Lobby.

When she entered Federal Parliament in 1994, she was seen as a strong contender for leadership. However, her political career suffered a set back in 1997 in what became known as the *Easton Affair*. In that year she was charged with lying while giving evidence to the Marks Royal Commission. Her trial did not take place until 1999. She was therefore obliged to stand down from her Ministerial duties. Although acquitted, she was seen to have blotted her copy book, at least so far as leadership possibilities were concerned. She told Good Weekend in 1995 ...*Premier of WA doesn't amount to much in the eyes of a lot of the lads on the Eastern seaboard*.

Dr Lawrence is said to be very adept at putting her constituents at ease and is enormously popular with the electorate. Of sharp intellectual capacity, she is said to have great facility in cutting to the chase of issues put before her. She is highly articulate and has used her considerable debating skills to champion the cause of women, helping to force the ALP at its National Conference in 1994 to adopt *the 35 percent rule*. This meant that 35 percent of Labor candidates preselected for election should be women. This was seen as a tremendous breakthrough in endeavours to get more women into Parliament.

Sources

Cadzow, Jane *Carmen Lawrence's Year of Living Dangerously* The Age and Sydney Morning Herald, Good Weekend 11 March 1995

*Mitchell, Susan *The Scent of Power* Angus and Robertson. 1996

Mitchell, Susan *Carmen's Fall* The Age, Saturday Extra 25 January 1997

Nicholson, Brendan *The Resurrection of Carmen* The Sunday Age 27 February 2000

*Reynolds, Margaret *The Last Bastion: Labor Women Working Towards Equality in the Parliaments of Australia* Business and Professional Publishing Ltd 1995

Carmen Lawrence Web Page: www.carmenlawrence.com.au

*Titles held by Jessie Street National Women's Library