



‘the lady who would rush into **PARLIAMENT** is one who has missed her chance in the **MARRIAGE** market’

WOMEN ARE COMMONPLACE CANDIDATES IN THIS YEAR’S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS BUT IAN WARDEN REPORTS THAT 100 YEARS AGO VIDA GOLDSTEIN’S CANDIDACY WAS A RADICAL THING

THE OLD MASTERS USUALLY GAVE EVE just one barely modesty-preserving fig leaf. In March 1910, Melbourne’s *Punch* magazine in a cartoon put Vida Goldstein in an utterly modesty-preserving dress of dozens of them.

The cartoon was captioned ‘The modern Eve and the new apple—will she pluck it?’ It showed Senate candidate Vida Goldstein, like the biblical Eve, yielding to the temptation to reach out to a forbidden fruit on a tree. The cartoon’s forbidden apple is spectacularly plump and tempting and is labelled ‘Seat in Parliament’.

Goldstein was that great 1910 novelty, a female candidate in the federal election. Election day was 13 April, Goldstein’s 41st birthday. She was standing for a Victorian seat in the Senate, just as she had in 1903 when, as the first woman in the Empire to stand for election to a national parliament, she had won 51 497 votes but had come 15th out of 18 candidates.

She did not succeed in 1910 either and only slightly improved on her 1903 vote. The election saw Andrew Fisher’s Labor Party come to power, defeating Alfred Deakin’s ‘Fusion’ coalition. A sympathiser wrote to the defeated Goldstein, commiserating, ‘You are a little ahead of your time and you have to pay the penalty’. But we see now that Goldstein was greatly, tragically ahead of her time and that her optimism about change being inevitable and just around the corner was misplaced. No woman was to be elected to Federal Parliament until 1943, just six years before Goldstein’s death.

In 1910, at the peak of her industrious optimism, she could never have dreamed that as late as 1997 there’d be any need for the famous *Don’t Get Mad—Get Elected* poster, with its frustrated King Kong-sized feminist warrior goddess, enraged by the continuing under-representation of women in federal politics in Canberra.

The misplaced optimism that Vida Goldstein showed in 1910 makes for poignant reading when one follows the 1910 campaign in the contemporary press which included, as well as the conservative dailies and weeklies that ridiculed her, her own little monthly suffragist battler *The Woman Voter*.

Modern, liberal readers will find it easy to take sides with the Goldstein of 1910 and against the most hostile and banal of those anxious to keep her and all women out of political life. In 1910, as throughout her life, she was admirably sincere, humane and principled and a crusader for underdogs of all kinds. She was personable, and handsome too, with everyone struck by what one enthusiast called in 1902 ‘Her vivid, keen and sparkling face’.

She once said she had a ‘simple faith in moral force’ and, hopelessly and transparently honest, she seems to have been incapable of imparting any cunning ‘spin’ to her political appeal. She never compromised her position or

ABOVE LEFT  
Phyl Waterhouse (1917–1989)  
*Portrait of Vida Goldstein* 1944  
oil on composition board  
45.5 x 37.6 cm  
Pictures Collection  
nla.pic-an2292721

BELOW  
Unknown artist  
*The Modern Eve and the New Apple* 1910  
from *Punch*, 24 March 1910  
Newspapers and Microforms  
Collection





ABOVE  
Unknown photographer  
for George Rose Publisher,  
Melbourne  
Great Suffragette  
Demonstration in London:  
Mrs Fisher, Mrs McGowen  
and Miss Vida Goldstein from  
Australia (detail) 1911  
photoprint on stereo card  
9.5 x 17.7 cm  
Pictures Collection  
nla.pic-an23371784

BELOW  
Unknown photographer  
Portrait of Vida Goldstein  
c.1900  
gelatin silver photograph  
28.7 x 19.9 cm  
Pictures Collection  
nla.pic-an23371660

improved her electability by joining a political party.

Why didn't she win in 1910? Publications like Melbourne's conservative weekly *Punch* helped to make the social and political ground too stony for feminist change to take seed easily.

The enfranchisement of women for voting in federal elections had *Punch*, ostensibly a witty organ, often shrill about the social

revolution that it feared was coming. Women might, shockingly, be about to forsake their proper, home-centred roles in life. Sensitive modern readers may wince to read the 1910 arguments against Goldstein's election.

Women, it was said, didn't have the minds to cope with political complexities and, anyway, would never be able to stay in a parliament for all-night sittings (because it would be unseemly for a woman to be surrounded by men). An interest in politics 'unsexed' women and gave them ugly and androgynous personalities. Only unhappy women wanted parliamentary careers.

'Miss Goldstein will no doubt get votes from a bespectacled and learned few', a *Punch* female columnist prophesied:

*but the majority of women will vote for male Senators ... As a rule the lady who would rush into Parliament is one who has missed her chance in the marriage market ... It would be the unwedded single ladies, whose youth was past, and the widows who are brave enough to face anything, who would fill the benches. All of them would have their eyes open for a good match.*



It is fascinating to notice that in 1910 Goldstein's sheer attractiveness (of character and intellect, as well as of looks) spiked the guns of so many who would have loved to caricature her

as an 'unsexed' thing. Conservative cartoonists usually did her striking appearance some justice, even when they showed her doing and saying ridiculous and demeaning things. In some of the places in which she campaigned in Victoria (for example, with typical tirelessness, she gave speeches in 16 places between 14 February and 4 March), the local press reported in wonder that she seemed, for a woman with such abnormal ambitions, to be disarmingly womanly.

Throughout 1910 Goldstein was owner, editor and principal writer of the Women's Political Association's monthly paper *The Woman Voter*. Its first edition, August 1909, hit the ground thundering for causes like banning white phosphorous in safety-match factories and the provision of more 'police matrons' at the City Lock-up because of 'objections to men [policemen] having anything to do with struggling women'.

This first edition called itself only a 'leaflet' but, by the edition of May 1910, readers were invited to notice that 'This month *The Woman Voter* is slightly increased in size [although] it still requires a powerful microscope to see the paper at all'.

It was rarely illustrated but, in the April 1910 election edition, it ran a mawkish propaganda cartoon, 'The Political Grace Darling'. Darling had been a real-life English heroine who, in 1838, rowed to the assistance of passengers when SS *Forfarshire* foundered on rocks. In the cartoon, the rowboat is tossed on the tempestuous seas of 'Party Politics' and the oarswoman, 'The Woman Candidate' (Goldstein, her hair flying wildly in the gale), is pulling pluckily towards the good ship 'Commonwealth' aground on the terrible 'Fusion Rocks'.

*The Woman Voter*, which was published from 1909 to 1919 (the National Library of Australia holds most of the editions in the Bessie Rischbieth Papers), cost a penny and was drab to look at. But it was lively and readable and its tone was, like Goldstein's own through the 1910 campaign, determined, unflappable and optimistic. It raged, but it was civil, polite, reasoned rage, so as not to alienate those whose conversion was surely at hand as soon as truth banished their innocent ignorance. And in an election campaign that became notorious in Melbourne for the rowdiness of the meetings of male candidates, Goldstein's rallies were always civilised. There was some shouting at her meeting in the

Prahran Town Hall but only from men at the back shouting ‘Hats off! Hats off!’ because women’s ornate hats prevented the men from seeing the star speaker.

*The Woman Voter* used verse a lot. The May 1910 edition, immediately after Goldstein’s defeat, ran the appropriate ‘How Did You Fight?’:

*You are beaten to earth?  
Well, well, what’s that?  
Come up with a smiling  
face.  
It’s nothing against you to  
fall down flat,  
But to lie there—that’s  
disgrace.  
The harder you’re thrown, why the higher  
you bounce.  
Be proud of your blackened eye!  
It isn’t the fact that you’re licked that  
counts;  
It’s how did you fight, and why?*

Why did Goldstein think it so important that there should be women in parliaments, making attempts herself on the Senate in 1903, 1910 and 1917 and on the House of Representatives in 1913 and 1914? Not because she had ‘missed her chance in the marriage market’, although she never did marry, but because she believed that men were incapable of thinking like women and of initiating the social reforms for which women hungered (for example, federal laws to give women equality in matters of marriage and divorce). Her 1910 ‘Manifesto to the Electors of Victoria’ began with the claim that ‘even the men most sympathetic towards women’s interests cannot represent Home, Children and Women Workers as a woman can’.

*Punch* disagreed:

*Practically all the men in Parliament  
are married men; they have mothers,  
sisters, aunts and cousins at their ears,  
and yet, with all that their wives and  
female relations can din into them, the  
whole of them cannot hope to know what  
one woman knows—that woman being  
Miss Goldstein. These claims to a sort of  
mysterious intuition are all balderdash ...*



Figuratively knocked to the ground on election day 13 April 1910, Goldstein didn’t lie there for long. That would have been a disgrace. She bounced back up and, before sailing for England early in 1911 to crusade with and for her especially oppressed suffragette sisters in Britain, she flung herself into months of activism.

Her effervescent *Woman Voter* bustled ahead; in the July 1910 edition, its owner/editor was able to rejoice that 5000 copies of every edition had been printed and that ‘what’s more, not a half-penny of debt has been incurred’ even though ‘We don’t take any advertisements that may appear harmful, no alcoholic liquors, no tobaccos, no marvellous remedies which will cure you in two doses!’

Goldstein’s life, career and influence on Australian life remain underexamined and the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* laments that ‘Her death [in 1949] passed almost unnoticed’ even though ‘by her pioneering efforts, her successes and her failures, she was a trailblazer who provided leadership and inspiration to innumerable people’.

The 1910 snapshot of Goldstein at large in the Australia of 100 years ago leaves an impression of dynamism and decency that makes one wistful about what extra effect she might have made if only she’d been allowed to pluck the dangling apple of a Senate seat.

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IAN WARDEN is a Canberra-based writer with a background in newspapers

ABOVE LEFT  
Unknown artist  
*Ardent Elector* 1910  
from *Punch*, 10 March 1910  
Newspapers and Microforms  
Collection

ABOVE RIGHT  
Unknown artist  
*The Rejected Suitor* 1910  
from *Punch*, 24 April 1910  
Newspapers and Microforms  
Collection