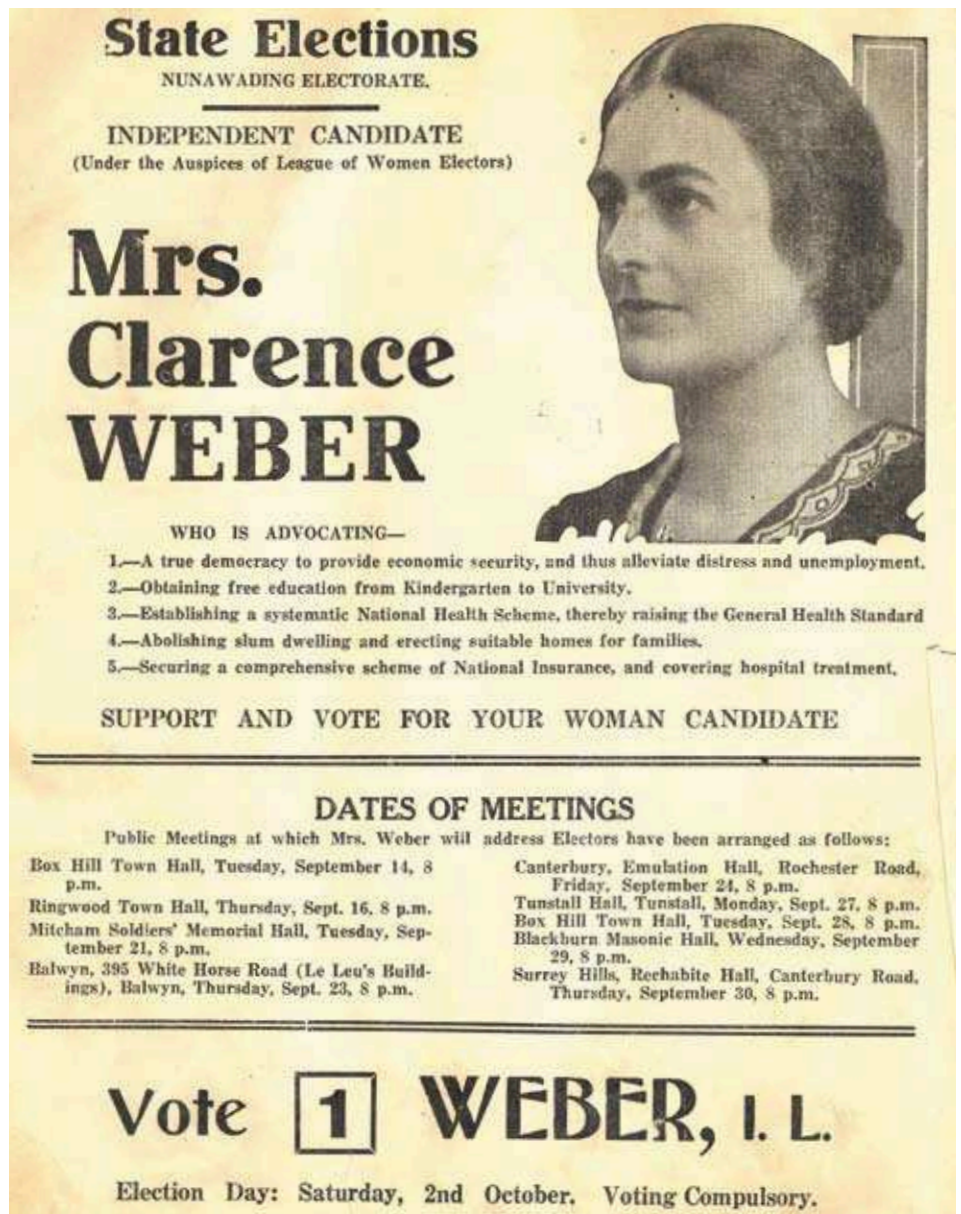


MEMBER BIOGRAPHY: IVY WEBER

WE ALL KNOW HOW demanding modern life can be: the challenges of work, finances and health, political instability, and for many, a family to care for. Well, consider tackling all of this but instead of having just one or two children, you have 11 to contend with!

Over the next few issues of Wellplan, we'll be featuring a series of Australian Unity members from the 1840s to the present day whom we believe were inspirational, socially minded, dedicated and visionary. Women like Ivy Weber (1892–1976), who earlier last century not only gave her all to improve living and working conditions for all Australians especially women and families, but who also managed to successfully raise a tribe of children along the way.

In so many ways, the more things change the more they stay the same, and former members such as Ivy Weber embody the very human-focused values that Australian Unity continues to strive for today.



State Elections
NUNAWADING ELECTORATE.

INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE
(Under the Auspices of League of Women Electors)

Mrs. Clarence WEBER

WHO IS ADVOCATING—

- 1.—A true democracy to provide economic security, and thus alleviate distress and unemployment.
- 2.—Obtaining free education from Kindergarten to University.
- 3.—Establishing a systematic National Health Scheme, thereby raising the General Health Standard
- 4.—Abolishing slum dwelling and erecting suitable homes for families.
- 5.—Securing a comprehensive scheme of National Insurance, and covering hospital treatment.

SUPPORT AND VOTE FOR YOUR WOMAN CANDIDATE

DATES OF MEETINGS

Public Meetings at which Mrs. Weber will address Electors have been arranged as follows:

Box Hill Town Hall, Tuesday, September 14, 8 p.m.	Canterbury, Emulation Hall, Rochester Road, Friday, September 24, 8 p.m.
Ringwood Town Hall, Thursday, Sept. 16, 8 p.m.	Tunstall Hall, Tunstall, Monday, Sept. 27, 8 p.m.
Mitcham Soldiers' Memorial Hall, Tuesday, September 21, 8 p.m.	Box Hill Town Hall, Tuesday, Sept. 28, 8 p.m.
Balwyn, 395 White Horse Road (Le Leu's Buildings), Balwyn, Thursday, Sept. 23, 8 p.m.	Blackburn Masonic Hall, Wednesday, September 29, 8 p.m.
	Surrey Hills, Rechabite Hall, Canterbury Road, Thursday, September 30, 8 p.m.

Vote 1 WEBER, I. L.

Election Day: Saturday, 2nd October. Voting Compulsory.

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IVY IN A LEAGUE OF HER OWN

There's probably no better role model for foresight, compassion and driving dedication than the illustrious Ivy Weber.

A true visionary and trailblazer, Ivy Weber was the first woman to be elected to Victorian parliament – a woman who raised her head above the crowd and campaigned tirelessly for a better life for Australian women and families.

Born Ivy Filshie at Captains Flat in NSW in 1892, Ivy was the only girl in a family of five children. She married in 1915 but

was widowed just two years later when her first husband, Tom Mitchell, was killed in France during World War 1.

Left with a small child, Ivy moved down to Melbourne where she married Clarence Weber, a widower with seven young children of his own. Together they had another three. Clarence, a 'physical culturist' (educator), was principal of the renowned Weber and Rice Health and Strength College. Ivy assisted with the running of the college and, commencing her vocation

in driving social change, at the same time became actively involved with the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

It should be noted that Ivy was not involved with the Temperance Union because she was against alcohol. However these were the days when many men were paid on Thursdays and drank away their week's wages by Friday morning. This left nothing for wives at home to buy food, clothing and other essentials for themselves and their children. Ivy saw there was a job to be

done to rectify the situation, and true to her zeal and courage, she set about addressing the problem within the Temperance Union.

Ivy didn't just join organisations, she drove them, bringing her vision and tireless energy to each endeavour. Ivy was known as a "woman of immense vitality."

She was also a key member of the National Council of Women and the Australasian Women's Association (a sister organisation of ANA – which ultimately evolved into Australian Unity).

Clarence Weber passed away in 1930 leaving Ivy with 11 children. Now on her own and needing to earn a living to support her family, Ivy gained a position with Berlei, the corset maker and now famous women's underwear company. Drawing on her previous work with her late husband, Ivy lectured women on health and figure control through diet and exercise. Remarkably, her teachings and advice in this area were almost a century ahead of their time and in fact pre-empted the shift towards 'wellbeing' and active health management we now practice in 2007.

To understand Ivy's calling, it also needs to be understood that the period between the wars in Australia was a time of great social upheaval and distress, particularly for housebound, impoverished women. In those times, there was no federal social welfare system – even if you had children and no husband – with many families living in slums. Women and families had very little social voice and there was certainly no equal rights for women. Ivy saw the need for dramatic social change and so – harnessing the dedication and drive she became renowned for – in June 1937, she became one of three candidates

endorsed to stand as an independent for state parliament. Running on the 'Mother, Child, Family, Home and Health' ticket in the seat of Nunawading, Ivy won the contest, becoming the first ever woman elected to the Victorian parliament in a general election.

Ivy's goals and policies were completely revolutionary. At that time, women were often completely reliant on their husbands to provide for them and had very little control over their welfare or that of their children. The notion that women should have a voice of their own, political power, government support and recognition in their own right was radical – these were ideas that broadly did not exist in Australian society during that time.

Many of the rights and privileges that women take for granted today were hard fought and won by brave and tenacious champions of the female cause, none more so than those in the very early days, such as Ivy Weber.

Ivy was a committed humanist. Her platform was built on the belief that a true democracy should provide economic security and thereby help to alleviate distress and unemployment. She also proposed systematic national health and insurance schemes, free education, the removal of slum dwellings and the construction of government-funded housing for needy families. Although an avowed 'anti-socialist', many of Ivy's beliefs were in fact very socialist in the broader sense that we understand the term today.

As a member of parliament, Ivy also lobbied for female representation on government boards, local councils and juries, and advocated a homemaker's allowance for women with families.

She won her seat again in 1940 and 1943, however eventually resigned from state

parliament to contest – unsuccessfully for once – the federal seat of Henty as president of the 'Women for Canberra' movement. It's timely to stop and imagine how different Australian social history might have been – particularly for women and children – if Ivy had prevailed at the federal level and been able to exert her positive and galvanising influence across the entire nation!

Post-parliament, Ivy worked tirelessly for the Country Party, the Australian Women's Movement against Socialism, and for the blind, driving each organisation with her vision and zeal. She also continued to be a loving and devoted mother to her cricket team-sized clan.

Almost a one woman political party in her own right, this remarkably effective force for genuine 'Australian unity', Ivy eventually died in Camberwell on March 6, 1976.

Ivy Weber was strong, courageous, dedicated and forward thinking – a thoroughly modern woman for her time. When asked how she had achieved so much during her relentlessly busy life, Ivy modestly attributed her extraordinary success to "working a tremendous lot of overtime." **w**

REFERENCES

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