It now seems almost certain that Jean Melzer, Kathryn Martin, Margaret Guilfoyle and Ruth Coleman will be elected to the Senate. Senator Dame Nancy Butfield (Lib., S.A.) retired at the end of last year for personal and private reasons.

Jean Melzer: “No armchair theorist”

MRS. Jean Melzer, Victoria’s first female Labor senator, has a problem.

“People ask me: ‘Are you going to promote women’s rights?’ I’m glad if I know what a woman’s issue. Of course there are things like child care and working mothers, that women know much more about than we do. But men are concerned about them, too. There is no separate issue for either women or men.”

Mrs. Melzer, mother of six, grandmother of 9½, has just spent over a week farming after a certain flattery which follows the hustle and bustle of the election. As secretary of the Victorian branch of the A.L.P. she headed the party’s State election campaign.

“Mrs. Melzer says she enjoys an argument, like a bit of shouting and banging on the desk. Nevertheless, in her office at Fitzroy, there is an aura of calm efficiency.”

By MAUREEN BANG

“How do you sell your political ideas?”

“Perhaps I can’t say it as well as others, but I do get the point across.”

Ruth Coleman: an advocate for change

GREEN-EYED effervescent Ruth Coleman came to politics via her second marriage, in 1967, to Jim Coleman, secretary of the Western Australian branch of the Trades and Labour Council. As the wife of a prominent trade union man, she naturally joined her local A.L.P. branch; within two years she was a delegate to the party’s state executive and, by May, 1972, she had won the second endorsement as a Labor candidate.

At the same time she was waging the battles in the Consumer Action Network which made Ruth Coleman a household name throughout Western Australia.

Before 1967 Ruth had been many things — shop assistant, clerk, bus conductor, housewife, telephone operator, radio announcer, and promotions officer with a television station — but nothing to suggest her ultimate status of senator. She has had some dozy state work, “just acting in a little theatre in Victoria” and, in 1964, an appearance as a café proprietress in a segment of “Consider Your Verdict”, as well as some small personal appearances.

By PAT PARKER

The seemingly endless mass of work around her does not worry her. “I can do three or four jobs at the one time. I can cope, because I like the work.”

She is still in her job as party secretary before she takes her place in the Senate. It is a position she has held since 1971 when she was the first woman to be appointed to the office.

“Politics are Mrs. Melzer’s life,” she is interested in people. “I like people. Politics are people. Mrs. Melzer has been ‘a bit worried’ about being in the Senate — ‘a place of revered old men’ — how it was pictured to her.

“But situations are as good as you make them. I think I can become just as much involved with people and have a bigger scope through the whole of Victoria.”

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