Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE0552

Beadle, Jean

(1867 - 1942)

Born	18670101, Clunes Victoria Australia
Died	19420522, West Perth Western Australia Australia
Occupation	Feminist, Social worker

Summary

After being exposed to ‘sweated labour’ conditions while working in the Melbourne clothing industry during the 1880s, Jean Beadle was inspired to dedicate her life to the betterment of conditions for women and children. Known as the ‘The Grand Old Lady of the Labor Party,’ she was a founding member of the Women’s Political and Social Crusade and the Labor Women’s Organization in Victoria (1898), Fremantle (1905) and Goldfields (1906). She was also a delegate to the Eastern Goldfields District Council of the State Australian Labor Party. Beadle was one of the first women appointed as a Justice of the Peace in Western Australia, sitting for many years on the Married Women’s Court. She was later appointed to serve as an honorary Justice on the bench of the Children’s Courts. An official visitor to the women’s section of the Fremantle Prison, Beadle also was instrumental in the building of the King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women. She was secretary, of the King Edward Memorial Hospital Advisory Board, from 1921 until her death. In recognition of her dedicated service the hospital annually awards a Jean Beadle scholarship.

Details

Jane (Jean) Beadle was born on 1 January 1868 at Clunes in Victoria. She was a miner's daughter. In Melbourne as a young woman she began her life-long activism for labour and progressive causes. She married iron moulder Henry Beadle on 19 May 1888 and had three children as she continued her political and industrial work. In 1901 the family decided to migrate to Western Australia to 'make some money'.

Jean organised the Women's Labor League in 1905 at the port of Fremantle where she initially lived. When the family moved to Boulder in 1906, she formed the Eastern Goldfields Women's Labor League, with meetings held alternately in Boulder and Kalgoorlie. Prejudice was strong in some quarters, the *Sun* newspaper labelling the meetings a 'convention of cackle'. She knew that, if women were to play an equal role in the life of the labour movement, they had to be active in both political and industrial labour. And she had no time for the notion of women's frailty, insisting that 'sometimes, it's the man who's the clinging vine'.

As well as promoting labour causes, Jean and the League campaigned for a maternity ward at the Boulder Hospital, the registration of nurses and a foundling home for abandoned babies. She organised the goldfields shop assistants to fight for better pay and conditions (chiefly shorter hours).

She spoke at public meetings, organised fundraisers for strikers' families, ran public lectures, travelled around the goldfields' towns to establish League branches and represented the League on many labour bodies.

Jean Beadle was a Labor leader, a fluent public speaker, excellent organiser and committed reformer and socialist. It was essential, she believed, to meet 'the real needs of the people' and to stop 'the waste of human life, of human abilities and capacities'.

When she left the goldfields in 1914 she donated her presentation purse of sovereigns to striking woodcutters.

In Perth she became chairperson of the Labor Women's Club, campaigning on issues including peace, disarmament, women's health, education, maternity allowances, pensions and child endowment. She was a committed anti-conscriptionist during World War I. She joined the State Executive of the Labor Party in the mid-1920s.

She was a special magistrate on the Children's Court and a foundation member of the Women Justices' Association. She was active in the establishment of the King Edward Memorial Hospital. For many years she was an official visitor to the women's section of Fremantle Prison. In the 1920s she was vice-president of the Workers' Educational Association. During the Depression, she served as treasurer to the West Perth Relief Committee.

It was a lifetime of Labor activism.

She died on 22 May 1942, aged 74.

Events

1898 - 1898
Founding member of the first Labor Women’s Organization in Australia

1905 - 1905
Founding member of the first Western Australian Women’s Political and Social Crusade (later the Women’s Labor League) at Fremantle

1906 - 1911
Founding president of the Goldfields Women’s Labor League

1915 - 1929
Honorary justice on the Children’s Court Bench

1931 - 1931
Invited by the Labor Women’s Organisation to stand for Labor pre-selection for the Senate (unsuccessful)

1901 - 1901
Jean with her husband, Harry, and family move to Western Australia

1919 - 1942
Justice of the Peace

1892 - 1892
Organized a Victorian relief committee for the Broken Hill strikers

1927 - 1927
Presided over the second Labor Women’s conference

1912 - 1912
President of the first Labor Women’s Conference

1930 - 1935
President of the Perth Women’s Branch of the Australian Labor Party

1930 - 1938
President of the Women Justices’ Association

1921 - 1942
Secretary of the King Edward Memorial Hospital Advisory Board

1898 - 1901
Vice-president of Women’s Political and Social Crusade

Published resources

Resource Section
Beadle, Jane (1868-1942), Birman, Wendy and Wood, Evelyn, 2006,
http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A070222b.htm

Book Section
A Truly great Australian woman' : Jean Beadle's work among Western Australian women and children, 1901-1942, Oliver, Bobbie, 1999

Labor Women: Political Housekeepers or Politicians?, Joyce, Robin R., 1984

Feminism: an early tradition amongst Western Australian Labor Women, Joyce, Robin R., 1984

Journal Article
In the thick of every battle for the cause of Labor' : the voluntary work of the Labor women's organisations in Western Australia, 1900-1970, Oliver, Bobbie, 2001

Conference Paper
Potential inefficients at best, criminal at worst': The girl problem and juvenile delinquency in Western Australia 1907-1933., Kerr, R, 1998,
http://education.curtin.edu.au/waier/forums/1998/kerr.html

Book
Uphill all the way: a documentary history of women in Australia, Daniels, Kay and Murnane, Mary, 1980

Reflections : profiles of 150 women who helped make Western Australia's history; Project of the Womens Committee for the 150th Anniversary Celebrations of Western Australia, Popham, Daphne; Stokes, K.A.; Lewis, Julie, 1979

Jean Beadle : A Life of Labor Activism, Oliver, Bobbie, 2007

Thesis
Feminism in Labor Women's Organisations 1905 to 1917, Joyce, Robin R., 1979

Women's Labour: Women's Power? Women in the Western Australian labour movement from the early 1900s to the Depression, Joyce, Robin R., 1999

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

State Library of Western Australia
Papers, 1899-1962 [manuscript]

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Digital resources


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