Entry type: Organisation
Entry ID: AWE0648

Victorian Women’s Post and Telegraph Association

(1900 - 1920)

Born	19000102
Died	19201231
Occupation	Trade Union

Summary

Early in 1900 the Victorian Women’s Post and Telegraph Association formed to ensure that the higher salaries paid to the colony of New South Wales postmistresses and female assistants were the ones that were adopted by the Commonwealth Department at Federation. Under the New South Wales Civil Service review of classifications in 1895, postmistresses were awarded equal pay with men, wherever the classifying authority considered that they were performing the same duties.

Details

Banned from joining the men’s Post and Telegraph Association in Victoria postmistresses and female telegraphists, led by Louisa Dunkley, established a committee during the 1890s. Members of the committee, mainly from the Melbourne chief telegraph office, appeared before the Victorian colonial service Classification Board to argue the case for equal pay. They received increases in salary, though not equality with men telegraphists.

Following the classifications of the New South Wales Civil Service in 1895, where postmistresses were awarded equal pay with men, the Victorian Women’s Post and Telegraph Association was established. Postmistress Mrs Webb was elected as president (1900-1906) and telegraphist Miss Louisa Dunkley as vice-president and spokesperson of the Association. Dunkley was elected delegate to the all-colonies conference of telegraphists held at Sydney in October 1900.

Although the conference endorsed the principle of equal pay and status, not all delegates, especially R J Meagher the Tasmanian representative, agreed. He and Dunkley and “L’Inconnu”, pseudonym of one of the Victorian female members, used the federal association’s journal *Transmitter* and newspapers to voice their opinions. Also members of the Victorian Women’s Association, supported by the new federal organisation and the *Transmitter*, commenced a campaign of letter-writing, public meetings and the lobbying of the newly elected Federal politicians. The first Commonwealth Public Service Act of 1902 embodied the principle of equal pay for postmistresses and women telegraphists.

The association continued its existence within the Australian Commonwealth Post and Telegraph Association as a state association and then a state branch of the federal body until 1920.

Published resources

Book
Communicators and their first trade unions : a history of the telegraphist and postal clerk unions of Australia, Baker, John S. (John Simms), 1980

Journal Article
Pioneers of our industrial : The women telegraphists of Melbourne and their union, 1895 - 1920, Baker, John S, 1978

Book Section
Women in the Victorian Post Office, McCuskey, Claire, c1982

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

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