Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE3852

Stewart, Anna

(1947 - 1983)

Born	19470311, Adelaide South Australia Australia
Died	19830412, Melbourne Victoria Australia
Occupation	Journalist, Political candidate, Trade union official

Summary

Anna Stewart, as Industrial Advocate for the Federated Furnishing Trades Society, successfully led the first Australian blue collar union campaign for maternity leave award provisions in 1975. She was a founding member of the Australian Council of Trade Unions Women's Committee from 1977, representing the Vehicle Builders Employees' Federation and then the Municipal Officers' Association from 1982, and contributing to the ACTU's Working Women's Charter and the Maternity Leave Test Case. She also stood as a candidate for the Australian Labor Party in the Legislative Assembly seat of Frankston at the Victorian state election, which was held on 5 May 1979.

Details

Anna Stewart was born in Adelaide and completed her schooling at St Margaret's Grammar School in Berwick, Victoria. After initially working as a journalist for the *Nation Review*, *The Sun* and *The Age* in Melbourne and in London, she moved into research and advocacy in the trade union movement in the early 1970s.

As Industrial Advocate for the Federated Furnishing Trades Society, she successfully led the first Australian blue collar union campaign for maternity leave award provisions in 1975, while pregnant with her third child. She then became the Federal Research Officer for the Vehicle Builders Employees' Federation of Australia and in this capacity contributed to the draft ACTU Working Women's Charter. In a submission to the ACTU Secretary she argued against recognising child care as only a women's issue and warned against simply recognising the status quo rather than effecting real change for working women. She argued that 'a woman's charter is to no avail if it is: drawn up entirely by men, restricted to child care and maternity leave [and] excludes the right of men to a non-sexist education and employment'. At the Vehicle Builders Employees' Federation she also fought for child care facilities in car plants, researched work value cases and initiated a campaign against sexual harassment, adding the right to work free of sexual harassment to the union's log of claims and forcing employers to recognise it as an industrial issue.

She was a founding member of the Australian Council of Trade Unions Women's Committee from 1977, representing the Vehicle Builders Employees' Federation and then the Municipal Officers' Association from 1982. She assisted with the ACTU's Maternity Leave Test Case before the Arbitration Commission in 1979 which resulted in working women being granted the right to up to 52 weeks unpaid maternity leave and the right to return to their job after leave. As the Senior Federal Industrial Officer at the Municipal Officers' Association, Stewart set up women's committees in most State branches of the union and developed strong policies in relation to women workers, particularly in the area of sexual harassment. She also developed an affirmative action policy which the MOA adopted in 1983.

Stewart also stood as a candidate for the Australian Labor Party in the Legislative Assembly seat of Frankston at the Victorian state election, which was held in May 1979, achieving 42.8% of the vote and a 5.5% swing in a conservative seat.

After her death in 1983, the Anna Stewart Memorial Project was set up to recognise her achievements and to carry on her work in encouraging and training women in the union movement. In 2024 the project celebrated its 40th anniversary. In 2001 Stewart was posthumously inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women.

Published resources

Site Exhibition
Carrying on the Fight: Women Candidates in Victorian Parliamentary Elections, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2008,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cws/home.html

Resource
Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Book
Work, Family and the Law, Murray, Jill (ed.), 2005

Article
40th anniversary of the Anna Stewart Memorial Project, 2024,
https://www.weareunion.org.au/40th_anniversary_of_anna_stewart_memorial_project

Archival resources

Noel Butlin Archives Centre, ANU Archives
Records of the Australian Council of Trade Unions

Author Details
Maggie Shapley

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