

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE4049

Egan, Francis

Occupation Activist, Café owner

Summary

Francis Egan was co-proprietor of the Barrier Café at Broken Hill, New South Wales, during the First World War. In 1915 she famously tarred and feathered the president of the Hotel, Club and Restaurant Employees' Union (the HC & REU) after he threatened the livelihood of herself and her family by refusing to give her union membership.

Details

With her brother, Thomas Smith, Francis Egan owned and ran the Barrier Café in Broken Hill during the First World War. After a union dispute, however, the café was forced to close – with other business-owners, Egan had refused to comply with union demands around wages. Suddenly, she was faced with the impossibility of finding employment in the union-dominated city of Broken Hill. She sought membership of the HC & REU but her efforts were frustrated by the president of the union, Evan Marshall, who clearly bore her a grudge. A single mother with four children to support and no income, Egan became desperate.

On 16 July 1915 she called Evan Marshall to her home, apparently to discuss union business. With the help of her friend Mrs Westmore, Egan locked Marshall inside and held him at gunpoint while she tarred his back, arms, chest, stomach and face, and covered him with pillow feathers. Marshall was then whipped by the ladies 29 times and, finally, paraded by them around the centre of town.

Incredibly, the jury of local townsmen called to hear the case against Egan and Westmore found them not guilty. Furthermore, the Amalgamated Miners' Association (AMA) was ordered to pay over £2,000 in costs and damages to Mrs Egan for conspiring to deprive her of a way of earning a living. Marshall became an object of ridicule in the town.

Published resources

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Newspaper Article

Tyranny of Unionism, Egan, Francis, 1915

Tar and Feathers, 1915

Journal Article

White Cards/Black Feathers: The Political Gets Personal - Broken Hill, 1915, Macnamara, E.R., 1999

Book

The Industrial History of Broken Hill, Dale, George, 1918

Site Exhibition

Unbroken Spirit: Women in Broken Hill, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2009,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/bh/bh-home.html>

Archival resources

Outback Archives, Broken Hill City Library
[McCulloch, George](#)

Author Details

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