Entry type: Person
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Stevens, Joyce

(1928 - 2014)

Born	19280106, Cullen Bullen New South Wales Australia
Died	20140506
Occupation	Activist, Communist, Historian, Women's liberationist

Summary

Joyce Stevens was a prominent member of the Sydney Women's Liberation Movement, a socialist feminist member of the Communist Party of Australia, and a historian of the women's movement.

Details

Joyce Stevens née Barnes was born in Cullen Bullen, NSW, to parents James and Lucy Barnes. Stevens' father worked as a railway fettler and the family lived in various tents and tin huts along the railway lines of NSW. Stevens attributes much of her initial political and feminist education to her working-class background, as well as to the influence of her mother.

Stevens was a motivated member of the Communist Party of Australia, joining in 1945 and later becoming the National Women's Organiser. During this time, Stevens was interested in socialist-feminism, or the connections between socialism and Women's Liberation.

As a Liberationist, Stevens was dedicated to promoting equal pay for women, establishing women's health centres and refuges and campaigning for abortion reform. She joined the Working Women's Group and in 1972 helped produce the booklet *What Every Woman Should Know*, to educate female high school students about women's health and methods of contraceptives. The next year this work soon grew into Control, a women's abortion referral service provided by Women's Liberation. That same year the Leichardt Women's Health Centre was opened.

Throughout this time, she also helped to produce and *Mejane* and *Scarlet Woman*, a feminist newspaper and magazine respectively.

During International Women's Year, 1975, Stevens was granted $6,000 by the National Women's Advisory Committee to hold a number of forums throughout suburban Sydney. These commissions, organised by Stevens and other Sydney activists, aimed to encourage women of all backgrounds to share their personal experiences with discrimination and prejudice as a form of 'consciousness-raising' and promoting a feeling of sisterhood amongst the attendees. These forums culminated in 'What has International Women's Year Done for Women', a Sydney-wide commission.

With a desire to document the activities and progress achieved by the Sydney Women's Liberation Movement, Stevens worked as part of a collective to create the *First Ten Years of Sydney Women's Liberation Collection*, work which began in 1978 and completed in 1999. In addition to this collection, Stevens has authored a number of books including *A History of International Women's Year in Words and Images* (1985), *Taking the Revolution Home: work among women in the Communist Party of Australia 1920-1945* (1987), *Lightening the Load -Women and Work – A History of WEAC 1982-1989* (1991), and *Healing Women: A History of Leichardt Women's Community Health Centre* [1995). Stevens' poem *Because We're Women*, written for Women's Liberation Broadsheet, International Women's Day, 1975, remains one of her most prominent works.

In 1996 Stevens was a made a Member of the Order of Australia in recognition of her social justice activism and her work as a writer. In 2002 she was a recipient of the Edna Ryan Award.

Joyce Stevens passed in 2014.

Archival resources

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection
First Ten Years of Sydney Women's Liberation Collection, ca. 1969-ca. 1980

State Library of New South Wales
Jill Lennon and Gwen Bloomfield interview some foundation members of the Women's Liberation Movement, 1995

Joyce Stevens papers, 1912-2005

National Library of Australia
Biographical cuttings on Joyce Stevens, feminist, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals

Author Details
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