

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Organisation

Entry ID: AWE0638

Wonthaggi Women's Auxiliary

(1934 -)

Born 1 January, 1934

Summary

The Wonthaggi Miners' Women's Auxiliary, the first Women's auxiliary of a mining union, was established at Wonthaggi, Victoria during the Wonthaggi Coal Strike. The strike, which commenced on 6 March 1934, lasted for five months. Miners' wives established a Board Committee and the President, Mrs Agnes Chambers issued an official statement on behalf of the Committee:

the women of Wonthaggi are firmly behind their husbands in this struggle. We women have for the past two years seen our husbands' pay reduced by more than a third...If our men quietly accept these reductions without further protest where will they end?...Our men have stood solidly in this great struggle, and the Government, realising that it cannot break the spirit of the men, now turns and threatens to take our homes from us. The Government threatens to close the mine permanently....The dispute has now been in progress 17 weeks, and it would appear that we have a long and dreary winter in front of us, but with the help of the women of Australia we can hold out. [1]

By the second week of July the Hon. R G Menzies, Deputy Premier and Minister for Railways, the State Government Department that held responsibility for the mine, agreed to negotiate. He agreed to the immediate recognition of pit-top committees and the reinstatement of the five wheelers whose dismissal provoked the strike. He also proposed that the reinstatement of two men who had been dismissed for insubordination be negotiated once the miners were back at work – a palatable concession for most miners. [2]

The women's independent organisation and their willingness to persist further throughout the winter was a factor in resisting efforts to call off the strike before their demands had been met.

[1] Cochrane, P, 'The Wonthaggi Coal Strike, 1934', Labour History, no. 27, 1974, p. 28

[2] *ibid* p. 29

Published resources

Book Section

The five month strike, Reeves, Andrew, 1979

Journal Article

The Wonthaggi Coal Strike, 1934, Cochrane, P, 1974

Thesis

Industrial men : miners and politics in Wonthaggi 1909-1968, Reeves, Andrew Paul, 1977

Resource Section

The militant history of Wonthaggi, Thompson, Jennifer, 1996,
<http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/1996/247/247p26.htm>

Wonthaggi Coal Strike (1934), Smith, Bruce A, 2002,
<http://www.atua.org.au/biogs/ALE1320b.htm>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

Joe Chambers, Lyn Chambers and Fred Brown interviewed by Rob Willis in the Rob Willis folklore collection [sound recording]

Jessie Hansen interviewed by Rob Willis for the Rob Willis folklore collection [sound recording]

The University of Melbourne Archives

Wonthaggi Women's Auxiliary

Rankine, Bill

Australian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation (Miners' Federation), Victorian District/Powlett River Branch

Chambers, Joe and Lyn

Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University

Australasian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation Wonthaggi Branch deposit

Author Details

Anne Heywood

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