

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE1026

Curthoys, Barbara

(1924 - 2000)

Born 21 June, 1924, Grafton New South Wales Australia

Died 28 September, 2000, Manly New South Wales Australia

Occupation Feminist, Pacifist, Political activist, Psychologist, social activist

Summary

Barbara Curthoys was an important figure in the history of Communism, feminism, the peace movement and the campaign for indigenous rights in Australia. An activist in the middle of the twentieth century, she was 'one of that small band of women who fearlessly campaigned for racial and social equality and world peace at a time when it was politically risky to do so'.

Details

Born in Grafton, New South Wales, on 21 June 1924 to John Archibald and Eda McCallum (nee Lockwood).

Moved to Sydney in 1932, parents divorced.

Educated at Canterbury Primary School and Fort Street Girls' High School.

Joined the Ashfield Branch of the Communist Party after finishing high school.

Joined the Women's Australian Auxiliary Airforce (WAAAF) in 1942 as a wireless telegraphist, subsequently becoming a Medium Frequency Direction Finder.

Married Geoff Curthoys in 1944.

Gave birth to Ann in 1945 and Jean in 1947.

Moved with her family to Broken Hill, New South Wales, in 1946, where she helped to establish the Happy Day Kindergarten. It still exists today.

Moved to Newcastle, New South Wales, in 1953, where she became a full-time Communist Party of Australia Activist. Joined the Newcastle Branch of the Union of Australian Women in 1954. She was secretary of the Branch between 1954-1960. and was elected to the organisation's national body in 1960, 1963 and 1970. In the 1960s, she also served as secretary of the Newcastle Trades Hall Council Equal Pay and Aboriginal Advancement committees. She was also a founding member of the Newcastle Peace Forum.

She returned to study in the late 1960s as graduated with honours in Psychology in 1973. She became a practicing psychologist at the Stockton Hospital where she worked until 1982.

She was the first Australian invited to use the Comintern archives when they were opened in 1990, as reward for her loyalty to Moscow after the Communist Party of Australia split in 1970.

Received the Peggy Hill Peace Award in 1991 in recognition of her active commitment to world peace.

Throughout the 1990s she wrote up the fruits of the research she completed in the Comintern archives. She also co-wrote a history of the Union of Australian Women.

In 1993, she and Geoff moved to Manly, a beachside suburb of Sydney, New South Wales.

Barbara Curthoys died on September 28, 2000.

Published resources

Journal Article

Obituary - Barbara Curthoys: Communist Activist and Researcher, Ryan, Lyndall, 2001

Book

More Than a Hat and Glove Brigade: The Story of the Union of Australian Women, Curthoys, B. (Barbara) and McDonald, Audrey, 1996

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

The University of Newcastle Archives, Rare Books and Special Collections Unit: Communist Party of Australia Archival Material

[Barbara Curthoys Collection](#)

State Library of New South Wales

[Barbara Curthoys - interviews with members of the Union of Australian Women, 1995](#)

Author Details

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