

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE1918

Melville, Gertrude Mary

(1884 - 1959)

Born 7 October, 1884, Port Macquarie New South Wales Australia

Died 21 August, 1959, Sydney New South Wales Australia

Occupation Housewife, Politician

Summary

A tireless worker for the rights of women, children and 'the little people', Gertrude Melville became known as the 'grand old lady of the Labor Party'. She was their candidate in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly Elections for the Eastern Suburbs in 1925 and for Hurstville in 1932 (Federal Labor party). Gertrude Melville was finally elected to parliament as a Member Legislative Council in 1952 to 1958. Prior to her attempts to enter parliament, she was Alderman in the Cabramatta-Canley Vale Municipal Council from 1944 to 1948, including a period as Mayor (1945-48).

Details

Gertrude Melville was educated at St Peter's Convent Surry Hills, Sydney. She married Arthur Melville, in Sydney on 2 December 1903 and they had five sons. She died in 1959. Her portrait by Miriam MacRae is held by the NSW Legislative Council.

Gertrude joined the Labor Party in 1904 and was a member of Central Executive 1922-26, and 1950-52. She was president of ALP Central Women's Organising Committee 1947-52. Child endowment in NSW is said to have originated from a motion she moved at her local branch, Randwick, in 1918. She ran unsuccessfully against Millicent Preston Stanley [please link] in 1925. Gertrude Melville joined Federal Labor after the Lang split and campaigned against Lang in 1932 election. She said that Lang's withholding of the payment of child endowment and widows' pensions made her decide to contest the seat of Hurstville in 1932. Later she opposed the industrial groups in the Labor upheavals of the 1950s.

She was elected by both houses to fill a casual vacancy in the Legislative Council in 1952, under the reconstructed constitution (1934-78). She served one term. In 1958 she was involved in a public controversy about police corruption.

Published resources

Book Section

HERstory: Australian Labor Women in Federal, State and Territory Parliaments 1925-1994, 1994

Book

Women in Australian Parliaments and Local Governments, Past and Present : A Survey, Smith, A. Viola, 1975

Resource Section

Melville, Gertrude Mary (1884 - 1959), Ritter, Leonora, 2006,
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A150411b.htm>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition

Putting Skirts on the Sacred Benches: Women Candidates for the New South Wales Parliament, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2006,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/pssb/home.html>

Author Details

Annette Alafaci

Created 1 February 2006

Last modified 5 April 2016