

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE3124

Katz, Alicia

(1876 - 1964)

Born 1 July, 1876, Melbourne Victoria Australia

Died 7 October, 1964, Melbourne Victoria

Occupation Political candidate

Summary

Alicia Katz was the first female candidate to stand for the Parliament of Victoria. She stood for Barwon as a Labor candidate at the Legislative Assembly election of 26 June 1924, and gained 3,046 votes. She was defeated by the Liberal party candidate, E. Morley, on 6,954 votes.

Details

Alicia Katz was born Elisia Johannah Watkins in Canning Street, North Carlton. Her father, James Watkins, was an engineer from Montmouthshire in Wales, who had arrived in Melbourne with his parents in 1867. Her mother, Annie Farley, hailed from County Meath, Ireland. The two were married in St. James' Church, William Street, Melbourne, in 1872.

As a young woman, Alicia developed a passionate belief in the Socialist cause. In 1900 she married Frederick Katz, son of a German migrant, and together they spoke at Socialist gatherings at the Bijou Theatre or in Richmond, at the corner of Swan and Docker Streets. In 1901 Alicia gave birth to their only child, Olive.

The Katz family moved to Tasmania in 1911, but returned to Melbourne in 1914 due to Olive's ongoing health problems. Alicia Katz joined the Women's Peace Army. At its September 1915 meeting, she moved a resolution that (among other things) governments of the world put an end to bloodshed; women be granted equal political rights with men; and Australian women be given direct representation in the council appointed to consider the terms of peace. Her resolution was seconded by Amelia Pankhurst.

Frederick Katz was a loyal member of the Federated Clerks' Union, and went on to stand for parliament several times, with limited success. He and his wife became heavily involved with the Labor Party. By 1921, Alicia was president of the party's Women's Organising Committee, working alongside Muriel Heagney and Jean Daley. On 12 May 1924, the Act allowing women to stand for Victorian parliament was passed. Somewhat unfairly, an election was called for June 26, leaving potential women candidates precious little time to prepare their campaigns. By 10 June 1924, the *Herald* was publishing an article headed 'On Her Own: The Woman Candidate'. Alicia Katz was the only woman to stand.

In those few short weeks before the June election, Katz did the rounds of the local town halls, addressing audiences on questions around free education, the welfare of women and children, and the need for women to enter politics. Her speech for the Women Citizens' Movement on 'The Status of Women in the 20th Century' was reported in the *Argus* on 28 May 1924. Women had bettered their position, Katz explained, by entering the labour market, and there was great scope for women's work. Katz felt that marriage laws needed reforming – when a woman is forced to adopt the nationality of her husband, 'she loses her individuality as a citizen' – and she was frustrated by the constraints placed upon women when confined to household duties. She did not shy from telling her audience that 'she would like to do something besides playing her part as a wife and mother': 'Undesirous as a man-made world had become, she did not desire a woman-made world, but wanted a world based on the attributes of both'.

In the final event, Katz was defeated by the Liberal candidate for Barwon, E. Morley. She and Frederick continued their involvement in politics, sometimes controversially. Frederick's anti-conviction stance led to a vicious bodily attack by a group of soldiers who tarred and feathered him, while Alicia's anti-prohibition stance, and advocacy on behalf of the Liquor Trades, saw her reprimanded by the Victorian Central Executive. Many years later, in 1947, Frederick did become a member of the Senate.

Frederick Katz died at home in Albert Park in 1961. Alicia Katz followed three years later, in October 1964, aged 88. At the time of her death, there were no women in the Victorian parliament. Dorothy Goble was the first woman elected in twenty years when she won the seat for Mitcham in 1967.

Published resources

Pamphlet

Alicia Katz: The First Attempt, Ravis, Joan, 1988

Site Exhibition

Carrying on the Fight: Women Candidates in Victorian Parliamentary Elections, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2008,

<http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/cws/home.html>

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

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