

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE3983

Devanny, Jean

(1894 - 1962)

Born 7 January, 1894, Ferntown, Collingwood New Zealand

Died 8 March, 1962, Townsville Queensland Australia

Occupation Feminist, Trade unionist, Writer

Summary

Jean Devanny was a novelist and prominent member of the Communist Party of Australia with a particular interest in the position of women in Australian culture and society. A staunch labour activist, she was also an admirer of the work of birth control activist, Marion Piddington. Initially living in Sydney, she eventually moved to Queensland, where she was caught up in the 1935 canecutter's strike. Her best known novel *Sugar Heaven* was based on these events.

Her energy was much admired by many of her contemporaries. Katherine Susannah Prichard, for instance, wrote that 'Jean Devanny is wonderful. No one I know is so vital, magnetic, absolutely devoted and disinterested. She is a great woman...I wish I could give all my time to Party work as she does.'

Details

Born in New Zealand, Jean Devanny arrived in Australia with her husband and two teenage children in 1929. Almost immediately, she became active in political and feminist circles; as a New Zealander, she was surprised by the relative absence of women from these circles in Australia. She spoke publicly to encourage women to participate in the political process and she was unimpressed by the masculinism of Australian social and cultural life. She described mateship as 'as enthusiasm which, since it was camaraderie not extended to include women I was sceptically unresponsive.'

A member of the Communist Party of Australia throughout the 1930s, she had several run-ins with the executive until she was eventually expelled for alleged 'political degeneracy'. Her commitment to literary form as well as sound ideological content saw her repeatedly clash with the Central Committee, but it was a campaign of sexual slander while she was on a speaking tour of the Atherton Tablelands and Far North Queensland that led to her expulsion.

Although distressed by the way she was treated, Devanny did not repudiate Marxism-Leninism, only the style of the Communist Party of Australia.

Published resources

Edited Book

Women in Australia : an annotated guide to records, Daniels, Kay, Murnane, Mary, Picot, Anne and National Research Program (Australia), 1977

Australian Feminism: A Companion, Caine, Barbara, Gatens, Moira et al., 1998

Book

Jean Devanny: Romantic Revolutionary, Ferrier, Carole, 1999

Sugar Heaven, Devanny, Jean, 1936

Laughter, not for a cage : notes on Australian writing, with biographical emphasis on the struggles, function, and achievements of the novel in three half-centuries, Franklin, Miles, 1956

Paradise Flow, Devanny, Jean, 1938

Bird of Paradise, Devanny, Jean, 1945

Journal Article

Eugenic Reform and the Unfit, Devanny, Jean

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Resource Section

Devanny, Jane (Jean) (1894-1962), Store, Ron, 2006,
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A080316b.htm>

Archival resources

James Cook University of North Queensland, Library Archives

[Jean Devanny Archive](#)

Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection

[Miles Franklin Papers - Correspondence with Jean Devanny](#)

National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection

[Papers of Eleanor Dark, 1910-1974 \[manuscript\]](#)

National Library of Australia

[\[Biographical cuttings on Jean Devanny, writer, containing one or more cuttings from newspapers or journals\]](#)

Author Details

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