

'A Truly Great Australian Woman'

Jean Beadle's Work among Western Australian Women and Children, 1901-1942

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When Jean Beadle died in May 1942, the Australian Prime Minister, John Curtin, paid tribute to her as a 'truly great Australian woman' whose work 'was of untold value to the Labor Movement, to the State of Western Australia, and to the nation'.¹ This paper examines Jean Beadle's commitment to the labour movement, and her motivation and philosophy in the context of her public life and work. It discusses her perceptions of women's struggles and the injustices that they frequently encountered even within the organised labour movement. In conclusion, taking up the theme of Curtin's tribute, the paper will attempt to assess Jean Beadle's contribution to the labour movement, the state and the nation.

Biographical

Jane Miller was born into a mining family at Clunes, Victoria, on 1 January 1868. She always used the form 'Jean', including on official documents. Her experiences as an apprentice in a Melbourne clothing factory inspired her life-long fight against the 'sweated' conditions endured by female factory workers. In 1888, Jean married Harry Beadle, an iron moulder. Soon afterwards, Harry's union embarked on a strike that lasted six months. Because of his role in this dispute, Harry was permanently boycotted in Melbourne workshops.²

Undaunted – or possibly even inspired – by this oppression, Jean Beadle became a labour activist. She was a founding member of the Labor Women's Organisation (LWO) in Victoria and of the Women's Political and Social Crusade (WPSC). The Beadles moved to Fremantle, Western Australia, in 1901, with their children, Elsie, William and Henry. In October 1905, Jean founded Western Australia's first WPSC – subsequently the Women's Labor League (WLL) – at

1 *Westralian Worker*, 29 May 1942.

2 See Jean Beadle's obituary in the *Westralian Worker*, 29 May 1942, and W. Birman and E. Wood, 'Jane Beadle' in *Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1891-1939*, vol.7, pp.223-24.

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Fremantle. After moving to Boulder, she became founding President of the Goldfields WLL, formed in December 1906, and was a delegate to the Eastern Goldfields District Council of the State ALP. She began organising previously non-unionised domestic servants and other female workers, and (with WLL colleagues) canvassed for Labor candidates in state and municipal elections. Their canvassing work prior to the 1911 state election was rewarded with a Labor victory at the polls.

The Beadles returned to Perth in 1911. Jean Beadle presided over the first Labor Women's Conference in 1912. During World War I, she was an active anti-conscriptionist. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, she held many offices in the Labor Women's movement, which will be discussed shortly. Beadle's service in the wider community included membership of the Women's Service Guild executive, and holding the offices of Justice of the Peace (1919-1942), and honorary justice on the Children's Court Bench (1915-1929). She was a founding member of the Women Justices' Association and was president from 1930 to 1938. An official visitor to the women's section of the Fremantle Prison, she campaigned for better conditions for the inmates. She supported efforts to obtain a maternity hospital in Perth, and was secretary of the King Edward Memorial Hospital Advisory Board from 1921 until her death.

Widowed in 1928, Beadle endured failing health during her later years and died of pneumonia on 22 May 1942. Thousands attended her funeral and among her pall-bearers were State and Federal politicians and the Lord Mayor of Perth. Curtin, who was unable to be present, sent flowers and a moving tribute:

Mrs Beadle was truly noble; her work was of untold value to the Labor Movement, to the State of Western Australia, and to the nation ... She never wavered in her ideals; she never laid down the torch; she never failed to look forward to the day of a better life for all ... Australia can be proud of Jean Beadle.³

Curtin's words highlighted the factors that were central to Beadle's motivation: a deep love and compassion for women and children, a strong conviction that all people deserve equality, and an unshakeable faith in the labour movement as the only effective means of removing those inequalities and injustices which create poverty and oppression. The following sections of the paper discuss some of the influences that shaped her ideas and the ways in which she, in turn, influenced the social, political and economic life of Western Australian women.

Motivation and Philosophy

Beadle clearly regarded herself as a socialist. In a 1909 lecture at a Social Democratic Federation meeting in Kalgoorlie, titled 'Why I am a Socialist', Beadle defined what she meant by 'socialist' – although, regrettably, the media reporting the event did not publish her definition – and proceeded to describe how the existing system contributed to 'race degeneration'. Under Socialism,

3 *Westralian Worker*, 29 May 1942.

she believed, both moral and physical standards would be improved.⁴ Beadle's association with the Yarra Bank orators had introduced her to many social reformers, including Ben Tillett, Dr W.D. Maloney and the Reverend Archibald Turnbull – all of whom she regarded as friends. Tillett, a gifted English socialist, who attracted large and admiring crowds on his 1897/1898 Australian tour, was a frequent visitor to the Beadles' home during his time in Melbourne. Dr Maloney founded the Social Democratic League (SDL) in 1889. The SDL promoted the idea of 'universal co-operation' rather than state socialism. In a 'co-operative commonwealth ... every citizen would vote on every law' and elect officials to administer these laws. Everyone would be educated and paid equally and everyone would have work. There would be equal rights for both sexes.⁵ Turnbull, an Anglican cleric who had fallen out with his denomination, founded the Labour Church that formed strong links with the Melbourne Trades Hall Council and the Victorian Socialists' League. Beadle referred to Turnbull and his wife as 'the parents of the WPSC' and regarded them as close friends. Mrs Turnbull was foundation president of the WPSC.⁶ Yet Tom Mann was the person whom Beadle herself credited with inspiring her to resume labour activism in Western Australia. Mann, a British Socialist, arrived in Melbourne in 1902, and became an organiser for the Labor Party. During his visit to Western Australia in 1904, Mann – who must have heard of Beadle's work in Melbourne before she left for Fremantle – sought her out and told her that 'she must get to work'.⁷

Although she did not specifically acknowledge their influence, Beadle's contemporaries included Vida Goldstein, Rose Scott, and Catherine Spence, who sought political, economic and social reform for women and children. Goldstein stood unsuccessfully for the Senate in 1903, and was prominent in the Victorian campaign for female suffrage.⁸ Scott's campaigns achieved legal reforms, including the *Infant's Protection Act* (1904), which established that an illegitimate child's father had a financial responsibility to support the child until the age of 14 or 16, and the *Girls' Protection Act* (1910), which raised the age of sexual consent in New South Wales from 12 to 16.⁹ In Perth, Beadle came in contact with Edith Cowan, Bessie Rischbieth, Lady Gwennyfred James (wife of liberal politician, Walter James), and other reformers. Cowan was a founding member of the Ministering Children's League, the Children's Protection Society

4 Unidentified newspaper clipping (probably *Westralian Worker*), 26 March 1909, in Jean Beadle Papers, PROWA Acc. No. 3114A (hereafter Beadle Papers), item 24.

5 V. Burgmann, *In Our Time: Socialism and the Rise of Labor, 1885-1905*, Sydney, 1985, p.110; see also fn 14 re Tillett.

6 'The Women's Political and Social Crusade', hand written notes in Beadle Papers, item 9; also Burgmann, *In Our Time*, p.117.

7 Beadle's reminiscences at a celebration in 1936 honouring the 83rd birthday of Mrs Riley, a founding member of the Fremantle WPSC, unidentified newspaper clipping, dated '1936' in Beadle Papers, item 27.

8 A. Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia: A Gift or a Struggle?* Cambridge, 1992, pp.152-54.

9 J. Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism*, Melbourne, 1994, pp.190-91.

and Alexandra Home for Women, initially the House of Mercy. Several of these reformers were strongly influenced by the ideas of the Theosophical Society whose world president, Annie Besant, visited Perth in 1907. Theosophy promoted the creed of a 'Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour'.¹⁰

Beadle's fight for women's rights took her into the controversial territory of private morality. She campaigned for legal justice for unmarried mothers, particularly those charged with infanticide. She sought to remedy the injustice of a woman being imprisoned for life for murdering her baby, after being left penniless by the father who went free of any crime or responsibility.¹¹ In a 1912 letter to the *West Australian*, Beadle condemned the Council of Churches for criticising the Fisher Federal Labor Government's provision of the maternity bonus to single mothers. Outraged by the clergy's claim that the bonus would encourage promiscuity, she wrote passionately:

Is motherhood a crime and are the women of Australia so prone to crime that they will willingly become criminals for a bonus of £5? ... Every mother should be revered as the race preserver and every child protected.

She added that, in Germany, fathers were forced to support 'children without honour' and provide for their education and training to the age of 16 years. 'Mr Fisher', she concluded, 'should be commended for his humanitarian act'.¹² She also campaigned against 'the terrible injustice of children being born in jail', reminding her Labor colleagues that the birthplace was recorded on the birth certificate and 'a child born in jail is branded for life'.¹³

Beadle was inspired by a strong conviction that all people deserve equality. Writing in her first column as 'Jeanette' in the *Westralian Worker*, she recalled her first public appearance, at a May Day rally on the Yarra Bank in 1899, when she moved a resolution 'pleading for better conditions for the woman wage slave'. Speaking to the resolution, she advocated equal pay for equal work. She never forgot the 'vast sea of faces', nor 'the ridicule hurled' at her the following day by the *Age*, declaring: 'Women can never hope to command the same wage as men'.¹⁴ Neither prevented her from embarking on a long career of public speaking and writing. In a debate in Perth in 1913 on the subject of 'Men versus Women', Beadle forcefully argued that there was no scientific proof that women

10 D. Davidson, *Women on the Warpath: Feminists of the First Wave*, Nedlands, 1997, pp.20-21.

11 'The Women's Political and Social Crusade', Beadle Papers.

12 *West Australian*, 30 September 1912.

13 Beadle to Secretary, Parliamentary Labor Party, 3 November 1909 (2 letters), Beadle Papers, item 2.

14 Beadle may have confused two occasions. The *Age*, 8 May 1899, stated that she spoke at the May Day rally in 1899, and described her in favourable terms as 'one whose speech was aptly described by the Chairman as "pleasing and exhaustive"'. Ben Tillett spoke at the 1898 May Day rally, but neither the *Age* nor the *Argus* mentioned Beadle among the list of speakers. The *Age*, 2 May 1898, did indeed ridicule Tillett and other speakers. For 'Jeanette's' column see *Westralian Worker*, 27 November 1908.

were weaker mentally than men, and that women were competent to undertake any and every public task.¹⁵

Asked whether a woman could engage in a career or take an active interest in public affairs and still give sufficient time to her home, Beadle replied that her own home had not suffered by her 'outside' work. She stressed the importance of 'home-loving women' extending their interests outside the home, especially into the industrial sphere where their children would have to make their living.¹⁶ Recalling the difficulties that she and her colleagues encountered when organising the first WLL in Fremantle in 1905, she said:

The women who had volunteered to publicise the meeting were ridiculed and repeatedly told that a woman's place was at home, minding the children and darning hubby's socks. These people were unaware of industrial changes that had long since forced women into factories. The home, which was once the family workshop where food, raiment and most of the necessities of life were manufactured, was fast disappearing.¹⁷

To Beadle, for women to work outside the home was not an ideal situation but a necessity forced upon them by the industrial age. In a 1926 address, she described the wage system as 'the last stage in the long class struggle' and 'the last and final form of mastery and servitude' in which:

Each step has been taken by the wish of the masters, and the conditions of each form of servitude have been enforced by the power of war, and the soldier still guards the shop and mine to enforce conditions to which the workers would not otherwise submit ... Collective ownership, democratic management and equal opportunities in the use of the collectively owned means of production are, in my opinion, the next step in the struggle of the race to exist.¹⁸

Beadle's concepts of the 'wage system' as a means of social control, and of an age when production was collectively owned, suggest a familiarity with Marxist theories of 'wage-labour', alienation, and 'true Communism' (the 'complete restoration of man to himself [sic] by means of the 'supersession of private property').¹⁹ Her early contact with the Labor Church and the Social Democratic League also strongly influenced her philosophy and actions. Although believing that Labor was 'the only Movement that offers any hope of *material* salvation to the great mass of the people', she maintained her faith in Christ as spiritual saviour, and saw parallels between the Kingdom of God and the Labor movement's aims of 'righteousness, truth and brotherhood'.²⁰ Like many

15 Unidentified newspaper clipping (probably *Sun*), 21 November 1913, in Beadle Papers, item 24.

16 Unidentified newspaper clipping, 1933, in Beadle Papers, item 27.

17 Beadle, 'Notes on the formation of the Labor Women's Movement in Western Australia (broadcast 27 October 1933 on 6PR to mark the twenty-first anniversary of Western Australia's first Women's Labor Conference)' in Beadle Papers, item 11.

18 Untitled address by Beadle, dated May 1926, in Beadle Papers, item 27.

19 K. Marx (trans. R. Livingstone and G. Benton), *Early Writings*, Harmondsworth, 1977, pp.270, 348.

20 Beadle, 'Ideals of the Labor Movement', handwritten notes, undated, in Beadle Papers, item 6.

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Laborites of her time, Beadle venerated knowledge, which she saw as being 'power - the highest power' which 'thrills the brain with the golden sunshine of higher vision of life and kindles the desire for a fuller and a better life in the brain of the most deadened wage slave'.²¹

Efforts to End Economic, Social and Political Inequality

Beadle sought to achieve economic, social and political equality for women and children, mainly through the labour movement. One of the biggest divisions between males and females was economic. An industrial system which estimated wage rates on the perceived requirements of an economic unit consisting of a male breadwinner, spouse and children, determined that most female workers were paid approximately half the male rate: females apparently had no dependents. Beadle was acutely aware of the daily struggles of women and girls merely to survive. She wrote of the situation in many Perth work-places c.1912:

In most of the larger city firms as well as the smaller ones girls worked for six, twelve and eighteen months - two years in some instances - for nothing per week. After that period the princely sum of 2/6 was given as a weekly wage, then 5/- to 7/6. It rarely reached more than the latter sum for holidays were invariably given to the girls who had the courage to ask for an increase. At the end of the holidays the places were invariably filled with other girl slaves.²²

Beadle maintained that the labour movement had done more to secure wage equality for women than any other organisation.

To secure a living wage for women as well as men has been a great ideal of the Labor movement from its very inception, and sweating conditions recognised as shown in the fourth plank of the Platform. Legislation [to effect changes] occurred through the persistent efforts of Labor.²³

Resistance had to be overcome within, as well as outside, the labour movement. 'Equal pay for equal work' became a plank in the ALP platform at the 1916 State Congress, yet William Somerville, the workers' representative in the Arbitration Court, continued to oppose the principle, until the ALP State Executive passed a resolution demanding his support.²⁴ Some Labor colleagues suggested that Beadle might more effectively represent female workers in the Arbitration Court than Somerville. In June 1918, appearing as advocate for the South West District Clothing Trades Union's application for an award, she stated

21 Unidentified address; see also 'Senate Selection ballot, 1931. Candidature of Mrs Jean Beadle', Beadle Papers, item 27 (emphasis added).

22 Beadle, 'What the Labour movement has done for Women', handwritten notes, dated February 1935, Beadle Papers, item 13.

23 Ibid.

24 See correspondence between the ALP State Secretary and Somerville, ALP State Executive Correspondence (hereafter SEC), PROWA Accession no. 1688A, file no. 50.

that it was essential for girls to learn a trade and that they should be apprenticed.²⁵

Beadle knew that if women were to play an equal role in the labour movement, they must take part in the political as well as the industrial process. Although Western Australian women – except Aboriginal women and women of non Anglo-Celtic descent – were able to vote in federal, state and municipal elections by 1903, many had not registered on the electoral roll. On the Goldfields, where many Labor supporters led itinerant lives, the state's strict residential qualifications disenfranchised many adults, both male and female. Before the 1908 State elections, the Eastern Goldfields WLL enrolled more than 200 new names on the electoral register. Many prejudices had to be overcome, including those of other women. Campaigning for the local Labor candidate, Richard Buzacott, Beadle travelled to the mining town of Menzies, a scattered settlement of hessian and iron houses and wandering goats, where she soon became the centre of attention for inquisitive children.²⁶ To see a woman electioneering was still relatively uncommon – and controversial – in many Goldfields centres. The Boulder *Evening Star* commended the political activity of the Labor women, asking whether the prevalence of female canvassers indicated that the 'trade unionists are more advanced than any other organisation', but the *North Coolgardie Herald* firmly opined that a woman's place was at home minding the baby instead of 'occupying political platforms in support of Buzacott, Bath and Co.'²⁷ In Menzies, this attitude prevailed with a specifically anti-Labor bias. Beadle reflected that the women who supported Gregory (the sitting Member) were just as guilty of 'leaving their homes and children neglected in order to record their votes', but the press criticised only Labor women voters. Strong class differences – greater among Menzies women than men, Beadle believed – were based on the distinction between 'permanent' local residents (who would never vote Labor) and those on mining leases (who would not vote anything but Labor). Beadle thought it ironic that town residents depended upon the miners for their livelihood and yet regarded themselves as superior. She attributed Buzacott's bitter and controversial electoral defeat to sectarianism and 'the deceit and disloyalty of workers to one another', and wondered whether the time would 'ever come when the masses will no longer allow religious differences and empty promises to divide them'.²⁸

State legislation passed during and after World War I increased the scope for female participation in public life. When amendments to the *State Children's Act* (1915) permitted the appointment of honorary male and female justices to sit on

25 Unidentified newspaper clipping, 24 June 1918, Beadle Papers, item 26.

26 Beadle, writing as 'Jeanette' in her regular column, *Westralian Worker*, 4 December 1908.

27 *Evening Star*, 30 November 1907; *North Coolgardie Herald*, 18 November 1908.

28 *Westralian Worker*, 4 December 1908. In the state election on 11 September 1908, Buzacott defeated Gregory by seven votes. A protest resulted in the election being declared void on 2 November, and a by-election taking place on 20 November. In this poll, Gregory won by 56 votes. See D. Black, *Election Statistics: Legislative Assembly of Western Australia 1890-1996*, Perth, 1997, pp.191-92.

the Children's Court Bench, Beadle was among the first selected. The *Justices Act* (1919) appointed women as Justices of the Peace (JP) on equal terms with men, and the first women called were the Children's Court justices.²⁹ Beadle frequently sat on the Children's Court bench, and heard the whole range of cases including maintenance dodgers, neglected children, stealing and truancy. One of Beadle's early cases concerned the rape of a seven-year-old girl by a teenage boy. Many of the houses in which children lived in filth and squalor, inadequately clothed and subject to physical and verbal abuse, were working-class homes where parents struggled to survive. Most neglected children were placed in the care of the State Children's Department until they were 18 years of age, but they often remained living with their mother. The Children's Court aimed to reform rather than punish, so parents were frequently cautioned and 'given a second chance'.³⁰ In August 1929, the Children's Court justices were superseded by one Special Magistrate, F. Horgan. Despite protests, the justices were never returned to the bench.³¹ From 1935, however, Beadle and other female JPs appeared on the Police Court Bench in family cases.³²

Other legislation, passed in 1919 and 1920, allowed women to contest municipal elections and to stand for State Parliament. In 1931, the Labor Women's Organisation (LWO) invited Beadle to stand for Labor pre-selection for the Senate. The first woman to enter an Australian Parliament, Edith Cowan, had held the seat of West Perth for the National Party from 1921 to 1924, but women on both sides of politics were to find the path to political power difficult. In order to contest her late father's seat of Forrest in 1925, May Holman had to win preselection over ten male candidates. She succeeded and became Australia's first Labor woman Member of Parliament.³³ Beadle, however, was unsuccessful in the preselection ballot, having to vie for a place on the ticket with such old stalwarts as ex-Senator Ted Needham.³⁴

Although a member of a vocal minority in matters of women's reform, when major schisms occurred, Beadle usually sided with the ALP majority. In 1916 when the Party split over the issue of conscription for military service, she supported the anti-conscriptionist stance. During the split in the Perth branch of

29 The debates surrounding the passage of both these Bills are described in M. Choules, 'Women in Western Australian Parliamentary Politics, 1921 to 1968', BA Honours thesis, Curtin University, 1988, pp.25 ff.

30 Children's Court Records, PROWA, Acc. No.2495, Evidence Books vols 2-4, 1916-1920, used with permission.

31 *West Australian*, 8 August 1929, and numerous other clippings in Beadle Papers, item 27.

32 Photograph dated 5 July 1935, captioned 'Mrs Jean Beadle, JP, who took a seat on the Bench of the Perth Police Court when the cases under the Married Women's Act were heard today. (Under a recent arrangement a woman justice of the peace will sit each Friday with the Police Court Magistrate.)', Beadle Papers, item 27.

33 See J. Watson (ed.), *We Hold up Half the Sky: The Voices of Western Australian Women in Parliament*, Perth, 1994.

34 'Senate Selection ballot, 1931. Candidature of Mrs Jean Beadle', Beadle Papers, item 27. Also *Westralian Worker*, 30 January, 6 March, 5 June, 9 October 1931. The winners of the selection ballot were E. H. Needham, G. Gaunt and L. B. Grieve.

SENATE SELECTION BALLOT, 1931

Candidature of Mrs. Jean Beadle



DEAR COMRADE,—At the request of the Labor women of Western Australia, I have allowed myself to be nominated as a candidate in the selection ballot to select six Labor standard-bearers, which is now being conducted.

In order that the rank-and-file members of the Party may judge wisely, I set out hereunder my record of service to the Labor Movement and to the working men and women of Australia:

At an early age I associated myself with one of the first women's movements ever formed in Australia, namely, The Women's Suffrage Alliance; its main object being to demand enfranchisement for women. I later associated myself with organizations that were formed to abolish child labor, etc. After coming to this State, I continued to work unceasingly for the further improvement of the social conditions of women and children.

At present I am associated with the following social welfare organisations: Hon. Secretary to the Advisory Board of the King Edward Hospital; President of the W.A. Women Justices' Association. I am also a member of, and an active worker in, several other societies interested in the education of our youth and the improvement of the social conditions of the people. For many years I was a member of the Visiting Committee to the Fremantle Prison, and of the Boarding-out Committee of the Child Welfare Department.

My association with the political and the industrial wings of the Labor Movement has been a long and continuous one. I assisted in the formation of the Party in Victoria, and was also responsible for assisting in the formation of many branches of the Party, both in Victoria and in this State. With the aid of the Labor supporters generally, and the Labor women in particular, I helped to usher in many reforms. Included amongst these were Amendments to the Factories Act; Appointment of Women on Hospital Boards, Benevolent Society Boards, and on Advisory Boards controlling schools.

I had the honor of being one of the foundation members of the first Labor Women's Organisation to be established in this State, and was its first President. I retained that position until I left for the Eastern Goldfields. I assisted in forming the Eastern Goldfields Women's League. I was Hon. Secretary of this League and a delegate to the E.G. District Council until I left for Perth.

On every conceivable occasion I have given of my best to every activity of the Labor Movement, believing as I do that it is the only Movement that offers any hope of material salvation to the great mass of the people.

I could detail my activities within the Party at great length. I feel, however, that I have written enough and that my activities for Labor are sufficiently widely known as to make this unnecessary.

All I desire to state is that, should the members of the Party do me the very great honor of rewarding my many years of untiring service to the Cause of Labor by electing me as a Senate candidate, I will exert every endeavor I am capable of in attempting to place the Labor Platform upon the Statute Book of the Commonwealth.

In conclusion, I desire to point out that, in my opinion, the only way by which the workers of the Commonwealth can be saved from complete impoverishment is by a drastic alteration in our monetary system.

Labor's policy has long provided the method whereby the necessary alterations might be made. I will give every support to that plank, as I will to the full platform and objective of the Party.

Trusting you will give fair consideration to my claim for your support.

I remain,

Yours in Unity,

(Mrs.) JEAN BEADLE.

Endorsed by E. H. Barker,
Sec. State Executive, A.L.P.
"Worker" Print, Perth

Figure 1
Senate Selection Ballot, 1931

the LWO in 1926, Beadle sided with the ALP State Executive and the LWO majority against a faction led by union organiser Cecilia Shelley. Accused of admitting her supporters illegally to the organisation and of working against the Labor government, Shelley subsequently was expelled from the ALP. Beadle took a leading role in the creation of a new Labor women's organisation, the Perth Women's Branch of the ALP. She was elected president, later resigning, but holding this office again from 1930 to 1935. Beadle's role in the LWO prior to the split is unclear. She appears to have taken no part in complaining about Shelley's 'branch stacking' activities and was not among the signatories to a letter from some of the members, asking the Metropolitan District Council of the ALP to hold an enquiry into the organisation's affairs. Nor is there evidence of any personal animosity between her and Shelley, although Shelley verbally attacked several of Beadle's long-standing friends and acquaintances including Jessie Johnson and Margaret Green.³⁵

Despite the new name, the organisation continued to be known as the LWO. The LWO campaigned with varying success on a series of practical matters: for a more simple style of dress for school children, for the appointment of female gynaecologists at Perth Hospital, for heating to be installed in the Ladies Retiring Room at the Town Hall, and for an increase of the £5 baby bonus to £10.³⁶ Another aspect of the women's work was their call for a complete review into the 'methods of dealing with the Aboriginal population'. They claimed that the government policies of the day did nothing to raise Aboriginal people from 'savagery' and equip them to be 'civilised citizens'.³⁷ While clothed in the patronising language and attitudes of the day, these statements are evidence that the Labor women did believe that Aboriginal people should become full citizens of Australia. They also suggest the influence of Mary Bennett, a campaigner for Aboriginal rights, who arrived in Western Australia in 1930 and proceeded to attack the policies and practices of the Chief Protector of Aborigines, A. O. Neville.³⁸

Labor Women's conferences were resumed after a gap of 15 years. With Beadle presiding, the second conference convened in October 1927, and thereafter became an annual event. After the conference, the Labor Women's Central Executive (LWCE) was elected with May Holman MLA as President, Jean Beadle as Vice President and Etta Hooton as Secretary.³⁹ In relation to the women's Labor organisations in Western Australia, the LWCE had a role parallel to that of the State Executive over the District Councils of the ALP. Beadle also travelled

35 Minutes of the Labor Women's Organisation (hereafter LWO Minutes) vol.1, 26 January 1926; PROWA Acc. No. 2011A, also correspondence and Minutes in SEC file 239.

36 LWO Minutes, 19 March, 13 and 29 April, 30 June, 14 July 1926.

37 Minutes of the Labor Women's Central Executive, 1927-1935, PROWA Acc. No. 2011A/2 (hereafter LWCE Minutes), 13 October 1932.

38 See A. Holland, 'Feminism, Colonialism and Aboriginal Workers: An Anti-Slavery Crusade' in A. McGrath and K. Saunders with J. Huggins (eds), *Aboriginal Workers: Labour History*, no.69, November 1995, pp.52-64; also Davidson, *Women on the Warpath*, pp.139-64.

39 *Labor Women's Silver Anniversary Souvenir*, p.18.

interstate on a number of occasions and in 1934 she was delegate to the third interstate Conference of Labor Women in Melbourne.⁴⁰

Jean Beadle's Contribution to the Labor Movement, the State and the Nation

While it would be inaccurate to suggest that all of the work performed by the various WLL and LWO branches was inspired by Jean Beadle, one can clearly trace a path of reform which coincides with her activity firstly in Melbourne, then Fremantle, then in the Goldfields, and later in the Perth metropolitan area. Beadle believed that the Fremantle WLL could 'justly claim to be the first organisation of women to publicly agitate and demand immediate action on behalf of their fellow women' on a wide range of important issues.⁴¹ Undoubtedly the first organisation of its type in Western Australia, its aims – and those of the Goldfields WLL – were remarkably similar to the Victorian WPSC. The Goldfields League, which had a membership of 90 within six months, was successful in establishing proper hospital care for indigent mothers and babies, and getting legislation passed to prevent children being born in prison, and to legitimise children born out of wedlock if the parents later married.⁴²

As either president or vice president of the LWO and then the LWCE for most of the last 15 years of her life, Beadle held a powerful and influential position in the women's Labor movement, but the role of women remained very much peripheral to the main male-dominated Labor organisation. Labor men often expressed the belief that 'women's' concerns were not of interest or importance to the wider Labor movement.⁴³ This attitude ignored the fact that the LWCE, in drawing the movement's attention to the poor working conditions endured by women and children, was highlighting loopholes in legislation such as the *Shops and Factories Act* (1920). Investigations by the LWCE in 1932 into the terrible working and living conditions still endured by tea-room and hospital domestic workers resulted in the Labor Government attempting to amend the *Shops and Factories Act* but the legislation was rejected by the Upper House.⁴⁴

Beadle's biggest single contribution to the Labor movement was her influence in politicising women, encouraging them to take an interest in affairs outside the home, and persuading them that equality of training, pay and a role in society was every woman's right. Although she was denied the chance to stand for Parliament, Beadle's work was acknowledged and praised. A member of the Eastern Goldfields ALP District Council remarked at a farewell in her honour

40 'Landmarks in the History of Western Australian Labor Women', *Labor Women's Silver Anniversary Souvenir*, pp.18-19; also LWCE Minutes.

41 Beadle, 'Notes on the formation of the Labor Women's Movement'.

42 Ibid.

43 See, for example, Barker to Collings, 18 December 1929, in SEC file no. 363.

44 See Mooney to Trainer, 13 September 1935, SEC file no. 462; also LWCE Minutes, 4 October 1932.

'A Truly Great Australian Woman'

when the Beadles left the Goldfields in 1911, 'if it were not for Mrs Beadle's retiring modesty, she would occupy a position in the public mind with Catherine Spence, Vida Goldstein, Mary Gilmore and Muriel Matters'.⁴⁵ In her later years, the press referred to her as the 'grandmother of Labor', and the Labor movement claimed that it owed her a considerable debt.⁴⁶ In this context, it is not difficult to see why Curtin regarded her as 'a truly great Australian woman'.

Beadle's achievements in the Labor movement benefited the wider community, and the reverse was also true. The non-political organisations which she joined undoubtedly gained from skills learned in the service of the Labor movement. Her work on the Children's Court Bench and as a Justice of the Peace greatly benefited Laborites and non-Laborites alike. Known for her 'gentle spirit' and tact, on several occasions she acted as chair and mediator in tense committee meetings.⁴⁷ In later life, many expressions of gratitude were bestowed upon her, and at her funeral, tributes came from people on both sides of politics.⁴⁸

Yet it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which women may have regarded her as a role model. To date, the author's research has not revealed a single instance of a woman attributing her entry into public life to the inspiration or influence of Jean Beadle. The reasons for this apparent lack of influence upon individuals must await further analysis. One thing is certain. Modern Australians cannot be 'proud' of her because most have never even heard of her name. Like so many other women, within and outside of politics, she awaits a biography and a much fuller analysis of her achievements.

45 *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 23 January 1911.

46 *Star*, August 1939, clipping in Beadle Papers, item 27.

47 See, for example, Davidson, *Women on the Warpath*, p.62.

48 See, for example, newspaper clippings, dated 1936 in Beadle Papers, item 27. Beadle was honoured with a gold ALP badge on 9 March at a gathering at Trades Hall, and presented with a gold-framed address and an inscribed pen from the Goldfields Labor women at a function at her house in Carr Street. Also 'Obituary', *Westralian Worker*, 29 May 1942.