

Archive No. 67

Zelda D'Aprano (24 January 1928 -)

Zelda was 41 years of age when she chained herself to the doors of the Commonwealth Building on 21 October, 1969, to protest about the failure of the Equal Pay case and the lack of pay justice for women. Ten days later, on 31 October, she was joined by Alva Geikie and Thelma Solomon, and the three women chained themselves across the doors of the Arbitration Court, the institution which deprived women of pay justice.

Zelda was born to Jewish migrant parents in Melbourne and raised during the great economic depression of the 1930s in the slums of Carlton. She left school before her fourteenth birthday and started work in a shortbread factory, soon moving on to a variety of unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. Obtaining a job as a dental nurse in a psychiatric hospital, she went on to graduate as a qualified dental nurse. Zelda married soon after she turned sixteen, continued working, joined the Communist Party and had one daughter just before the war ended in 1945.

Soon after the chain-ups, Zelda, Alva and Thelma founded the Women's Action Committee on 2 March 1970 to give women the opportunity to meet and discuss and work out what needed to be done to campaign against and to eventually alleviate the oppression of women. Over the next couple of years, Zelda helped organise and was involved several highly successful WAC protests, including the equal pay tram ride in 1970 and the anti-Miss Teenage Quest demonstrations in 1970 and 1971. She was one of the organisers of the Women at Work and Women and the Trade Unions Conference held at Melbourne Uni, August 1971. She also participated in the WAC C-R Group discussions.

Zelda went on to become one of the most outspoken and radically involved feminist activists in the Women's Liberation Movement during the 1970s in Melbourne. She spoke at numerous meetings all over Melbourne, at rallies and schools and wrote many letters to the press, answered innumerable phone calls and was interviewed on TV. She was instrumental in helping to set up the WL Centre at 16 Little La Trobe Street and to keep it open and accessible, was an active member of the Co-ordinating Committee and bought the roneoing machine to print up the newsletters. She was very much involved in most of the fundraisers, actions, protests, campaigns,

marches and demos as well as in debating and publicising the issues that affected women during those exciting and full-on years.

Zelda resigned from the Communist Party in 1971.

In 1977, Zelda self-published her autobiography, *Zelda: the becoming of a woman*, which included some of her initial involvement in the early days of the WLM. The book was reissued by Spinifex Press in 1995 with an extensive Afterword detailing many more WLM activities during the 1970s. Spinifex Press also published Zelda's second book, *Kath Williams: the Unions and the Fight for Equal Pay*, a biography detailing the fight for equal pay by a leading protagonist, in 2001. An essay of Zelda's was included in *September 11, 2001: Feminist Perspectives*, edited by Susan Hawthorne and Bronwyn Winter, Spinifex Press, Melbourne, 2002.

Zelda moved to live on the mid-north coast of NSW in 1980 and continued to maintain an active interest in challenging the patriarchy.

In March 2001, Zelda was one of the first 100 women to be named in the Victorian Honour Role of Women for her efforts and achievements on behalf of women.

Zelda received an Honorary Doctor of Laws from Macquarie University in 2000 and was named in the new years' Honours list in January 2004 when she was awarded the Officer of the Order of Australia (AO).

Zelda has since returned to Melbourne to live.