Muriel, the lobbyist for Equal Pay

Muriel Heagney was born in Brisbane in 1885. She spent her working life as an organiser in trade unions. From the 1920s she campaigned for equal pay for women. Women's wages then were just over half of men's wages.

During the Great Depression, when many workers were unemployed, some people thought that women were taking men's jobs. Muriel investigated this issue and found that many working women were discriminated against and poor. She wrote a book that persuaded others in the trade union movement to work for equal pay for women.

In **1937** she helped set up the Council for Action for Equal Pay, a lobby group supported by 57 trade unions and some women's groups. It lobbied Members of Parliament, employers and trade unions in 'men's occupations' to persuade them that workers should be paid for the job they did, not because they worked in a 'man's job' or a 'woman's job'.

Muriel Heagney spent more than 50 years persuading members of the trade union movement to support equal pay for women.

In the Second World War women were employed repairing aircraft and making ammunition – work that had always been 'men's jobs'. The unions in these areas now supported equal pay, because they didn't want women to provide 'cheap' labour, so Muriel was able to persuade the Australian Council of Trade Unions to support equal pay.

After the war when soldiers returned to their old jobs, many women left their wartime work. Trade unions were not so interested in the equal pay campaign then, but Muriel didn't give up the struggle.

In **1949** the Arbitration Court looked at the basic (minimum) wage for workers. Muriel argued that men and women doing the same job should be paid the same rate. The Court decided that women should receive 75% of the men's rate.

Muriel died in 1974, a week after the Court said that men and women should have an equal minimum wage.