

## Effie O'Hare



Effie O'Hare, political activist; born March 30, 1903, died August 3, 1999.

Effie O'Hare (nee Seyb) was born on a farm on the South Island of New Zealand daughter of Jacob and Charlotte Seyb (nee Morgan, Waimate)

Her father was a farmer who bred Clydesdales. Her family moved to Timaru, between Dunedin and Christchurch, during the First World War, where older relatives, of German origin, became naturalised citizens. She trained as a nurse, working at Sunnyside Mental Hospital, near Christchurch.

Her journey to Scotland came about because a nurse she met at the hospital, originally from Clydebank, had been corresponding with Dan O'Hare, a communist councillor originally from Cardross Parish Council, then Dumbarton County Council. Effie wrote letters on her friend's behalf and was interested in the tone of the replies. Years later she learned that her friend was sent out to New Zealand by parents who did not want their daughter associating with Dan. Effie saved up some money and planned to see the world.

She travelled with her friend to Scotland in March 1931, seeking work and a better life. They arrived when there was an economic depression. She was shocked she could not go from one job to another, as she was used to doing in New Zealand, where women had achieved the vote in 1910 and seemed to have greater equality. Her qualifications were not recognised by most hospitals, and it was five months before she got a job as a nurse at Larbert Mental Hospital in 1931, with help from a doctor Dan knew. She enjoyed the work but disagreed with the senior matron and so left.

Eventually, in December, 1933, she married Dan O'Hare, and they lived in Alexandria.

In the Vale of Leven, the Communist Party had a rare presence, with elected councillors who fought, along with the Labour Party, to win basic amenities such as a much-needed sewerage system. Effie attended her first demonstration, celebrating the vote for this measure, in January 1934.

She was impressed by individuals such as Helen Crawford, and also by the CP's regular contact with its electors through meetings every Friday night held beside the fountain in Alexandria. Here, councillors gave a weekly report of events. She joined the CP in 1936 and opened a greengrocer's shop in Main Street, working 16 hours a day "to keep a small business going to give us a living". Dan, the most prominent communist in the area, was a blacklisted engineer who toured the area with his horse and cart selling groceries while doing his council work. Effie closed the shop in 1952, due to Dan's health, and they moved to Renton, where he died in 1956. A street was later named after him.

Effie worked part-time as a home help until retirement in the 1970s and remained a communist until her death at the age of 96, ever modest of her contribution to the area's unique political history.