## **CHRISTIAN JOLLIE SMITH**

### A LIFE

Carolyn Margaret Skinner
TSTC (Parkville, 1969), BA (Melb, 1971), BCom (Melb, 1981)
MEc (ANU, 1990)

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Department of Modern History
Division of Humanities
Macquarie University

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The Academic Senate on 07 October 2008 resolved that Carolyn Margaret Skinner had satisfied the requirements for admission to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

This thesis represents a major part of the prescribed program of study.

#### Abstract

One of the first women to be admitted to practice as a lawyer in Australia, Christian Jollie Smith was also one of the founding members of the Communist Party of Australia. Following a short period of close association with the Party, she established and ran her own legal practice in Sydney for some thirty-five years from the mid 1920s. During this time she established a reputation for defending the unemployed, freedom of speech, and the Communist Party. Yet more than forty years after her death she has been largely forgotten.

Both the early history of the Communist Party of Australia and the history of the legal profession in Australia have been inclined to overlook the contribution of women. As both a Communist and a lawyer, Christian Jollie Smith was something of a paradox in her time which in itself makes her interesting. A biography is also warranted because Smith's life personifies the struggle for autonomy, independence and recognition which many educated women experienced in the early to mid twentieth century. Smith challenged the vigilant respectability of her times by breaking free from the conventional life that was expected of the unmarried daughter of a Presbyterian minister, moving from Melbourne to Sydney to live with a married man. Her political trajectory from strict Presbyterianism to the equally strict secular ideology, Communism, while unusual for a woman, was not unlike the path taken by many men who were prominent in the radical labour movement. Yet, while Smith selflessly served the Communist Party of Australia in its early years to the detriment of her health, her contribution is rarely recognised by Party historians. Although she initially had little success in the legal profession in Melbourne, Smith resumed practising the law in Sydney, successfully demonstrating that a woman could forge an independent career at a time when few women did so but which today is taken for granted.

This thesis contributes to women's history, labour history and legal history by bringing the three fields together in the study of the life and work of a woman who was both a radical and a professional. In so doing it presents further evidence to challenge the traditional view that Australian radicalism was the domain of working-class men and provides a fuller understanding of the early twentieth century Australian left.

I, Carolyn Margaret Skinner, declare that this thesis is entirely my own work, that all sources used have been acknowledged and that no part of the thesis has been submitted for higher degree at any other university.

bardyn MKum

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## Photographs

'The Owls'	facing page 42
Portrait of Christian Jollie Smith, 1913	facing page 85
Christian Jollie Smith leaving the Royal Commission on Espionage	facing page 260

#### **Abbreviations**

ACCL Australian Council for Civil Liberties
ACTU Australian Council of Trade Unions
ADB Australian Dictionary of Biography
AEU Amalgamated Engineering Union

AIF Australian Imperial Forces
ALP Australian Labor Party

ANU Australian National University ARU Australian Railways' Union

ASOF Australian Ship Owners' Federation

ASP Australian Socialist Party AWU Australian Workers' Union

BWIU Building Workers' Industrial Union CLF Commonwealth Literary Fund CPA Communist Party of Australia DNB Dictionary of National Biography FIA Federated Ironworkers of Australia

FOSU Friends of the Soviet Union

ICWPA International Class War Prisoners' Aid IWW International Workers of the World

ILD International Labour Defence

IRA International Red Aid ML Mitchell Library

MUP Melbourne University Press
NAA National Archives of Australia
NBAC Noel Butlin Archives Centre
NMH Newcastle Morning Herald

OBU One Big Union

Oxford University Press **OUP** Presbyterian Ladies' College **PLC** State Library of Victoria **SLV** Sydney Morning Herald **SMH** Transport Workers' Union **TWU** WIR Workers' International Relief Workers' Educational Association **WEA** Workers' Industrial Union of Australia **WIUA** 

WWF Waterside Workers' Federation

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