

Helen Corr, 'Hardie, Agnes Paterson [Nan] (1885–1947)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004
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Agnes Paterson Hardie (1885–1947): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/50060

Hardie [*married name* Hughes], Agnes Paterson [Nan] (1885–1947), socialist and political activist, was born in the Scottish mining town of Cumnock, Ayrshire, on 5 October 1885, the eldest daughter of [James Keir Hardie \(1856–1915\)](#), socialist and politician, and his wife, Lillias (Lillie) Wilson. Keir Hardie had two sons, James and Duncan, but it was Agnes—or Nan as she was later to be more commonly known—whom he treated as his political heir. She consequently developed an unusual political awareness and insight into labour politics and socialism, augmented by contact with many of her father's associates—such as Bruce Glasier.

On 8 August 1924 Nan married Emrys Hughes (1894–1969), acting editor of *Forward* and a well-known journalist. He was active in the labour movement and an advocate of Keir Hardie's attitudes towards pacifism and socialism. Nan placed herself mainly at his disposal, acting as housewife in Cumnock and supporting her husband's ambitions in the Labour Party. She was involved in Hughes's successful attempt to become provost of Cumnock.

In the 1930s, however, Nan became more active in municipal politics, with a particular interest in housing and welfare provision. In 1933 she was elected as a Labour candidate to Cumnock town council, and she became convenor of Cumnock public health committee in the following year. In 1935 she succeeded her husband as provost and the two of them initiated a major programme of slum clearance and council-house building. Opposition from the chief landlord in the area, Lord Bute, was eventually overcome, with the result that by the start of the Second World War three-quarters of Cumnock's population had been rehoused in low-rent, partially furnished accommodation.

Nan's campaigning led to further improvements in the leisure and welfare facilities in Cumnock. These included an open-air swimming-pool and park. As a magistrate of the juvenile court in the late 1930s, she was able to put her own liberal imprint on the treatment of offenders, preferring to encourage the participation of youth within the community through sports activities rather than imposing draconian sentences. A measure of her popularity in the area was her appointment during the war as joint chairman of the Cumnock Red Cross and war work party. This enabled her to officiate at all public meetings and to help to alleviate the wartime exigencies imposed on the inhabitants. Nan's contribution to the war effort suggests that by 1939 she had modified her earlier attachment to her father's pacifist principles, though she tended to explain her stance in terms of supporting individuals' needs rather than endorsing the country's mobilization.

In 1946 Emrys Hughes was elected as Labour MP for South Ayrshire, with Nan having relinquished her council duties during the campaign tour. When he became ill soon afterwards Nan again absented herself from duties, only then to fall seriously ill also. This compounded ailments from which she had suffered since childhood and ended her public career. She had served unopposed on Cumnock town council for

more than eleven years, playing a part in the transformation of the area's welfare and housing facilities. She regarded herself as a firm supporter of the Labour Party and socialism but displayed only limited personal ambition. With both her father and her husband, her assumed role was that of a helpmate, working behind the scenes for the cause instead of acting as its crusading proponent. Her modesty and retiring nature were accompanied by a striking appearance very similar to that of her father: 'She had a distinctive and well-defined bone structure and her face had a forthright and warm expression'. In later years her white, wavy hair was offset by broad, dark eyebrows (Corr, 139).

Nan Hardie Hughes died in Ballochmyle Hospital, Mauchline, Ayrshire, on 27 June 1947, and her funeral took place in Cumnock, attended by many prominent members of various local government bodies in Ayrshire; she was buried at the new cemetery, Cumnock. Emrys Hughes continued his career as a journalist and an MP. They had no children.

Helen Corr

Sources

H. Corr, 'Hardie, Agnes Paterson', *Scottish labour leaders, 1918–39: a biographical dictionary*, ed. W. Knox (1984) · W. Stewart, *J. Keir Hardie: a biography* (1921) · E. Hughes, *Keir Hardie* (1956) · K. O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie: radical and socialist* (1975) · I. McLean, *Keir Hardie* (1975) · m. cert. · d. cert.

Wealth at death

£3713 14s. 11d.: confirmation, 12 Sept 1947, *CCI*