

Helen Corr, 'Shaw, Clarice Marion (1883–1946)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004  
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Clarice Marion Shaw (1883–1946): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/54410

Shaw [*née* McNab], Clarice Marion (1883–1946), social reformer and politician, was born at 10 Morton Street, Leith, near Edinburgh, on 22 October 1883, the eldest daughter of Thomas Charles McNab, a wire-cloth weaver, and his wife, Mary Deas Fraser. Her father was a high-profile figure in local politics, including being a director of Leith's co-operative association, and played a large part in moulding Clarice's radical and political beliefs in Labour politics.

Clarice combined an interest in education and socialism from an early stage. Inspired by Keir Hardie's published views on religious education, she was a founder member of the Glasgow Socialist Sunday School in the 1890s. After training as a music teacher, at about the age of twenty she began teaching in an elementary school in Leith and became an advocate of the state provision for improved medical and welfare services for schoolchildren. Her election to the Leith school board in April 1922 indicated her ambitions in local government, which were enhanced by her activities in the Women's Labour League—an organization focusing on the employment and pay of female workers. Her radical approach towards women's rights, which included campaigning for the extension of job opportunities for girls after school, broadened into urging the abolition of children's employment and raising the school leaving age to sixteen.

Unlike many of her peers Clarice displayed clear political ambitions. By 1913 she had joined the Labour Party, partly out of support for socialist principles, but also as a route into local politics. In November 1913 she was elected to Leith town council, giving her the distinction of being the first Labour female member of a town council in Scotland. As a councillor she took a personal interest in medical and child welfare issues. In 1916 she was appointed as the Women's Labour League representative to attend meetings of the Scottish executive committee of the Labour Party. There she met, worked with, and eventually married in Edinburgh in July 1918, the widower [Benjamin Howard Shaw \(1865–1942\)](#), first secretary of the Scottish Labour Party. The couple complemented each other in terms of political ideas and tastes, teetotalism, and temperance reform. Both she and Ben Shaw were also closely associated with the Glasgow Socialist Sunday School, of which Clarice was the national president for twenty-five years. The marriage did not produce any children.

Clarice Shaw enjoyed an unusual period of relative inactivity in public life after the couple's move to Glasgow in 1918, but this came to a close in 1921 following their move in that year to Troon, Ayrshire. She was subsequently a member of Troon town council and Ayrshire county council, and during the next twenty years she fulfilled a number of roles in civic administration, continuing her educational campaign and serving as a JP. She was appointed a member of the Scottish Food Council, the price regulation committee for Scotland, and the 1928 royal commission on educational endowments in Scotland. Twice—in 1929 and 1931—she unsuccessfully fought Ayr burghs at the general election. When international tensions began to develop in the 1930s, Clarice initially held to her pacifist principles. She appeared at various peace

assemblies and in 1935 was one of the key speakers at a women's peace conference in the Keir Hardie Institute alongside Agnes Dollan. As the fascist threat grew more acute, however, she appears to have modified her views. Although she abhorred the many side effects of the Second World War, such as the lowering of educational standards, by 1945 she was demanding total victory and the crushing of German power.

Clarice Shaw's activities during the war represented the height of her manifold achievements. She was chairman of the Scottish Labour Party, a Labour councillor, and a member of the Scottish Committee of Co-operative, Labour and Trade Union Women, founded—partly by her—in 1934. She had close links with the Scottish Trades Union Congress and the Women's Co-operative Guild in England. When her husband died in October 1942, she committed even more time and energy to the Labour Party. At the general election in July 1945 she was rewarded with a 7537 majority over the only other candidate, the Conservative Lieutenant-Colonel George E. Walker, in Kilmarnock. Moreover, her services to the Labour Party were recognized by her being chosen as the secretary of the Scottish parliamentary group. Having fulfilled her major ambition, however, Clarice was then struck down by a serious illness shortly afterwards which rendered her incapable of ever attending the sessions in the House of Commons. She continued to deal with her parliamentary correspondence until she was forced to resign her seat in September 1946.

Ben and Clarice Shaw were remembered as one of the most successful and popular partnerships in the Scottish Labour Party. While Ben was introverted, Clarice's oratorical skills gave her the ability to command large audiences, despite her plump and matronly appearance. She was equally adept at handling the affairs of several prestigious governmental committees and commissions. She died on 27 October 1946 at 36 Titchfield Road, Troon, and was buried at Troon.

Helen Corr

## Sources

H. Corr, 'Shaw, Clarice Marion McNab', *Scottish labour leaders, 1918–39: a biographical dictionary*, ed. W. Knox (1984) · b. cert. · d. cert.

## Wealth at death

£7765 15s. 3d.: confirmation, 10 Jan 1947, *CCI*