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# Unions

Lucy Woodcock's international life began in what might seem the most unlikely of places – a small fishing town called Eden on the South Coast of New South Wales. This town had been the hub of Ben Boyd's transnational whaling empire. The Scotsman's ships, crewed by Aboriginal, Māori and Pacific Islander seamen alongside Englishmen and even the odd American, had crossed the Tasman, heading towards the Antarctic Circle. Perhaps it was not so surprising after all that Lucy discovered her wider world here.

Born in Granville, Lucy Godiva Woodcock had lived close to her parents' home during her five years as a 'pupil-teacher', her postings taking her only as far as Pitt Town and South Parramatta. Barely older than her students, she learnt 'on the job' from 1906 to early 1910. In her first real placement, in mid-1910, she was still an 'assistant teacher', but was far from home, in chilly – and lonely – Eden on the South Coast.

Lucy worked hard, as she was to do all her life, not only teaching in class but organising 'Empire Day' with a picnic for the whole community, a pageant and races for the children and a dance afterwards for the grown-ups. She felt a long way from home until she was welcomed into the warmth of the Robinovitz family, local storekeepers who knew what it felt like to miss their home.

For them, the little fishing town was an Eden, both in name and reality. It was a safe refuge after the terrifying persecution in Europe. Queenie Symonds, a child in the Robinovitz family, recalled her mother's warm welcome to all newcomers:

Our house was always opened. And I must tell you, there was a pupil-teacher sent down from Sydney, it took her three days to come. Miss Woodcock. And she'd never been away from home in her life.

As she passed our place, my mother said, 'Miss Woodcock, come in and have some afternoon tea'. And she looked and she saw my young sister and her eyes filled with tears. And she said, 'Do you know, we were a family of six or seven, and I left a baby at home, my youngest sister'. So my mother said, 'Come in every day after school and have something!' It wasn't so much a cup of tea, but my mother used to make her own ginger beer, it was like a beautiful soft drink. You couldn't go and buy lemonade in those days, no such thing! And Miss Woodcock became a very close friend of ours. And so much so, that ... my younger sister (who unfortunately has just died) took up teaching on her account.<sup>1</sup>

In later years, Queenie came to Sydney and worked in a real estate office in Enfield, where she met Lucy again:

Miss Woodcock, who we knew in Eden, came into the office one day and said they had bought some land and built a house there. And we kept up our relationship. And she was the one then that persuaded my sister who had just started to be a teacher.<sup>2</sup>

Over the shared home-made ginger beer in Eden, the Robinovitz family told Lucy their story. The elderly patriarch of the family, Isaac Robinovitz, had escaped as a young man from Odessa during the 1880s because of the rising religious persecution in Russia. His journey to Australia was difficult. He worked in various labouring jobs to make his way, via London and New Zealand, to Australia, eventually opening his 'Polytechnic Store' in Eden. He remained in touch with his family in Kishinev, Odessa. His decision to leave had been wise – the violence in Kishinev escalated to murderous proportions, with terrible massacres in 1903 – just a few years before Lucy met them. By then the news had circulated round the world.<sup>3</sup> The stories she heard were not just of one man's escape but of the terrible impact on the generations left trapped behind. The Robinovitz family was

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1 Queenie Symonds, interviewed by Brenda Factor, NSW Bicentennial oral history collection [sound recording], 1987. Held in National Library of Australia (Session 1 of 2, 42:47–43:45), nla.gov.au/nla.obj-216364926/listen?searchTerm=Woodcock%20jewish%20refugees, accessed 15 October 2017.

2 Ibid.

3 *Bega Budget*, 27 May 1911, 2.

still not financially secure when Lucy arrived in Eden, but their warmth and generosity gave her great comfort. Their kindness stayed with her for the rest of her life, and so too did their story.<sup>4</sup>

Despite her hard work, Lucy was not interested in individual advancement. Her approach to work and learning was collective. She was interested in the early discussions about forming a teachers' union and, as an 'assistant teacher' after finishing her training as a 'pupil-teacher', she was particularly alert to the disadvantages these 'assistants' suffered. The first Assistants' Union was established briefly in 1897 but then reformed as the Women Assistant Teachers' Association' in 1907. Pressure from assistant teachers went some way towards improving their recognition and representation in the various emerging unions for teachers, but there was a long way to go. Lucy began to advocate on behalf of assistant teachers as well as fully employed or qualified teachers, long before the NSW Teachers Federation was eventually established in September 1918.<sup>5</sup>

Lucy's support for the NSW Women Assistant Teachers' Association was driven, in part, by her frustrations around the differences in pay and opportunity for women teachers, who formed the majority of 'assistants'. All teachers' pay had been cut during the 1890s Depression, but, in 1893 and 1896, women suffered specific disadvantage when the pay of girls' and infants' mistresses, the only senior positions available to women, were reduced by a much greater margin than those of male teachers. Although the wages of male teachers had been restored to their 1880 level by 1911, those of women had not.<sup>6</sup> Lucy had been a schoolgirl in 1906 when Peter Board, the NSW Director of Education, had made his support for a discriminatory wage system very clear. Annie Golding, one of the early advocates of decent wages for women teachers, challenged Board, ridiculing him in his own words that women should 'take the salaries of women'. Board stood by his belief, insisting that marriage was more

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4 Isaac Robinovitz biography, courtesy Phillip Moses from the Australian Jewish Historical Society; *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 1 January 1942, 6; 25 June 1942, 8; 5 November 1942, 3; 26 November 1942, 6; 15 August 1946, 7; ChaeRan Y. Freeze and Jay M. Harris, eds, *Everyday Jewish Life in Imperial Russia: Select Documents, 1772–1914* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, University of New England, 2013), 31.

5 Bruce Mitchell, *Teachers, Education and Politics: A History of Organisations of Public School Teachers in New South Wales* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1975), 23, 36.

6 Mitchell, *Teachers, Education and Politics*, 25–26.

important for any 'sensible' woman than the departmental representation demanded by Golding. 'Every true woman', he insisted, 'ought to think of getting married'.<sup>7</sup>

This attitude persisted. As Lucy was finishing her training in 1910, the NSW Teachers' Association passed a motion that women teachers must resign on marriage. This was carried with the support of many women teachers, particularly unmarried ones. Bruce Mitchell asserted that they were 'anxious to protect their career prospects'.<sup>8</sup> The following year, 1911, the new NSW Labor Education Minister, G.S. Beeby, said he would make married women resign from the teaching service. No Labor government in NSW actually took this threatened action, but the proposal remained a troubling possibility. In 1913, the Teachers' Association adopted a motion calling for 'Equal Pay for Equal Work', but this was not included in the constitution of the new Teachers Federation in 1918, discussed below. It was later added only as an objective in 1920, after a battle by Lucy and others at the Federation's conference.<sup>9</sup> Lucy entered her career as a fully qualified teacher receiving only a fraction of the wages paid to her male colleagues and facing the threat of dismissal if she were ever to marry.

In 1913, Lucy returned to Sydney to teach at Lidcombe Public. In 1914, she began a new endeavour; enrolling at the University of Sydney as a night student in arts, the first of her two university degrees. She graduated in 1922 and by then had begun a degree in economics, graduating in 1924. While doing her first degree, she was aware of discrimination. She spoke years later, in 1962, about one instance burnt into her memory, after a radio program in which Mungo MacCallum II defended women's rights:

My mind went back to my own undergraduate days. His father, Sir Mungo, was no believer in women's rights. In his classes, he invariably addressed the mixed group as 'Gentlemen!' On one occasion, the women, tired of being ignored, planned to forego their customary places in the front of the lecture room and occupy the back benches. He had always looked over them to the back of the room.

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7 Transcript of Teachers' Assoc deputation to Public Service Board, 15 December 1906, pp. 14, 34–36, 1907/00530, in 1906–1907 Bundle, Box P3952, NSW Archives; cited in Mitchell, *Teachers, Education and Politics*, 224.

8 Mitchell, *Teachers, Education and Politics*, 26.

9 *Ibid.*, 57.

But the changed position did not affect his opening remark, for although he was looking straight at some forty women students, we were still ‘Gentlemen’ and ‘Gentlemen’ we remained while present at English Lectures.

As Vice chancellor of the University, Sir Mungo had no time for women speakers at public functions. At the famous meeting to launch the Carillon appeal, he would have denied us our right to put the point of view of the folk whose efforts in money raising built that Carillon. He had to be defied, and I know, because it was my maiden speech! Hot under the collar from being asked to forego the right of addressing the meeting, the speech was made. (It seems as if I have gone on making speeches ever since!)

Maybe the opposition to full equality can still be bridged if only enough women can be made indignant at being overlooked.<sup>10</sup>

World War I turned Lucy’s life upside down. Many years later, she told a young student about the day she found out that the war had started. She was at Sydney University and she met the paperboy at the gates, exchanging money for the paper. She was so shocked by the war news that she did not think to ask for change, having paid the lad two shillings not a threepence. Distressed, she made her way into the city centre, where she saw people dancing in the streets in celebration of the hostilities. This disturbed her even more<sup>11</sup> but there was worse news to come.

Lucy’s family was shattered by the war. Thomas, her much loved brother, survived almost till the end, before dying in France in January 1918. For Lucy, this was a brutal demonstration of the futility and destructiveness of war, a lesson that imbued her later life. Her parents were too broken to cope. Lucy, as the eldest child in the family, became the executor of her brother’s will. Despite, or perhaps because of, her family’s tragedies, she intensified her union activity and so she was one of the people who pushed the Teachers’ Association and others into forming an industrial union. In September 1918, the NSW Teachers Federation was finally established to bring all teachers’ organisations into the NSW Arbitration process. Lucy was a key participant in the formation meeting and later described to Bruce Mitchell, for his history of the NSW Federation, the electric atmosphere as the motion’s movers and seconders made powerful

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10 United Associations of Women (UA) *Newsheet*, August 1962, 2–3.

11 Kit Edwards, interview, 30 December 2017.

speeches before the final decision.<sup>12</sup> The next goal was recognition in the federal Arbitration system, and this was to prove far more difficult.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, as discussed later, Lucy persisted, maintaining her focus on the national sphere throughout her teaching career, even as she took on senior roles in the NSW Teachers Federation.

Lucy had continued her studies, despite the war. In fact, she thrived in the university atmosphere, even as a night student. She majored in English and philosophy in her BA but drew most from her second degree, which was in economics. Enrolling in 1920, she learnt from a range of popular lecturers, including the left-leaning economist R.F. Irvine.<sup>14</sup> Later, she told friends that her studies had opened up ways to explore the issues she was passionate about since her first years of teaching – race, internationalism, social injustice and gender. Certainly this degree shaped the rest of her life – Lucy argued all her later campaign contributions on grounds that would today be understood as political economy, from her speeches during the Depression, to all her statements on gender equality in employment through to her incisive economic analyses in the United Associations of Women newsletters in the 1960s. All of Lucy's closest associates in the Teachers Federation had studied economics, including not only Sam Lewis but, later, Elizabeth Mattick. Lucy appears to have continued her association with many of Irvine's students and close teaching associates from those years, who included F.A. Bland, P.C. Spender, Persia Campbell and H.V. Evatt. In *New Outlook*, the magazine Irvine edited, he published work by a wide range of young people who later had great influence, like David Rivett, Flora Eldershaw and Jack Lindsay.<sup>15</sup>

12 Lucy Woodcock, interview with Bruce Mitchell. Cited in Mitchell, *Teachers, Education and Politics*, 37 note 26 (on p. 225). No notes have yet been found in Mitchell's papers, deposited in the University of New England archives.

13 Recognition in a federal award was only achieved in 1986, long after Lucy's death in 1968, Steve O'Neill, *Development of Federal Industrial Powers*, Background Paper no. 33 (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, Parliamentary Library Research Service, 1993).

14 B.J. McFarlane, 'Irvine, Robert Francis (1861–1941)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/irvine-robert-francis-6800/text11763](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/irvine-robert-francis-6800/text11763), published first in hardcopy 1983, accessed online 14 May 2016.

15 Bruce Mitchell, 'Woodcock, Lucy Godiva (1889–1968)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/woodcock-lucy-godiva-9172/text16197](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/woodcock-lucy-godiva-9172/text16197), published first in hardcopy 1990, accessed online 12 November 2018; Michael Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives: Vitalism in Bourgeois Social Thought 1890–1960* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984), 265–69.

In the early 1920s, Lucy had begun to organise the Sydney University night students to form a lobby group to represent their interests. All of them were people like herself, working long hours in paid jobs, as well as travelling to classes and the library to study at night. It was in organising these students that Lucy started to meet other activists, and one who became her lifelong friend and colleague was Sam Lewis, from an Eastern Suburbs activist Jewish background who was younger than her and already a teacher. Over the same time, Lucy drew closer to Robert Irvine and his daughter Ysobel. Both were artists and Robert Irvine was also an avid bibliophile, commissioning artists to create bookplates. During the 1920s, Robert Irvine lived first in Darlinghurst and then Paddington. His daughter Ysobel lived in a flat at 215A Lower George Street near Circular Quay in Sydney, which was also home to a number of innovative artists associated with bohemian Sydney. They included Grace Crowley and Margel and Frank Hinder, as well as Rah Fizelle, the painter with whom Lucy taught at Darlington from 1921.<sup>16</sup> Sometime in the 1920s or 1930s, Lucy rented another flat in that same block and used it frequently during her later life.<sup>17</sup> Lucy continued to follow Ysobel's career as she studied design at Julian Ashton's Sydney Art School and volunteered at the Children's Library in Surry Hills in the late 1920s. Lucy also remained interested in Robert Irvine's ideas, inviting him to lecture about contemporary economics and politics to Federation members in September 1939, on the eve of another war. Irvine discussed the importance of socialism – making it clear he was no friend of communism – and ended by endorsing H.G. Wells's statement that 'Education is the one hope of humanity'.<sup>18</sup> Eventually, Lucy cared for Irvine in his final years and became the custodian of his papers after his death in 1941.<sup>19</sup> Irvine's biographer, Bruce McFarlane, interviewed her in the 1960s. He found Lucy generous with her time and open to talking about Irvine but reticent about herself, saying only that she was involved with 'Bohemian friends'.

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16 The Hinders pioneered abstract and kinetic art in Sydney in 1930s. See shared biography under Eileen Chanin, 'Hinder, Margel Ina (1906–1905)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hinder-margel-ina-18079](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hinder-margel-ina-18079), published online 2016, accessed 3 January 2019. Lucy was transferred to Darlington in 1921.

17 Lucy's will indicates she never purchased this flat, and her only property on her death was her half share with her sister in the Enfield home.

18 Irene Leslie, summarising 'Dreams and Nightmares', Irvine's lecture, *Education: The Journal of the NSW Teachers' Federation*, 18 September 1939, 344, 369.

19 *Ibid.*, 275.

The philosophy of bohemianism in Sydney in the 1920s had many attractions for Lucy.<sup>20</sup> Bohemianism seemed to possess an atmosphere of excitement. Its adherents had a lively enthusiasm for literary and artistic expression. These were the elements of the progressive educational philosophies that increasingly intrigued Lucy. She was interested too in the movement's critique of contemporary bourgeois culture, although, as Moore demonstrates, this body of artists still needed patronage from affluent mentors and engagement with a consumer market. Nevertheless, their assertion of independence from and contempt for capitalism was attractive for Lucy as a union activist. Perhaps, also, Lucy was drawn to the sexual freedom championed by bohemianism.

Bohemianism in Australia was distinctive, with more overtly political dimensions than Europe.<sup>21</sup> Although some of its Australian adherents were uninterested in actually opposing bourgeois capitalism, there were others, notably Jack Lindsay, who were active socialists for at least part of their careers. Moore points out that these politically activist bohemians in the 1920s included journalist and socialist Sam Rosa, the CPA co-founder Guido Baracchi (then a Melbourne University student and guild socialist), the poet Lesbia Harford (one of the few socialist women to acknowledge a relationship with another woman) and the writer and CPA member Katherine Susannah Prichard.<sup>22</sup> Betsy Matthias, the proprietor of the popular Café la Bohème, was associated with various socialist parties in Melbourne and Sydney and with the anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (known as the Wobblies or IWW) and eventually with the Labor Party. George Finey was another example of the active socialists at the centre of Sydney's 1920s Bohemia.<sup>23</sup> John Anderson, who became Professor of Philosophy at Sydney University in 1926,

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20 Peter Kirkpatrick, *The Sea Coast of Bohemia: Literary Life in Sydney's Roaring Twenties* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1992); T. Moore, 'Australia's Bohemian Tradition' (PhD thesis, History, SOPHI, University of Sydney, 2007), whose *Bohemian Rhapsody* on the ABC was an important initiating point for the thesis.

21 Moore, 'Australia's Bohemian Tradition', 443–57, Conclusion: 'Bohemia Then and Now'.

22 The assumption of political inactivity is more evident in Kirkpatrick, *The Sea Coast of Bohemia*. Recognition of distinctive Australian dimensions to bohemianism is an argument developed by Moore, 'Australia's Bohemian Tradition', 443–57; Joy Damousi discusses the activist women, either in the socialist parties or in the Labor Party, who were also associated with bohemian networks in Sydney and Melbourne, Joy Damousi, *Women Come Rally* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press 1994), 13–56.

23 Damousi, *Women Come Rally*, 266.

was not himself part of the bohemian group. However, Andersonian libertarianism was an active political influence on the Left as well as others in the bohemian network.<sup>24</sup>

Moore may be less accurate in another point – he argues that an aggressive masculinism was a universal characteristic of Australian bohemianism, arising in part from the gendered (and racialised) segregation of Australian hotels. The exclusion of women from Australian pubs does appear to have encouraged many bohemians to exaggerate masculinism, celebrating not only the alleged benefits of the exclusion of women, but also excoriating those women opposing the abuse of alcohol in the Women's Temperance Union.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, many women did participate in the bohemian movement, albeit with little criticism of its patriarchal values. A notable publicist was Dulcie Deamer, while women like Dora Birtles and Mary Martin were on the margins. Lucy knew a number of these women well, either through their social life, teaching or activism. They all participated in the celebration of drinking, imbibing in cafes, clubs and restaurants. Sam Rosa frequented some important venues in Sydney – cafes like the Roma in Pitt Street; Betsy Matthias's café, La Bohème, and Theo's Café, both in Campbell Street near Chinatown. In these places, alcohol was freely available as was news about unions,<sup>26</sup> and Rosa edited the union publications *Common Cause* and *Labor Daily* (from 1925 to 1934) before returning to *Truth*. As Betsy Matthias's life suggests, the influence of the IWW was strong among Sydney bohemians and unionists. The IWW had made a forceful critique of racism and sexism, which was sustained long after the Wobblies themselves had been forced off the industrial stage.

Some women challenged the segregation of hotels, not by drinking elsewhere nor by calls for temperance, but instead by demanding an end to segregation. Lucy Woodcock was one of those. She made scathing attacks on the Australian preference of spending money on alcohol rather than education. She did not demand abstinence; she insisted that

24 Ibid., 266–67; John Docker, *Australian Cultural Elites: Intellectual Traditions in Sydney and Melbourne* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1974); See Anderson's letter co-signed with Lucy opposing censorship of literature on contraception, *SMH*, 25 March 1946, 2.

25 Moore, 'Australia's Bohemian Tradition', 443–57.

26 For example, the Australasian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation. Verity Burgmann, 'Rosa, Samuel Albert (Sam) (1866–1940)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, [adb.anu.edu.au/biography/rosa-samuel-albert-sam-8264/text14475](http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/rosa-samuel-albert-sam-8264/text14475), published first in hardcopy 1988, accessed online 13 May 2016.

male-only bars humiliated women drinkers, creating a gender segregation that generated harm. She was quoted under the headline ‘Women Seek Equal Rights in Drinking’:

Drinking conditions in Sydney hotels either denied women the right to have a drink or made it degrading for them to do so.<sup>27</sup>

The hotel under Lucy’s home, 215A George St, was, for many years, the only one in Sydney that allowed women to drink in the main bar rather than a separate ‘Ladies Bar’.<sup>28</sup>

As it was for many on the Left, Lucy’s involvement with bohemians and bohemianism was complex. Bohemian society generated continuing tensions and conflicts as well as providing a supportive environment.

Her friendship with Robert Irvine is easier to understand. In 1920, ‘liberal and radically minded students and staff’ at Sydney University established a Public Questions Society and the League of Nations Union. Their goals were to debate contentious questions of national and international significance. The Public Questions Society set up five study circles, one of which, chaired by Robert Irvine, was on ‘Women in Industry’. This topic must have been of immediate interest to Lucy Woodcock.<sup>29</sup> She would also have been sympathetic to Irvine’s innovative and broadly political approach to economics. Lucy became one of Irvine’s wide circle of staff and students, many of whom considered him the ‘father of political economy’, recalling affectionately not only his ‘vivid lecture discussions’ but his informal assistance outside the classroom. The Sydney University newspaper *Hermes* noted that his influence extended far beyond the university, encompassing art, literature and history as well as economics.<sup>30</sup>

Irvine consolidated much of his economic theory in *The Midas Delusion*, a book meant to be a weighty economic analysis. Yet its first chapter was a much more personal memoir about his time at Sydney University and the students with whom he formed such close bonds. Although he

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27 *Tribune* (Sydney), 11 June 1946, 6.

28 Ken Muir, former teacher and a fellow active Federationist although much younger than Lucy, pers. comm. 2017.

29 Alan Barcan, *Radical Students: The Old Left at Sydney University* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 23–27.

30 Peter Diderik Groenewegen, *Educating for Business, Public Service and the Social Sciences: A History of the Faculty of Economics at the University of Sydney, 1920–1999* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2009), 6–8.

chose not to name anyone in particular, he dedicated this first chapter to the ‘good companions’, and in it he gave a glimpse of the energy and excitement of the circle that Lucy joined in the 1920s:

It was my good fortune, when the lecture halls knew me, to have a succession, year after year, of student comrades who were eager to join with me in exploring the dark and winding passages of the economic labyrinth. Exactly how this fellowship – for such it was – grew into so delightful a thing, I do not know. Perhaps it was the spirit of the times.

... A new intellectual interest grew rapidly among us. We had encouraged each other to read books other than the textbooks and other than economic books: books that were alive and palpitant with the hopes and fears of men and women today. It did not matter particularly what – poetry, novels, belles-lettres, the more humanistic philosophy, the new psychology – anything that was vital, fearless and sincere in its interpretation of life.<sup>31</sup>

The warmth of this passage is striking and confirms the diversity of the discussions with students and colleagues, ranging across all genres, from fiction and poetry to emerging disciplines such as psychology. Just as compelling is Irvine’s evident recognition and respect for the intellectual contribution of the women in the group. This was in marked contrast to Lucy’s other world – that of teaching – at that same time. In the period 1890 to World War I, teaching was the only professional career available to the growing number of women emerging from the ‘compulsory, free, public education’ of the late nineteenth century in Australia. It enabled them to earn an independent living with community respect, without any need to be married to earn status. But single women became increasingly stigmatised and marginalised after World War I, as they came to be seen as deviant and threatening. The career structure for teachers from 1920 became more complex: the NSW Education Department constructed differences between primary and secondary education, which consolidated the gendered limits on certain roles. Such rules ensured that men always managed (as principals, masters or administrators) and that women taught always in subordinate positions, with lower income and less power.<sup>32</sup>

31 R.F. Irvine, *The Midas Delusion* (Adelaide: self-published, printed by Hassell Press, 1933), 1–11, and in particular pp. 3–4, 5.

32 Marjorie R. Theobald, *Knowing Women: Origins of Women’s Education in Nineteenth-Century Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), doi.org/10.2307/27516628; K. Whitehead, ‘The Spinster Teacher in Australia from the 1870s to the 1960s’, *History of Education Review* 36, no. 1 (2007): 1–17, doi.org/10.1108/08198691200700001.

In his introduction, Irvine emphasised the later careers – though not the names – of these young comrades, ‘the men and women who have sought truth and understanding, above all things’ and who ‘stand high in their chosen professions or callings’. He noted with both irony and regret that some had gone into business but those emotions were absent in his commendation of those who had gone on to be the ‘educators’. Irvine believed educators, regardless of gender, had an important and valuable role.

In 1922, when Irvine was 63, he was forced to resign from his role as Dean of the Faculty of Economics and from Sydney University. McFarlane believed that ‘the post-war wave of anti-socialist hysteria that swept Australia probably contributed to his removal from the university’.<sup>33</sup> The immediate issue was an accusation of a long extramarital affair with an American woman who had assisted him in the faculty for some years.<sup>34</sup> This caused widespread dismay among fellow staff and students. Lucy organised a gift from students to mark their appreciation for Irvine’s teaching and she was a prominent signatory of the student testimonial presented to him.<sup>35</sup>

Ten years after his forced resignation, Irvine reflected in the *Midas Delusion* on those warm friendships amongst the young economics students in the early 1920s. He finished that introductory chapter by admitting that, at the time, he had failed see the dynamics of the group. Only in retrospect did he comprehend that this fellowship relied on the insight and emotional work of a small number of these ‘good companions’:

Looking back now, I can see, more clearly than I did then, how much our coterie owed to the devotion of a few of their number who gave themselves, heart and soul, to the better ordering of our activities. Theirs, in fact, was the ‘invisible hand’ that kept us together. They were very wise for their years ...

And so it dawned on us, borrowing thus widely and subject to such influences, that the ‘dismal science’ was, after all, the most human and perhaps the greatest of all studies. We saw that nothing

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33 McFarlane, ‘Irvine, Robert Francis (1861–1941)’.

34 *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 7 July 1916. It is important to note that McFarlane apparently interviewed Lucy Woodcock about Irvine’s life and – given that she was still then in possession of his papers – she was able to facilitate McFarlane’s full access. The high value of this interview to McFarlane is discussed by Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives*, 276, in a note to Roe’s footnotes for his own chapter on David Irvine.

35 *Northern Star* (Lismore), 14 October 1922, 10; Roe, *Nine Australian Progressives*, 275.

human was fully foreign to it and, rightly or wrongly, we felt that we were sharing in a reorientation of thought that seemed to make it possible to frame a 'New Economics'...<sup>36</sup>

Although he did not name those 'wise young people', Irvine's description of their thoughtful nurturing of the group is similar to the descriptions written by women activists in a heartfelt obituary in the United Associations' newsletter after Lucy's death. Certainly, by 1933, Lucy had proven herself an excellent friend to Irvine, giving him the attention he needed to live independently in Ysobel's flat and eventually caring for him until his death in 1941.

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Despite juggling work and study, Lucy, like many university students, took every opportunity to seek out like-minded new friends. Two teaching colleagues – from different sides of the political fence – remembered these early years vividly. At the Teachers Federation tribute to her on her retirement in 1953, during the intensifying Cold War, Sam Lewis, a left winger, one of Lucy's lifelong friends and a former president of the Federation, said:

I remember Miss Woodcock in the 1920s when she was a fresh young woman in her early thirties. The first time I saw her was at the University where she was active in the Evening Students' Association ...

She was in at the birth of the Federation and has been a doughty champion of many causes of women teachers. But then she sees women's rights as Union rights. She has been a champion of assistants, but she saw the assistants as part of the whole teaching service and now that she has been a Mistress for many years, she has seen the Mistress's interests, but has never failed to see the interests of the assistants and of the Federation as a whole. She has seen the welfare of women teachers as part of the welfare of all who make a contribution to the life of our community

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36 Irvine, *The Midas Delusion*, 7.

As far as I can see, she is one of those people whose mental power has grown with the years. I want to say that she is one of the most respected persons on the Labour Council, and possibly about the only person on the Council who will be listened to by all sides with respect and in silence.<sup>37</sup>

At the same 1953 gathering, Harry Heath (a moderate who had just won Lewis's position as Federation president in 1951) explained that he had met Lucy later:

My first recollection of Miss Woodcock goes back to the very earliest days of my teaching career in 1924. At the time I was a member of the Federation Council and Miss Woodcock was one of the leading members of the Council ...

She is the last pupil-teacher ... Miss Woodcock is the last person in the service who did the whole five years of pupil-teaching.

She was not trained in a college and, in the course of her career as a teacher, she has risen to the highest position a woman can occupy in our teaching service: that is, she has been the Mistress of an A. Department for a number of years. In addition to that, she has been a woman of immense energy and her interests have not been entirely confined to the Federation ...<sup>38</sup>

Lucy's energy and wide interests ensured her continued involvement in the university evening students' organisation she had helped to found, still managing social events that developed the relationships that would allow this notoriously difficult-to-organise community to make itself both visible and audible. She became president of this organisation by the end of her enrolment.

Her 1921 transfer from Lidcombe Public School to Darlington came just as she was beginning her economics degree. This brought her into direct contact with inner-city communities, at a time when a boom in manufacturing led to increased employment in the surrounding factories and the Eveleigh Railway workshop. As a university student and a teacher in the local public school, Lucy became involved in the University Settlement,<sup>39</sup> a community social welfare organisation that, from its

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37 Sam Lewis, 1953, UAW Files, AU NBAC Z236, Box 32, NBABL.

38 Harold Heath, retirement testimonial speech, December 1953, *ibid.*

39 Established 1891 by the Sydney University Women's Society, rebadging itself as the Sydney University Settlement in 1913, just before Lucy began her first degree.

inception in 1891, operated on the settlement principles of the nineteenth century, emphasising reciprocity, partnership and collaborative work to tackle entrenched social problems and provide social support. Here she met the people in the area with the lowest income and who were the most vulnerable. Among them were Aboriginal people, some of whom she knew from the South Coast. Lucy became increasingly aware of the challenges faced by working people, including Aboriginal families who had been living in Redfern for many years, as her analysis of the economics of urban Australia developed through her studies. She became well known in the Aboriginal community, as Jack Horner attested when he met her in 1956, because she was interested in adult education. Even though she could not provide it herself, she was able to direct local mature-aged Aboriginal people to attend the Cleveland Street Evening School.<sup>40</sup>

While studying and developing new relationships in her working environment, Lucy was also throwing herself into the work of the new Teachers Federation. She earned a reputation as 'a hard worker on the Council' and, in November 1924, was elected for the first time as a NSW Federation delegate to the next Interstate Teachers' Conference in Hobart in January 1925.<sup>41</sup> Her fellow delegates included three male teachers and one other woman, the veteran teacher – and fellow Granville local – Margaret Swann, the retiring headmistress of Parramatta Primary School. Swann was much older than Lucy and had been involved in more conservative organisations like the Country Women's Association and the Parramatta Historical Society, but had nevertheless asserted the activist role of women and teachers.<sup>42</sup>

Lucy remained deeply troubled by the gender discrimination in pay in the teaching profession. The Teachers' Association had been divided on the multifaceted issue of women's pay. In 1910, single women teachers, while supporting pay claims, had won a vote in the Teachers' Association to force women teachers to resign on marriage. The then Labor Government, perhaps influenced by women members who were also teachers, like Kate Dwyer, did not proceed with corresponding legislation. The Teachers' Association abandoned the 'resign on marriage' provision and instead put in place an 'Equal Pay for Equal Work' platform in 1913.<sup>43</sup>

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40 Jack Horner, *Seeking Racial Justice: An Insider's Memoir of the Movement for Aboriginal Advancement, 1938–1978* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), 18–19.

41 *Northern Star* (Lismore), 15 November 1924, 14.

42 *West Australian* (Perth), 6 January 1928, 6.

43 Mitchell, *Teachers, Education and Politics*, 26.

When the new Teachers Federation was formed in September 1918, this Equal Pay policy was not included in its platform, indicating the ambivalence among teachers about these issues. The call for Equal Pay was, however, included in the Federation's first claim before the Arbitration Court, which ruled in 1920 that women teachers should receive not equal pay, but no less than 80 per cent of the male rate in any comparable job. The Teachers Federation responded by finally altering its formal policy to include 'Equal Pay for Equal Work', but, in practice, ignored it in the Federation's campaigns over the following years. In any event, the issue was massively complicated by the differential classifications and promotion rates of male and female teachers. There were some jobs in public schools that were not available to women, no matter how experienced or highly trained.<sup>44</sup>

Lucy had campaigned strongly on Equal Pay from the very beginning of the Federation's existence in 1918, assuming an increasingly vocal role in the intimidating and divided atmosphere of the Federation conference. In the final Federation meeting of 1924, supported by two other 'lady teachers', Miss Beatrice Taylor and Miss Ettie Cunningham, Lucy demanded that the union take a strong position on equality of pay and opportunity for its women as well as its male members by challenging this 80 per cent limit. The Labour press congratulated her on her criticism of the department that upheld this pay injustice, but her attack was directed as much against the men in the Teachers Federation who failed to carry through on their promises:

Miss L. Woodcock got a good one home on the men. 'Women teachers,' she said, 'are fully alive to the dangers of men who only half carry out their platform. We women are fully organised, and will fight for the principle of equal pay. We are prepared to stand by and defend our position.'<sup>45</sup>

In the end, Lucy and her supporters lost their original motion but won a subcommittee to draw up a schedule of pay for women teachers.

Members viewed their Teachers Federation as being overly dominated by headmasters and headmistresses over its whole existence. This was one of the reasons Lucy had continued to be active in the Women Assistants' Association, becoming its vice president in 1924, the same year that she was elected as an interstate representative for the overall Federation.<sup>46</sup>

44 Ibid., 57; Lucy Woodcock, 'Brave Hearts Led Bid for Equality', *Our Women*, March–May 1964, 26.

45 *Australian Worker* (Sydney), 31 December 1924, 2.

46 *Evening News* (Sydney), 1 March 1924, 3.

Lucy's advocacy for Equal Pay and her concern over the domination of senior staff in the Federation in particular and in the teaching profession as a whole is obvious in her co-authored 1925 booklet *Justice vs Tradition*, published under the authorship of the Combined Women Teachers' Association of NSW.<sup>47</sup> Bruce Mitchell, Lucy's biographer and colleague, regarded her as the key author of *Justice vs Tradition*.<sup>48</sup> The book rebutted the 1924 argument for higher salaries for male teachers over women teachers made by the London School Masters' Association, a prestigious body of headmasters in highly regarded British secondary schools.<sup>49</sup>

In their challenge to the London headmasters, whose argument had received wide support among Australian male teachers, the Combined Women Teachers' Association attacked the injustice of unequal pay in the education sector particularly but more broadly across society. They drew on two arguments very strongly in *Justice vs Tradition*, which were in some contradiction to each other. One relied on an assumption of biologically determined aptitudes in women – in what today would be called an essentialist argument – in asserting that all women were innately – biologically and temperamentally – suited to the teaching of children, whether or not they had actually borne offspring. In contradiction to this was their other argument – an anti-essentialist argument – that women, as equal citizens, by virtue of their qualifications and citizenship, were as capable as men of teaching children.

Yet, while Lucy and the other authors of this booklet were attacking the gendered hierarchies of their own patriarchal society, they endorsed the racial hierarchies of the colonial world. Their book began with the statement that women are better off in the 'West', then went on to condemn discrimination against women in the teaching profession. The authors argued that the comparative disadvantage faced by women in India, Turkey and China demonstrated that these countries had attained a low 'stage in race evolution', thereby justifying continued colonial control by the West.<sup>50</sup>

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47 Women's Propaganda Committee for Combined Women Teachers' Association of New South Wales, *Justice vs Tradition* (Sydney: Epworth Press, 1925).

48 Mitchell, *Teachers, Education and Politics*, 58. Mitchell strongly criticised *Justice vs Tradition* because it did not effectively challenge the status quo, meaning the details of the complex gendered 'glass ceiling' discrimination in the teaching service. It could be argued, however, that the whole premise of the book is a rebuttal of any type of gendered discrimination.

49 London School Masters' Association, *Equal Pay and the Teaching Profession* (London: The Association, c. 1924).

50 Women's Propaganda Committee, *Justice vs Tradition*, 8 for quotation and 7–10 for broader discussion. Lucy came to disagree strongly with this view.

Despite the entanglement of *Justice vs Tradition* in eugenics and in the politics of colonialism, it was an unprecedented and courageous step by women teachers to fight against the discrimination they faced. Its very production and wide circulation were a triumph for its authors. Yet it provides an uncomfortable window into the ways in which arguments for gender equality in the West could also contribute to the justification of colonial domination.

Equal Pay for Equal Work remained as Teachers Federation policy: it survived challenges in 1921, 1925 and 1927.<sup>51</sup> The Federation, however, repeatedly failed to back its own policy, shuffling what its male members found to be a difficult question into the ‘too-hard’ basket. There continued to be pay-offs and benefits for male teachers in the Education Department. To confuse the issue even further, some jobs were only offered to men and other, less well paid jobs offered to women. Reluctant to deal with the question, the Federation ignored its own policy, to the increasing frustration of its women members.



Figure 2.1: Lucy in her early days of teaching.

She enjoyed wearing fashionable and striking hats.

Source: *Warwick Daily News* (Qld), Wednesday 11 March 1942, p. 3. Trove, National Library of Australia.

<sup>51</sup> Mitchell, *Teachers, Education and Politics*, 58.

Lucy was incredibly busy in the mid-1920s, becoming vice president in the Teachers Federation, graduating with two degrees, excited and stimulated by the learning at university and by her circle of friends there, teaching intensively at Darlington and volunteering at the University Settlement as well. In addition, she also took an office-bearing role in the Sydney University Women's Graduates Association and the Sydney University Economics Society. She spoke before the National Council of Women (NCW) on at least two occasions, once with fellow economist Persia Campbell. Both spoke about child endowment and contributed to a NCW submission to the sitting Royal Commission on Endowment.<sup>52</sup>

All this came crashing to a halt – quite literally – when Lucy was hit by a speeding ambulance as she tried to cross Liverpool Road in Enfield to catch a tram in August 1926. Badly injured, she spent a month in hospital and was off work for more than nine weeks. Characteristically, Lucy decided to fight a case in court for compensation. Lucy argued that the ambulance driver had been negligent because he had failed to sound the 'gong' or give any other warning, before speeding from behind the tram. She took the NSW Ambulance Board to the District Court where a jury awarded her compensation.<sup>53</sup> This was a salve to her pride but it did not repair the permanent damage to her right leg. Her limp forced her to use a walking stick from the late 1930s.<sup>54</sup>

Lucy may have considered international exchange teaching as an opportunity to have a break away from the pressures in NSW as well as to expand her horizons. She was concerned, however, that the NSW Education Department expected teachers to use their long service leave entitlements for the exchange. Lucy's opinion, expressed through the Teachers Federation, was that the experience of British culture would definitely benefit NSW teachers, but it was unfair to expect them to use their own leave. In fact, she said, the NSW Education Department should encourage teachers to gain this experience by funding it!<sup>55</sup>

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52 *Labor Daily* (Sydney), 19 November 1927, 7; *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 20 November 1927, 26; *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 20 November 1927, 16; *SMH*, 21 November 1927, 4.

53 Michelle Hocter, 'Ambulance in the 1920s', NSW Ambulance Service Media documents, [www.ambulance.nsw.gov.au/Media/docs/Ambulanceinthe1920-0b8abfe6-0c68-4538-9990-8828685a042a-0.pdf](http://www.ambulance.nsw.gov.au/Media/docs/Ambulanceinthe1920-0b8abfe6-0c68-4538-9990-8828685a042a-0.pdf), accessed 18 October 2018; *SMH*, 17 September 1926, 18 November 1926.

54 Sam Lewis referred to her accident and the walking stick outcome in his 1953 testimonial speech.

55 *Maitland Weekly Mercury*, 24 July 1926, 13.

She herself was granted leave to spend all of 1927 in the United Kingdom. Exchange teachers in the UK were often given relief teaching – a punishing schedule in many different schools.<sup>56</sup> This was what Lucy did – teaching in over 20 inner-city schools – but it was an exciting time. These were underprivileged ‘slum schools’, managed by the London County Council, then at the cutting edge of innovation, drawing on creativity through theatre, for example, in the experiment of ‘progressive’ education.<sup>57</sup>

In the UK, she met Rosemary Benjamin, who was working with the London County Council to encourage theatre. Benjamin volunteered with the YWCA and Girl Guides and founded two theatre companies, ‘The Lyndians’ for adults and The Young People’s Theatre for Children. These theatres had Australian connections: they were influenced by Australian actor Joan Luxton’s previous work in London on similar projects.<sup>58</sup> Lucy also met another Australian exchange teacher in London at this time. Edna Nelson – later Edna Ryan – became a lifelong friend.<sup>59</sup>

Lucy learnt a great deal from the ferment of new ideas circulating in the UK about ‘progressive’ and ‘child-centred’ education. She did *not*, however, learn any reverence for English ‘traditional’ education. Instead, she was fascinated by the new strategies being developed there to address physical and psychiatric disabilities, as she reported to the Australian Teachers’ Union on her return:

She was particularly impressed with the educational work that was being done by the London County Council, and praised very highly the system of grading the children in Group schools. There adequate provision was made for the mentally defective child and for the physically defective child: while there were schools for the deaf and dumb and for the partially blind. These children were as well catered for as the normal child. In the cripple schools

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56 K. Whitehead, ‘Exchange Teachers as “Another Link in Binding the [British] Empire” in the Interwar Years’, *Social and Education History* 3, no. 1 (2014): 1–24.

57 Lucy Woodcock, Report to UA on UK, Japan, and China. *UA Newsheet*, October 1955, 3–4; *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 22 January 1930, 14; Rosmarie Benjamin, ‘The Story of the Theatre for Children’, typescript play, c. 1949, held online by State Library of Victoria, [digital.slv.vic.gov.au/dt\\_publish/pdf/marc/3/2125895.html](http://digital.slv.vic.gov.au/dt_publish/pdf/marc/3/2125895.html), accessed 17 November 2018.

58 Benjamin, ‘The Story of the Theatre for Children’; John McIntyre, ‘Rosemarie Benjamin and the Theatre for Children in Sydney, 1937–1957’, 2013, [www.artpages.com.au/Theatre\\_for\\_Children/McIntyre\\_Theatre%20for%20Children.pdf](http://www.artpages.com.au/Theatre_for_Children/McIntyre_Theatre%20for%20Children.pdf), accessed 17 November 2018.

59 Ruth Fink Latukefu, pers. comm., 3 September 2015.

particular attention was paid to fitting the child to earn a living. In fact the aim was to make these children as socially efficient as it was possible for them to be considering their physical condition.<sup>60</sup>

Lucy added that support was available to teachers as well as children:

The London County Council, Miss Woodcock declares, was not only interested in the children attending the schools within its jurisdiction. But it paid special attention to the teachers in its employ, of whom there are more than 20,000. During the winter months each year a special course of lectures is given for the benefit of the teachers to help them in their work and to inform them as to the latest development in teaching practice.<sup>61</sup>

It was not surprising then that Lucy was offended by the suggestion, made by the Australian High Commissioner to the UK, that the benefits of exchange teaching would largely flow to Australians from British culture. Instead, in London in July 1928, in the middle of her exchange year, Lucy was adamant that the benefits were reciprocal. Under headlines like ‘No Lopsided Gain’, many Australian newspapers reported her words:

Miss L. G. Woodcock, formerly vice-president of the New South Wales Teachers’ Federation, declared that contact with English traditions and culture was most valuable to Australian teachers. On the other hand, English teachers would gain valuable instruction by watching a young country tackle educational and industrial problems.<sup>62</sup>

Characteristically, on her return to Australia, she threw herself into organising teachers who had been on exchange. By 1930, an Exchange Teachers’ Club had been established, and Lucy became honorary treasurer, a position she held until 1934. The club enabled exchange teachers to keep in contact with each other and also welcomed and entertained international teachers coming to Australia. In 1937, Lucy was still hosting visiting teachers and taking them on trips around Sydney.<sup>63</sup> Most visitors in this period were from the UK, Canada or New Zealand and, from them, Lucy learnt more and more about women’s lives and work outside Australia’s shores.

60 *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 22 January 1930, 14.

61 *Ibid.*

62 *Daily News* (Perth), 20 July 1928, 7; *Register* (Adelaide), 21 July 1928, 12; *West Australian* (Perth), 21 July 1928, 19; *Mercury* (Hobart), 24 July 1928, 5.

63 *SMH*, 25 February 1932, 3; 5 January 1934, 8; 12 March 1934, 4; 3 June 1947, 7.

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