

7

What Sort of Australia? 1938

In 1938, many currents came together for Lucy and the organisations in which she was so active. It was the Sesquicentenary Year – marking 150 years since the British had claimed sovereignty over the continent. It was well known that state and federal governments would make the Sesquicentenary an occasion to celebrate British settler society and there were many people who either wanted their voices heard in the events or wanted to challenge them altogether. Yet the threat of war was also growing – so while some citizens were raising jingoistic national pride, there were many others who were trying to defend the peace.

The NSW Teachers Federation had been planning since 1935 to hold a major conference in the sesquicentenary year to foreground the importance of education for building a new nation in Australia.¹ But Aboriginal people, too, had been planning for some time to hold a counter demonstration – asserting their opposition to the official ‘celebrations’ and to the British occupation. The plans for the Day of Mourning were underway well before 1938, led by Aboriginal activists Bill Ferguson (who brought the Australian Workers’ Union and other unions), Jack Patten (who brought the nationalist Australia First movement as well as his friend, the unionist, sometime socialist and Theosophist Michael Sawtell) and Pearl Gibbs (from Brewarrina, who brought alliances with the women’s movement organisations including the United Associations of Women).²

1 *Education*, 15 June 1935, 239, FSSTA plan for linked 1938 World Education Conference.

2 *The Abo Call*, 1938, Issues 1–6, edited by Jack Patten for the Aborigines Progressive Association.

Yet from 1935 also, as war fears grew, some teachers tried to address the increasing tensions by teaching children about maintaining the peace. One way to do that was through the League of Nations, established in the wake of World War I with the express hope of fostering increased international communication to avert future hostilities. Teachers were finding that it was difficult to obtain League publications to include in their course materials, so in August 1937 they turned to the NSW Teachers Federation for assistance through its Peace Committee, then chaired by Ethel Teerman, who had become a high school teacher and Federation member. As much an activist as her parents had been in Cessnock, the younger Ethel had been busy in the Peace Committee, building links with the International Peace Campaign (IPC) with which the Federation had affiliated. The IPC had been founded in Britain as a reaction to fascist Italy's invasion of Abyssinia in October 1935.³ It aimed to influence public opinion internationally and to organise popular support for the peacekeeping tasks of the League of Nations by coordinating groups across the whole political range, from communist to conservative, from atheists to the religious. Its leadership demonstrated this broad base: it was led by the British conservative Robert Cecil, Viscount of Chelwood, and the French radical socialist, deputy and later minister of the Popular Front Government Pierre Cot. Ethel followed up the concerns teachers raised with her and, by early 1938, she had secured permission for the NSW Education Department to publish League of Nations publications as teaching resources.

The Day of Mourning was planned for Australia Day, 26 January 1938, as an Aboriginal-only gathering at the Australian Hall in Elizabeth St, Sydney. The Communist Party of Australia criticised it as separatism but it was strongly supported by the nationalist Australia First movement.⁴ The Aboriginal campaign had pushed the state government into acting too. During 1937 there were two inquiries in process. One was a State Parliament Select Committee inquiring into the conditions of Aborigines, to which Ferguson had given evidence, basing much of his information on the community research of Pearl Gibbs at Brewarrina Station in the previous months. Other witnesses included Caroline Tennant Kelly, an anthropologist working at Kempsey under the direction of Professor

3 'International Peace Campaign: History', SNAC [Social Networks and Archival Context], snaccooperative.org/ark:/99166/w62n95mj, accessed 17 November 2018.

4 Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics, 1770–1970* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1996), 202, 230–46.

A.P. Elkin, who was seeking recognition for a formal role for anthropologists in the state's administration. There was also, however, a Public Service Board inquiry into the Aborigines Protection Board itself, and Elkin, well connected in political circles, concentrated on this inquiry as he saw it as a stronger possibility for assisting anthropological involvement in future administration.

The Day of Mourning was held as planned, with some publicity and photographs published in *Pix*,⁵ but political interest in the Select Committee hearings waned. In February it finally collapsed for want of a quorum. The Aboriginal campaigners used this collapse to gain further publicity for the problems with the state government's apparatus. Pearl Gibbs and Caroline Kelly both rallied the women they knew in the feminist groups – both right and left wing – who demonstrated en masse at the final hearing of the Select Committee, gaining a striking photograph and headline in the *Truth*: 'We Are Absolutely Disgusted'.⁶ The United Associations of Women (UA) was there, among a range of women's organisations from across the political spectrum. There is no roll of the 'fifty prominent women' who attended this protest, but if Lucy was not there, she certainly knew about it.

This was only the beginning of a tumultuous year for Lucy as an activist. As we have seen, Lucy was already immersed in the campaigns to improve nutrition and housing for the families of Erskineville and in the development of policy to improve the physical environment of schools. But by 1938, many among teachers and the public knew of the growing power of fascism in Europe. Lucy had already been assisting Jewish refugees bringing news from Europe since at least 1935, and she was well aware too that the presence of representatives from fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in the NEF conferences was troubling many who had embraced its progressive education and internationalist messages. As the senior vice president of the NSW Teachers Federation, Lucy knew Ethel Teerman's work on the Peace Committee and the two worked closely together in the events around the Peace movement and women in the early months of 1938.

The first was the National Women's Peace Conference, closely aligned with the IPC and held in two synchronised sessions – one in Sydney and one in Perth on 10 and 11 April 1938. The Sydney session brought

5 *The Abo Call*, April 1938, Issue 1, 1.

6 *Truth*, 20 February 1938, 35.

together women interested in Peace from across the political spectrum, from the UA to more conservative bodies like the National Council of Women. The synchronised Perth conference was convened by the influential conservative feminist Bessie Rischbieth and attended by a range of women including the CPA member Katherine Susannah Prichard.⁷ The program for both conferences addressed five key themes: treaty obligations, armaments reduction, strengthening the League of Nations, establishing international conflict resolution mechanisms and the child and peace. Ethel Teerman was a part of the Sydney organising group for the conference and coordinated the NSW Teachers Federation involvement, which focused on the sessions on 'The School Child and Peace' and 'The Pre-School Child and Peace'.

Lucy chaired the session on the 'School Child' and gave an important keynote address to it, titled 'Prejudices'. Her activism at this time was in just this area, and her speech must have addressed prejudice against women but also racial prejudice against both Jews – in Europe and Australia – and against Aboriginal people. Lucy offered no simplistic 'maternalist' line but instead pointed out that it was mothers who fostered much of the prejudice that was exhibited in schools. She closed by arguing that 'A school for mothers is long overdue ... Teachers are daily correcting misconceptions passed on by the mothers to the children'.⁸

Ethel herself spoke in this session, discussing the need to teach children in both primary and secondary schooling about the possibilities for peace and about the League of Nations. Then the anthropologist Caroline Tennant Kelly spoke, describing the prejudice against 'pommies' that she had felt as a child of English immigrants when she attended school in Australia, and then pointed to the prejudice she had observed as a researcher against Aboriginal children in public schooling. Finally, Marie Gollan spoke in the later session on the Pre-School Child and Peace, supporting Lucy's arguments by pointing out that 'it was the mothers of bygone years, as well as the schools, who fostered the spirit of national superiority and hate that brought men to the battlefields', continuing: '[i]f we wish to bring about permanent friendship and peace among nations we must begin with the child of today'.⁹

7 *West Australian* (Perth), 2 April 1938, 8.

8 *Education*, 24 May 1938, 636.

9 *SMH*, 8 April 1938, 4.

Soon after, a 'Mother's Day Peace Conference' was held in Sydney in May but it had a very different tone, essentialising women as maternal peacekeepers. While Spanish and Chinese women drew on the brutal invasions of their own countries to make their passionate demands for peace, the tone was set by the overall conference leadership, which was by Christian organisations, although they ranged from the more conservative through to more militant bodies. Lucy spoke prominently here too, continuing her emphasis on the child and education but with a softened line towards mothers:

The weakness lies in the way we educate children ... The present system of education bred the competitive spirit and love of power that would destroy all that women's organisations stood for.¹⁰

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the involvement of groups like the Salvation Army, the headline read: 'Mother's Army: Women to work for peace'. The frequent portrayal of women by speakers in such militaristic language contributed to the distinctive message of this conference compared to the April one, despite the involvement of similar people – including Caroline Tennant Kelly and Ethel Teerman and the Teachers Federation Peace group she led. Caroline Tennant Kelly (called Mrs Timothy Kelly!) said: 'I do blame the mothers who took their children to the military tattoo ... I think there is something wrong in the dramatic presentation of war.'¹¹

These were the major Peace gatherings in 1938 specifically aimed at women, but the Peace movement itself became increasingly active over the year, as war became ever more likely. Within the Federation, Ethel Teerman's Peace Committee published curricula such as that for 'International Peace', amplifying the call made by Lucy Woodcock and Jess Rose in 1936. The Peace Committee now encouraged the Teachers Federation Council to go further by establishing a Peace Society in which all teachers could take part. It called on the IPC and the League of Nations to pressure the Australian Government to honour its treaty obligations.¹² In October, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain made his 'Peace in Our Time' announcement of the Munich Agreement between Britain, Germany, France and Italy, allowing Germany to annex parts of Czechoslovakia. The agreement did little to allay grave fears about

10 *SMH*, 9 May 1938, 13.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Education*, September 1938, 790; November 1938, 24.

coming warfare. The price paid during World War I – which had been paid in blood by so many families in Europe and Australia, including Lucy's own – was never far from public memory.

Since 1936, after the invasion of Abyssinia, the Teachers Federation had organised a major rally on Armistice Day, 11 November, the anniversary of the end of World War I. In 1938, the third of these rallies occurred, with leading speakers from the IPC, the Public Service Association, the League of Nations Union and the Federation itself. Ethel Teerman delivered the Federation message, echoing those of the other keynote speakers: 'the greatest enemy to peace was the inactivity of the people'. She sketched out the difference between 'those who say smilingly "It can't happen here" and those who say with determination, "It won't happen here"'.¹³

It was this belief in the need for widespread, citizen responsibility that underlay the major activity of the Teachers Federation over the sesquicentenary year: its call for 'Education for a Progressive, Democratic Australia'.

Lucy worked closely with the overall coordinator, Sam Lewis, to plan this broad campaign, which organised a series of conferences in major cities across the state, sent deputations to government and initiated strategies to intervene in the wider structures of education, such as the university examinations, against which Lucy had campaigned for years because they shaped all earlier schooling. Whereas the NEF conference in 1937 had concentrated on the educational profession, the Teachers Federation was determined to include the Australian public in the debates during these conferences. The Federation announced 'We Go To The People' and argued 'we must become evangelists in the cause of educational reform. We must convince hundreds of thousands of people of the need for educational reform, for educational expenditure'.¹⁴ To each event, the Federation invited the peak organisations of farmers, unions, doctors, dentists, journalists, public servants, parents' and citizens' organisations, women's organisations, surrounding shires and municipal bodies. After an initial, large four-day conference in Sydney in early June, there were gatherings in Cessnock in July, Tumut and Bankstown in August, then major conferences at Wollongong late in September, then in Newcastle and later still in Goulburn.

13 *Education*, December 1938, 54.

14 *Education*, April 1938, 591.



Figure 7.1: Lucy Woodcock on the executive of the Teachers Federation with her allies in the campaign for the role of education in a vision of Australia's democratic future.

Source: NSW Teachers Federation archives, undated photograph P2255.

As the senior vice president of the Federation and a school headmistress, Lucy was a headline speaker in the conferences. Her speeches repeated her view that the goal of public education was to nurture a child to become an independent-minded, thoughtful, questioning and creative person, who could take their place as a well-informed and independently minded democratic citizen. This view of the school as the centre of a democratic society was one she was to repeat on other occasions, like that in Melbourne in January 1940 when she addressed the Australian Teachers' Federation (successor to the Federated State School Teachers' Association). 'The school', she said, 'should be a centre in the life of the district, fitting the child for life in a democratic community.' She cited Erskineville Public School as one example, explaining how it was associated with a branch of the Sydney Day Nurseries Association and a Children's Library managed by voluntary workers under the Creative Leisure Movement, as well as having informal parents' groups.

Fundamentally, all her speeches showed her deep conviction that education could achieve social justice and peace.

The main conference in 1938 was held over four days from 8 to 11 June. Lucy was the central speaker in the session on ‘Curriculum, Extension of School Leaving Age and Country Education’ where she spoke on the need for a complete revision of the existing curriculum. The theme of her talk, according to the program (which she had had a role in formulating), was to be:

the fitting of the syllabus to the child and his [sic] present and future needs – greater freedom to be allowed to both teacher and child. The curriculum to be linked up with the child’s real world and the world with which he will come in contact when he leaves school ... Greater attention to be paid to technical education and to real commercial and rural education ... Increased attention to be paid to the conditions and institutions of people in other countries and to the effect of the interaction of people of different countries on each other.¹⁵

The key elements of Lucy’s speech were reported in *Education*.¹⁶ As well as pointing to the importance of educational opportunities for country children and the need for a new course of training for teachers, she focused on the urgency of curriculum change to create ‘well-balanced, tolerant, critical young people’. In a period when eugenic interest in biological explanations for abilities and attitudes was widespread, among the Left as well as the Right, Lucy insisted that it was instead social forces that determined the capacity of people to be informed and active democratic citizens. Education, she argued in this speech, must be about more than ‘reading, writing and arithmetic’. It must support individual creativity, respond to the challenges children faced in the real world and nurture inquiry and independent thinking.

In the conference at Newcastle, Lucy expanded on these themes, arguing that human society faced two threats: that of war, which would destroy all they had built, and that of the dread of poverty, of which Newcastle had its share. She warned that:

Man had failed to adopt conditions which would ensure the abolition of poverty and to make the world secure from the ravages of war. They had been told that democracy had failed, but had they ever given it a fair chance?¹⁷

15 *Education*, June 1938, Insert: Conference program, p. 6.

16 *Education*, July 1938, 705.

17 *Education*, October 1938, 803.

Education must respond to these threats, she insisted, by teaching children ‘to analyse and judge free from prejudices and superstitions of the past. They should argue as free people, not as shackled citizens’. Lucy continued:

Although a child was bound by environment, he should not be given secondhand thought that would prevent free thinking after school life. He should be critical and tolerant. He should be given a curriculum which he would love and respond to ... Here could be suggested a basic principle on which a real and lasting democracy could be built.

Competition was not cooperation; and if [we] shared and thought together [we] would eliminate arming against each other ... With a new curriculum, [we] could remould and rebuild society so that war and poverty would be abolished.¹⁸

Lucy Woodcock was no friend of tradition. She had titled her 1925 book *Justice vs Tradition*, and throughout her life she clearly believed that tradition made justice impossible. On the contrary, tradition was the source of prejudice and discrimination. In Newcastle she continued:

With a new curriculum, we could remould and rebuild society so that war and poverty would be abolished. If we had made them in the past, we could unmake them in the future. In this regard, we owed a great debt to Russia where tradition did not exist. If we were free from tradition, we could build anew.¹⁹

Her interest in Russia was to be sustained over many years, although there continued to be no evidence that she was ever a member of the Communist Party, despite frequently expressing support for Russian innovations in education and social relations. The NEF, too, expressed these views – which Clews argues was one reason for its falling financial support after 1945 from the US.²⁰ Lucy’s position in 1938 was, however, similar to many of the people she was by then associating with, including Jessie Street who campaigned strongly for support for the Soviet Union over the 1930s and ’40s. Lucy was certainly close friends with

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid. The journal reported this in the third person – for clarity here, the word ‘they’ has been transposed into ‘we’. Lucy probably also delivered this speech in the present and future tenses, rather than in the past tense as the journal rephrased her words.

20 Christopher Clews, ‘The New Education Fellowship and the Reconstruction of Education: 1945 to 1966’ (PhD thesis, Institute of Education, University of London, 2009), 107–22.

colleagues in the Federation who were in the CPA, like Sam Lewis and Ethel Teerman. Lucy's own position, however, as we have seen in earlier chapters, was strongly socialist but had been formed during the 1920s in her years among bohemian friends and unconventional lifestyles as well as the influences she drew on from Irvine and others during her economics studies. At Erskineville, those who were her students in the 1930s believed Lucy to be a communist and ASIO kept trying to find evidence of her membership in the party but failed completely. It seems most likely that, like Jessie Street, Rev. Alf Clint, Bishop Ernest Henry Burgmann and others of the time, Lucy greatly admired Russia but did not ever join the Communist Party – or indeed any others.²¹

The leading role Lucy took in this campaign was not only as the senior vice president of the Federation but as the new president of the NSW Branch of the NEF. In doing so, she located herself strongly with those advocating the significance of the social interactions of the child. Lucy believed that the development of the human mind was a social as well as an individual process. Therefore the curriculum should be 'planned on broad lines ... social studies, conditions of the world, general science, creative projects, music, art, literature, the living environments'.²² The curriculum should, therefore, provide for each child both as an individual and social being.

The campaign overall did not end with conferences and meetings. A permanent committee was established in September 1938 to continue the campaign and to raise funds for ongoing local CPA communication so that the broader public would have a role in and awareness of educational innovations.²³ There were then a series of deputations to the Minister for Education, putting forward the goals arising from the conference resolutions. In one deputation on 26 October, the Federation also put strongly the case for the repeal of the 1932 legislation that forced the dismissal of married women teachers.²⁴ Minister Drummond conceded that the Act had been introduced as an emergency financial measure

21 Ernest Henry Burgmann, High Anglican Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn, was called by newspapers of the day 'The Red Bishop', Anne Sanders, 'Burgmann, Ernest Henry (1885–1967)', *Obituaries Australia*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/burgmann-ernest-henry-9626/text24834, accessed 10 July 2018, e.g. *Argus* (Melbourne), 25 September 1948, 5. When Lucy's passport was obstructed by the federal government in 1954, the representations made on her behalf by Rev. Alf Dickie stressed that she had never been a member of any political party. Lucy Godiva Woodcock ASIO file, Vol. 1, f 138, A6119, 2030, NAA, 11 June 1954.

22 *Education*, 15 July 1938, 705, report of conference.

23 *Education*, October 1938, 807.

24 *Married Women (Teachers and Lecturers) Act 1932* (NSW).

during the worst years of the Depression, but argued that it had now been demonstrated to reduce sick leave among remaining women and make administration smoother, despite causing some problems in the supply of trained teachers.²⁵ As well as the deputations to the state minister, the NSW Teachers Federation organised a deputation to the federal government facilitated by Billy Hughes and including the Australian Teachers' Federation, arguing that educational reform was a national responsibility not only a state one.²⁶

In one of the first results from the Federation's 1938 conferences, the NSW Minister for Education D.H. Drummond began the process of surveying and improving the physical environment of schools. The Teachers Federation embraced this, as it was in accord with the goal Lucy had long argued: the need to have environments that would evoke positive emotional responses from students, where they would want to engage and learn.²⁷ Federation President Malcolm Mackinnon and Lucy, as senior vice president, were relieved of other duties to carry out an inspection of schools across the state, an experience that Lucy brought to her later conference speeches and which she wove into her campaigns for better housing for working-class communities.²⁸ The Federation participation in arguing for improvements in the space, buildings, infrastructure and equipment – the hardware – of education has been criticised by some commentators as being a retreat from the intellectual content of education, but it arose from the complex of concerns about progressive education and working-class environments.²⁹ It may have been easier for governments and parents' organisations to contribute money to infrastructure rather than tackle the more complex intellectual challenges of education. But it should also be seen in the context of its time, when eugenicist biological causes were being increasingly propounded to explain educational disadvantage. In this setting, a focus on the environment of schools was a significant challenge to eugenic 'solutions'. In any case, the school infrastructure was certainly not the only concern of either the Federation or of Lucy herself. In February 1937, Lucy Woodcock and Zillah Bocking had called on the Australian Teachers' Federation meeting for parents' and citizens'

25 *Education*, November 1938, 46–48.

26 *Education*, February 1939, 118.

27 *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 9 August 1938, 5.

28 *Education*, July 1938, 696.

29 John Michael O'Brien, 'The NSW Teachers Federation, 1957–1975' (PhD thesis, University of Wollongong, 1985), 121–22.

bodies nationally to pay more attention to research into education than to equipment.³⁰ The government concern with building was nevertheless an immediate and visible recognition of the Federation's calls for reform.

In what was a parallel process, rather than a direct result, the primary final examination was abolished. This had been a major demand that Lucy had made on many occasions, although in practice it did not meet her concern – or that of the progressive educationists – that education would be shaped by the needs of the child rather than by the needs of the education system and its secondary and, ultimately, tertiary structures. In mid-1938, in regional areas, the primary final examination was replaced by a combination of intelligence testing, a new and problematic tool of the emerging field of educational psychology as discussed earlier, and an unreliable assessment of work in sixth class. In Sydney, Parramatta and Newcastle, the high school entrance component of the primary final examination was retained for those seeking admission to high, intermediate high and junior high schools. This was because positions remained competitive for schools in these areas, and among students seeking bursaries.³¹ It had been this high school entrance component that had stopped so many children from working-class families going from primary school to the type of secondary school that would allow them entrance to a university. It was not till 1943 that the high school entrance component of the primary final examination, even in the cities, was replaced by the combination of intelligence testing and assessment of work in sixth class. While this was seen as less draconian than the original primary final, the process of sorting children into different types of high school – and ultimately into career options – was continued.

One major direction, however, which arose from both the 1937 NEF Conference and the Teachers Federation campaign in 1938 was the rising emphasis in the NEF on discussion and free exchange of views as an educational methodology.³² Lucy referred to this as a key element in her approaches to developing learning environments to foster democracy in her Erskineville classes where:

30 *Education*, 17 February 1937, 76.

31 *Education*, July 1938, 696; 'Facts and Figures: Examinations', NSW Department of Education, education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/our-people-and-structure/history-of-government-schools/facts-and-figures/examinations, accessed 6 August 2017.

32 Margaret White, 'Traversing Personal and Public Boundaries: Discourses of Engagement in New Education, 1930s to 1980s', *Paedagogica Historica* 43, no. 1 (2007): 156–57, doi.org/10.1080/00309230601080634.

group discussions were encouraged. This was the only way to make the children stand on their own feet and not be imitators, not a machine made individual, but one that would build on its own foundation.³³

This approach shaped the way the NEF developed in Australia. It initiated a program of summer schools, such as the one at Newport in January 1940, aimed at bringing together educators and students from many different environments and expanding its focus from education within schools to lifelong 'leisure' education, that is to learning in the community. It emerged to be a powerful learning situation – highly valued by participants like Clarice McNamara, Lucy's long-time colleague in the NSW NEF. In the words of one analyst, discussion became 'a significant technology in education'.³⁴

A specific strategy emerged as well from the Teachers Federation campaign. In August 1938, the Federation Council decided that despite the partial removal of the primary final examinations, the university entrance requirements still exercised iron control over all secondary and primary public schooling. The Federation decided that it should attempt to intervene at the university level itself, nominating for graduate seats on the University of Sydney Senate in order to raise a voice for public schooling.³⁵ Lucy evaluated the plan and reported back to the council in October, leading to the nomination of two teacher graduates for Senate positions, one man and one woman. Lucy was the woman, nominated by fellow Federationists R.B. Noble, Ethel Teerman, L.A. Walsh and L.A. Gordon. These nominations both failed, but the Federation had not given up. Lucy was again nominated in 1942 by the same colleagues, except for Ethel, who had married Sam Lewis in 1940 and so had been forced to retire from teaching.

33 National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), first annual meeting of Western Suburbs Committee, in the Enfield home of Miss Lucy Woodcock, *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 3 September 1942, 10. Lucy may have let out some or all of this house to Jewish refugee friends, the Goldschmidt family, whose entry to Australia she had sponsored. Stephanie Goldschmidt called and hosted this meeting, and the family had given the 7 Beaumaris St, Enfield, address of Lucy's home as their residence on their naturalisation applications in 1949 and 1950.

34 Clarice McNamara, 'Summer School of Leadership, Newport, NSW', *New Horizons*, Autumn 1940, 15; White, 'Traversing Personal and Public Boundaries', 156; Martin Lawn, 'Reflecting the Passion: Mid-century Projects for Education', *History of Education* 33, no. 5 (2004): 506.

35 *Education*, September 1938, 795.

This time, Lucy was elected, becoming the first woman graduate to be elected by her fellows to serve on the university's Senate. *Smith's Weekly* ran a half-page spread on Lucy in April 1942, titled 'Sees New Vistas for Education', choosing to focus (ironically given her internationalist outlook) on her 'settler' family origins and her commitment to Australia, with 'Love of Australia' written above her portrait.³⁶ She was described as a woman from a working-class area who had risen to the heights of service in the public education system, highly regarded by her peers and students alike as well as attaining distinction in her hard-won, evening-course university degrees. Her decade of country teaching explained her wide understanding of the whole country. The warmth of her relationships with those rural communities was demonstrated by the note of congratulations she had received on her Senate election from the community at Eden, where she had known the Robinovitz family.



Figure 7.2: 'Sees New Vistas for Education'. Sketch of Lucy for article in *Smith's Weekly* about her election to the University of Sydney Senate.

Source: *Smith's Weekly*, 4 April 1942.
Trove, National Library of Australia.
No attribution for artist.

36 'Sees New Vistas for Education', *Smith's Weekly*, 4 April 1942, 14.

Just as Lucy and the Federation had hoped, the election allowed her to explain her philosophy and call for reform. In her school at Erskineville, the *Smith's Weekly* reporter explained, in some surprise:

modern methods and progressive ideas are encouraged, with the basic idea that that a child should be a personality to be developed rather than a phonograph disc to be impressed with a hieroglyphic jumble of facts. Miss Woodcock aims to develop the creative faculties of the mind, to make children aware of their own power in original effort. Startling though it may seem, she even encourages them to write poetry, frequently with interesting results.³⁷

Lucy's role as NSW NEF President over the previous two years was called on to demonstrate the credibility of her ideas and her international connections, all brought into the service of her Australian vision. To confirm this, her deep commitment to the Erskineville community was stressed:

Miss Woodcock has also taken a deep interest in sociology and is particularly concerned with the question of housing, especially of poor people. Since her school is in an industrial area where over-crowding exists, its incidence is inescapably and more or less continuously before her, so that, on this subject, she can speak with particular knowledge.

The reporter summed her up:

Miss Lucy Woodcock is a fine public speaker, an impressive personality, capable, humane, kindly and confidence-inspiring.

This description would have been recognised by Beverley Langley, Betty Makin and others of her students, even if not by all – given that a few remember her as distant and 'terrifying'. The sketch published with the article accords with this glimpse of her softer side. Certainly distinguished and imposing, it is nevertheless a poignant image of a woman with a sadness about her eyes.

37 Ibid.

This text is taken from *Teacher for Justice: Lucy Woodcock's Transnational Life*, by Heather Goodall, Helen Randerson and Devleena Ghosh, published 2019 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.