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Women and War

The outbreak of war in September 1939 was a bitter disappointment to Lucy as it was to many who had campaigned for Peace. Lucy's pacifism had been deepened with her brother's death in World War I, both the sadness and the conviction staying with her throughout her life.¹ As World War II approached, Lucy had been a staunch advocate of the need to build international understanding by negotiation and interaction, not by armaments.

But the immediate issue for her in confronting a new war was that it greatly worsened the problems she had been campaigning to solve. One was the problem of older sisters being kept out of school to look after younger children in the family. The other was the government's decision in 1932 to sack married women teachers and refuse to employ any woman who had married. Both problems were intensified by the war, and Lucy tried to mobilise the organisations in which she was heavily involved – the NSW Teachers Federation and the United Associations of Women (UA) – to campaign for justice on them. In the process, however, Lucy's calls for action were to be redirected in unexpected ways.

This chapter offers a very different view of the 'home front' – this is not an account of how home resources and labour were mobilised to win a war, nor is it about the glamorous and fragile world of troop romances and tragic disappearances. Instead, it is about the grim struggle many working-class families had just to stay afloat as conditions worsened.

1 Kit Edwards, interview with Heather Goodall, 30 November 2017, Hardy's Bay.

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Lucy had become increasingly associated with socialists and communists among her Federation colleagues during the 1930s as she found, for example, that it was Ethel Teerman and Sam Lewis who most consistently supported the campaign to restore jobs for married women. After a period as a rank-and-file member of Federation Council (1930–33), Lucy had been re-elected as senior vice president from 1934 onwards. While maintaining her alliances with the core group of women activists within the Federation, like Beatrice Taylor, Lucy became more involved in many campaigns with Sam Lewis, Hettie Ross and other teachers who were Communist Party of Australia (CPA) members. Others to whom Lucy became close, like Clarice McNamara, secretary of the New Education Fellowship (NEF), had been associated with the CPA when younger. The Australian Security Service, ASIO, believed for a time that Lucy had been a member of the CPA herself, but never found any evidence. Despite her increasingly close alliances, Lucy seems to have distanced herself from the awkward twists and turns imposed on CPA members by the Comintern policy about the war. Rather than the shift to the ‘United Front’ approach imposed on CPA members after June 1941, Lucy held a consistent opposition to war and its diversion of funds from what she saw as the more urgent tasks of building up independence and critical thinking and ‘cooperative spirit’ among young people to ensure an educated public in the democracy of the future.² Lucy’s statements throughout the war all condemned the way that Australian expenditure of public funds on warfare and ‘destruction’ diverted those funds from the more urgent tasks of reconstruction, which in her view were primarily about education. She continued to take this view to the end of her life, writing to Rewi Alley in 1956 about the coming atomic testing at Maralinga: ‘Huge preparation and much money going up in smoke that could help ordinary people to get many things they can’t get now.’³

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In order to try to keep girls in schools, Lucy had argued in 1938 for three things that would address this in her working-class area: raising the school-leaving age, increasing child endowment payments to mothers and

2 *Mercury* (Hobart), 19 January 1936, 10; *SMH*, 8 April 1938, 4; *Argus* (Melbourne), 8 January 1948, 5; *Mercury* (Hobart), 12 May 1949, 8.

3 Lucy G. Woodcock to Rewi Alley, 14 March 1956.

creating better and more accessible childcare. All of this was aimed at practical support for the employed women of Erskineville and their older daughters. Lucy had made the case for these three linked measures in each of her speeches at the Federation's 1938 conferences for a progressive, democratic Australia. But the whole problem was made far more urgent with the war because many adult women, who had previously been at home, were drawn into war jobs – either those jobs vacated by men who enlisted or the new jobs created to build munitions and other war supplies. It was the older girls in working-class families who paid the price of war work through their lost schooling and lost opportunities to gain job skills.

The Federation strongly supported the goal of training more childcare staff and equipping them to be educators rather than only carers. Linking early childhood training to that of primary and secondary teachers had been a key demand from left-wing teachers like Marie Gollan during 1938 and 1939. As pressure increased on all women to take up war work, the need for more childcare, better trained staff and better facilities all escalated. The UA initiated a body to address these issues in April 1941, known as the Women's Forum for Social and Economic Reconstruction, which was jointly run by the UA and the Teachers Federation.⁴ Jessie Street chaired this but it seems that Lucy was actively involved, along with Clarice McNamara (as the NEF representative), and Mona Ravenscroft as secretary. Certainly the committee's interests in improving economic conditions and accessing credit for women's needs were in line with Lucy's goals. The major outcome from this Women's Forum was the discussion on the theme of childcare at the UA conference in August 1942. Lucy spoke there to call for the immediate construction of additional childcare centres – saying that the heaviest cost of the war effort had fallen on the group of women who 'in normal times would be looking after their young families'. Strategically, she evoked alarmist images: 'Many cases of delinquency were found among children whose parents were away from home working during the day or night'. She was supported by unionist Flo Davis from the Hotel, Club and Restaurant Employees' Union, who detailed how her members were making do with poor food – if any at all – to ensure there was support for their families.⁵

4 *SMH*, 4 April 1941.

5 Women's Forum (with Flo Davis) *SMH*, 9 May 1941, 4; *Land* (Sydney), 20 June 1941, 13; *SMH*, 7 July 1941, 7.

The Teachers Federation in turn generated a new body, the Committee for the Care of the Child in War Time, which brought unionists together with ‘suburban groups of women working for childcare’. This body organised a conference, held on 12 December 1942, chaired by Lucy and attended (on the model of the 1938 Federation conferences) by a range of community organisations, including the Kindergarten Union and the Sydney Day Nurseries Association, as well as academics and professionals in child health and development.⁶ This December conference generated many views – some openly denigrating young working-class women and leading to headlines like ‘Girls Deceive Homes: “Wages” from Soldiers’.⁷ Others, however, were far more supportive of women, including those expressing concern that ‘the health of the child was suffering, and of the mother, too, who is carrying a double burden of worry and work’.⁸

The headlines arising from this committee were nevertheless sensational. The *Sydney Morning Herald* screamed “‘Worst Wartime Social Problem’: Children Running Wild’, while the Perth *South Western Advertiser* added figures: ‘Twelve Thousand Children Running Wild: “Worst War Time Social Problem”’.⁹

Lucy’s concerns, however, were firmly rooted in the conditions of the working-class communities around her at Erskineville. She was horrified at the appalling conditions into which the children of working-class families were forced when their mothers were doing war work. As she spoke to the NSW Teachers Federation soon after:

Pigs were better treated than many children left in some privately owned ‘minding’ schools ... Several such schools were run for profit in slum conditions, in single rooms and back yards. Ordinary standards of decency and cleanliness were often not observed and no attempt was made to isolate sick from healthy children.¹⁰

As chairperson, Lucy wrote up the report of the December 1942 conference, which the Federation printed and circulated widely.¹¹ Some at this conference spoke about a rising and uncontrolled epidemic

6 *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 26 November 1942, 6–7.

7 *Sun* (Sydney), 31 January 1943, 7.

8 *Murrumbidgee Irrigator* (Leeton), 25 June 1943, 3, quoting Lucy’s report of this December 1942 conference; *SMH*, 2 December 1943, 4, briefly reporting the conference.

9 *Sun* (Sydney), 3 October 1943, 7; *South Western Advertiser* (Perth), 11 November 1943, 4.

10 *News* (Adelaide), 21 November 1944, 4.

11 *Murrumbidgee Irrigator* (Leeton), 25 June 1943, 3, citing Lucy’s report, the ‘Emergency Plan of the Joint Committee’.

of delinquency, runaways and truancy, notably the state government representatives and A.P. Elkin, representing the academic voice. The report, however, was less alarmist and far more constructive. In it, Lucy stressed the importance of the Commonwealth assuming control for a well-planned and well-resourced strategy across the country to increase childcare facilities and improve care worker training in childcare and early childhood education. This would ensure places for the many thousands of children of war workers who needed assistance to care for their families while they were engaged in essential national services.

This reflected a narrowing of the goals that Lucy had advocated before the war. No longer were the educational needs of older sisters a priority, but rather the health and well-being of babies – the citizens of the future nation – and to a lesser extent that of their mothers as breeders, rather than as citizens. And, after all this, there is little evidence that this hysteria led to any support for childcare from the state or federal governments during the war or in its aftermath.¹²

Lucy did, however, continue her calls for family planning and contraception advice, responding in part to the attacks made on young women's sexual activity. Instead of bemoaning promiscuity, Lucy insisted that sex education should be an essential part of all education for children – and should be extended to parents as well. In agreeing with a proposal from the Director of Education to initiate sex education classes for parents as well as children, Lucy's statement reflected her focus on equipping children for real life and independently minded democratic citizenship:

‘The education of a child is incomplete without sex education,’ Miss L. Woodcock, vice-president of the Teachers' Federation said recently. ‘Child education on sex should begin with elementary biology when the pupil enters school and should continue until the pupil leaves with a fair knowledge of sex and sex hygiene.’ ... Such education would produce frank and ethical citizens.¹³

Lucy's assertiveness on this probably reflected her friendship with Lotte Fink. Prevented from gaining an Australian practising certificate by her family responsibilities, Lotte had turned her medical training to assisting women with contraception and family planning advice.¹⁴

12 Stuart Macintyre, ‘Women's Leadership in War and Reconstruction’, *Labour History*, no. 104 (2013): 65–80, doi.org/10.5263/labourhistory.104.0065; *SMH*, 25 February 1944, 4; *Sun* (Sydney), 21 May 1944, 5.

13 *Cairns Post*, 14 December 1942, 3.

14 Ruth Fink Latukefu, interview with Heather Goodall, 3 September 2015.

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Lucy was more frustrated by the wartime impact on the campaign to restore the jobs of married women teachers. Pressures had led to the policy being amended in 1935, but these changes simply disadvantaged most women teachers still further. Although first enacted in the emergency of the Depression, this policy had proved very convenient for the government, giving it a flexibility it had not had previously to respond to changing student numbers. Theobald and Dwyer put it succinctly:

the Dismissal Act augmented the pool of cheap and malleable labour available to the Education Department. Those responsible for staffing the schools soon became addicted.¹⁵

At least the Federation's policy had continued to demand the repeal of this Act, even though many male teachers – and some single women – had supported the dismissals. In the Federation Annual Conference immediately after the war broke out, in October 1939, a motion was passed calling on the Minister for Education yet again to repeal the law. Ethel Teerman spoke on behalf of the Federation, arguing that 'the war is just another sane reason for the repeal of this Act'.¹⁶ The government refused the demand – yet again.

Things got much worse as the war developed. As more and more male teachers left to enlist, the department needed to make up their numbers and did so by re-employing married women who had formerly been teachers. But it would not take them back into continuing full-time employment. Instead, it would employ them only on casual contracts at a far lower rate of pay than they would have been entitled to as full-time staff. Lucy spoke passionately on this issue to an audience of North Coast teachers, both men and women, in 1940. She pointed out that many of the wives of male teachers were also there. She explained how important it was to 'win the peace as well as the war' by ensuring that education was at the highest quality for all children, with a higher leaving age, better adult education for parents and better training for teachers. Then she continued:

15 Marjorie Theobald and Donna Dwyer, 'An Episode in Feminist Politics: The Married Women (Lecturers and Teachers) Act, 1932–47', *Labour History*, no. 76 (1999): 59–77, doi.org/10.2307/27516628; Judy Mackinolty, 'To Stay or To Go: Sacking Married Teachers', in *In Pursuit of Justice*, eds Judy Mackinolty and Heather Radi (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1979), 71–72, 140–47.

16 Theobald and Dwyer, 'An Episode in Feminist Politics', 72; the restoration of married women's positions was a sustained presence in Teachers Federation demands, e.g. *Education*, 20 November 1943, 1.

As a keen woman member and a foundation member of the Federation, I feel strongly on the matter of equality of sexes in the teaching profession. We are all on one footing, except that when a woman teacher gets married, she has to give up her job. This is a shocking inequality and in no other profession does it apply, and this is the weakest link in our Union organisation.¹⁷

It was hard to argue for the repeal of this discrimination in the middle of the war, which appeared to demand sacrifices. Indeed, Lucy signed a Teachers Federation advertisement in August 1943 – endorsed not only by all the office bearers of the Federation but by ‘Peter Finch (Gunner)’ – which called on all ‘professional men and women of every political belief’ to unite behind Prime Minister Curtin and ensure the war effort through national unity.¹⁸ In this climate, it was unlikely that the burden on married women would be lifted. Nevertheless, it was the efforts of married women, badly paid and employed only on casual contracts, which kept the teaching service afloat through the war. Even in 1947, two years after the war ended, there were 1,200 married women teachers employed on temporary contracts – one-twelfth of the teaching service.¹⁹

Along with common ground in her alliance with the UA on the question of married teachers’ employment, Lucy also found similar views in opposition to racism. Yet while there had been a strong interest in Aboriginal people in the UA, most of the women who had focused on this question had very different perspectives than those to which Lucy had become educated in Erskineville. Led by Mary Bennett and other women involved in northern and central Australia, such as Phyllis Duguid, the UA had shown a dominant concern with the intrusion of settlers and settler society into the lives of ‘Full Blood’ and ‘Tribal’ peoples, along with a construction of Aboriginal women as victims and in need of ‘protection’.²⁰ There had also, however, been some protests about the White Australia policy. Vida Goldstein in 1930, for example, and Eleanor Hinder, with experience in China in the mid-1930s, had criticised the short-sightedness of Australia’s discriminatory immigration laws. At the same time, as Lake has pointed out, Linda Littlejohn and Jessie Street had

17 *Macleay Chronicle*, 16 October 1940, 2.

18 *SMH*, 19 August 1943, 3.

19 Theobald and Dwyer, ‘An Episode in Feminist Politics’, 72.

20 This is a simplification of the tensions within the feminist organisations and personalities, but in general, even the most liberal like Mary Bennett was criticised by the emerging Aboriginal spokespersons in the eastern states, like Ferguson, Patten and Gibbs, as seeking control over Aboriginal people by ‘protection’ rather than supporting Aboriginal people in the decisions they took themselves.

moved the UA into an alliance in the mid-1930s with the US group Equal Rights International, thereby raising the prominence of arguments for equal rights within the UA at the expense of arguments about the special needs of women.²¹

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Attention during the war, however, was focused outside Australia. Lucy was very aware that whatever the injustices faced by women teachers or working-class mothers in Australia, the gravest dangers were being faced by European Jews. The incoming refugees with whom Lucy had become involved before the war were carrying deeply disturbing news of murderous violence.

Dr Fanny Reading, then president of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) in New South Wales, with whom Lucy had become close friends, was calling by 1943 for the creation of an Anglo-American agency with immediate authority to facilitate the large-scale immigration and rehabilitation of refugee Jews from Europe to Australia. Fanning argued:

Our minds were too blunt to realise that 4,000,000 Jews in Europe had been cruelly done to death in most fiendish ways. That was a world catastrophe unprecedented in history. We have been asked to wait for impending victory, but unless something is done speedily, there may not be a single Jew left in Europe to enjoy the benefits of victory.

Lucy had already begun to work with the various defence organisations to help people get out of danger and bring them to Australia, after which, as we have seen in Chapter 6, she was able to assist refugees to find employment in education or, like Ruth, ensure they had access to language training so they could climb the education ladder. Fanny Reading said that, by January 1942, Lucy had already assisted 160 people coming into Australia. Lucy spoke at a number of meetings of the NCJW during 1942, each chaired by Reading. In September, Lucy's Enfield home was the venue for the first annual meeting of the Western Suburbs branch of the NCJW, which had been meeting regularly at Bankstown. In November, both Lucy and her friend Lotte Fink spoke at the meeting held in Bondi.

21 Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1999), 163, 168.

The topics on which Lucy chose – and was invited – to speak, allow us to see her two major preoccupations: progressive education and Equal Pay for women. But these issues also show the causes to which she thought the Jewish community – both long established and newly arrived – could contribute. Many of the recently incoming Europeans were, as we have seen, interested in the New Education Fellowship, both because it reflected their own home experience but also because they hoped to meet progressive Australians in an area in which they could take part. Lucy gave two talks about education – one in January 1942 about the changes that had already taken place in Australian schools (a rather optimistic talk it must be said!) and then another in September about what progressive educationists hoped to achieve, such as an end to university-dominated examinations. In both she stressed the importance of discussion and creative expression, as both would teach a child ‘how to stand on their own feet and not be imitators’.²² Her talk on Equal Pay was framed very explicitly in the international experience of her audience. Speaking not only in her Federation role but as joint president of the Council for Action on Equal Pay (CAEP), Lucy outlined the history of women’s employment in Australia and then explained the international significance of the call for Equal Pay:

In the USSR and Chile women received the same pay as men.
In Holland, Norway, Denmark and Switzerland, women teachers
receive the same pay as men.²³

On each of these issues, Lucy was calling on her audience to locate Australian conditions in comparison to those existing internationally, appealing to their broader European experience as well as to their commitment to progressive social justice. She hoped that refugees as well as the established Jewish community would be contributors to the climate of justice and innovation that she wanted to create in the Australian future in which they would all now share.

The UA had been expecting that women would be recognised as having a key role in the postwar reconstruction process. The women’s movement was bitterly disappointed when Curtin offered no seat at all to any women’s organisation in the 1942 Constitutional Convention

22 *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 3 September 1942, 10.

23 *Ibid.*, 26 November 1942, 6–7.

that considered reconstruction.²⁴ It was from this point that the UA and the broader women's movement turned to alternative strategies to have women's voices heard.²⁵

An immediate model was the Atlantic Charter, 14 August 1941, which, as many analysts have pointed out, meant little to the US and UK leaders who drafted it, but was understood widely by the Left and particularly by colonised peoples around the world to embody a promise by colonisers to withdraw from colonial power.

More broadly, the concept of a charter was of course a very old one in British law – not just as a granting of rights and powers but as a claim for justice, as was the Magna Carta. In the twentieth century, the League of Nations from 1918 had used the term 'covenant' but the concept was a continuity of the inspirational 'charter of rights', which continued to be important and was used frequently in the formation of the United Nations from 1945. The term was used more widely around the globe than in Britain itself and its echoes in the Anglophone colonial world were ones that Australians heard.

The charters or statements of rights that offered more immediate models for Australians were those of the anti-colonial movements, in which many Australians saw themselves to have a role.

They were particularly aware of political upheavals in the UK – the Easter Rebellion in Ireland, for example, had resonated throughout Australia where a high proportion of the population shared an Irish background. Stories about the Irish anti-colonial movement were carried widely in the Australian press. The Irish independence campaign was not seen in Australia as a phenomenon of Europe but as one of the British Empire. The British army's attacks on the Irish nationalists, for example, were compared in Australian newspapers with the Amritsar massacre in India.²⁶ One way that anti-colonial nationalist movements were underpinning their demands for independence was by using a statement of rights as the basis of their campaigns. As early as 1927, the Women's Indian Association (WIA), associated with the Theosophical Society in India (and with Margaret Cousins, herself from Ireland), was an example of this

24 Convention ran from 24 November to 2 December 1942, cited in Macintyre, 'Women's Leadership in War and Reconstruction', 73 note 38.

25 *Ibid.*, 73–74.

26 *Catholic Press* (Sydney), 15 July 1920, 27; 17 March 1921, 13.

approach with its 'Charter of Womanhood's Vision of a Reformed India', which had circulated widely in India and internationally.²⁷ It went on to become embedded in India's most significant documents.

While it is not clear whether women in the Australian women's movement knew about this 1927 WIA Charter, the issue of equality of the sexes became more prominent as it was embraced by the nationalist movement. By 1930, Gandhian nationalists had shifted their position on women's rights significantly during the Salt March demonstrations, with women invited into the movement in a new way. Participation was still dominated by elite and middle-class women who were concerned about 'respectability' and being mistaken for prostitutes.²⁸ Nevertheless, the shift towards recognition of women's activism had become clear in the Karachi session of the Indian National Congress in 1931, when Gandhi supported the Fundamental Rights Resolution, 'which assured complete equality between men and women as a basic principle for free India'.²⁹ This declaration echoed the WIA Charter in stating explicitly that women were to have equal civic rights with men in the new India. It was later quoted and fully endorsed as the first recommendation of the Sub-committee of the National Planning Committee on Woman's Role in a Planned Economy, reporting 1938, under the heading 'Chapter 1: Civic Rights':

1. All citizens are equal before the law, irrespective of religion, caste, creed or sex.
2. No disability attaches to any citizen by reason of his or her religion, caste, creed, or sex, in regard to public employment, office of power or honour, and in the exercise of any trade or calling.
3. The franchise shall be on the basis of universal adult suffrage.³⁰

27 WIA Charter and references to it in Theosophical Society Archives.

28 Geraldine Forbes, 'The Politics of Respectability: Indian Women and the Indian National Congress', in *The Indian National Congress: Centenary Highlights*, ed. D.A. Low (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1988), 54–97.

29 Vina Mazumdar, 'Women's Participation in Political Life in India', Report for UNESCO Meeting of Experts on Participation of Women, SS-83/CONF.620/8 (Paris: UNESCO, 1983), 2.

30 Quoted in National Planning Committee (India), *Woman's Role in a Planned Economy*, Report of the Sub-Committee (on women) (Bombay: Vora, 1948), 37–38, 225. Such ideas circulated widely among other independence movements, which developed similar statements in later years. For many, like the African National Congress in South Africa, its statement of women's rights in 1955 was the precursor and model for its later (and far better known) 'Freedom Charter' on the rights of the imagined new nation and its citizens. Helen Hill, *Canberra Times*, 9 August 1986, 7B for the tenth anniversary of the Soweto uprising.

Such ideas may have been discussed in London when Lucy was there in 1927, when her hectic year exchange teaching had located her in the inner city where populations had been racially and culturally mixed and highly politicised. But they had been much more evident to the younger students there in the 1930s. One such person was Rachel Makinson, whom Lucy met in Sydney during the war and who had been actively involved in the circulation of new ideas in UK universities just before she had migrated to Sydney in 1939. Makinson was a young physicist who had married an Australian scientist, Richard Makinson, arriving with him just months before the war. Rachel and Richard were both Peace advocates and socialists, which drew them into Lucy's circle. While Rachel is best remembered today as a wool scientist who broke the glass ceiling to become first female Chief Research Scientist at the CSIRO, she had brought much with her beside her scientific talent.

At Cambridge in the 1930s, Rachel Makinson had been close to many of the young Indian women who had come to the UK as students, like Renu Chakravartty, Vidya Kanuga (later Munsu) and Kitty Boomla, some of whom later came to Australia and all of whom were anti-colonial nationalist activists. Rachel recalled the political activity in Cambridge during the 1930s:

I belonged to Cambridge University Socialist Club and I still remember attending my first torchlight procession. And I was fairly active. And also there were a great many Indians in Cambridge at the time. I think they were about one sixth of the total, and, well, if they weren't all nationalists, they were at least leaning towards it, under those conditions. And I used to attend their meeting, at the Majilis [Hotel] fairly frequently ... Oh, there was all sorts of stuff going on. I went to most of it. The peace movement was very strong, too.³¹

The universities in London, like Cambridge, were sites of active interchange of ideas and movements not only from Europe but across the British Empire.

31 Kathleen Rachel Makinson, interview by Dr Ragbir Bhatlal, 1 March 1997, Australian Women Scientists – Oral History Project, NLA. Rajani Dutt (1896–1974), former Marxist theoretician and Communist leader, recalled beginning to study Marxism during the 1930s with other Indian students at these meetings at the Majalis in London, with him becoming the first secretary of the 'London Majalis', in Panchanan Saha, *Rajani Palme Dutt: A Biography* (Kolkata: Biswabiksha, 2004), 58.

Australian women had been organising around women's rights issues, both at home and in the British Empire, for many years, but they had made little impression at the upper levels of government or legislation. This contrasted with the emerging independence movements – in India, China and other non-Western places – which had been able to take such questions into what they planned to be the fundamental documents for their future nations.

India was known to have a large proportion of its population living in poverty and illiteracy, so there could have been few illusions among Australian feminists about how far the goals of elite women's organisations like the WIA and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) might actually go.³² Nevertheless, India continued to be an important source of ideas for Australians because there were continuities with earlier links, including the small number of Christian missionaries who had become interested in the independence movement, like Elsie Rivett's sister Eleanor and the continuing connections through Theosophy and education, not only in the NEF but among Australians who had gone to India to teach in Theosophical schools.³³

Perhaps even more significant for Lucy's awareness, the Peace movement had turned its attention to 'Oriental philosophies' – and more particularly to Gandhi's non-violent strategies, in the 1930s. Although it had arisen in the West particularly after World War I, the Peace movement had become aware of Gandhian philosophies about non-violent non-cooperation during the Salt Marches in 1930. War Resisters International (WRI) in the US was, for example, seeking Indian speakers in 1932 to discuss 'Oriental philosophies' (a reference to Gandhian strategies) that contributed to peace.³⁴ During the 1930s, this interest in Gandhian strategies brought some Western women associated with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) to India where they made connections

32 *Stri Dharma*, WIA Journal, 1920, 1921, 1928, Theosophical Society Archives, Adyar; Women's Indian Association, *Annual Report* 1929–30, Theosophical Society Archives, Adyar; *Roshni*, AIWC Journal, 1927–47, AIWC Archives, New Delhi.

33 Margaret Allen, 'Eleanor Rivett (1883–1972): Educationalist, missionary and internationalist', in *Founders, Firsts and Feminists: Women Leaders in Twentieth-Century Australia*, eds Fiona Davis, Nell Musgrove and Judith Smart, Australian Women's Archives Project ([Melbourne]: eScholarship Research Centre, University of Melbourne, 2011), 45–63; also at www.womenaustralia.info/leaders/fff/pdfs/rivett.pdf.

34 Kapila Khandvala, speaking in a session titled 'Lessons from the Far East', Program, Third Annual Conference on Militant Pacifism, War Resisters League, NY, 6–8 May 1932. Peace Palace Library: www.peacepalacelibrary.nl/.

with women's organisations, even though WILPF as a body had no meetings outside Europe until 1970.³⁵ The World Fellowship of Faiths (WFF), associated with WILPF, was similarly drawn to India on the basis of its understanding of Indian philosophy. In 1938, a Mrs Lankaster, who had been in India as a colonial wife 20 years before and was now visiting Madras from the UK as a WILPF and WFF representative, told the WIA that she had come to India 'in quest of peace' and that the organisers of WILPF and WFF 'all remember that the fundamental teaching of this country [India] is "non-killing"'. As a result of such interest and occasional contacts, themselves built on past colonial connections, the WILPF journal published a quarterly report from its Indian Committee. This echoed the 'maternalist' concerns of much middle-class feminism aiming to 'protect' colonised women, rather than to acknowledge their agency or empower them.³⁶ Nevertheless, this quarterly WILPF report also carried updates on various Indian women's campaigns, which allowed news to circulate around the WILPF network.³⁷

Lucy's awareness of India may have been sharpened by her knowledge of Winifred West's long-established connections with Bengali families (friendships forged in the UK initially and later by West's visit to India),³⁸ and it was certainly raised by her increasing contacts with Jessie Street as Lucy became more involved with the UA. Jessie had been born in India and, although she did not return until late in 1945, she had an interest in developments there.³⁹ Although Jessie's autobiography and other published material focused on the roles she played and her own speeches, rather than on what anyone said to her, we can see from later reports by Lucy and others who travelled with her that her experiences must have been of great interest to those in Australia.

35 WIA, *20th and 21st Annual Reports*, 1936–1938, 34–37. Theosophical Society Archives, Adyar.

36 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 72–86; Fiona Paisley, *Glamour in the Pacific: Cultural Internationalism and Race Politics in the Women's Pan-Pacific* (Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 2009), doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824833428.001.0001; Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia 1880–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

37 Margaret Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*, 34 (Lincoln: Nebraska, 2009), referring to the activities of Mrs Lankaster, Secretary of the India Committee of WILPF, London, reported in her speech to WIA group, 10 January 1938, Madras.

38 West (1881–1971), founder of the progressive girls' school Frensham (1913) in the NSW Southern Highlands. Priscilla Kennedy, *Portrait of Winifred West* (Sydney: The Fine Arts Press, 1976), 15–16, 87–91.

39 Lenore Coltheart, ed., *Jessie Street: A Revised Autobiography* (Sydney: Federation Press, 2004).

Equal Rights for Women and the Charter of 1943

So, when the government failed to include women at all in the new Department for Post-War Reconstruction in late 1942, women turned to considering an Australian Woman's Charter, on the models of the League of Nations and particularly the Atlantic Charter.⁴⁰ Jessie Street, through the UA, called a conference for November 1943, titled the 'Australian Women's Conference for Victory in War and Victory in Peace'. This was the largest-ever gathering of women's organisations to have occurred in Australia – 90 organisations came together to contribute to a conference that, at first sight, was dominated by the war, as was the whole of Australia. In November 1943, the Japanese held what seemed an unbreakable hold over much of South-East Asia and threatened Australia and the whole region with further advances. But the speeches of the conference – and certainly its resolutions – were aimed squarely at a future beyond the war.

The conference had few international speakers – wartime travel, as the government pointed out when asked for funds, was limited – but in any event, the conference was aimed at the Australian federal government. To do so, the conference addressed many themes, and a key one was education. Lucy delivered a major speech called 'Planning Education for the Future' and, although the full text has not survived, it was quoted and summarised prominently in a number of newspapers.⁴¹ From these fragments, we can see that her speech drew directly from her active work over the previous decade.

Lucy called firstly for a need to plan for diverse students, referring to her experiences in East End London in 1927 and then in inner-city Erskineville from 1933 to 1943. She insisted in this speech that education should not be 'in a vacuum' but should reflect 'the real world' and 'the community as it is', including by recognising the diversity among students. She argued that such diversity arose from many sources. She pointed out firstly that there were varying intellectual or physical capacities among children. One source for her information was her experience in London with

40 Macintyre, 'Women's Leadership in War and Reconstruction', 72–73.

41 'Plea for Aid to Jews', *SMH*, 22 November 1943, 7; 'Educational System: Need for Free and Full Facilities', *Age* (Melbourne), 22 November 1943, 2; 'Woman Author Condemns Trashy Novels', *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 22 November 1943, 3; 'Child Welfare: Women in Conference', *West Australian* (Perth), 22 November 1943, 4.

education for the physically and mentally handicapped children, while another source was her work in Erskineville, establishing and teaching in one of the state's first Opportunity Classes for gifted children. But she also talked about diversity arising from inequality in access to education and cultural resources. Her examples, drawn from Erskineville, were the crushing economic handicaps faced by working-class children and the frustration they faced as bright children in being unable to pursue higher studies because of their families' poverty.

Lucy used this speech to call for the need for education for the future to stress creativity and exploration – to allow this diverse student body to develop in ways which suited each child. She was drawing clearly here on the themes of progressive education. She rejected the sorting of children through testing; not only the gatekeeping examinations in academic institutions but presumably also the new IQ testing.

Her call was not, however, to plan education for students just as individuals, but to build in them 'a spirit of cooperation'. Lucy wanted social responsibility to be part of the outcomes of education, which engaged with her interest in education linking students with the community 'as it is'. This was accompanied by the goal of encouraging each child to take responsibility for their own decision-making, which was aimed at fostering active participation in the democracy of the future.

This shift to a child-centred and creativity-focused real-world education must involve the training of teachers, Lucy argued, and this was a cost the government must recognise as socially important. She pointed out that:

It took four years to train a veterinary scientist but only two to train a teacher of children.⁴²

Finally, Lucy stressed that she wanted reforms to begin immediately – not to wait till some hoped for peacetime changes. She demanded a recognition of the enormous cost of war – to which she referred uncompromisingly as 'destruction'. Furthermore, she demanded that it be recognised who it was who was paying the price for the massive expenditure on destruction – it was not taxpayers, she insisted, but the children whose future education was being damaged and delayed.

⁴² *West Australian* (Perth), 22 November 1943, 4 (similarly, *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 24 November 1943, 4).

While Lucy's paper did not comment on issues other than education, it is clear that her experience in Erskineville with its racially diverse population would have been very different from that of remote-area feminists, including the radical and innovative Mary Bennett. Coming from an inner-city suburb where Aboriginal people were struggling with Depression-ridden contemporary urban economies, Lucy would have found little of relevance in the call for inviolate reserves for 'tribal' Aborigines. It would be reasonable to assume that Lucy would have supported motions – had there been any – that demanded equal access for Aboriginal people to primary and secondary education as well as adult education, rather than the calls for isolation and protection.

Perhaps the major demonstration, however, of Lucy's interest in a new agenda on racial discrimination was the high-profile speech of her long-time friend Fanny Reading, president of the NCJW. Its outcome was the 'special resolution' on 'Racial Persecution' that called for Australian Government and women's movement action 'in the name of justice and mercy' to assist Jews to escape from the barbarism of Europe and to resettle 'in Palestine or elsewhere'.⁴³

This urgency was not only felt in Fanny's speech – and in the special resolution of the conference. It was also a key issue for Lucy, who spoke directly to the federal Minister for Education Clive Evatt, who attended the conference. Lucy insisted that reforms to education could not wait till the war was won, they had to be started immediately and be a part of fundamental planning for the war and for the peace.

For Lucy, the urgency applied right here in Australia, not just in far away Europe. Just as with education, Lucy was compelled by the urgency of acting in relation to Jewish people but she wanted to stem the expression of discrimination in Australia as well as trying to protect those escaping from Europe. Lucy was by this time taking an active role in the organisation of International Women's Day (IWD). In March 1944, she invited her close friend Lotte Fink to speak at the IWD conference. Lotte, representing the Association of Refugees of NSW, protested at the treatment of all 'refugee aliens' by the Allied Works Council, which was making them work 'under humiliating circumstances' alongside interned 'enemy aliens', for low rates of pay. As she explained:

43 Fanny Reading, 'Plea for Aid to Jews', *SMH*, 22 November 1943, 7.

Most refugees have a high opinion of Australian working conditions ... and we protest at having to work for less than Australian rates of pay and at being used as scabs against our will. We want equal duties but we also want equal rights.⁴⁴

Woman's Charter resolutions: A 'living document'

The Charter conference's 28 resolutions were published as a booklet early in 1944, just a few months after the conference. It was intended that these resolutions would be discussed and modified as they circulated widely around women's organisations in all states. The Charter was to be a living document, reflecting the up-to-date concerns of Australian women.

The original 28 resolutions covered all of the concerns of the women's organisations present, including not only health and women in public life but also moral standards and alcohol. The themes did not, however, cover the concerns of all Australian women – and must have been a deep disappointment to women like Lucy who had been campaigning for sex education and family planning. In the 'Health' theme there were no resolutions at all on birth control or on abortion. While Lake has pointed out that the views of younger women on birth control may have been marginalised because these organisations were largely composed of middle-aged women,⁴⁵ it was also older women like Lucy, closely involved with working-class communities, who were angered and frustrated by this lack of recognition. The eugenic theme was strongly evident, in the resolution on 'Birthrate' in which the Charter stressed the importance of raising the birth rate and of protecting the maternal health of women by training more gynaecologists. It called for any obstacles to the marriageable age to be removed where necessary. In other words, the Charter called for the age of marriage to be *lowered* where requested.

Nevertheless, the conference did demonstrate a strong emphasis on equal economic rights for women. This reflected the alliance built during the Depression between feminist organisations and the women unionists like Lucy Woodcock in the Teachers Federation who had been campaigning for Equal Pay as well as the restoration of jobs for married women.

⁴⁴ *West Australian* (Perth), 14 March 1944, 2.

⁴⁵ Lake, *Getting Equal*, 197–202.

In the Charter publication, the conference sessions were presented as key themes with subthemes reflecting the specific resolutions moved and accepted. The first theme, 'Women in War and Peace', contained much about the duties of women as citizens during the war. It included many obligations to contribute to total mobilisation for the war effort, including enlistment in defence forces (although without specific mention of the armed services, but did specify nursing in the services or work in the land army), as well as volunteering in various ways to assist the home front.

Theme 15 on 'Education' called for all of the things for which Lucy had been arguing, including childcare for the benefit of children. It was a blueprint for progressive educational goals, which did not include the emerging psychological testing of intelligence quotients that had been in evidence in the 1937 NEF Conference.⁴⁶ Rather, this Charter was for the more humanitarian orientation within progressive education. Specifically, it called for nationwide free primary, secondary and tertiary education, and for academic and technical training to be designed to fit the students to meet the expanding needs of modern community life. It addressed specific subjects for study, in a call for the syllabus to be shaped to meet the diverse needs of each child as well as to contribute to future world peace. In particular, all students would be required to study the Atlantic Charter as the basis for future societies, to learn about science and the study of nature, and to learn about public health. The Australian women's resolutions called for more generous federal funding directly to education, given its key importance for the future of the nation. They also argued for the development of a national arts and cultural fund in order to enable these creative areas to contribute to education. Despite avoiding the 'modern' educational theories grounded in psychology, the Australian Woman's Charter argued strongly for greater training for teachers and for a research body into education to be established. In a final recognition of the importance of class and rural limits on children's leisure and experiences, the Charter called for more holiday homes, a program nurtured by the NSW Teachers Federation, which contributed heavily to Stewart House.

46 Julie McLeod and Katie Wright, 'Education for Citizenship: Transnational Expertise, Curriculum Reform and Psychological Knowledge in 1930s Australia', *History of Education Review* 42, no. 2 (2013): 170–84.

While the Charter theme on 'Education' was expansive and drew on many recent developments, the theme on Aborigines was notably limited in geography and in politics. It focused on 'full-blood' and 'tribal' Aboriginal people, arguing for inviolate reserves and coercive 'protection' for women. The section on education for these Aboriginal people spoke only of 'potential equality' rather than any current condition. This theme reflected in many ways the strongest assertions of the importance of supporting Aboriginal women, drawing much of its energy from Mary Bennett in Western Australia, who was regarded as far more radical than the conservative women who were seeking largely to have white women employed as 'Protectors'. Yet, in November 1943, there had already been over five years of very active and assertive Aboriginal political spokespeople in south-eastern Australia demanding full citizen's rights and an end to the interventions of 'protectors' altogether.⁴⁷ This 1943 Woman's Charter theme on Aborigines not only looks limited in retrospect, but even in 1943 it must have been an unwelcome shock to many activist Aboriginal women like Pearl Gibbs and Margaret Tucker. It must also have been hard for Lucy – with her contacts with local inner-city Aboriginal people through Erskineville Public School – to see the irrelevance of these Charter demands on Aborigines for any of the Aboriginal people she knew.

The 1943 Woman's Charter conference may have had shortcomings for Lucy, but it had been largely outside her control to meet them. However, she was on the committee for organising ongoing consultation and amendments of the resolutions of 1943 and on the committee to organise the next conference.

Some follow-up meetings did occur, but the campaigns by women for Equal Pay and for a place in the planning for reconstruction suffered further major setbacks. By October 1943, partial demobilisation was occurring, bringing men back into the workplace. The largest union, the Federated Ironworkers' and Sheet Metal Workers' Union, withdrew from the CAEP late in 1943 and, over the following year, the other big unions with predominantly male membership began to withdraw effective

47 And this is only the most recent of the Aboriginal advocates for the abolition of 'protectors', see John Maynard, *Fight for Liberty and Freedom* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007). For 1930s political activity, see Jack Horner, *Vote Ferguson for Freedom* (Sydney: Australian and NZ Book Company, 1974); Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics, 1770–1970* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1996).

support.⁴⁸ Leadership passed to the unions like the Teachers Federation that had substantial female membership and Lucy became CAEP Joint President with fellow Federation member Robert L. Day.⁴⁹

Over the same months, with the war far from won, Prime Minister Curtin's health began to fail and he devolved a number of pressing social issues to his ministers in order to concentrate on the prosecution of the war. Curtin had attempted to have a large number of powers transferred from the states' control to the federal government, including postwar reconstruction as well as control over employment, profiteering and prices and, at the last minute, powers over Aboriginal people. While all states seemed to have agreed at a Constitutional Convention convened in December 1942, by February 1943 it became clear that a number of states were actually reluctant to undertake the transfer. This made a referendum necessary, with all the powers bundled together to be accepted or rejected together. Curtin argued that the powers were all related and the minister with carriage of the referendum, Jessie Street's friend H.V. Evatt, agreed. This made an unwieldy 14-point bundle. The UA members, including Lucy, campaigned actively on behalf of the 'Yes' vote for the referendum, focusing particularly on the transfer of both the postwar reconstruction powers and the Aboriginal powers. But the complex question appears to have confused electors and, despite a significant 'Yes' vote, the referendum failed to win a majority in all states, and was therefore rejected in total.⁵⁰

48 Penelope Johnson, 'Gender, Class and Work: The Council of Action for Equal Pay and the Equal Pay Campaign in Australia During World War II', *Labour History*, no. 50 (1986): 145, doi.org/10.2307/27508787.

49 Beverley Symons, 'Muriel Heagney and the Fight for Equal Pay During World War Two', *The Hummer* 3, no. 1 (Summer 1998–99): 1–13.

50 Macintyre, 'Women's Leadership in War and Reconstruction', 65–80.

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