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## **Recognising Race: Decolonisation**

When World War II ended, there was a major shift in the political environment in which Lucy was working. The war had been for Lucy a period when pressures on working-class women intensified. She had focused on two issues – the lack of childcare for war-working mothers and the injustices of women’s economic rights, shown most clearly in the refusal to employ married women teachers as permanent staff but visible across the board. Lucy’s role in the Council for Action on Equal Pay (CAEP) had intensified and many of her concerns had been addressed in the 1943 Australian Woman’s Charter. There were, however, other issues she championed like family planning and the demands of urban Aboriginal activists, which were not well addressed. Lucy had been acutely aware of the impacts of racism against Aboriginal and Jewish communities and so her activism already targeted discrimination on the grounds of race as well as sex. The entangling of race and gender came into sharper focus immediately after the war. This chapter will compare the 1943 Charter with the new environment shown in both the Indian Women’s Charter of 1946 and the revised Australian Charter of the same year, and then in the Teachers’ Charter adopted and circulated by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) from 1947 to 1954 and beyond.



Figure 9.1: The shops in front of Lucy's flat in upper 215A George Street where she spent most of her time and where all her political activities were carried out – the NEF met there, the NSW Peace Council met there and the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship was created there.

Looking north along George St from between Grosvenor St and Essex St, 2 October 1963.

Source: City of Sydney Archive, City Engineers Photographic Negatives, 1953–1973, SRC6089 Originally CRS 268/3687.

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Within months of the end of the conflict, there was a rush of activity to create the new world that had been glimpsed and imagined while the war was on. But there was a sense of urgency because tensions had already begun to rise as the tide turned in the war. Both the hopes and the fears about communism had re-emerged and polarisations began that would shape the coming Cold War. At the same time, the war had shaken European imperial holds over colonies and, in many cases, nationalist movements were rising in prominence and public awareness, including

some with apparently feminist agendas. As Sluga, Zachariah and others have argued, 1945 was a brief time poised between a world war and an even more all-encompassing Cold War, a time when new worlds really could be imagined despite the looming conflicts.<sup>1</sup> In this time of both internationalism and nationalism, the United Nations (UN) was envisaged, drawing much from the old League of Nations but built on the new principles of human rights, theoretically beyond the nation state. In its fundamental paradox, however, the whole UN edifice depended on the endorsement of nation-states to come into reality.

In the scramble to fulfil the hopes that were already under threat, many organisations were created in the months after the conflict ended. The British trade union movement initiated the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in London on 3 October 1945, then the United Nations itself, long planned, came into being on 24 October after the San Francisco conference. Lucy was particularly interested in UNESCO, inaugurated in Paris on 16 November 1945, the United Nations body that was to focus efforts in education, science and cultural expression. The United Associations of Women had been represented through Jessie Street at the San Francisco conference, where she attended as a non-voting member of the Australian delegation. After this, Jessie travelled to Paris for the first meeting of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) in December, then on to India where she attended the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) in Hyderabad (later in Pakistan), in January 1946.

The concept of a Charter of Rights was circulating actively. The United Nations itself was founded on a Charter, a treaty between the victorious Allied nations. Jessie Street took the 1943 Australian Woman's Charter with her to San Francisco where she used it to support the argument to have women specifically mentioned in the UN Charter and to support the planning for a Commission on the Status of Women. This was eventually created in mid-1946, with Jessie being later sent as a delegate. The Indian Women's Charter was already in draft form late in 1945, drawing substantially from the 1931 Karachi Resolution of the Indian National Congress, which had in turn drawn on the 1927 Women's Indian Association Charter. The 1946 Indian Women's Charter of Rights

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1 Glenda Sluga *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Ali Raza, Roy Franziska, and Benjamin Zachariah, eds, *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views, 1917–39* (New Delhi, Thousand Oaks, London, Singapore: Sage, 2015), doi.org/10.4135/9789351507994.

and Duties was presented, moved and adopted at the AIWC congress in Hyderabad in January 1946, which Jessie attended. Her speech notes show that she spoke very briefly, presenting an overly positive view of the situation of gender equality in Australia and then summarising the goals of the 1943 Charter as:

We are fighting for the elimination of sex discrimination and the realization of the principle of equal status, rights and opportunities for men and women.<sup>2</sup>

After its adoption at Hyderabad, the Indian Women's Charter of Rights and Duties was taken by Hansa Mehta to the UN in April 1946 and circulated there, as the 1943 Australian Women's Charter had been circulated in San Francisco. This Indian Women's Charter was next brought to Australia in August 1946 by Kapila Khandvala and Mithan Lam, who came as delegates from the AIWC. They may have met Jessie Street at the Hyderabad conference, or even at the initial WIDF meeting in Paris, but they represented the earliest international guests for whom the Australian Charter Committee could organise passports. Some others, notably the Soviet and Chinese delegations, were not able to get into the country while the Americans were not able to get out of their own. But the Indian women, then British subjects, were able to obtain visas and brought their Charter to be discussed among the women attending the conference to consider the second Australian Woman's Charter, which was adopted in August 1946 and was in existence till the 1960s.

At this second Australian Woman's Charter Conference, Lucy chaired the session on education and was closely involved with day-to-day conference management as the sessions occurred. The analyses of the 1946 Australian Woman's Charter to date have centred on the widely reported Cold War debates that blew up on the conference floor, splitting the women's movement into opponents and supporters of communism. Less attention has been given to comparing the contents of the charters in 1943 and 1946, and even less attention to comparing the Indian Charter with those of Australia. No attention at all has been directed to what was said on the floor of the conference but which might not have been reported.

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2 Speech Notes by Jessie Street, Hyderabad, 28 December 1945, Scanned, AIWC Archives.



**Figure 9.2: Kapila Khandvala and Mithan Lam at the 1946 Australian Woman's Charter meeting.**

The meeting participants were gathered for this photograph on the rooftop of the city building where the conference was held, which overlooked Hyde Park with glimpses of Sydney Harbour in the distance. Mithan Lam and Kapila Khandvala, in saris, were in centre of the participants' group. Jessie and Lucy can be seen with others in a small organising huddle on left.

Source: Jessie Street papers, MS 2683, NLA.

The changes in the Australian charters' contents suggest that the 1946 shift arose firstly because of pressure from Indigenous Australian activists but also from the same sources that had shaped the Indian Charter: the international campaign for decolonisation. These 1946 changes broadened the Australian Charter into a movement calling for equality between racial as well as gender groups, which was quite a different goal than that in 1943. The new focus of the 1946 Charter was exactly the focus of the concurrent 1946 NEF Conference, which was focused on the theme of 'Education for International Understanding'. Lucy was an organiser for both.<sup>3</sup> The NEF held sessions in all major cities and Lucy

<sup>3</sup> See photo of Kapila Khandvala and Mithan Lam with participants of 1946 Charter conference overlooking Hyde Park. Jessie Street and Lucy Woodcock visible among planning group in lower left-hand corner. Jessie Street papers, MS 2683, NLA.

had ensured that Kapila, as a senior educator, would speak at each, often accompanied by Mithan. Both spoke also in each city to the peak union bodies, organisations to which Lucy's leadership role in the Australian and NSW Teachers Federations, as well as the overall labour movement, allowed them introductions.

The concept of a 'charter' continued to hold evocative power throughout the decade. In another charter in which Lucy was directly involved, UNESCO began, after its 1947 Mexico conference, to work through teachers' unions among all its member states to draft, circulate and eventually endorse an International Teacher's Charter in 1950, later called, from 1954, a Charter on Education.<sup>4</sup> This final UNESCO Charter was based on the fundamental principle that the questions of racial and gender discrimination were linked, and, like discrimination against religions, were obstacles both to fair working conditions and universal access to education. In all these conferences – for the Australian Woman's Charter, the New Education Fellowship and the Teachers' Charter discussions at UNESCO – an end to discrimination on the basis of race, sex and religion was at the core of any new world.

Although the women's movement had become more fragmented with the early impact of the Cold War, this engagement of gender with racial and religious equality was to mark the later careers of many of the women activists involved. It was also a characteristic of the UNESCO work on the Charter for Teachers and Education. The NEF also offered many opportunities to take this path, and as a member of the NEF Federal Council, hosting the NSW NEF meetings in her flat, Lucy was well informed and supported its recommendations on child migrants in 1947. These aimed to address children's educational needs in order to avoid what was even then the well-known abuse that had occurred in earlier decades when English child migrants to Western Australia had been given no training and instead used as cheap labour.<sup>5</sup>

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4 The UNESCO-commissioned summary of the 1954 Charter was summarised by Christiane Dazaud, and published in Australia in various newspapers, discussed at end of this chapter.

5 *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 3 June 1947, 6.

## Recognising decolonisation

### The Indian Women's Charter of Rights and Duties, 1946

We know from the Australian Woman's Charter agenda and Kapila's report to the AIWC that the two Indian delegates spoke in detail about the Indian Women's Charter on a number of occasions during their Australian visit. Yet there is a silence in the accounts we have of the conference proceedings, probably arising from the tensions between the anti-communist and the left-wing groups among the women's organisations attending. Whatever its cause, this absence in the Australian documents of the time makes it easier to understand why later Australian historians have failed to notice whatever contribution these Indian visitors may have made to the 1946 outcomes.

This Indian Women's Charter used similar language to that used in the 1943 Australian Woman's Charter, and had much common ground, but it also contained some significant differences. It had nine key principles, but, like the Australian charters, each principle contained a number of subpoints. In the areas of common ground, the first principle, civic rights, called for full adult franchise but then included the complete topic of education as it was regarded as a civic right of all. Many principles of the Indian Charter, for example, 'Marriage' (VII), contained all the material that in the Australian Woman's Charter was addressed under a number of different principles. In the Australian Charter, headings covering marriage included: 'Women as mothers', 'Childcare', 'Moral Standards' (which called for equal moral standard for men and women and continued penalties for prostitution but *both* parties to be guilty of offence), 'Legal Reforms', 'Divorce', 'Widows' Pensions' and others. The difference between the two in this area of marriage was that the Indian Women's Charter contained no reference to prostitution at all. The fundamental common ground was that women were not to be regarded as property but to have full equal rights of decision-making with their husbands over children throughout their lives, both inside the marriage and in any divorce. Similarly, there should be no gender difference in property law.

There was similar common ground in the area of civic and legal rights, with both charters asserting that full adult franchise should be the rule regardless of sex and also of family status, and that women should be eligible to stand for all public offices. Women similarly should receive pay equal to men and have equal access to jobs, regardless of marital status. But at the same time there should be provision made for breastfeeding mothers, for crèches and for maternity benefits to ensure that equal access to work was a reality.

The Indian Charter was called ‘The Indian Women’s Charter of Rights and Duties’; this suggests a stronger pressure to define women’s responsibilities than in the Australian Charter, which was entitled simply ‘The Australian Woman’s Charter’. Yet when comparing the documents, three of the six clauses in the final Indian principle ‘the Duties of Women’ (IX) are very similar to those in the Australian Charter’s article one: ‘Women in War and Peace’. Both charters argue for the accessibility of war work for women – although neither charter mentions armed services – and make it clear that women carry equal responsibility with men to serve their country in times of crisis.

The clauses that differ are, firstly, one in the Indian Charter that defines the responsibility of women to be of ‘high moral standards’. This was not like any included in the Australian Charter – although it was certainly part of the unspoken assumptions among Australian feminist organisations. The second of the divergent clauses called on Indian women to take responsibility for modernising Indian culture – for condemning purdah, for example, and caste. The third different clause calls for Indian women to commit themselves to work for world peace. These ‘duties’ of Indian women are not then about submission to men, but rather about service to a vision of a modernised state and an internationally peaceful world.

There were two further points of difference. The Australian Woman’s Charter argues for the right to have the age of marriage lowered, while the Indian Charter calls for raising the age of marriage. Such differences are well explained by the different cultural histories of marriage in each country but they make a striking contrast. The other difference is less easily explained – in the ‘Women’s Place in the Family’ clause (VIII), the Indian Charter states unequivocally that a woman has a right to limit her family and the state has the responsibility to provide her with the necessary knowledge and facilities to do so. Given there is no mention of contraception at all in the Australian Woman’s Charter of 1943, this is an important difference, and it is a significant clause in placing control

for family limitation into women's hands, with no requirement for consultation with husbands or family, unlike the other clauses contained in this principle.

The overarching context, however, of the whole Indian Women's Charter of Rights and Duties is that it is directed at a future, independent and democratic, India. It begins with the words 'We believe that freedom and equality are essential to human development' in what was a direct call for the end of colonialism. The duties and responsibilities of Indian women were therefore directed to this independent India, not towards the Raj of the day, under British control. The strongest message of the Indian Women's Charter to Australian women was perhaps that these women wanted the same as they did – and were arguing even more strongly to get it – which brought home the injustice of colonial control.

## The Australian Women's Charter Conference, 1946

The major changes in the 1946 Australian Woman's Charter from the 1943 Charter were in the clauses about Aboriginal people and about the world outside Australia. Two influences that must have contributed had been occurring before 1943 but had had no expression in the Charter that emerged. With a new committee, however, including Lucy, these influences did find expression. One was the ongoing activism of Aboriginal Australians, like Bill Ferguson, Jack Patten and Pearl Gibbs, who had made a direct linkage with feminist movements through the anthropologist Carolyn Tennant Kelly in 1937; this led to Kelly mobilising a large group of women from the Feminist Club, the United Associations of Women and other women's organisations to witness the collapse of the hearings of the NSW Select Committee into the Protection Board in February 1938.<sup>6</sup> The collapse of the Select Committee, publicised widely by women's organisations, contributed support to the Aboriginal campaign for full citizens' rights, adding to the impact of its best publicised event, the Day of Mourning in January 1938. The organisers of the 1943 Charter conference had been advised by women with remote-area interests, but the committee for the 1946 Charter had much more experience in south-eastern Australia, which brought very different concerns into the foreground.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Truth*, 20 February 1938, 35.

<sup>7</sup> *The Abo Call*, 1937–38, throughout each of the six issues; Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics, 1770–1970* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1996), 178–206, 274–93; Victoria Haskins, *One Bright Spot* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

The second influence was the impact on Australians of Jewish experiences of racism, retold by refugees from Nazism like Hilda Byk and the Fink family, with whom Lucy was able to use her standing in public and progressive education to facilitate supportive networks.<sup>8</sup> After Fanny Reading's impassioned speech at the 1943 Charter conference, the issue of racial persecution was far more prominently on the agenda in 1946.

The third was not evident in 1943 and created the most urgent impact on the Charter conference of 1946. This was the globalising effect of the war itself. It had made Australians vividly aware of Asia in an unprecedented way: bringing Indonesians into Australian political and social networks, creating widespread sympathy in Australia for the Chinese in their struggle against the Japanese invasion, making Australians aware of Indians in shared combat zones in all theatres of war, eliciting deep fear and anger against the invading Japanese in the Pacific theatre but then rising horror as the effects of the 1945 atomic blasts were brought home. The war and its immediate aftermath brought the anti-colonial nationalist movements of decolonisation, including the non-violent strategies of Gandhi, into direct contact with activists within the 'dominions' like Australia.

All of these influences shaped the 1946 Australian Woman's Charter, as did the very changed circumstances of the times. In 1943, the Charter conference had marked the high point of the Australian women's movement, with its active alliance between unionised working women and feminist groups. In 1946, however, the Charter conference saw a deeply divided Australian women's movement. The weakening of union support for equal pay for women from 1944 has been discussed above, with the strongest unions withdrawing from the CAEP as demobilisation began to reduce the number of women in the workforce. Cold War tensions had invaded the UA just as they had the union movement. Jessie Street's strong support for Russia during the war and her outspoken appreciation of the gains made by women under socialism had frightened both anti-communist feminist bodies and the anti-communist unions. Some feminist organisations refused to take part in the 1946 Charter conference at all, others came but argued strongly against Street's leadership. Although some international delegations were unable to come due to the rising Cold War tensions, the Indians were there, along with the Sri Lankans, New Zealanders, Yugoslavs and French.

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8 See Chapter 5, this volume; Lucy Godiva Woodcock ASIO file, Vol. 1, f 156, A6119, 2030, NAA.

The two Indian women who came were extraordinarily impressive. Both senior women in their professions, each experienced, well-travelled and articulate, they were able to make repeated contributions to the conference discussion and to the many public meetings that occurred around the Charter conference. Mithan Lam (1898–1981) was the acknowledged leader of the two and the first Indian woman to become a barrister, being admitted to the Bar in London. Beautiful and elegant, she was a member of the Tata family, a family more powerful and far more wealthy even than Jessie's family, but she was nevertheless an activist and a nationalist. Mithan was to go on to become the president of the AIWC during the later 1950s and '60s. Kapila Khandvala was a leading educationalist from Bombay who had trained in India and gained a higher degree in the United States. She had travelled widely in Europe as well as Asia, taught in a rural social development organisation and, by the early 1940s, had risen to become the first woman to take control of primary education for the City of Bombay. Kapila's father, T.C. Khandvala, a successful Gujarati eye doctor in Bombay, was a member of the Brahmo Samaj, which meant he was committed to a reforming and modernising Hindu practice. He ensured education for his four daughters and encouraged marriage outside religious and caste restrictions. Kapila, however, had been determined to make her own decisions, and did not marry at all. Instead, she chose to live with her partner, C.M. Trivedi, for her whole life. Trivedi was already committed in an earlier marriage and had left his wife and children to live with Kapila. They lived together for the rest of their lives, clearly devoted to each other, but the relationship deeply disturbed her family as well as his. So, although she came from a privileged background, Kapila was negotiating social disapproval for living an unconventional life, which in some ways put her into a similar situation to Lucy.

Mithan and Kapila were significant in Lucy's story because she went to visit them both, in Nagpur and then Bombay respectively, along with Jessie Street early in 1955, after attending a Peace conference in Madras. It appears that Lucy kept in touch with them, although we cannot be sure because she left few letters or papers – all we have from this period are Jessie's breezy communications addressed to them all. We do know, however, that Lucy reported speaking to women in trade unions and in agricultural areas during her visit to India, meetings that are likely to have been organised by Kapila, who made these types of arrangements for other visitors like Lotte Fink in 1952 and Lee Brown (now Rhiannon) in the 1970s.

Kapila Khandvala and Mithan Lam are even more significant overall because their extensive reports to the AIWC about their Australian observations give us a very different perspective on the events of the Charter conference and their other Australian travels. As well as her 20-page report, Kapila submitted an itinerary of their whole trip that documented a gruelling program of meetings, speeches and travelling, from Brisbane to Perth, from their first press interview on 3 August to Kapila's final speech at the NEF conference on 12 October. Kapila recorded the topics of their speeches, as well as the dates and locations, and listed the speakers and sessions in the conferences they attended, so we know that, once again, Lucy had organised for Fanny Reading to chair a Charter session.<sup>9</sup>

We know from Kapila's records that both Mithan and Kapila talked about the Indian Women's Charter in detail at the Australian Woman's Charter sessions and at a public meeting under the auspices of the Charter, where Kapila noted that she had spoken on:

The Charter framed by the AIWC, about the trade union movement in India and the food crisis facing India.<sup>10</sup>

We also glimpse the events around the main Australian Charter conference. As was to become her usual practice, Lucy Woodcock was actively involved with the organising during each day of the conference but did not give a paper. Kapila noted that Lucy had chaired the session on education, which was for her one of the most interesting, and at which Kapila herself spoke about the role of education in fostering peace. Beyond the formal conference sessions, however, Lucy had brought Kapila to speak at a meeting of the Assistant Teachers' Union and later at another meeting of the Teachers Federation, at which Kapila had been made an honorary member.<sup>11</sup> Kapila spoke about trade unions in India at a NSW Trades and Labour Council meeting and on similar themes at various other union meetings. On her return to India she gave the AIWC a list of all the trade unions who had been responsive to her accounts of industrial and women's issues in India, with advice to develop the relationship with follow-up contact.

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9 Kapila Khandvala, 'A Detailed List and Itinerary of the Conference at Australia', 10 December 1946, 1–5; 'Report on the Australian Conferences to A.I.W.C.', 10 December 1946 (unabridged, 20 pages). Both in AIWC Archives, New Delhi.

10 Khandvala, Report, 12.

11 Meetings held 1–2 October 1946. Khandvala, Itinerary, 5; Report, 17.

Perhaps the most powerful and memorable event of the conference had been the closing Peace march, during which floats decorated in the national costumes and colours of the conference guests and up to 2,000 women, including women from the various war service bodies, marched through the Sydney city streets. All traffic was stopped for them to pass. They marched to the Cenotaph, where a Brigadier from the Salvation Army read a prayer for peace and Jessie Street laid a wreath to those who had died in the war. Then the procession marched to the Domain, where the speakers included both Mithan and Kapila as well as the visitors from Yugoslavia and France. Kapila met Rachel Makinson, who had spoken a number of times at the conference about the danger of atomic weapons and the importance of Peace, which was again her theme at the Peace rally. Kapila reported to the AIWC that all the speeches stressed that there could be no peace without unity and freedom.<sup>12</sup>

In her report, Kapila made special mention of the conditions faced by Aboriginal Australians, expressing grave concerns about their welfare and independence. While she repeated the fears held for the disruption of traditional culture, she was most concerned to point out that all Aboriginal people should have the right of equal wages and of full payment in cash, just like fellow non-Aboriginal workers. She argued also for the importance of Aboriginal people being free to vote for their own representatives.<sup>13</sup> She linked their well-being with the suggestions, which were just beginning to be made at that time, that there should be a range for testing rockets across the Western Desert lands, necessitating major incursions into the homelands of Pitjantjatjara and other Western Desert peoples. Although in 1946 there had been no hint of testing atomic weaponry, the idea of military rocket testing was enough to raise alarm bells not only for those opposed to incursions into Aboriginal lands but to those campaigning for an end to military spending.<sup>14</sup>

In her own speeches to the Charter conference, Kapila reported that she had continually stressed the importance of freedom and independence, a theme she repeated at trade union meetings and in her speeches at the New Education Fellowship conference sessions, on 'Education for International Understanding'. Kapila's NEF speech read in part:

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12 Khandvala, Report, 14–15.

13 Khandvala, Report, 7–8.

14 Khandvala, Report, 4.

Equality, justice and freedom are the three fundamental principles essential for peace. These very ideas must also form the basis of education, the world over, if humanity is to have peace. It is because these ideas are sadly neglected in education that problems of the coloured and colonial peoples, arising out of racial discrimination and hatred, still exist as the most disturbing factors to world peace. So called peace conferences, and high-sounding talk of international goodwill and peace, are not likely to achieve anything, unless a world organisation like the New Education Fellowship takes upon itself the task of bringing about a radical and fundamental change in the ideals of education all over the world. It is possible for education to mould the new generation with the ideal of furthering the democratic and peaceful way of life. The aim of education should therefore be not only to stop all wars, but to build up and maintain peace.<sup>15</sup>

Mithan Lam's keynote speech to the Woman's Charter meeting in Sydney was published in the AIWC journal *Roshni*, in February 1947. Titled 'Freedom and Equality', her address covered many aspects of AIWC work, but it made her position on independence very clear:

Our object should be not merely to nail down the world order, so that the bomb cannot fall again, but we must remember that security is obtained by eliminating the grievances which ... have to be removed before the body politic can become healthy. Social inequalities are at the base of many upheavals while the racial arrogance, the exploitation of the weaker and less advanced peoples, the trade rivalries caused thereby provide fertile soil for internal as well as international bickering and war.

If we want real peace in the world, there will have to be no room for narrow sectarianism. Therefore I appeal to you to study dispassionately the other side of the question, from the coloured people's point of view, and use your undoubted influence to guide – and if need be to curb – your statesmen.<sup>16</sup>

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15 Kapila Khandvala, 'Education, International Understanding and Peace', in *Education for International Understanding: Selected Addresses to the International Education Conference Held in Australia from 31st August to 12th October, 1946*, ed. Rupert Best (Adelaide: New Education Fellowship, 1948), 113.

16 *Roshni*, February 1947, 49–50.

These speeches were not recorded in the final Australian published version of the Charter, and they are certainly not visible in Jessie Street's autobiography or in the later histories of the Australian women's movement. But the text of the 1946 Australian Woman's Charter suggests the extent to which the presence of Kapila Khandvala and Mithan Lam may have enhanced the directions that were already shaping the women's movement emerging into the Cold War.

## What was *in* the 1946 Australian Woman's Charter?

The 1946 Australian Woman's Charter was comprised of 35 clauses, presented in five sections, and was followed by a series of 16 resolutions moved from the floor, most amplifying the content of the basic clauses. The overall tone of the Charter document in 1946 was very different from the confidence and optimism of 1943. In general, the 1946 Charter was responding to the worsening situation for women at the end of the war as well as to the bitter experience of having been ignored and bypassed by the Labor Government in the postwar reconstruction.

In the Charter's fourth clause, 'Unity and Cooperation', as just one example, fell just before 'Woman in Public Life' (clause 5). Instead of speaking about commitment to the war effort as the 1943 Charter had done, the 1946 Charter stated that it 'views with alarm the tendency to force women back to be exploited as cheap labour', to obstruct the work of women's organisations and to restrict women's access to childcare.

Similarly, the sixth clause 'Equal Status, Opportunity, Responsibility and Reward' stated that: 'The indispensable contribution that women make to all phases of human life is at present inadequately recognized'. The Charter conference therefore demanded amendment to the constitution, changes in laws and full access to employment at equal pay. The Charter expressed regret that the Women's Employment Board was now in demise. While some, including Lucy, felt it had only been of benefit to a few,<sup>17</sup> it had nevertheless recognised the presence of women in the workforce, a recognition the Charter conference felt was a fast disappearing.

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17 Lucy Woodcock's 1963–64 assessment of the long campaign for Equal Pay found in *The WA Teachers' Bulletin*, May 1963, 106; and *Our Women*, March–May 1964, 26.

In amplification of clause 6, the third of the 16 Conference Resolutions on 'Dismissal of Women' stated:

We deplore the dismissal of women after efficient and faithful service from the many positions of responsibility attained by them during the war; and declare that ample opportunities for the employment of women could be created by the adequate development of the resources of the country and other construction work.

And furthermore:

This Conference deplores the fact that all countries have again denied women a voice in the shaping of the peace treaties ...<sup>18</sup>

Apart from this overall tone of disappointment and frustration, there was much that was similar in the 1946 Charter when compared to its predecessor in 1943. For example, the clause on 'Birthrate' (clause 25) still concentrated on the need to increase births. So the conference called for better community facilities for care of children and for the 'removal of obstacles to early marriage'. It did, however, add a call for the removal of the causes of war.

But there was still no mention at all of contraception or abortion. So, once again, women wishing to limit their families and control their own fertility were ignored. In 'Social Hygiene–Equal Moral Standards' (clause 30) the Charter still regarded prostitution as an offence, but it now criticised the injustice of directing punishment for prostitution only at women. Its recommendation was to remove the specific offence of prostitution, keep only the general nuisance laws and make men equally punishable. Even with such minor tweaking, much of the substance remains the same as in 1943.

The dramatic differences lie instead in the clauses of the Woman's Charter on Aborigines (34) and on 'World Peace' (clause 1 and resolution 16). In relation to Aboriginal people, the whole clause was named differently, having become '(Clause 34) Aboriginal and Coloured People'. Then the following recommendations on Aboriginal people were a competing tangle of contradictory directions, revealing the conflicts between

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18 Australian Women's Charter Conference, *Australian Woman's Charter, 1946–1949: Which Comprises the Resolutions Adopted by the Australian Women's Charter Conference* (Sydney: Australian Women's Digest, n.d., c. 1949), 28.

women's organisations. The subsections included a substantial number of the original 1943 recommendations, aimed at keeping 'tribal' people and their land inviolate and protectable, but the rest were totally different.<sup>19</sup>

Firstly, there was the right to full and equal pay, equivalent to fellow white workers, to be paid in cash each payday to the workers who were 'Aboriginal and colored people' (recommendation e). This call for equal pay was a major challenge to the existing labour hierarchies. Furthermore, the clause was not based on any guess about the possible 'admixture' of Aboriginal 'blood' and instead insisted on equal pay as a right.

Next there was the recommendation (g) calling for the right for Aboriginal people to organise and elect their representatives in any way they chose and without interference. This may have arisen directly from contact with the Aboriginal communities most affected, either through Caroline Tennant Kelly over the NSW Select Committee or Lucy Woodcock in Erskineville. But it arose, too, from contacts in other states with militant, organising Aboriginal activists. In Western Australia, for example, while older feminists like Mary Bennett were still influential, there were newer voices like that of the author Katherine Susannah Prichard, in touch with the Pilbara strikers who had walked off their pastoral worksites at the end of the war to begin a three-year strike. Most notable of the differences on Aboriginal people was recommendation (c), which called for 'the extension of national independence to the colonial and semi-colonial peoples'. While this did not explicitly mention Aboriginal people, there must have been some who saw parallels. And clearly this completely new clause must have been influenced by the presence of Kapila Khanvala, Mithan Lam and presumably Mrs Opie, who was the delegate from Ceylon (Sri Lanka), whose voice is absent even from the reports of Khandvala and Lam.

In relation to world peace, the Charter clauses were unremarkable, with Clause 1 calling for a world free from war, the following clauses 2 and 3 calling for support for the United Nations and for its Committee on the Status of Women. Then, however, the conference resolutions went far beyond amplification. Instead, Resolutions 15, in relation to atomic energy, and 16, on world peace, were completely new and had clearly been shaped by the tumultuous events of the war and its aftermath. Resolution 15 welcomed the discoveries of atomic energy but declared that the knowledge associated with its peaceful use should be disseminated to all.

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19 Ibid., 25–26.

Furthermore, the resolution called for the complete outlawing of atomic weapons and any form of atomic energy that could be used for warfare. Resolution 16 on world peace argued that the defeat of the fascist forces was not enough to ensure peace, and that instead close relationships must be developed between the world powers, explicitly mentioning the Soviet Union and ‘all other democratic countries’ through the United Nations, with the goal of fostering unity and ensuring the effectiveness of bans on all uses of atomic energy that could be used for war. The resolution then drew on the principles of the 1941 Atlantic Charter to ensure all nations recognised ‘the principles of equality of nations and the rights of the people of each nation to choose freely, without foreign interference, their form of government’. Even more unequivocal was the next segment, calling on all nations ‘to recognize the need for the extension of national independence to the colonial and semi-colonial people’.<sup>20</sup>

Both the resolution on ‘Atomic Energy’ (15) and the resolution on ‘World Peace’ (16) discussed the use of atomic power and weapons. This of course was also all new in comparison to 1943, arising from the horror at the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of the war with Japan. This was the area to which Rachel Makinson had made a strong contribution during the conference, impressing Kapila Khandvala with her knowledge and thoughtful approach, in which she called for recognition of the potential positive uses of atomic power as long as its technology was open and shared and as long as all weapons were banned.

As well as the clauses on national independence on which Kapila and Mithan probably had an influence, there was at least one other in which they were certainly involved. There was a formal resolution on an ‘Appeal for India’ (13) for food and medical supplies that resulted directly from their explanations of the grave fears held across India that a repetition of the food shortages of 1943, best known in the West for their catastrophic effect on Bengal, were again looming.<sup>21</sup>

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20 Ibid., 31–32.

21 Ibid., 30.

## Indian disappointment

The Australian Woman's Charter Committee published a brief outline of the events of the 1946 conference as an introduction to their booklet containing the full resolutions of the Charter. This account presented the Indians bringing greetings and news, and indeed as excelling with their 'colourful float' in the Peace procession.

Mrs Mithan Lam, LLB and Miss Kapila Khandvala, MA, BT, Director of Primary Education Bombay, brought greetings from the All India Women's Conference and the Bombay Presidency Women's Council. Audiences listened with deep interest to vivid descriptions of women's progress, of conditions of work, and the Trades Union movement in India. A final appeal was made for food to help the famine stricken people of that Country.<sup>22</sup>

The newspapers were full of the visit by the two Indians, but mainly in order to comment on their exotic saris.<sup>23</sup> Neither the newspapers nor the Charter booklet contained any account of assessments these two highly accomplished women may have made, but the Indian sources allow us to see at least some. While Kapila Khandvala was diplomatic in her report, Mithan Lam was more straightforward in her 'Impressions of the Women's Charter Conference in Sydney', published in a special edition of *Roshni* in November 1946, in terms that must have resonated strongly with Lucy Woodcock.<sup>24</sup> Mithan discussed the impending loss of Australian women's employment with the war's end and continued with a broad description of the conditions they had observed:

Women do not generally hold important top posts: for instance the highest post that a woman can aspire to in the educational service would be that of inspectress of girls' schools. They [Australian women] were surprised to find in India, which they had been led to believe was very backward, Miss Khandwala holds such an important post. Even the magistrates presiding over juvenile courts are men (not necessarily trained welfare workers) who were assisted by women J.P.s. In that field we do better here, at least in Bombay. Married women are not encouraged to carry on their work however brilliant they may be; even in the

22 Australian Women's Charter Conference, *Australian Woman's Charter*, 6.

23 *SMH*, 24 July 1946, 6; 3 August 1946, 3; *Argus* (Melbourne), 27 July 1946, 10; 20 August 1946, 10; *Barrier Miner* (Broken Hill), 6 August 1946, 1; *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 12 August 1946, 6; *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), 2 September 1946, 3.

24 *Roshni*, Special Issue, November 1946, 42–48.

universities they are generally given positions on a temporary basis and thus have no security of tenure. The things grieved us greatly, for we were under the impression that women in Australia were very advanced.

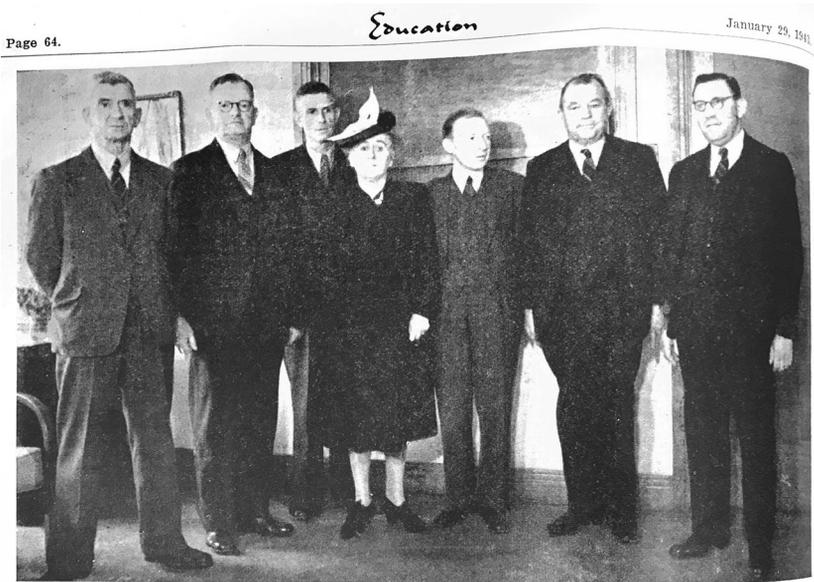
Mithan continued:

The clauses of the Charter which interested us particularly and were of international importance were those which dealt with peace and the affirmation of the belief of the conference that 'to win a lasting peace oppression must be eradicated, true democracy established throughout the world and justice, liberty and equality enjoyed by all peoples in all countries without distinction as to colour, race, creed or sex.' An affirmation of these important principles is good these days, when the coloured people are fighting for their just rights ... In my speech, I spoke on that part of the clause quoted above, telling them that the white people must face the problem of colour squarely if they wished to have a lasting peace.<sup>25</sup>

We catch a glimpse of the day-to-day arrangements over their whole visit from Kapila Khandvala's report to the AIWC, and it is clear that Lucy Woodcock played the major role in organising this visit by Kapila and Mithan. Lucy chaired the education session of the Charter conference in August, after which Kapila and Mithan spoke to a number of organisations associated with the UA. From then on, Lucy appears to have been even more closely involved with the visit. As an office holder in the NSW NEF, Lucy managed Kapila's speeches to the NEF seminars in Brisbane (2 September) and Sydney (7 September) then Melbourne (12 September), Perth (16 September) and Adelaide (26–27 September). Along the way, Lucy organised dinners at the University of Sydney and at the Fellowship of Writers, and she had set up a speech by Kapila to the Victorian Parents' and Teachers' conference (23 September). In October, at the end of this Australia-wide trip, Lucy hosted Kapila in speaking to the Assistant Teachers' Union (1 October), organised for her to speak at various school assemblies and then to speak alongside Mithan Lam to members of the Teachers Federation (2 October), where she had organised for Kapila to be made an Honorary Federation member. As a Teachers Federation delegate to the NSW Trades and Labor Council (TLC), Lucy had invited Kapila, Mithan and Jessie to speak there, also on 2 October, introducing them to the assembled TLC delegates, after which she organised a time spot for Kapila to speak on the Labor Party radio station, 2KY.

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25 *Roshni*, November 1946, 44–45.



TEACHER'S CERTIFICATE PANEL.  
 Left to right: Mr. T. A. Murray; Mr. M. Mackinnon, B.A., B.Sc.; Mr. L. A. Walsh, B.Ec.; Miss L. G. Woodcock, B.A., B.Ec.;  
 Mr. H. S. Norington; Mr. A. McGuinness; Mr. S. P. Lewis, B.Ec.

Figure 9.3: Lucy on the Teachers' Certification Committee 1943 – this shows both how she was often the only woman and how diminutive she was.

The amazing hat here must have been chosen to assist her to assert her presence.

Source: *Education: Journal of the NSW Teachers Federation*, 29 January 1943, p. 64.

Courtesy of State Library of New South Wales.

While Lucy had had an exhausting role during 1946 – criss-crossing the nation as she travelled with her Indian visitors as well as organising with the UA and the NEF – she had not lost touch with her Teachers Federation colleagues. Women teacher friends had offered her the most sustained support for her campaign for equal pay and economic rights for all women, married or unmarried, but she had also had unfailing backing from Sam Lewis and a handful of male teachers, like Hal Norington, the Federation organiser. While they had taken no role in either of Lucy's major events in 1946, one of the principles Lewis shared with Lucy was his commitment to progressive education. He planned to attend the November 1947 conference of the new UN body, UNESCO, to be held in Mexico, in order to take part in the discussions around new models for education. Lewis, then secretary of the Teachers Federation, was elected as a delegate from the union, along with Frank Medworth, an art teacher from Sydney Technical High.

Although they were paying their own fares, they were given leave by the department for the duration of the conference. Because Lewis was a member of the Communist Party, there was an immediate outcry from conservative politicians, particularly from the anti-communist right-wing of the Labor movement, like former premier Jack Lang. All the press coverage prior to the conference was taken up with the controversy over whether CPA members should represent Australian organisations, even at their own expense. Tragically, Medworth took his own life after he arrived in Mexico City, and the press coverage switched immediately to cover his death, often luridly and with continuing anti-communist innuendo.

It is difficult then, amidst all these controversies, to find information about the outcomes of the conference, yet these were to be of importance to Australian teachers. The UNESCO resolutions from Mexico called for a Teachers' Charter and a Youth Charter, which would state the rights and goals of both teachers and students in all forms of education. The resolutions of the Mexico City conference and the next, in Beirut, set out the fundamental principles of these charters, as well as calling for further survey work from each of the member states.<sup>26</sup> These principles were that neither in the employment or work of teachers nor in the learning and teaching process was there to be any discrimination on the basis of 'race, colour, sex or religion'. Nor was any person, youth or adult, to be denied access to education because of their income.<sup>27</sup> This resonated immediately with the campaigns not only for gender equality but also for racial equality that had become Lucy's passionate commitment. Moreover, the rejection of any obstruction to education due to income – in other words, denial because of class – was just as important to her in her commitment to working-class education. Lucy had paid less attention to religion but most of these UNESCO principles were precisely in line with her own established positions.

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26 United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Resolutions Adopted by the General Conference During Its Second Session: Mexico, November–December 1947* (Paris: UNESCO, 1948), Resolution 3.11 and 3.12, p. 21, [www.unesco.org/ulis/body/dec\\_res.html](http://www.unesco.org/ulis/body/dec_res.html). Fundamental to both was that 'no bar founded on distinctions of race, colour, sex or creed should operate in any way in any branch of the teaching profession' or 'against any group of young people'. Furthermore social status and income was to be no barrier to either teaching or gaining access to education or certification.

27 Ibid.

UNESCO initially identified its work as being in 'Fundamental Education', by which it meant all forms of education, from early childhood learning through formal public schooling and technical training, as well as literacy, community and adult education. While UNESCO eventually restructured its organisation to reflect the more conventional segmentation of learning, this holistic approach reflected the vision of educators like Lucy, committed to progressive educational approaches. So furthermore, this resonated with her conviction that learning should be student-centred and engaged with 'real-life communities'. There were differences between the approaches of UK educators, often associated with the New Education Fellowship, to which Lucy subscribed, and those from the United States, but there was nevertheless a common interest in considering education widely across many forms and stages of life, rather than being limited to the conventional sequences, regulated and disciplined by universities.<sup>28</sup>

So there were many in the NSW Teachers Federation who, like Lucy, were eager to respond to the UNESCO call for draft charters to come from the teachers' unions of member states. Within a few months, the NSW Federation had formulated a draft that it was ready to share with international organisations. The NSW body was affiliated with the International Federation of Teachers' Associations (IFTA), one of three organisations of teachers that existed to bring teachers together across borders. One of Lucy's good friends in teaching, Ellen Grace Reeve, was in the UK on exchange teaching and attended the IFTA meeting held at Interlaken in Switzerland, in mid-1948. She carried the draft Charter proposed by the NSW Teachers Federation to the IFTA conference and was back in Sydney in time to report to the Federation's Annual Conference in December 1948. She was critical of the Eurocentrism of all three international teachers' organisations, pointing out that none of them had any significant representation from teachers from India, Africa or China.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, Reeve found the IFTA meeting valuable and reported to the Annual Conference of the NSW Federation that their draft had been discussed extensively and then endorsed with little amendment:

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28 Joseph Watras, 'The New Education Fellowship and UNESCO's Program of Fundamental Education', *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education* 47, no. 1–2 (2011): 191–205.

29 Ellen Grace Reeve ASIO file, Vol. 1, N49946, f 9, 8 June 1949, A6119, 1500, NAA. Reeve's report to NSW Teachers' Federation dated December 1948.

Members of this Council will remember that this Federation submitted to I.F.T.A the draft of a Teachers' Charter. This draft formed the basis for discussion for one session of conference and after certain amplification was adopted unanimously. I was asked by members of the conference to convey to the NSW Teachers' Federation, their thanks for preparing and submitting the Teachers' Charter.<sup>30</sup>

Lucy was then able to take this International Teachers' Charter to the Australian Teachers' Federation Annual Conference in Melbourne in January 1949 where, as past president and a continuing active member, she commanded significant respect. The Charter she proposed was accepted in full.<sup>31</sup> While no text of the Charter has been found to date, it seems that the NSW Federation – and therefore the International Teachers' Federation and then the Australian Teachers' Federation – had brought the two elements of the original UNESCO proposal together, so that the one Charter addressed the interests of both teachers and learners. The document was circulated and discussed at a number of levels and was accepted by UNESCO by 1950.<sup>32</sup> Lucy was heavily involved in gaining further endorsement from the Australian Teachers' Federation in 1951 and 1952. She argued (although losing these two points on amendment) that the continued purchase of armaments was directly undermining children's education and that individual teachers should become signatories to the Charter.<sup>33</sup> What is clear, however, is that the fundamental principle of both original charters was incorporated by the NSW Teachers Federation: 'no distinctions of race, colour, sex or creed' were to operate in any way, either for teachers or for students. Nor should any financial handicap act as an obstruction to free and full access to all educational opportunities for all.<sup>34</sup>

UNESCO itself was grappling with the challenges of decolonisation – it was forced in the most public of ways to revise its Eurocentric orientation to the central question of race. After undertaking in 1948 to provide a definitive statement of current knowledge on race, it did so in 1949, asserting that there were three human races, the Caucasian, Mongoloid

30 Ibid., f 6.

31 *Argus* (Melbourne), 4 January 1949, 5.

32 Ibid., 8 June 1950, 4.

33 *Tribune* (Sydney), 19 April 1951, 3; *Barrier Daily Truth* (Broken Hill), 12 January 1952, 3; *Biz* (Fairfield), 17 January 1952, 5.

34 UNESCO, *Resolutions Adopted by the General Conference During Its Second Session*, Resolutions 3.11.1 and 3.12, p. 21.

and Negroid races. But it was forced to issue a revised statement in 1951, retracting its first statement completely and explaining its erroneous conclusion as having been based on sociological opinion. Its revised 1951 statement corrected this with the conclusions of biological scientists, which were that there was in fact only one ‘race’ of human beings, *Homo sapiens sapiens*.<sup>35</sup> The implications of decolonisation and its challenges to European cultural dominance were clearly not a simple matter.

So it was not until after a meeting of non–state controlled teachers’ unions in Moscow, in August 1954, that Christiane Dazaud was commissioned by UNESCO to summarise the Teachers’ Charter. This text, published in a number of Australian newspapers in December 1954, included the following:

Teachers and professors ... who took part in the 19th session of the Joint Committee of International Teachers’ Federations, unanimously adopted a series of resolutions – collectively entitled the Teachers’ Charter – which, while claiming certain rights, sets forth many duties and obligations.

The charter underlines the essential duties of the teacher, which are ‘to respect the individuality of the child, to discover and develop his abilities, to care for his education and training, to aim constantly at shaping the moral consciousness of the future man and citizen, to educate him in a spirit of democracy, peace, and friendship between peoples.’

The responsibilities of the teacher – not his rights – take first place in the preamble of the charter. ‘The education of children is vital, not only for the development of the individuals, but also for the progress of Society.’

It is obvious that certain rights correspond to those obligations but these are only safeguards which any citizen could legitimately claim for himself regarding appointments, professional liberty, freedom of association, decent salaries, paid holidays, &c. There is no question of privileges. Certain rights seem to be set forth in the charter merely to underline more clearly the obligations to which

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35 Michael Banton, ‘UNESCO Statements on Race’, in *Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity and Society*, ed. Richard T. Schaefer (Los Angeles, London: Sage, 2008), 1096, 1098, doi.org/10.4135/9781412963879.n450.

the teachers pledge themselves ... The authors of the Charter were more concerned with education than they were with the private interests of the educator.

In the same spirit, they underlined the essential mission of the school which 'should contribute to the development of character ... A humane discipline in keeping with the self respect of both pupil and teacher, should exclude coercion and violence.'

It should not be assumed that the provisions of the charter are completely new. On the contrary, these resolutions, for the most part, reproduce in a more condensed and striking form those which the 16th and 17th International Conferences on Public Education had already drafted in detail at Geneva. What is new is the fact that teachers themselves, through their own international non-governmental organisations, have proclaimed them.<sup>36</sup>

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These events reflected a time of significant decision-making for Lucy herself. As she approached retirement age, she was charting out a new and challenging pathway for herself. Her earlier work in education and women's rights was broadened during the 1940s to include racial as well as gender equality, along with an expansion of her internationalism as she engaged with Indians and the wider world through UNESCO. It was to expand further to include Asia as she pursued her commitment to the Peace movement as we see in the next chapter. Lucy worked – as always in very practical ways – to contribute to the broadened vision she drew from the processes of achieving the Australian Woman's Charter of 1946 and the Teachers' Charter of 1950.

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36 *Queensland Times* (Ipswich), 9 December 1954, 3; *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), 23 December 1954, 7.

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