

# 14

## Bringing the World Back Home

Beside her major commitment to the United Associations of Women (see Chapter 13), Lucy took two further approaches to crossing Cold War borders and we discuss them both in this chapter. One was very public: she focused on the links between working women across the world through International Women's Day (IWD). The second was lower profile: Lucy began tutoring Chinese-background students, from Australia and overseas. Lucy's role as president of the New South Wales IWD organising committee was harder than her role in the United Associations of Women (UA). In the IWD committee, she had moved out of the familiar structures of teachers' unions and into the complex worlds of left-wing Labor and Communist Party politics in a time of high tension. After the anti-communist Democratic Labor Party had been formed in 1955, more ALP members had become active in the Peace movement. But anti-communism remained strong within unions. The women's movement was gaining greater recognition within the Communist Party, but, at the same time, there was rising conflict over the Soviet role in Hungary, Krushchev's 'secret' speech and the widening rift between the USSR and China. Lucy had many allies and close friends, like Freda Brown, among the women organisers in the CPA, who were caught up in these conflicts.

Lucy was still strongly based in the union movement although she was, by this time, far to the Left of many Teachers Federation colleagues. She had bitterly opposed the Teachers' Anti-Communist League, formed in 1946 and, in the wider union movement, the anti-communist activists known as the 'Groupers', who had formed 'Industrial Groups' within unions to challenge what they saw as rising communist control. The 'Groupers' had

formed the nucleus of the Democratic Labor Party in 1955 and continued to take a major role in Australian union and parliamentary politics, as Lucy discussed in her letters to Rewi Alley.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, because she was not in the CPA, her tireless efforts in IWD were given little space in the pages of the *Tribune* (the CPA newspaper), which instead gave greater coverage to accounts about IWD activity by women who were members of the CPA.

In the same period, rapid changes were occurring in the Aboriginal movement through the mobilisation of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship (AAF) and the upsurge of the Civil Rights movement in the United States. In the Peace movement, the internal divisions in the CPA and ALP were of major significance along with the intensification of the conflict in South Africa and the war in Vietnam. The IWD events each year reflected these underlying tensions as well as emerging issues and new movements, making their planning and implementation challenging exercises. Lucy tried to use the IWD role to strengthen regional networks through friendship and reciprocity.

In the second approach we see Lucy employing in her later life, she worked at a far less public level. She turned the broad transnational visions of her IWD work into concrete reality in the close personal relationships she was forming with the women and young people of the Asian and Australian Chinese communities in Sydney. She became increasingly interested in offering her skills and knowledge to young people in Australia for university studies in an industrial climate where exploitation disadvantaged them and where the cultural climate was poisoned by the continuing hostility of the 'White Australia' and anti-communism. The scattered evidence shows that Lucy was building on her lifetime of committed unionism as well as her skills in teaching by returning to her greatest strength, one-on-one tutoring, to support students from Australia and overseas.

## International Women's Day

We know less about Lucy's role in the IWD committee than about her work in the UA, but her IWD work provides an interesting counterpoint to her UA work. In IWD, Lucy was working in a context of tensions within both the Labor Party and the Communist Party. She was nevertheless

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<sup>1</sup> Lucy Woodcock to Rewi Alley, 18 October 1956, 11 December 1957, Rewi Alley Papers, MS-Papers-6533-307, NLNZ.

among unionists, a familiar environment. The IWD secretary until 1962 was Audrey McDonald, then a young member of the Clerical Workers' Union. When Audrey took leave for the birth of her son, her role as secretary was filled by Sylvia Harding, who also continued as the secretary of the Union of Australian Women (UAW).

During the early 1950s, IWD was observed on 8 March with local gatherings of women's rights activists and strong support from the Communist Party, an emphasis on industrial rights, sometimes a concert and always a commemoration of earlier women's struggles. Lucy had been involved in IWD activities since at least 1941 and, during the 1957 events, although Lucy was overseas, she became president of the United Associations of Women. Her time abroad probably made her more aware of the IWD celebrations in Europe. For IWD in Sydney in 1957, activist women in the CPA like Lucie Barnes and local unionists spoke at factories and also at large gatherings of women with guests of honour, including Elsie Rivett, with whom Lucy continued to work on peace and women's rights issues. In the months following her return to Australia, Lucy took on the role of president of the New South Wales organising committee for IWD.<sup>2</sup>

In 1958, the first year in which Lucy had taken a leadership role, the IWD events had an expanded vision. It was the 50th anniversary of the 1908 strike by the New York garment-maker unionists that had so inspired later IWD commemorations. The Sydney committee held an exhibition of arts and crafts at a major Sydney department store, Anthony Hordens, to which women from America, Italy, Pakistan, Israel, Germany and Spain contributed creative sewing and fabric work as well as floral arrangements. There was also a film evening at the UA rooms. Lucy opened the exhibition with a speech emphasising the international character of the event, drawing on various themes she championed, including the importance of meeting women from other lands and learning more about each other through personal relationships:

It is one day of the year when women of all nationalities, all creeds, all colours, can tie their activities round friendship and mutual understanding among women of all nations. Friendship and mutual understanding are factors of immense importance in promoting peace and goodwill among people wherever they may live and whatever government they may live under.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Tribune* (Sydney), 6 March 1957, 8; 13 March 1957, 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Tribune* (Sydney), 26 February 1958, 8; 3 March 1958, 11. Sadly, there was no mention of the films shown.

Celebrations were held in all capital cities and in the coastal industrial sugar-harvesting regions like Townsville and Cairns, where the unions, the UAW and the CPA were strong. The Women's Christian Temperance Union and the National Council of Women, both conservative bodies, were just as involved, holding events in Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane.<sup>4</sup>

In 1959, the focus on local women's achievements continued with the Brisbane IWD Committee coordinating the national events. A more transnational vision was suggested by the NSW IWD Committee when it circulated a letter endorsing the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) call for immediate cessation of nuclear tests, banning of all nuclear weapons and for disarmament.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, the NSW IWD Committee under Lucy altered the WIDF appeal slightly – the original was couched in maternalist language, appealing to women in their child-bearing capacity. The NSW endorsement was instead focused on a more straightforward and universal call for nuclear disarmament, based on a vision of global citizenship.

In 1960, the NSW IWD Committee had the daunting responsibility of coordinating the national events on the 50th anniversary of the first IWD celebration. In honour of the occasion, major international input was planned for a large Sydney meeting at Town Hall. The president of the All China Women's Foundation, Mrs Chao Feng, was to come with her interpreter, Miss Tai Yi-Feng, and also the distinguished Indonesian journalist Mrs Rusijati to speak on Gerwani, the Indonesian women's movement.<sup>6</sup> The New Theatre would present dramatic sketches and there would be musical items. Lucy's view was that the whole event was focused on peace, in support of the WIDF call made in October for a Women's Assembly for Disarmament. *Tribune* reported on the IWD preparations in February:

This new hope raised by disarmament proposals and the part Australian women can play in making it a reality will feature prominently in Sydney's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations, Miss Lucy Woodcock, President of the IWD Committee, told *Tribune*.

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4 *Tribune* (Sydney), 19 March 1958, 10.

5 *Tribune* (Sydney), 4 March 1959, 2.

6 *UA Newsheet*, March 1960, 1.

The function to be held at the Assembly Hall, Sydney, on March 8, will celebrate the achievements of NSW women in their long battle for equal rights and status, Miss Woodcock said.

‘The achievements of the past have their significance now and for the future. Women have always been profoundly interested in peace and are even more so today. The oneness of women in the fight for peace is becoming more and more recognised by women all over the world, including Australia.’<sup>7</sup>

At the last minute, however, the plans were thrown into disarray by federal government visa restrictions. The Chinese women arrived too late for the Sydney meeting but went on to Newcastle, Brisbane and far north Queensland. The Sydney meeting was large and imposing in any case. Lucy wrote a special historical introductory speech that was widely quoted, especially her view that the women’s movement had a long, inclusive history. Lucy’s historical overview was presented by the actress Nellie Lampont, a staunch feminist herself, who had been prominent in IWD events in earlier years. It opened with a celebration of Aboriginal women and a recognition of convict women ‘who came to this country against their will’.<sup>8</sup>

Lucy then flew to meet the Chinese delegates in Brisbane – where she did three radio interviews – and accompanied them to Townsville and Rockhampton for an IWD event that the local press called ‘the most representative and best function of its kind ever held there’. They all flew back to Sydney where Lucy introduced them and the Indonesian journalist Mrs Rusijati, who had eventually been able to enter the country to begin her speaking tour,<sup>9</sup> to the NSW Trades and Labor Council. Finally, Lucy took the Chinese women to a reception in their honour hosted by the Australia–China Society and the Chinese Youth League early in April, before they flew home.<sup>10</sup>

7 *Tribune* (Sydney), 3 February 1960, 3.

8 *Tribune* (Sydney), 9 March 1960, 12.

9 *Tribune* (Sydney), 30 March 1960, 9; 6 April 1960, 10.

10 Lucy Godiva Woodcock ASIO file, Vol. 2, f 166, A6119, 2031, NAA.

Lucy reported to the UA about the North Queensland meetings in terms that were different from the *Tribune* account, which had quoted the local press as calling the events ‘the most successful and most representative events of its kind ever held there’.<sup>11</sup> In Lucy’s report, she took the opportunity to explain the industrial situation of the far north Queensland towns and point out the cooperation between the various women’s organisations including the unionists’ wives’ committees. She was impressed by ‘the keen interest taken by many young women in public affairs. It was most stimulating to find that so many of the speakers at the meetings I addressed were young and very vital’. Her warmest praise, however, was directed to Mrs Shirley Cairns, from the Aboriginal Advancement Committee in Brisbane:

One of the finest, most invigorating speeches I heard in Queensland was given by a young Aboriginal woman, Mrs. Shirley Cairns, of Brisbane. She took for her subject ‘These are the Rights of My People’.<sup>12</sup>

Lucy’s interest in Aboriginal politics reflected the rising tempo of Indigenous activism since the formation of the AAF in which she had taken a role since 1956.<sup>13</sup> One notable event occurred during the visit of the American singer and activist Paul Robeson with his wife, Eslanda, in November 1960. In an informal meeting organised by both the Peace Council and the AAF, Robeson viewed two films about Western Australia that moved him so much that he declared he would come back to Australia to take up the campaign for full Aboriginal citizen rights.<sup>14</sup> One was a problematic film shown under various names around activist circles in the early 1950s, purporting to show Aboriginal poverty in Warburton.<sup>15</sup> The other was the short film *People of the Pindan* (made as a pilot to raise funds for a longer film) about the successful Yandiyarra mining cooperative in the Pilbara, set up by the many Aboriginal pastoral workers who had gone on strike in 1946 against exploitative conditions.

11 *Tribune* (Sydney), 30 March 1960, 9.

12 *UA Newsheet*, April 1960, 2.

13 Lucy attends annual NSW State Conference AAF, 15 November 1961, Lucy Godiva Woodcock ASIO file, Vol. 2, f 251, A6119, 2031, NAA.

14 Ann Curthoys, ‘Paul Robeson’s Visit to Australia and Aboriginal Activism, 1960’, in *Passionate Histories: Myth, Memory and Indigenous Australia*, eds Frances Peters-Little, Ann Curthoys and John Docker (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2010), 163–84, doi.org/10.22459/PH.09.2010.08.

15 Faith Bandler, interview, 2016.

One of the people involved in organising this event and who hoped to produce the longer version of the second film was Helen Hambly, a member of the CPA. Helen, and others who became close to Aboriginal communities in New South Wales, felt they received little support from the Communist Party, which was more interested in remote 'traditional' Aborigines than in the complex conditions and aspirations of colonised Aboriginal people in the south-eastern states.<sup>16</sup>

The IWD events of 1961 and 1962 demonstrated this tension. In 1961, the Russian pianist Tatyana Nikoley was the visiting guest at an IWD luncheon at which the Reverend Alf Clint spoke of Aboriginal conditions, focusing on heavily settled south-eastern Australia and particularly on the cooperative organisations run by Aboriginal communities in east coast areas.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, *Tribune* emphasised remote-area conditions, focusing on Aboriginal women as 'wards of the state' in the Northern Territory during its IWD coverage.<sup>18</sup>

Aside from the tensions around Aboriginal issues, Lucy's IWD events also continued the theme of Equal Pay, a cause Lucy had championed over many years. On 11 March 1961, ASIO reported that Lucy had chaired a meeting of the IWD committee on equal pay at Federation House. As ASIO summarised her speech:

She had given her life to fighting for the rights of women. Started in 1919 and still going in 1961. Some progress; need for solidarity of women. Assistance of IWD. Need for women to get together; instanced that the first teachers' meeting at Federation House, where David Jones now stands, very few enthusiasts, but grown to the mighty Teachers Federation. Need for women to join trade unions.<sup>19</sup>

16 Con O'Clerkin, activist on South Coast, NSW, pers. comm. to Heather Goodall, 1977–78; Helen Hambly, interviews with Heather Goodall, conducted 1989; Curthoys, 'Paul Robeson's Visit to Australia'.

17 Re Union of Australian Women, 8 March 1961, Lucy Godiva Woodcock ASIO file, Vol. 2, ff 220–21, A6119, 2031, NAA; UA *Newsheet*, March 1961, 1.

18 *Tribune* (Sydney), 15 March 1961, 12.

19 International Women's Day Committee forum, 11 March 1961, Lucy Godiva Woodcock ASIO file, Vol. 2, ff 222–26, A6119, 2031, NAA.



Figure 14.1: Lucy at International Women's Day outdoor rally with Enid Hampson (Union of Australian Women, in striped dress) with Tom Wright (Sheet Metal Workers Union) speaking, IWD 1962 at Wynyard Park.

Source: Courtesy of Audrey McDonald.

In 1962, the issues came much closer to home. There was a rally, chaired by Lucy, in Wynyard Park where the key guest – Mrs Boney, an Aboriginal woman from Coonamble – spoke about Aboriginal women’s struggles in NSW for equality, decent housing and access to town services. She was supported by Helen Hambly, the CPA and AAF member, who had been involved in the films shown to Paul and Eslanda Robeson.<sup>20</sup> The theme of IWD that year was ‘Women’s Right to Security – a question of our happiness and wellbeing’, and Mrs Boney spoke about the challenges she had faced trying to raise seven children in a tin shed on the Reserve with no house and no running water because of local racism and the lack of any state government interest.<sup>21</sup>

The *UA Newsheet* in 1962 focused on the Equal Pay conference on 28 March, chaired by Flo Davis from the Hotel, Club and Restaurant Employees’ Union, who argued for an end to calls for ‘Equal Pay for Equal Work’. Instead, she asserted, there should simply be no classification into men’s work and women’s work, just a rate for the job. By this time, Lucy was pressing for more than overall equal pay. She was now demanding that questions of racial prejudice needed to be addressed at work places. As evidence of the first steps in the shift she was calling for, Lucy argued that airline companies were training Aboriginal girls to be air hostesses, while ‘the teaching service, too, is recruiting people of all nationalities, irrespective of colour’.<sup>22</sup> Equal Pay, she said, necessitated equal access to jobs and an end to racial discrimination.

Three women from the USSR – one an educationalist, one a judge – whose visas had eventually been granted for a limited stay of 14 days, were among the international visitors to IWD. Women’s organisations struggled to ensure their mobility and one of the women suffered a motor vehicle accident in Brisbane soon after she arrived. The other two, however, made it to Sydney and were welcomed by Lucy to a conference on 13 March at the Russian Social Club. According to ASIO, Lucy ‘referred to International Women’s Day and said how gratifying it was to

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20 Helen Hambly, interviews with Heather Goodall, 1989. Helen and her husband, Sidney Lloyd Hambly, were two of the eight shareholders of Marngoo films, 1960, which produced *People of the Pindan*, about the Pilbara Strike. Helen was a member of the CPA and the AAF. Ann Curthoys, ‘Paul Robeson’s Visit to Australia’.

21 *Tribune* (Sydney), 14 March 1962, 11.

22 *UA Newsheet*, April 1962, 3.

have such capable and brilliant women representatives of the USSR to be present in Australia at this time'. In return, the Soviet women conveyed a message from women of the USSR calling for peace.<sup>23</sup>

Audrey McDonald, secretary of the NSW IWD Committee from the mid-1950s until 1962, remembered Lucy as a dedicated and hard-working activist, but one who did not easily share her feelings with others. After the birth of her son, Audrey was surprised to receive an unexpected and warm note from Lucy that congratulated her and thanked her for the 'valuable contribution you yourself made to the success of IWD' and hoped that her baby son might learn 'your perseverance and splendid cooperation'.<sup>24</sup>

Lucy continued her formal role of president of the International Women's Day committee after 1962 but her presence is rarely seen in the pages of *Tribune*, which, as noted earlier, continued to focus its coverage on the members of the CPA who participated in the IWD events in the key cities in each state where it was celebrated. There were international guests – Geeta Mukherjee, for example, came in 1965 for the Third National Conference of the UAW. She had strong connections to the Indian Communist Party and so was most often photographed and profiled with UAW and CPA members like Freda Brown.<sup>25</sup> Lucy, however, seems to have been active throughout 1962 in the Australian Women's Charter of which again she was the chairperson. The Charter held a major conference in Sydney on 15–16 June 1962. Lucy remarked that the goal of the Charter meeting was 'winning equal rights and opportunities for women'. She was again thinking of the decolonising world as a model for the Australian Charter movement. In her view, much had been won in these new nations, pointing to 'a need to break through in the Western World'.<sup>26</sup>

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23 Visit to Sydney by Soviet Women, 20 March 1962, Lucy Godiva Woodcock ASIO file, Vol. 3, ff 24–25, A6119, 2032, NAA.

24 Lucy Woodcock to Audrey McDonald, 25 May 1962, courtesy Audrey McDonald.

25 See photograph, Freda Brown, Geeta Mukherjee, Enid Hampson and Beth Evans, Third National UAW Conference, *Tribune*, 18 September 1963. UAW Files, AU NBAC Z236, NBABL.

26 Re Australian Women's Charter, 29 June 1962, Lucy Godiva Woodcock ASIO file, Vol. 3, ff 33–36, A6119, 2032, NAA.

It is hard to remember that, in this period of intense activity, Lucy was ageing: by 1962 she was 73. The pages of the *UA Newsheet* began from 1960 to record stories of loss. Lotte Fink died in June 1960 and Rosine Guiterman died barely a month later.<sup>27</sup> Beatrice Taylor by this time was crippled with arthritis and others whom Lucy knew well passed away over the next months. At the same time, the *UA* reported the deaths of many suffragettes or marked the anniversaries of others who had passed away years ago. In September 1961, Jess Rose died – she had been a foundation member of the Assistant Teachers' Association. Lucy referred to her as a hero of the struggle for Equal Pay: 'She was tireless working in the cause of equality and though dogged by ill health, she still kept going, giving generously of her time, energy and money to the cause of equality.'<sup>28</sup>

The centre of gravity of the women's movement shifted in the early 1960s and such deaths increased the weight on those who remained. In April 1962, Betty Dunne, Lucy's activist colleague over many years, died suddenly. Betty, a staunch member of the Public Service Association, had worked hard to gain real pay rises for women union members. Over the years, Betty's politics had not moved to the left as Lucy's had done, but Lucy had learned to make allowances. She told friends in 1958 that there were some things she felt she could not say in front of Betty.<sup>29</sup> But she relied on Betty throughout her activist life in the unions and the women's movement, often travelling with her, and she appreciated Betty's wit and her insights in tight political corners. Lucy wrote in the *Newsheet*:

Betty and I were fellow students in Economics at Sydney University. Throughout almost 40 years we remained close friends. She was an active member of this Association and Treasurer for two years. She represented the *UA* on the Status of Women Committee and at various Conferences on Equal Pay ... Her unselfish work for her fellows will long be remembered. A fitting tribute was paid to her at the funeral, by a colleague. He told Mrs Alting, 'I was a better man for having known Betty'.<sup>30</sup>

27 This terrible sequence of losses could explain the unusual ASIO observation of 31 October 1960 'Lucy Woodcock does not look well' It is the only entry on the page – all other words have been redacted. Lucy Godiva Woodcock ASIO file, Vol. 2, f 18 of 140, A6119, 2031, NAA.

28 *UA Newsheet*, July 1960, 4; August 1960, 4; October 1961, 2.

29 Re Canberra Education Conference, 13 June 1958, NSW Teachers Federation ASIO file, Vol. 3, ff 53–56, A6122, 2477, NAA.

30 *UA Newsheet*, May 1962, 3.

There was some respite from the deaths early in 1963. Jessie Street had retreated to the North Coast – to write – but returned to Sydney often, keeping up to date with UA matters and offering support and the cash needed for practical necessities, like the soundproofing that helped the UA cope with new accommodation and tighter spaces. It was getting harder and harder for Lucy to maintain her frenetic activity. Then, in May 1964, Elsie Rivett died. Lucy had lost the people to whom she was closest.

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Lucy kept busy. A week before Elsie died, Lucy was a witness with Alec Robertson at the wedding of her friend, the unionist poet Denis Kevans on 13 March. A few weeks later, Lucy paid tribute to Jessie when she came to Sydney for her 75th birthday celebrations in late May. Lucy maintained her letter-writing for the UA, sending Vivienne Newson copy for the *Newsheet* until the last weeks of her life. And she made one more overseas trip.



Figure 14.2: Lucy on delegation to China late in 1964 as guest of the National Chinese Women's Council.

Leader of the delegation Kath Williams seated third from the right.

Source: Lucy Woodcock papers, held by Kit Edwards, personal collection.

In August 1964, Lucy was in China again as a guest of the National Women's Federation of the People's Republic of China. She was part of a delegation of five women trade unionists, led by Kath Williams, who was an Equal Pay advocate from Melbourne and who later left the CPA to join the China-line CPA (Marxist-Leninist).<sup>31</sup>

On her return, Lucy reported to the Australia–China Society, as well as the UA. Her verbal report was recorded in the staccato style of the ASIO agent secreted in the Australia–China Society meeting:

I went to China as the guest of the Federation of Chinese women with a group of Australian women. I was impressed with Canton. It is a clean city and I saw no hungry people there. In Peking I looked at Child Study Groups, schools etc and studied the universal education system they have. It is compulsory education as we know it. I saw no evidence of aggression towards the USSR. I saw a Defence Budget in operation, easily as defence happy as Holt's Budget. The Revolutionary People's Government want to unite the Chinese people with pride and complete unity into a whole Socialist nation. I am convinced that China wants peace above all. Massive new and modern buildings in all cities. 100 broadcasting stations on the Mainland. Education needs Western History and other text books. The structure of Specialised Universities of Iron and Steel is filled with erstwhile part time students who have qualified to enter these important special universities. The Chinese realize, as we do, that agriculture is the back-bone of a Nation's strength.<sup>32</sup>

In her written report to the United Associations, Lucy focused on women's access to education in China and its positive consequences. Women were high-ranking provincial politicians and filled senior roles in the University of Iron and Steel. There were women she met who were engineers and scientists. She wrote:

In the professions of geology, mining, road and railway engineering the women of China are now well established and have done extremely well – but Australia continues to deny women the right of entry to many of these fields.<sup>33</sup>

31 Zelda D'Aprano, *Kath Williams: The Unions and the Fight for Equal Pay* (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2001). The China-line Communist Party was the smallest of those to emerge from the Sino-Soviet split in Australia and is usually referred to by its initials as 'CPA ML'.

32 Aust China Society meeting, 2 September 1964, Lucy Godiva Woodcock ASIO file, Vol. 3, ff 113–14, A6112, 2032, NAA.

33 UA *Newsheet*, September 1964, 1.

## Person to person: Internationalism in close focus

Alongside her work in the UA and the IWD committee, Lucy had continued to speak to many groups of all political complexions about her hopes for peace, stressing that shared knowledge and personal friendships were essential steps on the way. She reinforced this with her observations of China from her visit in 1954 and her continuing involvement with the Australia–China Society, having become close friends with the NSW secretary, Dr Cecil English, who had spent time with Rewi Alley in China.<sup>34</sup> She was interested not only in China itself, but also in Australians of Chinese background in Sydney and in the Chinese-background students who were coming increasingly under the Colombo Plan. In 1959, she wrote to Rewi Alley that she had begun tutoring young Chinese men from Singapore – and it was characteristic that although they had probably come to Australia for tertiary study, she was concerned first about gaining them industrial justice.

She wrote to Rewi, in April 1959, in apology for a delay in writing to him:

Then I have taken on a task of teaching some of the young Chinese here from Singapore etc, some elementary English. Many of these lads are employed in our cafes and because they cannot speak English, have to put up with many things that they should not have to endure in their work.<sup>35</sup>

Rewi Alley himself came to Australia in the following year, 1960, when Lucy organised for him to give a talk at Teachers Federation House and was able once more to enjoy his companionship.<sup>36</sup> Lucy began to offer tutoring to some of these young Chinese Singaporeans and news that she was available for tutoring circulated by word of mouth, bringing her

34 Lucy Woodcock to Rewi Alley, 11 December 1957, 3 April 1959, 22 December 1962, Rewi Alley Papers, MS-Papers-6533–307, NLNZ. The Australia–China Society was later to become the Australia–China Friendship Society. Dr Cecil Hampshire English was a secretary of the NSW group in the late 1950s and early 1960s, although records are scarce for this period. Lucy, who was also on good terms with English's mother, wrote to Rewi in her 3 April 1959 letter about English: 'His heart is still in China'.

35 Lucy Woodcock to Rewi Alley, 3 April 1959, Rewi Alley Papers, MS-Papers-6533–307, NLNZ.  
36 Clipping from *Tribune*, 13 April 1960, 10 on reception for Rewi Alley, Australia–China Society, 10 April 1960, Lucy Woodcock included in Lucy's ASIO file, with ASIO officer's report, Vol. 2, p. 173, A6119, 2031, NAA.

a modest but steady stream of students. By 1963, Lucy wrote to Rewi that her students now included young women as well as young men. And their interests had extended beyond the industrial conditions they faced:

I have been so busy with my Chinese boys and girls that I haven't had time to write. So many of them have attempted the leaving certificate or other Uni exams that I have [been] flat out doing my best to get them through the barriers to enable them to get some good training, hoping that they will return after they have qualified to help in building the homeland.<sup>37</sup>

Among her non-Asian students was Kit Edwards, who became her student around 1964. Lucy was on good terms with the owners of the small shops and pubs around her upper George Street flat. Kit's family had a store in the building next to Lucy's, which had originally been a bespoke shoemaking concern but gradually came to include various tailored items. Kit was a teenager when his family approached Lucy to tutor him for his matriculation exam. He was her student through the later part of 1964, striking up a friendship with her and dropping in often over the next few years when he was at university, and then when he became a teacher himself. Kit enjoyed the wide-ranging conversations he had with Lucy, and has fond memories of afternoons spent in her flat, chatting about his studies and asking her about her life in the way, as he laughs about it today, of an inquisitive teenager. While Lucy remained just as private about her personal life and just as humble with him as she was with others, Kit recalled her emotional reaction to a piece of poetry he was studying, which recounted a soldier's experiences of war. Lucy had told him about her brother's death in World War I; he felt that the grief he saw in her at that instant reflected her enduring sadness over her brother's death and that this had motivated her lifelong pacifism.

During this time, one of Lucy's friends from the Peace movement, Janice Crase, introduced Lucy to her son Antony Symons, an artist who painted portraits in oils. Around 1965, he painted Lucy's portrait, as she sat in the streaming sunlight near the large eastern window of her flat overlooking Circular Quay. This is Kit's enduring memory of her, a strong figure but also an elderly woman. The portrait depicts her dozing in the sunlight waiting for her students, her hands twisted with arthritis but, as Kit

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37 Lucy Woodcock to Rewi Alley, 19 December 1963. Rewi Alley Papers, MS-Papers-6533-307, NLNZ.

remembers, she would instantly snap alert when he or another student arrived. The portrait hangs now in Kit's home, high above a bookshelf, in pride of place, looking down across his own sunlit dining room.



**Figure 14.3: Portrait of Lucy in the sunny sitting room of her George Street flat, overlooking the Quay, Sydney Harbour.**

Painted in this flat by Antony Symons, c. 1965. Portrait now owned by Kit Edwards, who was tutored by Lucy in this sitting room during this time.

Source: Courtesy Kit Edwards, photograph Heather Goodall.

Kit did not meet Lucy's other students, but Lucy mentioned some of them to his parents in the weeks before his successful matriculation exam. His parents had sent her a gift to thank her for her attention to Kit, whom she knew as Chris. She wrote back saying how much she had enjoyed getting to know 'a lad of his ability' and how sure she was that he would do well in his exams:

The path is not easy these days for unfortunately, people teach subjects not growing lads, and this is so apparent in the lads who come into the flat [as her students]. However we have had some great successes this year. One boy, Joseph Yong, has just been in to tell me that he is now BE (Chemistry). Another has passed his 5th year medicine and another got one of those 4th year special Commonwealth Scholarships, so tell Chris that I think the success cycle will hold.<sup>38</sup>

Kit visited Lucy in the last weeks of her life when she was ill in hospital. He found her weak but lucid and eager to hear how his studies were going. Her last words to him were an encouraging command: 'Finish that degree!'<sup>39</sup>

After her death, Kit was able to rescue the small bundle of papers that she had chosen to keep along with some of her books. The papers contained some further references to the Asian students she had been teaching. One was a card sent from Hong Kong in 1965, by someone called George who promised to look up the families of her former students who lived there. Another was an undated card from a student called Moy Hor, who had gone to Adelaide. They and Lucy must have talked about possible tensions in what sounds like a new town for them.

The letter read:

Dear Miss Woodcock,

I am sorry to cause you so much troubles. I found everything would be all right if only I had my bankbook. I like Adelaide, no hostility so far. I hope to tour Adelaide this afternoon,

best wishes,  
Moy Hor.

38 Lucy Woodcock to M. and P. Edwards, undated, estimated to have been sent late in 1964, courtesy of Kit Edwards.

39 Kit Edwards, interview with Heather Goodall, 30 November 2017.

It was only after Lucy's death that Kit met the Chinese students she had taught. They came to her funeral, with tears and tributes. This was so striking that it was highlighted in the Teachers Federation obituary for Lucy. Their contributions to Lucy's funeral highlighted a whole dimension of her community involvement, far beyond the individual students whose studies she had supported. As was her custom, Lucy had become involved in the community, supporting education for all and reaching out particularly to women and girls.

The Teachers Federation tribute to Lucy included this special section on her involvement with the Chinese and Asian communities, told through the testimonies given at her funeral. There is no byline for this article, but it is included here almost in full as there is so little other information about this informal set of relationships. The *Education* obituary read:

#### **A Tribute from the Chinese Community**

Few will miss Lucy Woodcock more than members of Sydney's Chinese community, by whom she was loved and respected. Always a champion of the poor and oppressed, Miss Woodcock's interest in China dates back a long way and she took a passionate interest in their long struggle to win emancipation and human dignity.

A staunch supporter for the new socialist China from its inception, Lucy was associated with the formation in Sydney of the Australia China Society. Right until her end she took a continuing and well-informed interest in China's efforts to build a new life ...

Lucy extended this interest and support for China to Chinese living here (perhaps because they also labored under an extra handicap) so much so that she came to be regarded as a guardian angel by the Chinese and Malayan students. She spent an enormous amount of her time helping them with their English, coaching them in their general studies, assisting them to get jobs in their vacation, battling to have them admitted to university and aiding them in their problems with the immigration authorities. Nor did she confine this assistance to students from overseas, but also helped Chinese workers here, from café or market garden, and their children, with their English and all their other problems.

Perhaps typical of her indignation at injustice and her determination and courage is an incident that happened a few years ago. A Chinese girl had come here as a wife for the son of

a family who rigidly followed the old feudal traditions, making the girl work for the family and keeping her a virtual prisoner forbidden to have contact with anyone outside the family.

At last, an appeal was made to Lucy for help in solving the problem. Promptly, with a group of other women she went to the house and 'liberated' the girl there and then, taking her out of the house. With the feudal tyranny thus broken, the young couple set up house on their own and now have a young and happy family.

Truly the tears that were shed by the Chinese girl at the funeral came from the hearts of the Chinese community.

The World Education Fellowship (formerly the New Education Fellowship) also published an obituary which pointed to Lucy's border-crossing role:

Lucy became known as one of our fearless fighters for enlightened and progressive education, for human rights and social justice – especially for children and for women – and for international friendship and world peace. Those who knew her well will never forget her immense power as a fighter for people and causes needing a champion and her compassion and concern for children in every land. She was a true internationalist and was especially concerned to support and help migrants to Australia.<sup>40</sup>

Lucy's friendship with the Robinovitz family in 1911 had set her on a course of fighting for justice, which led, both to her assistance for Jewish refugees fleeing Nazism and, later on, to her support for Chinese-background Australians, Singaporeans and Malaysians fighting racial discrimination and economic exploitation in Australia. As always, Lucy saw education not for its own sake, but as a strategy to foster gender equality, transnational understanding and peaceful border crossings.

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40 World Education Fellowship: NSW Section, *News Bulletin*, April 1968, 1–2.

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