

1

World War I and the founding of WILPF

On 28 April 1915 over one thousand women from warring and neutral nations came together at The Hague in the Netherlands for four days to discuss how to bring about peace.¹ Barred from commanding heights of power, these women nonetheless insisted on their capacity to deliberate on and seek to influence global events. Political women around the world looked on with interest. The very decision of these women to move across the borders of nations at war, was worthy of note. Some of the women's home nations prohibited them from travelling—the British Government refused permits to 180 women and the French government arrested women trying to attend.² Australian journalist and feminist Miles Franklin, at the time living in the United States, described the delegation of American women as the 'latest crusaders to formulate the idea of peace amid the fumes of war madness'.³

1 See Harriet Alonso, 'Introduction', in *Women at The Hague: The International Congress of Women and Its Results*, ed. Jane Addams, Emily G Balch and Alice Hamilton, 2003 ed. (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1915), vii; and Kate Laing, 'World War and Worldly Women: The Great War and the Formation of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Australia', *La Trobe Journal*, no. 96 (2015): 117–34, an article which informs this and the subsequent chapter.

2 J Ann Tickner and Jacqui True, 'A Century of International Relations Feminism: From World War I Women's Peace Pragmatism to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda', *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (1 June 2018): 223, doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx091.

3 Miles Franklin, 'Peace Ahoy! Crusaders of 1915', *Life and Labor* (April 1915): 66–67. Quoted in Jill Roe and Margaret Bettison, *A Gregarious Culture: Topical Writings of Miles Franklin* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 55.

There is something dramatic and inspiring in the S.S. Noordam slipping through the war-infested water lanes flying a little white flag bearing in blue letters the legend PEACE, when all the dominant flags on the seas today signify nothing better than hell let loose.⁴

Writing in the National Women's Trade Union League of America's journal, *Life and Labor*, Franklin did not want to 'worship them as heroes' noting they were 'a group of comfortable women, able to set sail on an adventurous and entertaining holiday, while lesser mortals are tied to the inconspicuous and monotonous grind which upholds the social fabric'.⁵ Despite this, and pleased that a trade union representative was among them to put forward the plight of working woman at the conference, she encouraged readers to support the action for peace amid global turmoil. The motivation for the conference demonstrated how 'a shred of the developing sisterhood remained though brothers fought like fiends'. Franklin's hope was tinged with dismay that some in the British suffrage movement had chosen instead to support the nationalist war effort over the worldwide movement they had instigated before the war. She ended with a rallying call:

Those contemptuous of the childish simplicity and apparent lack of practicality in asking for anything so violently repudiated as peace may be reminded that it was a bewildering intricacy of gymnastic reasoning on the premise that the only way to preserve peace is to prepare for war which is in part responsible for the present debacle ... send forth our gallant band of crusaders with a blessing and a cheer.⁶

This first Hague Congress of Women has become emblematic of the internationalism the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) aspired to, both then and now. Women crossed borders, defied nationalistic chauvinism and greeted each other as sisters with common interests.⁷ It is a story of pride in the WILPF. Yet, as significant as the conference was for the history of the WILPF, the women's peace movement in Australia was more homegrown, first developing independently and only later merging with the international assembly. No Australians were able to attend that conference in 1915 because of distance and geography, though many, including Franklin, watched closely. The organisations that formed

4 Franklin, 'Peace Ahoy! Crusaders of 1915', Roe and Bettison, *A Gregarious Culture*, 55.

5 Franklin, 'Peace Ahoy! Crusaders of 1915', Roe and Bettison, *A Gregarious Culture*, 55.

6 Franklin, 'Peace Ahoy! Crusaders of 1915', Roe and Bettison, *A Gregarious Culture*, 55.

7 GC Bussey and Margaret Tims, *Pioneers for Peace: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1965*, 2nd ed. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965); Catherine Foster, *Women For All Seasons: The Story of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989).

locally, the Sisterhood of International Peace and the Women's Peace Army, were influenced by the resolutions and ideas sent around the world after its conclusion and the optimism of that conference became foundation for local activity.

The formation of Australia's two major women's peace groups, the Sisterhood of International Peace and the Women's Peace Army, was initially spurred on by the Australian domestic political landscape. They subsequently widened their interest to international action and politics, drawing inspiration from the Hague Conference. Internationalism was a popular political movement at the turn of the century and the growing threat of war made it an attractive instrument for those trying to achieve permanent peace, especially for those activists and intellectuals who abhorred the atrocities they believed were committed in the name of nation and empire.⁸

Australian women had a markedly different experience of World War I from those in Europe and North America. Physical distance from the 'front line' shaped the opportunities available to women and shielded them from the full-scale transformative dislocation of total war mobilisation, as was experienced by civilians in Britain and Europe.⁹ For the majority of women the strict gender division of labour was exacerbated and their contribution to the war effort defined by what was considered 'feminine', such as knitting for the troops overseas as part of the Australian Comforts Fund. Many women joined the Red Cross to feel useful in contributing to the war effort and, with children, were responsible for large-scale volunteer organising devoted to providing for the men at the front.¹⁰ The sheer amount of volunteer work was unparalleled but because it was unpaid it has often been underrated, then and since.¹¹ There were few aspects of women's lives that were not affected by the war, and even social activities were curtailed due to the shame of associating with 'shirkers'. Some women felt it was their patriotic duty to encourage men to enlist.¹²

8 Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 2, doi.org/10.9783/9780812207781.

9 Michael McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War* (Sydney; London: Collins, 1984), 65.

10 McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, 75; Melanie Oppenheimer, *The Power of Humanity: 100 Years of Australian Red Cross 1914–2014* (Sydney: Harper Collins Australia, 2014), 27.

11 See discussion in Oppenheimer, *The Power of Humanity*, 27.

12 Carmel Shute, 'Heroines and Heroes: Sexual Mythology in Australia 1914–18', in *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 27.

Many historians, including the official historian of the war, Ernest Scott, have focused on how the main motif of women's participation in the war was waiting.¹³ Duty required many to 'wait and weep'—most having to deal with the loss of close friends, sons, brothers and husbands.¹⁴ Even for those whose loved ones returned, the scars of war often ran deep.¹⁵ In this environment, commitment to pacifism was a minority view. Mainstream opinion upheld loyalty to nation and empire, creating an inhospitable social and cultural environment for pacifism. It is partly for this reason that the establishment of anti-war groups is worthy of scholarly attention. World War I was the catalyst for the creation of women's peace groups in Australia. But their ability to connect so quickly with the international context was indebted to the strong networks that existed in the suffrage and women's rights movements that preceded the established peace movement.

Australian women and the tradition of internationalism

The domestic women's movement was familiar with international interactions and the exchange of ideas across borders. Formal organisations were set up for women to campaign internationally in the late nineteenth century, including the International Council of Women (ICW) formed in 1899, the International Alliance of Women (IAW) in 1904, and later the Woman Suffrage Union of the British Dominions in 1913.¹⁶ Through domestic groups like the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the National Councils of Women (NCW), which were in various ways affiliated to the ICW and the IAW, Australian women travelled and received international travellers to recruit, discuss and share ideas and experiences. They organised on political grounds, often focused on women's suffrage.

The ICW's primary goals were to facilitate communication between countries on the political position of women with a view to improvement and, as with the focus of other women's rights organisations of the time,

13 Shute, 'Heroines and Heroes', 31; Ernest Scott, *Australia During the War, 1914–1918*, volume 11 (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1936), 31.

14 McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, 93.

15 Marina Larsson, *Shattered ANZACs: Living with the Scars of War* (Kensington: University of New South Wales Press, 2009).

16 Leila J Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 16, doi.org/10.1515/9780691221816.

it promoted maternalism. The ICW's formation coincided with the development of the world peace movement, responding to concerns with new industrialised methods of warfare. Two mixed-gender peace conferences were held at The Hague in 1899 and 1907.¹⁷ The ICW sent messages of support to The Hague in 1899 and recognised it as 'the first international women's association to identify itself with the Peace movement'.¹⁸ However by World War I the NCWs in Australia that were affiliated with the ICW were unable to criticise the war effort and moved away from the peace movement. The NCW had separate council structures in each state, made up of local women's groups with different goals and political persuasions. With membership including the pro-empire Australian Women's National League (AWNL), the diversity of opinion on the council often inclined the leadership to avoid the discussion of peace activities during wartime.¹⁹ As the war split feminists within the movement between those for and against the war, the need for a dedicated peace organisation became more pressing.

Understanding the tradition of women's internationalism indicates that the emergence of a peace-specific internationalism in 1915 was an extension of a pre-existing tradition. It drew on a history of Australian women proudly presenting to the world and using internationalism as a tactical political instrument for domestic gains. These representations were to become pivotal in connecting local peace groups with the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace (ICWPP) after the women's congress at The Hague. One of their main organising methods was to send letters to every known and prominent internationalist they could reach to urge them to consider taking up the cause. Yet, when the ICWPP was created, later becoming WILPF, the impetus for internationalism had another layer. The focus was not simply on networking and sharing information on women's suffrage and maternal welfare, but rather it sought to encourage national governments to use arbitration instead of conflict to settle international disputes. It preceded a wider move to internationalism embodied in the creation of the League of Nations. The national sections of the international body ran in parallel with national governments, encouraging and lobbying them to embrace liberal internationalism as a new world order.

17 Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, 19.

18 Judith Smart and Marian Quartly, *Respectable Radicals: A History of the National Council of Women of Australia 1896–2006* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2015), 108.

19 Smart and Quartly, *Respectable Radicals*, 111.

The Federation of the Australian colonies in 1901 markedly changed women's engagement with the internationalism of the women's movement. Women who had previously situated themselves within the trans-Tasman world began to narrow their focus to the new nation-state.²⁰ Australian nationalism began to coalesce around the new federal parliament which legislated the White Australia Policy (WAP). A new national flag was also created and adopted. The new federal system was tightly bound to empire, preserving the right of appeal to the Privy Council in the United Kingdom. Women's activists were very interested in understanding the law, and the legal system of federation. Pacifists like Moore were aware that the constitution profoundly changed Australia's military system. It gave the Commonwealth power over 'the Naval and Military defence of the Commonwealth and of the several States, and the control of the forces to execute and maintain the laws of the Commonwealth.'²¹ This provision was intended to 'remove from the States all means of making war upon one another', and Moore noted how after Federation all state-based military schemes ceased, including cadet training through schools. It was also important as it gave the legal power to the Commonwealth Government to defend Australia against attack, although the *Defence Act 1903* did not permit conscription for overseas service. But as the constitution reaffirmed the bonds of empire, Australians could be rallied to serve as volunteers if Great Britain was at war. That was precisely what happened in August 1914 with the formation and despatch of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) as a volunteer army.

The women's movement's priorities post-Federation

Many of the organisations like the WCTU and the NCW that agitated for women's suffrage thought first and foremost about women's roles in the care of others, particularly children. They were maternalists who recognised the different life patterns of women and sought political acknowledgement of women's work.²² It was a strategy characteristic of early Australian women's rights activists. Suffrage activists before Federation, such as the Womanhood Suffrage League (founded in 1891), with renowned members such as Rose Scott and Louisa Lawson, thought that the values of voting women would

20 James Keating, *Distant Sisters: Australasian Women and the International Struggle for the Vote, 1880–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 3, doi.org/10.7765/9781526140968.

21 Keating, *Distant Sisters*, 14.

22 Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 13.

bring a new experience and morality to public life. They believed that women lacked economic independence, not only by being denied access to fair working conditions and opportunities but also by the traditional division of labour within marriage.²³ Marriage for many activist women represented a degrading dependence on men. There were only narrow avenues of escape from abuses of husbands.

Women's rights campaigners agitated for the vote so that women would be able to have greater agency and bring into public life issues that were important to women and children but often unseen in politics because considered purely domestic or private. Especially once given the vote, beginning in South Australia in 1894, federally in 1902, and ending in Victoria in 1908, female reformers campaigned for welfare rights of women and children, to protect them from the abuses of men, and to help women better perform their nurturing roles.²⁴ Some believed that men's aggressive behaviour was exacerbated by alcoholism, tying women's rights movements with temperance as the WCTU did to encourage more harmonious family lives. When Vida Goldstein promoted the achievements of Australia abroad in 1902, her advocacy advanced the ideas of distinctive difference between men and women, noting that as mothers and wives women had different values and interests that should be prioritised and protected rather than to demand the same rights as men.²⁵ While maternalist feminism, and the way reformers encouraged women to use the vote, limited women's participation in the public sphere, it still had the potential to disrupt men's domination and posed a threat to male control over home life. Unsurprisingly, there was significant backlash among men against these calls for reform.

Maternalist campaigners did not necessarily link their nurturing agenda with peace, and the women's movement became divided over its involvement with the nascent peace movement. The war 'consolidated the idea of a sexually differentiated citizenship' and established the 'citizen soldier' who was compensated for their sacrifice to the nation, an idea that women activists used to model the 'citizen mother' as a claim to greater state recognition and support.²⁶ Maternalist feminism, where the responsibility

23 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 3.

24 Marian Sawyer, *A Woman's Place: Women and Politics in Australia*, 2nd ed. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 5.

25 Marilyn Lake, 'Women's International Leadership', in *Diversity in Leadership: Australian Women, Past and Present*, ed. Joy Damousi, Kim Rubenstein and Mary Tomsic (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 73, doi.org/10.22459/DL.11.2014.

26 Marilyn Lake, 'A Revolution in the Family', in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, ed. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York: Routledge, 1993), 382.

for caregiving was of primary importance, was repurposed for both the women's peace campaign and in support of the war. Supporters of the war believed it was a mother's duty to sacrifice sons in the interests of the nation, and some felt that their efforts should be compensated with state financial support. Women peace activists broadened the focus of the violence and control of men in the home to state violence and power of men in battle. At a time when society was sharply sexually segregated, the women's peace movement's appeal to women as mothers aimed to acknowledge the reality of women's work and daily lives while encouraging them to structurally consider where their power lay in the international economic system that caused and sustained wars.

Australian peace groups formed in World War I

In July 1914 tensions in Europe escalated and the military alliance system pulled the great European powers into war. When Britain declared war in August, it did so 'in the expectation that Australia and other Dominions would follow'.²⁷ The Australian Government, led by Prime Minister Joseph Cook, accepted the decision without question, reminding Australians that 'when the Empire is at war, so is Australia at war'.²⁸ Australia soon offered an initial expeditionary force of 20,000 men that increased to 33,000, all of whom had to be volunteers.²⁹ From a population of fewer than 5 million, this target was ambitious. The Australian Imperial Force (AIF) was created with bipartisan support from politicians. Australia's commitment to World War I, mainly uncontentious at first, would eventually ignite a nation-wide discussion about imperial loyalty. The issue of conscription in particular came to divide communities, and the imposition of wartime restrictions and general experiences of grief and loss caused an atmosphere of mistrust. The government, along with churches and other community groups, highlighted emotional and 'patriotic' identification with empire in recruitment campaigns. Men who chose not to enlist—nearly 70 per cent of eligible men between 18–60 years old—were labelled 'shirkers'.³⁰ It was

27 Joan Beaumont, *Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2013), 12.

28 Joseph Cook, Prime Minister, *The Argus*, 3 August 1914, 14.

29 Beaumont, *Broken Nation*, 16.

30 Beaumont, *Broken Nation*, xv.

in this political climate that the peace movement gained momentum, with some choosing to join peace societies to challenge unquestioning loyalty to empire and jingoistic patriotism.

In prewar Australia, peace activism had often taken root through the propagation of branches of groups that originated in England. The Society of Friends, whose religion was based on the Quaker Peace Testimony that refused militarism and violence, appeared in Australia from the 1880s, when individuals and families migrated from England.³¹ For Quakers, pacifism was a way to 'reflect the spirit of Christ'.³² The identity and following of the religion became stronger by the twentieth century and while the number of Quakers in Australia was never very large, they had an outsized presence in the peace movement.

One of the oldest peace groups in England was called the London Peace Society, formed by the Quakers in 1816.³³ Taking their lead from this, branches of the London Peace Society were established in Melbourne in 1905 and Sydney in 1907.³⁴ Other peace groups formed before the war included the Australian Freedom League, inaugurated in 1912 in Adelaide to oppose compulsory military training for young boys. There was also the Free Religious Fellowship, led by Reverend Frederick Sinclair (who later became president of the Australian Peace Alliance), and the Peace, Humanity and Arbitration Society of Victoria, which was set up by Professor Lawrence Rentoul from Ormond College at Melbourne University to campaign specifically against the Boer War.³⁵ Many of these peace societies were connected with liberal religious organisations.

While peace groups became active in all Australian states during World War I, it was women's peace groups in Melbourne that were most energetic and outspoken. The establishment of the Australian Church, led by Rev. Dr Charles Strong, had exercised a great influence on social ideas in the city.³⁶ Having arrived from Scotland in 1875, Strong became a popular

31 Thomas D Hamm, 'Quaker Peace Testimony', in *The Oxford International Encyclopaedia of Peace*, ed. Nigel Young, online version (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

32 Hilary Summy, *Peace Angel of World War I: Dissent of Margaret Thorp* (Brisbane: Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, 2006), 12.

33 Patricia D'Itri, *Cross Currents in the International Women's Movement, 1848–1948* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), 123.

34 Eleanor M Moore, *The Quest for Peace, As I Have Known It in Australia* (Melbourne, 1948), 22.

35 Mimi Colligan, 'Brothers and Sisters in Peace: The Peace Movement in Melbourne 1900–1918' (BA Honours thesis, Monash University, 1973), 6; Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 18.

36 Malcolm Saunders, 'An Australian Pacifist: The Reverend Dr. Charles Strong, 1844–1942', *Biography* 18, no. 3 (1995): 242, doi.org/10.1353/bio.2010.0089.

and respected clergyman in the Victorian colony and the first president of the Peace Society.³⁷ His teachings were too liberal for the Presbyterian church and in 1885 he formed a new congregation he called the Australian Church, which was designed to engage 'in harmony with and expressive of, the free, democratic and progressive spirit of Australia'.³⁸ Standing on Flinders Street, Melbourne, the church and congregation grew to around 1,000, all comfortable, well-connected people from Melbourne's middle class, including the families of activists Eleanor Moore and Vida Goldstein.³⁹ Goldstein's father, Col. JRY Goldstein, was the church's first honorary secretary. By 1896 Alfred Deakin, a future Australian prime minister and close personal friend of Strong, had also joined.⁴⁰ Following in the tradition of theosophy, the Australian Church was suspicious of Christian orthodoxy and promoted liberalism and freedom of thought, and through Strong's personal conviction, anti-militarism.⁴¹ It was a congregation of 'radicals and progressives, acutely aware of the social ills of their day, and determined to do something about them'.⁴²

In January 1915 Strong gave an address to the church titled 'Women and War'.⁴³ He suggested that the:

Women of Australia should form a League of Peace ... think what a moral influence such a League would have ... by exchange of literature, lectures, and conferences educating each other, and educating the young! ... Woman helped to found Christianity. She was called now to aid in bringing the new patriotism, the new cosmopolitanism, with their new social conscience.⁴⁴

37 Saunders, 'An Australian Pacifist', 241.

38 Dr Charles Strong, quoted in Saunders, 'An Australian Pacifist', 241.

39 Farley Kelly, 'Vida Goldstein: Political Woman', in *Doubletime: Women in Victoria, 150 Years*, ed. Marilyn Lake and Farley Kelly (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 1985), 170. See also: Janette M Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein* (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 1993); and Joy Damousi, 'An Absence of Anything Masculine: Vida Goldstein and Women's Public Speech', *Victorian Historical Journal* 79, no. 2 (November 2008): 251–64.

40 Colin Robert Badger, *The Reverend Charles Strong and the Australian Church*. (Melbourne: Abacada Press, 1971), 100.

41 Jill Roe, *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia 1879–1939* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1986), 33.

42 Marion Maddox, 'Charles Strong's Australian Church: A Network for Justice and Peace', in *Remembering Pioneer Australian Pacifist Charles Strong*, ed. Norman Habel (Melbourne: Morning Star Publishing, 2018), 74.

43 Dr Charles Strong, 'Pulpit and Platform', *Commonweal*, 1 February 1915, State Library of Victoria (SLV), 186.

44 Strong, 'Pulpit and Platform', 186.

Part of the attraction of the church to many members was the discussion of social theorists. Readings that greatly influenced the congregation included works by John Ruskin, Edward and John Caird, George D Herron, Thomas Carlyle and Alfred Russel Wallace.⁴⁵ Ruskin was particularly favoured. Indeed, Strong's lecture was inspired by Ruskin's words in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865):

There is not a war in the world, no, nor an injustice, but you women are answerable for it; not in that you have provoked, but in that you have not hindered.

After the lecture the church publication *The Commonweal* published a 'suggested enrolment card' that promised to collect the names of interested readers.⁴⁶ On 25 March the first meeting of the Sisterhood was convened with 60 members under the motto 'Justice, Friendship, and Arbitration'.⁴⁷ Monthly meetings included guest lecturers which brought the women of the group into contact with many of the leading speakers on internationalism in Australia. Topics ranged from White Australia to peace, arbitration and conflicts around the world. The Sisterhood continued to grow and by 1918 members were designated as 'suburban secretaries' to encourage small reading groups around Melbourne, and sub-branches were formed in St Kilda and Footscray.⁴⁸

Despite being barred from practising or studying law in some states, many political women were deeply interested in the law and the way the federal system shaped political involvement.⁴⁹ For women choosing to be active within the Australian Church and the Sisterhood, there was a desire to better understand how the federal system had led to Australia's involvement in the war. For some, the war illustrated how empire was fatal—their sons, brothers and husbands were killed in a far-off war front. The experience prompted a more critical stance toward imperialism. Their internationalism therefore arguably represented a shift away from empire and towards the global, as they sought to create a new system that would prevent war. In calling for justice and arbitration, the Sisterhood were focused on a practical legal solution to counteract the war system and called for an international court where national disputes would be settled.

45 MR Parnaby, 'The Socially Reforming Churchman: A Study of the Social Thought and Activity of Charles Strong in Melbourne 1890–1900' (BA Honours thesis, University of Melbourne, 1975), 13.

46 'Suggested Enrolment Card, the Sisterhood of Peace', *Commonweal*, 1 February 1915, 170.

47 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 27.

48 *Peacewards*, published as a supplement to the Australian Church's *Commonweal*, SLV, July 1918, 12. 'International Peace—Local Sisterhood Centre Formed', *Advertiser*, Footscray, 3 August 1918, 1.

49 Margaret Thornton, 'Women as Fringe Dwellers of the Jurisprudential Community' in *Sex, Power and Justice: Historical Perspectives of Law in Australia*, ed. Diane Kirkby (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995), 189.



Committee of the Sisterhood of International Peace, 1919.

Back row from left to right: Mrs Slater, Miss Pierson, Mrs Jefferies, Mrs Levens, Miss Ferguson. Front row: Mrs Drummond, Miss Douglas, Mrs Warren Kerr, Mrs Paling, Miss H Milliard BA. (Eleanor Moore, abroad.) Mrs Janet Strong was also a founding member of the Sisterhood, but died in 1919 before this photo was taken.

Source: Records of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, MS 9377, State Library of Victoria.

When WILPF became more established internationally the official organisation was not connected to any religious order. However, as the connection to the Australian Church in Melbourne suggests, religious motivations played a large role in its establishment in Australia and overseas. Free-thinking nonconformist Christianity influenced both pacifism and women's activism in the early twentieth century and continued throughout with connections to the Society of Friends and individual Quakers. Spirituality contributed greatly to members' ideas about public and social theory, and their practical commitment to creating a better society. Eleanor Moore was closely aligned with the Australian Church. Educated at the Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC), the school for girls in East Melbourne, she followed other active political alumni including other women's peace activists such as Mabel Drummond, Vida Goldstein and Marion Phillips, who would be elected to the British parliament in 1929.⁵⁰ Moore's peace

⁵⁰ For more information on PLC and the women educated there, see: Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *PLC Melbourne: The First Century, 1875–1975* (Burwood: Presbyterian Ladies' College, 1975), 113.

activism began in middle age. Her first engagement with peace campaigning was as a member of Strong's Peace Society, opposing the compulsory military training for cadets aged between 12 and 18 which had been introduced by the federal government in 1911.⁵¹

Moore's founding role in the Sisterhood was as corresponding secretary. Other prominent women involved included Mrs Lucy Paling as president, Mrs Janet Strong as general secretary, Mrs Mabel Drummond and Mrs Jane Kerr. The membership of the group grew to around 210.⁵² They stayed in close contact with Dr Strong's Peace Society and the two organisations 'enjoyed a brother-sister relationship', jointly organising many activities and sharing responsibility for the monthly pacifist journal, *Peacewards*.⁵³ Joining the Sisterhood was a statement for many of the members. Jane Kerr was the wife of a prominent government adviser, Warren Kerr, who served as chairman of the Commonwealth War Savings Council and the Victorian War Savings Committee. Her outspoken commitment to the Sisterhood baffled some, not least the wartime censor who predictably dismissed women's anti-war activism and considered it 'somewhat remarkable that the husband of the President of the Women's Branch, W. Warren Kerr, takes a prominent part in patriotic movements here. Evidently a divided family.'⁵⁴ Mabel Drummond's activity was similarly disapproved of by her mother.⁵⁵ Both Drummond and Kerr had relatives in the war. Drummond's brother Thomas Gardner was her constant correspondent, and Kerr's son died at Gallipoli, inspiring her to continue organising against war. She 'scandalized some who talked of "avenging" their dead by declaring that she was at least thankful that her boy had died before he had had time to hurt anyone else.'⁵⁶ This statement was highly provocative even to those sympathetic to maternalist feminism.

51 LL Robson, *Australia and the Great War, 1914–1918: Narrative and Selection of Documents* (South Melbourne: Macmillan of Australia, 1969), 2.

52 Malcolm Saunders, 'Are Women More Peaceful than Men? The Experience of the Australian Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915–39', *Interdisciplinary Peace Research* 3, no. 1 (1 May 1991): 47, doi.org/10.1080/14781159108412732.

53 Malcolm Saunders, 'The Early Years of the Australian Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 82, no. 2 December 1996: 182.

54 T Miller to unknown, 1 July 1918, 're Sisterhood of International Peace (Melb)' Censor's notes, 169/26/34 MF1376 'Intelligence reports on enemy trading and other suspicious actions', MP95/1, National Archives of Australia (NAA).

55 Janet Morice, *Six-Bob-a-Day Tourist* (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin Books, 1985), 46.

56 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 40.



Eleanor M Moore, 1924.

Source: Eleanor M. Moore papers, 1887-1953, Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW PXE 1025. See Appendix for a short biography of Eleanor Moore.

The Sisterhood was proud of the status of Australian women as voters. Sisterhood followers also felt the weight of that responsibility and a corresponding need to have fully formed opinions and accurate information before making decisions:

The situation of Australian women is peculiar. We are, as you know, fully enfranchised, therefore our actions have political significance, and since our country is one of the belligerents, it is by no means easy to know always what is the right and wise attitude for us to adopt.⁵⁷

Overlooking the frontier wars as well as the war in South Africa (1899–1902), members of the Sisterhood believed that, until the outbreak of World War I, Australia had always been at peace.⁵⁸ Their motivation to action was to counter the habit of ‘always waiting for a lead from abroad’ when discussing Australia’s role in combat, which along with the focus on ‘arbitration’ showed their interest in foreign affairs policy.⁵⁹ Inspired by the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration that had been created in 1904, which set awards and settled political disputes between business and labour, Australian liberal pacifists believed that an international arbitration court would similarly be able to mediate differences between states without violence. Arbitration was a primary part of Australian progressivism that after Federation was promoted to the world alongside women’s suffrage. Progressives concentrated on the domain of the international to understand the conflict and to insist that Australia should engage with diplomacy rather than blindly follow the empire. In a letter to American pacifist Jane Addams, Moore expressed how their group would be strengthened by joining the international community as women in general were ‘torn by conflicting feelings’. As pacifist numbers were not great, they ‘must be linked up in close bonds of sympathy and understanding with one another all over the world’ if they were to have any influence.⁶⁰

57 Moore to the ICWPP 1919 conference organising committee (undated), Papers, WILPF, 1723/1 MS 9377, SLV.

58 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 13.

59 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 14.

60 Moore to Jane Addams, Chicago, 5 May 1915, series III reel 54, WILPF International Papers 1915–1978, Sanford, NC: Microfilming Corp. of America, c 1983, accessed at the National Library of Australia (NLA). Hereafter referred to as WILPF Papers.

The Sisterhood were sceptical of any claim of women's innate peacefulness, acknowledging that there was no guarantee that women would automatically vote for peace.⁶¹ However, in the wartime setting, the Sisterhood women were observant of the gendered division of labour that was exacerbated during the conflict, with eligible men being expected to fight while women were told to attend to the home and wait for the men to return. Echoing Ruskin's words, they realised that while women were not in the decision-making spaces directing men to war, they were still responsible for not 'hindering'. The Sisterhood wanted to use education to help women realise their power as a collective to stop war rather than accepting their subordinate status in voluntary organisations supporting the troops at the same time as nurturing the soldiers of the future in their homes. If adequately educated and informed, they would come to understand that a 'martial spirit was foreign to women's nature'.⁶²

The Sisterhood was formed not just because of a belief that women might exercise a moderating influence on decisions about war. Its founders also believed that separate women's organisations allowed for greater autonomy and influence in the peace movement, as women in mixed organisations were rarely able to take on leading roles or feel as comfortable expressing their opinions. Moreover, they believed that women suffered more in war than men and had 'a special right to struggle for peace, but no special ability to achieve it'.⁶³

The Sisterhood were not the only group to emerge in response to the horrors of World War I. Vida Goldstein and her Women's Political Association (WPA) turned their attention to peace in 1915. Goldstein's involvement in the Australian women's suffrage movement has been well documented.⁶⁴ In 1903, one year after Australian women were granted full political rights nationally, she formed the WPA and became its president. It was specifically a 'non-party' organisation which acted as a lobby group outside the major parties. The association supported Goldstein's several bids for parliament between 1903 and 1917. Yet, her electoral popularity declined with each election.⁶⁵ Moore noted that 'during the war, her outspoken

61 Saunders, 'Are Women More Peaceful than Men?', 55.

62 Moore to May Wright Sewall, 5 May 1915, Papers, WILPE, 1723/1 MS 9377, SLV.

63 Saunders, 'The Early Years of the Australian Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom', 184.

64 Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*; Kelly, 'Vida Goldstein: Political Woman', in Lake and Kelly, *Doubletime*, 170. See also Fitzpatrick, *PLC Melbourne*, 116.

65 Lake and Kelly, *Doubletime*, 176.

pacifist principles tended to lessen her popularity'.⁶⁶ In July 1915, the WPA formed a dedicated peace group, the Peace Army, to protest against the war and its impact on women.⁶⁷ Though a pacifist organisation that committed to 'fight for peace and internationalism', their decision to call themselves an 'army' was ironically anti-militarist. But they were influenced by socialist ideology and recognisably militant, modelling their activism on the British suffragettes. Their tactics were deliberately provocative.⁶⁸ The announcement of the group in the *Woman Voter* illustrated how the choice of name was embracing militaristic emotive rhetoric; 'the Peace Army would be a fighting body, and would fight for the destruction of militarism with the same spirit of self-sacrifice as soldiers showed on the battlefield'.⁶⁹ Members were called 'peace soldiers'. With Goldstein as the president, the Peace Army attracted other prominent women from the suffrage movement abroad. Adela Pankhurst, recently arrived from England with experience of suffragette militancy, became the secretary, and Cecilia John, an accomplished contralto singer, the treasurer.

The WPA argued that women's voting would change the nature of public life. Goldstein also hoped that women would vote for peace and, in the *Woman Voter*, she emphasised their responsibility to do so:

The time has come for women to show that they, as givers of life, refuse to give their sons as material for slaughter, and that they recognise that human life must be the first consideration of nations ... The enfranchised women of Australia are political units in the British Empire, and they ought to lead the world in sane methods of dealing with these conflicts.⁷⁰

The political philosophy of the organisation focused on women's advancement and the leadership remained in women's hands, although the organisation allowed men to join as members.⁷¹ In working for women's advancement, the WPA had previously promoted the benefits of women's internationalism. For example, the *Woman Voter* reprinted a 1913 article from *Jus Suffragii*, the journal of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance,

66 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 28.

67 For more on the Women's Peace Army, see Pat Gowland, 'The Women's Peace Army', in *Women, Class and History: Feminist Perspectives on Australia 1788–1978*, ed. Elizabeth Windschuttle (Melbourne: Fontana Books, 1980), 216.

68 Gowland, 'The Women's Peace Army', 217.

69 'Women's Peace Army', *Woman Voter*, 15 July 1915, 2.

70 Vida Goldstein, 'The War', *Woman Voter*, 11 August 1914, 2.

71 Vida Goldstein, 'Women's Peace Army', *Woman Voter*, 15 July 1915, 2.

declaring that: 'The curse of women has been her isolation ... But at last the cry has sounded "Women of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains".'⁷² Following in this tradition, for the WPA, internationalism might thus provide a solution to the evils of imperialism, as well as to the general oppression of women.

Not all members of the WPA supported the new campaign for peace. In November 1914, three months after the outbreak of the war, two executive office bearers felt compelled to resign on the grounds 'they were out of sympathy with the anti-war campaign of the WPA', stating 'any opposition to compulsory military training and to militarism at this juncture might tend to weaken England's opportunities for obtaining volunteer military service in the present war'.⁷³ The WPA moved to establish the Peace Army as a separate organisation in part to accommodate internal differences. It meant that those 'who do not approve of our non-party political policy [could] unite with us in regards to peace'.⁷⁴ Labor Party women, proscribed from joining the WPA, could now join the Peace Army without risk of expulsion from the Political Labor Council of Victoria.

It was after the establishment of the Sisterhood and the Peace Army that news of the international women's congress in April 1915 reached Australian shores. This conference, initiated by Aletta Jacobs, a physician from the Netherlands, and led by Jane Addams and other US women from the Women's Peace Party, brought together 1,135 women from many different women's organisations with an interest in pacifism.⁷⁵ Australian women were not able to be present at this conference, though Australian-born Muriel Matters financially contributed and was listed in the report as representing the 'Union of Democratic Control, London Branch'.⁷⁶ She may very well have planned to attend but the majority of the British delegation was prevented from travelling by the British Government just days before they were due for departure.⁷⁷ The gathering had resolved to

72 Winifred Harper Cooley, 'Women and Internationalism', reprinted from *Jus Suffragii*, Official Journal of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, *Woman Voter*, 16 September 1913, 3.

73 Hilda Moody and Doris Kerr, 'WPA Becomes Anti-militarist; Misses Moody and Kerr resign', *Woman Voter*, 10 November 1914, 1.

74 Goldstein to Ms Hobhouse, ICWPP secretary, Amsterdam, 3 November 1915, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

75 Carrie A Foster, *The Women and the Warriors: The U.S. Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1946* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 11.

76 'International Congress of Women, 1915 Report', Amsterdam, database edited by Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, *Women and Social Movements, International—1840 to Present*, 247.

77 'International Congress of Women, 1915 Report', 247.

convene another conference immediately after the war, and formed the committee called the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace (ICWPP) to begin preparations.⁷⁸ They also delegated envoys to meet with national governments to 'urge the Governments of the world to put an end to this bloodshed and to establish a just and lasting peace'.⁷⁹

The ICWPP began canvassing for support in each country by using the already established women's networks. They sent letters to all known women's rights campaigners to ask for sympathy with the peace cause, beginning the letter 'knowing that you are an active worker in the Women's movement we are sending you the enclosed papers in the hope that you will find yourself in sympathy with our work.'⁸⁰ The Sisterhood sent letters to Jane Addams before receiving the ICWPP circular, being able to contact her through Mrs Janet Strong's association with the NCW Victoria.⁸¹ While it was through the NCW that the Sisterhood first reached out to international women, the NCW's balancing act of incorporating vastly different opinions made women of the Sisterhood feel they could no longer support the NCW. Strong and Moore both resigned from the council over their stance on peace. Strong had been the vice-president of the Victorian branch for 11 years, but took a stand, noting 'what is to be said of the officers of a National Council who return communications on Peace Work in America unread?'⁸²

Many Australian women replied positively and the ICWPP began organising to put women in touch with one another. They circulated a memorandum that identified the leading women's rights campaigners they were corresponding with. There was a genuine effort to represent each state including Rose Scott from NSW and Edith Cowan from WA, though many of the women mentioned did not end up becoming extensively involved in the ICWPP or WILPF, as the Melbourne groups took on most of the responsibility for organising.⁸³ Rose Scott, however, was heavily involved in the peace movement as a foundation member of the NSW Peace

78 Addams, Balch and Hamilton, *Women at The Hague*, 77; Emily G Balch, *A Venture in Internationalism 1915–1938* (WILPF Switzerland, 1938); Sklar and Dublin, *Women and Social Movements*, 7.

79 Addams, Balch and Hamilton, *Women at The Hague*, 77.

80 ICWPP to M.A. Harwood, 8 January 1916, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

81 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 27.

82 *Peacewards*, 1 September 1915, 12.

83 Memorandum from the ICWPP, 8 January 1916, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers. For more information on Rose Scott see Judith Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Society until her death in 1925.⁸⁴ The memorandum was intended to help organise a national structure to affiliate to the international committee, and to overcome communication difficulties. It demonstrated an alliance of practicality formed through established networks and is a reminder of the difficulties in communicating across such vast distances. Logistical rationality was required alongside affinity with the cause.⁸⁵

Looking through the WILPF International archive, which has been divided into sections with each country's correspondence filed in order, Victoria's activities outstrip the action in other states.⁸⁶ After the initial contact with known campaigners sent by the ICWPP, most of the letters discuss the complexity of the engagement between the Sisterhood and the Peace Army and their efforts to find ways that both groups could affiliate separately.

They attempted an amalgamation but could not find common ground. Towards the end of 1915 the Peace Army suggested both groups use the title 'Victorian Branch of the ICWPP'. The Sisterhood agreed to form a provisional committee to discuss the proposal. The Peace Army sent Adela Pankhurst to Sydney and Brisbane to set up more branches, in the hope of forming a representative national committee that could affiliate to the international.⁸⁷ The ICWPP supported the move to set up a national structure and distributed a memorandum to help coordinate the interest in Australia.⁸⁸ Though the Peace Army saw the Sisterhood as a 'sort of Peace Kindergarten, as they themselves assert', they were happy to join together in order to smooth arrangements for international affiliation.⁸⁹ The Sisterhood, however, decided against amalgamation, fearing it would be subsumed into the Peace Army.

84 Malcolm Saunders, *Quiet Dissenter: The Life and Thought of an Australian Pacifist: Eleanor May Moore 1875–1949* (Canberra: Peace Research Centre, Australian National University, 1993), 6.

85 Memorandum from the ICWPP, 8 January 1916, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

86 Finding aid for this archive is: Mitchell Ducey, *The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Papers, 1915–1978: A Guide to the Microfilm Edition* (Sanford, Microfilming Corp of America, 1983).

87 Goldstein to Hobhouse ICWPP Secretary, Amsterdam, 3 November 1915, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

88 'Memorandum on the progress of the organisation of an Australian National Committee to work in cooperation with the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace', sent by the ICWPP to all Australian contacts, 8 January 1916, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

89 Goldstein to Hobhouse ICWPP Secretary, Amsterdam, 3 November 1915, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

The groups saw their purposes differently. The Sisterhood believed it would be most effective after the war had ended and was recruiting and engaging in the international struggle to put itself in a good position to educate once the war was over. Moore recognised the different attitudes of the groups, noting that the Sisterhood preferred persuasion through reason and education rather than provocation:

When public opinion is inflamed, there are two ways of seeking to influence it. One is to be provocative, taking the risk of reprisals, in the hope of making converts on the recoil. The other is called educational.⁹⁰

The women from the Sisterhood were also not as militant as the Peace Army in protesting the war. They saw their work as 'primarily educational' and advertised their 'non-sectarian and non-party' approach to spread knowledge of international affairs.⁹¹ Care was taken to cultivate the image of respectability. They used discussion groups, reading material, letter writing and meetings in delegations with members of government to engage with the political debate. They only cautiously supported the 'no' campaigns during the conscription plebiscites because the engagements between pro- and anti-conscriptionists were characterised by hostility, aggression and disruption.⁹² Monitoring school literature and encouraging internationalist reading for both adults and the young were the ways the Sisterhood chose to promote their anti-war philosophy.

Many of the women present at the founding of the Sisterhood had not been involved in political protest or activism. They did not wish to break the law or jeopardise their status within their communities. Their motivation to organise along gender lines was to give themselves a space for discussion they felt was not available to them through mixed-gender societies. They wanted to lead and control the direction of the group rather than being relegated to secretarial support work. Not all in the group were convinced that women were inherently peaceful. Nonetheless, especially in the education campaign targeting school children, their material adopted a maternalist rhetoric to

⁹⁰ Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 28.

⁹¹ 'Sisterhood of International Peace', *The Age*, 21 December 1918, 15. See also Judith Smart, 'Women Waging War: The National Council of Women of Victoria 1914–1920', in *Victorian Historical Journal* 86, no. 1 (June 2015): 64.

⁹² Judith Smart, 'The Right to Speak and the Right to Be Heard: The Popular Disruption of Conscriptionist Meetings in Melbourne, 1916', *Australian Historical Studies* 23, no. 92 (1989): 203–19, doi.org/10.1080/10314618908595809.

claim authority in the debate.⁹³ As women were predominantly responsible for the welfare of children, their education and wellbeing, this area of reform was one in which the Sisterhood could claim a moral authority through their presentation of gender.

The Peace Army, on the other hand, wanted to protest the war as it was happening, preferring action and high-profile tactics. They believed that the 'timid' position of the Sisterhood meant they were left to do the real grunt work of opposing the war:

The Sisterhood does not do any public propaganda in Victoria, let alone other states, and joint actions with them in Victoria can have little practical value. It is very nervous about being publicly criticised and ridiculed because of association with us, who are anathema to the militarists. Nevertheless it can do good educational work on ethical lines, in its quiet way, and we must carry on the political part of peace work, and continue our organising efforts in the other states.⁹⁴

The Peace Army formed in direct response to a crisis and subsequently folded in 1919 with the conclusion of official hostilities, unable to sustain momentum when the immediacy of the situation had passed. This collapse contrasts with the Sisterhood, which continued its work after the war. While it might have been seen as more 'conservative' or 'cautious' in its approach and agenda, it was able to find a more enduring place in the peace movement with its more moderate views. Focusing on education and recruiting members that were more interested in the 'slow burn' of activism, they aimed to hold course in times of crisis and sustain interest when times were less fractious.

Both groups produced pamphlets and spoke at various public engagements. Moore and the other international secretary of the Sisterhood, Mabel Drummond, were regarded as good speakers and invited to address audiences along with the Peace Army, the Peace Society and the Australian Peace

93 In all pamphlets the SIP discussed bringing the 'humanising influence of women to bear on the bolition of war', Lucy Paling, 'SIP Call to Arms' pamphlet, May 1915, Box 30/4, WILPF, SCPC, University of Colorado at Boulder Archives (CU Archives). In a pamphlet Janie Kerr appealed to girls by expressing the grief and hopelessness women felt 'because of your very womanhood the maternal instinct made you cry aloud and ask yourselves was it hopeless to think of doing something to make impossible the horror and madness which had overtaken this world of yours', Janie Kerr, 'SIP Appeal to Girls', April 1916, Box 30/4, WILPF, SCPC, CU Archives.

94 Goldstein to the ICWPP, 27 April 1916, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

Alliance (APA).⁹⁵ Moore and the Sisterhood were more wary of disobeying the strict censorship laws imposed during the wartime than the Peace Army, releasing pamphlets that were only lightly censored due to a pragmatic choice of words. This contrasted with the WPA's publication *Woman Voter* which was heavily censored and even occasionally released with blank pages.⁹⁶ The Peace Army was more accustomed to public criticism. Their members had dealt with backlash from the public during the suffrage campaigns up to 1908 and in subsequent campaigns for public office. They were often criticised in the mainstream press, and by conservative groups organising recruitment efforts for the war. The conservative AWWNL often spoke against them in their publication *The Woman*, with leader Eva Hughes chastising them for appearing unladylike:

I have been to meetings for women only. What have I seen? A chance word, or a speaker, has transformed a quiet, nice looking face into that of a fury—womanhood, motherhood forgotten—clenched fists, stamping feet, curses on lips that should speak gently.⁹⁷

Both the Peace Army and the Sisterhood were prone to unfavourable press coverage during World War I. The *Argus* and the *Age* would both print reports of Peace Army and Sisterhood meetings in such a way that upset the women involved. Moore would always write correction letters, attempting to argue over the misrepresentations. For example, she wrote one to the *Argus* in 1916 requesting that they amend a report of a Sisterhood meeting where Moore felt they gave 'an impression' that the Sisterhood was encouraging men to request false medical certificates from doctors to avoid enlisting. She wrote:

The only remark made in regard to certificates of medical unfitness was made by me, and I referred only to one medical man as having been asked to issue false certificates. I added that I was far from believing he or others would be guilty of doing such a thing, and that I had no sympathy whatever with men who sought to avoid military service in such a contemptible way.⁹⁸

95 Australian Peace Alliance Poster advertising a public meeting in Melbourne 18 March 1818 lists both Goldstein and Moore as prominent speakers on the topic 'Peace Terms—Australia's Part', Malcolm Saunders and Ralph Summy, *The Australian Peace Movement: A Short History* (Canberra: Peace Research Centre, Australian National University, 1986), 26.

96 Saunders, *Quiet Dissenter*, 90; Goldstein, 'The War', 2.

97 Eva Hughes, *The Woman*, 1 December 1916.

98 Eleanor Moore, 'A Correction—To the Editor of the Argus', *The Argus*, 5 May 1916.

Nonetheless, the *Argus*, known in Melbourne for its conservative coverage, frequently reported on the Sisterhood in unfavourable terms, despite their efforts to avoid controversy. Members of the Sisterhood and Peace Army were part of a deputation to the education minister in Victoria in 1917 requesting that *The School Paper* be less militaristic in tone. Responses concluded that 'these good ladies would find better use for their time knitting socks for the soldiers who will have to be heard later about the wisdom of shaking hands with our enemies'.⁹⁹ Their interest in the school syllabus was also a cause for concern for the censorship authorities. In 1918 a censor annotated a letter from Mabel Drummond on this subject: 'the pacifists are becoming more aggressive, and ... intend to [sic] undermining the inculcation of healthy Patriotic ideals in State Schools ... Is it not time that these dangerous Societies should be taught a lesson?'¹⁰⁰

An *Argus* report in November 1915 noted that peace societies in Melbourne that discussed peace in the abstract were 'really railing at the British and Commonwealth Governments, and trying to discourage recruiting, and to bring about "peace at any price"'.¹⁰¹ The article went on to describe the Sisterhood and the Peace Army, and printed quotes out of context written by the Sisterhood in *Peacewards*, and the Peace Army in *Woman Voter* to illustrate their unpatriotic beliefs. Similarly, letters to the editor offer insight into the perspective of some of the *Argus* readership. One reader signing off as 'Anti-Hypocrisy' wrote:

A society calling itself the 'Sisterhood of International Peace' has passed a resolution of sympathy with the relatives of Nurse Cavell, who was executed by the Germans, the resolution goes on to say that the atrocity was the result of 'militarism and war'. Here you will notice this 'peace' society cunningly places the foul crime on militarism in general, and not 'German' militarism in particular. If I am not mistaken, this 'peace' society and the 'international socialists' society are identical, and their aims and sympathies are pro-German.¹⁰²

99 'Peace! While There is No Peace', *Daily News*, Perth, 24 April 1917, 4.

100 Drummond, Hon. Sec. Sisterhood of International Peace, to T. Miller, Bentleigh, 'Coniston', 117 George Street, East Melbourne, undated, c. early July 1918, MP95/1, 169/17/25, MS1275, 'Intelligence reports on enemy trading and other suspicious actions', Censor notes, NAA.

101 'Peace Talk', *The Argus*, 27 November 1915.

102 'To the Editor of the Argus', *The Argus*, 9 November 1915.

The Peace Army not only had to deal with the press, but with scrutiny from the government which had increased powers to prosecute under the *War Precautions Act 1914*. This legislation, passed by the government of Prime Minister Andrew Fisher and subsequently extended in 1915 and 1916, gave the authorities wide-ranging powers to restrict civil liberties.¹⁰³ It allowed the censoring of media reports likely to cause disaffection or alarm and provided for the monitoring and prosecution of anyone deemed guilty of prejudicing recruiting.¹⁰⁴ The Act specified prohibited acts of protest, including tearing down recruiting posters and disturbing referendum meetings.¹⁰⁵ The Peace Army was prone to disagreements with the authorities over activities that allegedly contravened the Act. Cecilia John, Adela Pankhurst and Jennie Baines, all at times members of the Peace Army and the WPA, were summoned to court under this regulation for various peace-related activities.¹⁰⁶ The Peace Army held demonstrations against the unprecedented legislation. Pankhurst led a march on the Yarra Bank in Melbourne in January 1916 in defence of free speech, but the Sisterhood decided not to participate ‘on the ground that the right of free speech on their part has not been assailed by the government’. Such a decision again reflected their desire to avoid being labelled as subversive.¹⁰⁷ At the end of the war, the Sisterhood joined delegations of peace activists who met the attorney-general with a petition to repeal the Act, showing their principled stance against it even if they were fearful of protest.¹⁰⁸

While the Peace Army was accustomed to misrepresentation in the papers as well as prosecution from government and criticism from pro-war groups, they were not pleased to receive what they perceived as similar treatment

103 Diane Kirkby, ‘When “Magna Carta Was Suspended”: National Security and the Challenge to Freedom in Australia, 1914–1919’, in *Challenges to Authority and the Recognition of Rights: From Magna Carta to Modernity*, ed. Catherine MacMillan and Charlotte Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 322.

104 Kirkby, ‘When “Magna Carta Was Suspended”’, 322.

105 Scott, *Australia During the War*, 145.

106 Cecilia John was taken to court over printed material, see ‘The Lasso Act Electors’ Judgment Printer and Secretary—Another War Precautions Prosecution’, *Daily Herald*, 5 December 1917. Baines and Pankhurst took their prosecutions to the high court, where they were charged with leading a protest to the steps of parliament. *Pankhurst v Porter* [1917] HCA 52 (2 October 1917); ‘War Precautions Act Regulations Appeals Against Convictions Upheld by High Court’, *The Ballarat Star*, 3 October 1917. For more information on the arrests, see: Judith Smart, ‘Baines, Sarah Jane (1866–1951)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (ADB), National Centre of Biography, ANU, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/baines-sarah-jane-5100/text8519, published first in hardcopy 1979, accessed 14 January 2015.

107 Sisterhood Minutes of monthly committee meetings, discussing a demonstration at the Yarra Bank protesting the curtailing of free speech organised by Pankhurst in January 1916, quoted in Colligan, ‘Brothers and Sisters in Peace’, 50.

108 ‘Free Speech Repeal of Restrictions Urged by Deputation’, *Daily News*, 20 October 1919, 6.

from the Sisterhood, who purported to share their goals. Moore had written a letter for inclusion in the circulated publication of the ICWPP called the *International*. It was designed to give an update on the state of affairs in Australia and explain the existence of two peace groups in Victoria, but unwittingly inflamed the animosity. She noted that two of the Peace Army meetings had ‘ended in disorder’ and that the group ‘felt a duty to influence men not to enlist’.¹⁰⁹

Moore apologised for the oversight and wrote again to the ICWPP to request they amend her paragraph.¹¹⁰ Yet the incident again demonstrated how different the two groups were. The Sisterhood, not used to such a public performance, was inadvertently criticising the Peace Army in a similar way to the establishment, implying that they were unladylike and their methods disruptive. It revealed a deeper belief that women in the protest movement should be reserved. Considering the wide international circulation of the publication, some women who were members of both organisations saw it as an ‘endeavour to aggrandise the Sisterhood at the expense of a sister society’.¹¹¹ Treasurer Cecilia John reacted with a sharp word written to the ICWPP:

For your private information I may tell you that the Sisterhood of Peace is unknown even in our own city and has never held a public meeting. I could write at length about it but I do not desire to say more.¹¹²

While the Sisterhood used language that offended the Peace Army in describing its activities, Moore and the Sisterhood’s membership saw themselves as justified in their fear of aggressive involvement by the intensity of the backlash. Many of the women who decided to become active in the Sisterhood were still reluctant to become publicly involved and the leadership felt that:

109 Cecilia John to the editor of the *International*, 14 June 1916, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

110 Moore to the secretary of the ICWPP, 19 September 1916, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

111 Clara Weekes, member of the Sisterhood and the Peace Army, letter to Mrs Strong secretary of the SIP copied in with the ICWPP, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers. See: Deborah Towns, ‘“Youth and Hope and Vigor in Her Heart”: Clara Weekes, a “Born Teacher” and First-Wave Feminist’, *Victorian Historical Journal* 79, no. 2 (November 2008): 277–95. Clara and her sister Edith were both Sisterhood treasurers in 1920, specifically concerning the publication *Peacewards*. Ina Higgins was another member of both societies, as the *Peacewards* treasurer of the SIP and member of the WPA. She was sister of Judge Henry B Higgins, see Deborah Jordan, ‘“Women’s Time”: Ina Higgins, Nettie Palmer and Aileen Palmer’, *Victorian Historical Journal* 79, no. 2 (November 2008): 269–313.

112 John to Dr Aletta Jacobs, 14 June 1916, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

There are many women who would sever their connection with the peace movement entirely if they thought it meant an open clash with their already harassed government. They nevertheless hold true peace ideals, their support is valuable, and the cause cannot afford to lose it.¹¹³

There was an increasing number of reports of violent behaviour on the part of returned soldiers who had become more threatening to women opposed to the war and conscription. One soldier reportedly interrupted a Peace Army demonstration and shouted: 'If the men here did as the Germans did to the Belgian women he would stand by and watch them with pleasure'.¹¹⁴ The accusation is revealing of the ways in which those questioning militarised violence were often confronted by the 'violent defence of violence itself'.¹¹⁵ Moore noted in her memoir the perceived need for a less threatening space for women to support their cause:

There is a place for both, but they are better to work apart, especially at a time when a severe penalty may follow an unwise word. If one is to go to gaol for hindering recruiting (that was the sovereign offence in 1915), or to be ducked in the river by indignant men in uniform, it is something to know that the trouble springs from the assertion of one's own principle and not from the indiscretion of a colleague.¹¹⁶

The Sisterhood's insistence on differentiating itself from the Peace Army was entirely about approach, tone and tactics.

Conscription and the divided home front

The conscription campaigns exacerbated the tense public atmosphere. They also created new dangers for socialist women.¹¹⁷ Women attempting to enter the male domain left themselves 'subject to sanctions ranging from ridicule to violence'.¹¹⁸ Before the war outspoken political women such as Vida Goldstein and Rose Scott were often subject to ridicule, especially

113 Moore to *The International March*/April 1916, quoted in Saunders, *Quiet Dissenter*, 93.

114 Soldier addressing crowd after interrupting a meeting of WPA on Yarra bank, quoted in letter by FJ Riley to Hughes, 15 May 1916, quoted in Colligan, 'Brothers and Sisters in Peace', 41.

115 Colligan, 'Brothers and Sisters in Peace', 41. See also: Joy Damousi, 'Socialist Women and Gendered Space: The Anti-Conscription and Anti-War Campaigns of 1914–1918', *Labour History*, no. 60 (1 May 1991): 1–15.

116 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 29.

117 Damousi, 'Socialist Women and Gendered Space'.

118 Damousi, 'Socialist Women and Gendered Space'.

as their attempts at social reform clearly articulated criticism of traditional masculine values and behaviours. Even so, prior to the conscription campaigns of World War I, women had usually been able to engage in socialist movements without drawing actual physical violence. The conscription campaigns changed this situation, not least because women's support for the anti-conscription campaign directly 'challenged values associated with masculinity and manliness'.¹¹⁹ The war, by its nature, reinforced conventional gender roles by defining who should fight the enemy and who should care for the home. Much government propaganda reinforced this division, playing on sentiments of masculinity to motivate men to enlist. Against this background, radical, anti-war and anti-conscriptionist political activity by women attracted male aggression. Soldiers would intimidate speaking women at rallies, tear down 'No' signs, and even resort to violence against the women as a way of reasserting their masculinity and enforcing their views.¹²⁰

There were many tensions over masculinity in the gendered milieu of anxieties surrounding the conscription debates. Men dealing privately with the decision to enlist were faced with conflicting visions of ideal masculinities—negotiating their 'duty' to the nation with the more present and immediate 'duty' to the family as breadwinners and income earners.¹²¹ But while the image of the ideal man, a physically strong and brave soldier, became increasingly obsolete and irrelevant when matched with artillery and machine guns, the conventional tropes and conventions of this ideal soldier remained central to patriotic propaganda.

Pro-conscription campaigners, returned soldiers and imperial patriots were also swept along with the aggressive sentiment against the women's campaigns in response to the unusual and threatening performance of femininity in the public sphere. Examples of such brazen expressions of femininity included an instance when young girls protesting against conscription 'tried to swing constables to dance with them' after a rowdy meeting was being shut down, as a nonviolent and good-natured way of undermining the social order and male authority.¹²² At the same time the government campaigned for conscription in the same way they encouraged men to enlist—by playing into masculine stereotypes about duty and war. Pro-conscription rhetoric

119 Damousi, 'Socialist Women and Gendered Space', 8.

120 Damousi, 'Socialist Women and Gendered Space', 13.

121 Bart Ziino, 'Enlistment and Non-enlistment in Wartime Australia: Responses to the 1916 Call to Arms Appeal', *Australian Historical Studies* 41, no. 2 (2010): 217–32, doi.org/10.1080/10314611003713603.

122 Smart, 'The Right to Speak and the Right to Be Heard', 210.

and coercion to enlist became intertwined as labels such as 'shirkers' came to represent both people voting against the plebiscite and those refusing to enlist. Women of the AWWNL saw the conscription votes as a way for women to publicly 'urge men to be strong in the courage of their fate', just as they had been encouraging women privately to do in persuading their men to volunteer.¹²³ Prime Minister Billy Hughes described the failed result of the plebiscite in 1916 as a 'triumph for the unworthy, the selfish and treacherous in our midst'.¹²⁴ But for the peace and anti-conscriptionist cause, it was a triumph for peace.

The violent behaviour of some soldiers who felt undermined by women's campaigns reinforced the gender divide. To women peace activists, their actions confirmed that women needed protection from the physical and sexual abuse of men, and that militarism and war cultivated these very behaviours. To the satisfaction of temperance-oriented women campaigners, all states imposed restrictions on hotel trading hours. Reports of brawls and looting by returned soldiers influenced these decisions, such as an incident early in the war where a soldier was shot dead in Sydney. The tragedy confirmed the 'horror the possible depredations of a drunken and licentious soldiery'.¹²⁵ Women active in the peace movement saw the negative impact of militaristic values on young men that encouraged their abuses of alcohol and made soldiers a force of social disorder. Each public riot and the abuse of dissenting women furthered their belief in the damaging social impact of war.

The question of conscription was put to a plebiscite by Prime Minister Hughes twice during the war, first on 28 October 1916 and later on 20 December 1917.¹²⁶ The year 1916 was therefore a very volatile one for public action, and once again highlighted a divide between the Sisterhood and the Peace Army in their responses. The Peace Army used the plebiscites as a core issue for action and held demonstrations on the Yarra Bank. One notable protest that Moore recounted was led by 'the striking figure of miss Cecilia John on horseback' with banners saying 'Gentle maiden, trust him not!' referring to Prime Minister Hughes' statement that married men or

123 Eva Hughes, 'AWNL Appeal to Women, Letter to the editor', *The Argus*, 24 October 1916.

124 William Hughes, quoted in Jeff Sparrow, *Radical Melbourne* (Carlton North, Vic: Vulgar Press, 2001), 216.

125 Robson, *Australia and the Great War, 1914–1918*, 12.

126 Saunders and Summy, *The Australian Peace Movement*, 20.

sole remaining sons would not be conscripted.¹²⁷ Cecilia John was renowned for singing 'I didn't raise my son to be a soldier/ I brought him up to be my pride and joy/ who dares to put a musket on his shoulder/ to kill some other mother's darling boy?'¹²⁸ The Sisterhood by contrast, hesitated. Moore wrote:

Its members had been enrolled on the understanding that the society, as such, would not pronounce on questions directly connected with the waging of the war ... But, as controversy increased, everyone had to take one side or the other, and so it came about that all the most active members of the Sisterhood found themselves linked up with the anti-conscription movement.¹²⁹

Fear of involvement and retribution from a tumultuous political environment was soon put to the side with the Sisterhood spurred on by public talks over the nature of war. Moore noted that the issue was so intensely debated that 'Yes' and 'No' buttons were almost universally worn, and 'wearers of the one eyed the others balefully in the street, silently thinking up epithets for use when conversation should so permit'.¹³⁰ Mabel Drummond wrote about the conscription meetings in her diary, giving some insight into the passion and controversy aroused by the political divisions. She noted in 1916 that, at one meeting, 'all rose to speak but they did not utter a word as the crowd howled them down, yelled and screamed TRAITOR and so on'. Furthermore, 'when some of us stood up against the motion of conscription, they howled around us like a pack of wolves'.¹³¹ By the second vote in 1917, the Sisterhood and Moore had joined the Peace Army in stressing the gendered reasons to vote 'no', as seen in the piece she wrote for publication. 'I AM A WOMAN', wrote Moore,

I can only be loyal in a woman's way. I cannot give to the State what is not mine. Giving away other people's money is not generosity; it is theft. Voting away other people's liberty is not patriotism; it is persecution. Forcing other people to risk their lives for me is not courage; it is cowardice.

127 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 36. See also Gavin Souter, *Lion and Kangaroo: The Initiation of Australia* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2001), 255.

128 Lyrics quoted in Shute, 'Heroines and Heroes', 29.

129 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 34.

130 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 36.

131 Drummond, 10 and 16 October 1916, quoted in Morice, *Six-Bob-a-Day Tourist*, 52.

I AM A WOMAN. I was given a vote that I might impress my womanly feeling and point of view on public life. If I use that vote to strengthen men's faith in violence and revenge as against intelligence and moral force, my influence is worse than wasted ...

I AM A WOMAN. For the honour of womanhood, for the glory of Australia, and for the encouragement of men to be true to the highest in them, I mean to record a vote of WANT IN CONFIDENCE IN WAR, and VOTE NO!!!¹³²

In this excerpt Moore was debating the very foundations of the pro-conscription argument. Women in groups like the AWWNL saw the responsibility of women to put their country above their family and sacrifice their sons and husbands for the war. Moore was also attempting to clarify the confused message that pro-conscriptionists peddled, by reiterating that voting away personal freedoms was wrong, and separate from the issue of encouraging enlistment. It also highlights her thorough commitment to personal liberty and individual freedoms. The establishment press appealed to women to do their duty by publishing opinions such as 'the mother who gives her son in war is noble, sublime ... the noblest thing on earth today.'¹³³ Public sentiment began to acquire a coercive quality where women were told they should feel 'ashamed' of not having their men at the front. Another paper noted that 'any right-minded woman would rather be the mother or sister of a dead hero than a living shirker'.¹³⁴ This sentiment became so pervasive that activists called some childless women in the pro-conscription camp, who said they 'wished they had a dozen sons to send to the war', 'Vieilles Dames sans Merci' (old women without mercy).¹³⁵ Fairness and equity were in the minds of many women, who had already sacrificed and lost loved ones while watching bitterly as other men avoided a similar fate.¹³⁶

132 Moore, 'Conscription and Woman's Loyalty', in *The Mclvor Times and Rodney Advertiser*, 20 December 1917.

133 Excerpt from paper *National Leader*, June 1917, quoted in Shute, 'Heroines and Heroes', 29.

134 Excerpt from paper *Brisbane Courier*, 1916, quoted in Shute, 'Heroines and Heroes', 25. See also Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Marian Quartly, and Ann McGrath, *Creating a Nation* (Ringwood, Vic: McPhee Gribble, 1994), 212.

135 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 36.

136 For more on the discussion of loss and grief in World War I see: Joy Damousi, *The Labour of Loss: Mourning, Memory, and Wartime Bereavement in Australia* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511552335.

Both the pro- and anti-conscription campaigns attempted to appeal to maternal sentiments. The former portrayed ideal motherhood as a willingness to give up one's sons as a sacrifice to the war effort. The latter countered that the best kind of motherhood was to be found in a commitment to peace and the anti-conscription cause, based on the desire to protect young men from harm.¹³⁷ A contributing argument against conscription was that if men were forced to enlist, they would lose their jobs to women, as was occurring in Britain; something that concerned and shocked the AIF causing them to 'express the hope that Australia would never sink so low'.¹³⁸ The portrayal of women in these campaigns was often used as a tool for an anti-woman agenda. Prime Minister Hughes would speak at large patriotic women's meetings about the necessity of conscription, and women themselves promulgated the stereotyped duties of the patriotic woman.

The success of the anti-conscription campaigns was not entirely due to women's organising. Moore recognised that the influence of the women's campaign was limited. 'No one section', she explained, and 'certainly not the pacifists—could fairly claim to have exercised the dominating influence'.¹³⁹ A number of factors were important, including the commitment and backing from the labour movement and the collaboration of anti-war activists with moderate left-wing organisations that were at once anti-conscription and pro-war.¹⁴⁰ But the anti-conscription campaigns, and even the pro-conscription campaigns, provided a platform for women's groups to articulate what they saw as a connection between motherhood and a woman's responsibility with the vote. As women had only recently been enfranchised, and voting was not compulsory for the plebiscites, both sides were trying to mobilise women by appealing to their emotions and duties as mothers in a way that had not been seen previously. Not only were the people of Australia given a choice for conscription that no other participant country offered its citizens, the women of Australia were also a voice in whether their sons should be compelled to go to war.

137 Grimshaw et al., *Creating a Nation*, 214.

138 McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, 89.

139 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 34.

140 Saunders and Summy, *The Australian Peace Movement*, 20.

The rift between the Sisterhood and the Peace Army was in many ways representative of the political culture at large in its response to World War I. The country was divided politically and socially, and not just because of conscription. The cost of living was increasing ahead of wages. Even so, strikers garnered bitter criticism from imperial patriots who despaired at their unwillingness to sacrifice mere material interests for the sake of King and country.¹⁴¹ The anxiety around voluntary recruitment created a divide between men who enlisted and those who remained behind. The latter found themselves labelled 'shirkers', and 'slackers' for their lack of commitment to the war effort and they were harshly targeted by pro-war groups. At the same time, Australia's costly involvement in the war prompted questioning in some quarters about the pressing demands of empire and the nature of imperialism. While the initial commitment of the nation seemed to be 'almost unique in its touching simplicity', the naivety of 1914 had, by the war's end, given way to a more searching interrogation or to self-conscious reinforcement.¹⁴²

While it seemed that women became more politically active during the conscription campaigns, not least because of their ability to vote, both the 'pro' and 'anti' positions reinforced the strongly defined sex roles that were upheld with Australian society. Active pacifist women were in the minority. In fact, holding such opinions was often seen as disloyal and unpatriotic, making the commitment of the groups that did speak out against the prevailing status quo all the more remarkable. They utilised women-specific internationalist traditions to gain political power in the domestic sphere, while also playing into the definitions of gender that were widely accepted. Both the Sisterhood and the Peace Army believed in the political philosophy of internationalism. They were affiliated with the ICWPP and committed to sending delegates to the international congress in 1919. As was the nature of an international network, women from other countries experienced the war very differently. The national political framework still dictated the experience of war for many of the women, and the need for local activism illuminated the tensions in campaigning nationally for an international ideal.

141 Robson, *Australia and the Great War, 1914–1918*, 13.

142 Governor-General Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson, December 1915, quoted in Souter, *Lion and Kangaroo*, 245.

It was the Sisterhood that endured once the urgency of the war dissipated, and in 1919 it voted to change its name to the Australian section of WILPF. Yet both groups had played a pivotal role in the foundation of WILPF in Australia, as their collaboration and confrontation defined the Australian section during a globally tumultuous time. The establishment of WILPF in Australia was gradual, emerging out of transnational internationalist networks and building on maternal notions of women's rights and protections. It proceeded in various guises before settling on the WILPF. Those early incarnations laid the groundwork for gendered understandings of peace that prevailed during the turbulent war years, creating the pathways for women after the end of hostilities to travel and to experience international politics in the quest to implement their ideals.

This text is taken from *Sisters in Peace: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Australia, 1915–2015*, by Kate Laing, published 2023 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/SP.2023.01