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The Cold War and nuclear disarmament

In 1952 the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) hosted a meeting to protest nuclear tests. 'If atom bombs make a country secure Americans should be serene and confident', opined Lillian Miller, president of the Victorian WILPF branch. 'But they have the jitters so badly that it is being seriously suggested that they should live and work underground'.¹ Miller believed Australians did not want the bomb. And yet the government was proposing collaboration with the British Government to test nuclear weapons in Australia. Pacifists had to be ever vigilant. As one war ended, new conflicts and more terrifying weapons continued to dominate world politics.

By the 1960s a new trend in WILPF's operating style was emerging. WILPF's international headquarters acknowledged that 'technical and political developments' were taking place at an 'unprecedented speed' which made the 'mass protests, manifestoes and petitions of the 1930s ... no longer adequate'.² The headquarters in Geneva placed greater importance on the executive committee giving continuous attention to policy, and their UN consultants' 'constant attendance at history-making commissions

1 Mrs. L. Miller, 'Report of the Public Meeting of Protest Against Atom Bomb Test', 18 March 1952, 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.

2 GC Bussey and Margaret Tims, *Pioneers for Peace: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915–1965*, 2nd ed. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965), 203.

and assemblies'.³ It saw the role of national sections in this new program as being 'never-sleeping watchdogs of governmental policies which might make or break the world'.⁴ This emphasis, with the Geneva office focusing on lobbying the UN while the national sections acted as local governmental pressure groups, represented a subtle but significant shift in the identity of WILPF. A movement born out of and responding to crisis was transforming into a professional modern non-government organisation (NGO). It was a shift prompted by the Cold War tensions of global politics.

WILPF had to adapt to the Cold War era of the 1960s and early 1970s to focus their energy on nuclear disarmament through the channels that they felt they were most effective. The direction of campaigns became more about understanding and targeting militarism and its socialisation and exposure to children, shown with the 'no war toys' for children slogan, as well as wider campaigns against French nuclear testing in the Pacific. The Cold War and the constant nuclear threat provided the world with an incentive for institutionalised militarisation, and WILPF had to try to mobilise people against militarism, without the specific catalyst of combat or global warfare. This proved a much more complex environment within which to recruit and grow as an organisation. While it was a more complicated mobilisation, stalwarts in WILPF felt their work was now more urgent than ever, with the nuclear bomb and the apocalyptic threat presented by its future use reinforcing how necessary it was to intervene before a crisis. They wished not to 'protest when an international crime had been committed', but to 'anticipate the crisis and offer an alternative, practicable policy.'⁵ Human survival seemed to depend on it in a nuclear age.

Working within the new Cold War environment, the Australian section during the 1960s also adapted and modified its organising style. After attending the 1959 Stockholm WILPF Congress, new member Margaret Holmes founded the Sydney branch of WILPF, which soon assumed responsibility for the organisational duties of the national section as the leaders of the aging Melbourne branch were unable to continue with their volunteer workload. Strengthening sections in South Australia, Tasmania, Queensland and Western Australia were able to connect with the New South Wales and Victorian branches to establish the first interstate network, adding another to the organising structure.

3 Bussey and Tims, *Pioneers for Peace*, 203.

4 Bussey and Tims, *Pioneers for Peace*, 203.

5 Bussey and Tims, *Pioneers for Peace*, 203.

While self-proclaimed progressive groups focused their energy on campaigning against the bomb, they also had to negotiate the divisive and often cynical politics of conservative politicians and commentators who claimed any campaign against the US was 'communist'. The peace cause became synonymous with communism, a problem exacerbated by the active campaigns of Cominform, and Comintern before it, to coopt the terminology of peace.⁶ WILPF had a complex relationship with communism and a rhetorical challenge to maintain their image of neutrality. Other women's groups, such as the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF), were founded and further changed the dynamics of the women's international sphere. WILPF had to find a way to interact and cooperate despite a fundamental difference on 'communist sympathies'. Despite this, they still became part of the political targeting of communists in the Australian context. They were tracked by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), questioned by politicians and harangued by anti-communists. This inevitably interfered with their organising, especially after the referendum to ban the Communist Party by the Menzies Government in 1951.

The atomic age: Nuclear testing in Australia

The world entered the atomic age after World War II, and the peace movement was dismayed by the 'shame and horror of the atomic bomb' after its use at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945.⁷ In 1946 WILPF in Melbourne participated in a combined protest against the manufacture of atomic bombs, and demanded that:

scientific research should be free from military and political control and that scientists should not be hindered from making known to one another and to the public the results of their investigations.⁸

6 Peace was a highly politicised term during the Cold War, and scholars such as Petra Goedde have noted how it was 'a controversial concept infused with multiple meanings in different geographical and political spheres'. Peace discourse both divided and united various parts of the international community, and the rhetoric of peace was 'used, altered and fought over', allowing some to assert the Soviets appropriated the idea, while Western leaders equated peace advocacy with communism. Unaligned peace groups struggled to uncouple these tensions in opposing militarism in the Cold War. Petra Goedde, *The Politics of Peace: A Global Cold War History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 2, doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195370836.001.0001.

7 Eleanor M Moore, *The Quest for Peace, As I Have Known It in Australia* (Melbourne, 1948), 150.

8 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 151.

However, the beginning of the Cold War and the sprint for many nations to become nuclear powers meant that scientific information was often classified. A number of countries all began nuclear weapons testing programs to develop and improve their capabilities. Britain was determined to become a nuclear power, believing that a strategy of deterrence would be economical and effective.⁹ Excluded from sharing US nuclear secrets from 1946, the United Kingdom began its own nuclear program and enlisted Australia to provide land that could be used for bomb testing. This brought together the two issues that WILPF prioritised: protesting any increase in militarism and the manufacture of weapons intended for mass destruction, and the welfare of Indigenous communities, since the testing sites in Central Australia were inhabited by Aboriginal people.

The federal government's decision to allow British testing to occur on Australian soil was influenced by imperial identity and fears for Australia's own national security during the Cold War. The Australian government's 'extraordinary generosity' meant Britain performed 12 atmospheric atomic explosions between 1952 and 1957.¹⁰ The aid was so 'freely given' by Australia because in the 1940s and 1950s, despite Australia's disappointment about the fall of Singapore in 1942 and Curtin's appeal to America, many Australians and their politicians still felt a strong sense of belonging to the British Empire. In 1946 Prime Minister Ben Chifley established, at Britain's request, the experimental Woomera Rocket Range. At 1,250 miles in length, it was the largest testing range in the Western world, covering areas in South Australia and Western Australia.¹¹ Chifley's statement to a 1946 London Conference concerning Pacific strategic planning reinforced the bonds of empire:

the amount required has been provided and the plan is being carried out ... we have great respect for our American friends, but we simply say: 'We are part of the British Empire and we are prepared to help the United Kingdom'.¹²

9 Lorna Arnold and Mark Smith, *Britain, Australia and the Bomb: The Nuclear Tests and Their Aftermath*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 5.

10 Arnold and Smith, *Britain, Australia and the Bomb*, xi.

11 Peter Dennis et al., 'Long Range Weapons Establishment, Woomera—Oxford Reference', *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, online version (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780195517842.001.0001. For more information on this see: Peter Morton, *Fire Across the Desert: Woomera and the Anglo-Australian Joint Project 1946–1980* (Canberra: AGPS Press, 1989).

12 LF Crisp, *Ben Chifley: A Biography* (London: Longmans, 1961), 282.

This rocket range was named after an Aboriginal weapon, the woomera, which is used to launch spears. It encompassed areas known as Emu Field and Maralinga and was established only after Indigenous communities at nearby locations such as Ooldea, where a mission was in operation, were relocated.¹³ This enclosed area was known to be Yankunytjatjara land, which concerned pacifists and Aboriginal rights activists.

At this time Doris Blackburn was a member of the House of Representatives, succeeding her late husband as a Labor independent. In 1947 she proposed a motion to parliament condemning the proposed Woomera Rocket Range and weapons testing.¹⁴ Her criticism of the project was twofold: first, she was against the testing because of her firm belief in disarmament, and second, she was concerned about the impact it would have on Indigenous people and their land. The discussion around the impact on the Aboriginal community was focused on the 'tribalised' lifestyle of the population in the area, and much of the anxiety centred on their 'nomadic traditions', which would be curtailed by military personnel.¹⁵ It was not just 'projectiles' falling over the area 'but the real danger to the natives' would be 'their probable contamination by the white people who will go into that area.'¹⁶ With limited collegial support in the parliament particularly on this issue, and as an independent without a party, Blackburn turned to her connections and networks with women's organisations for support. As a member of parliament she frequently corresponded with Anna Vroland and WILPF to discuss the campaign against the rocket range. Blackburn encouraged WILPF to ramp up protests so public opinion could influence proceedings, though she lamented that 'it seems the matter is cut and dried with the government already' and complained of a gag being applied to her motion, 'effectively stopping everything. There had been other speakers waiting from both sides of the house', wrote Blackburn in a letter to Vroland. 'Since then I have been told that the prime minister said "we might perhaps have let her finish, but I could not allow other speakers on the subject"'.¹⁷

13 Heather Goodall, 'Colonialism and Catastrophe: Contested Memories of Nuclear Testing and Measles Epidemics at Ernabella' in *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), 71.

14 Richard Broome, *Fighting Hard: The Victorian Aborigines Advancement League* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2015), 40. See also discussion in Deborah Wilson, *Different White People: Radical Activism for Aboriginal Rights 1946–1972*, (Crawley: UWA Publishing, 2015), 95.

15 Wilson, *Different White People*, 95.

16 Doris Blackburn, 'Question, Guided Weapons, Speech', *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD)*, House of Representatives, 1 May 1947, 1844.

17 Doris Blackburn to Mrs Vroland, 22 November 1946, 7 March, 1947, 14 May 1947, 4 March 1948, Box 1726, Papers, WILPF, MS 9377, SLV.

Prominent experts supported Blackburn in her opposition to the rocket range, including the Presbyterian doctor Charles Duguid and anthropologist Donald Thomson, who both travelled to the affected communities and published widely on their observations.¹⁸ WILPF, through the efforts of Vroland, maintained consistent communication with Thomson and Duguid so that their information could directly inform WILPF's activism.¹⁹ Duguid was responsible for establishing the Ernabella Aboriginal reserve in 1937 which was considered 'one of the most culturally sensitive ever established'.²⁰ Ernabella was directly affected by the creation of the rocket range. Collaborating with groups such as the WILPF against the testing, Thomson and Duguid convened a public forum in 1947. Thomson, as historian Bain Attwood has noted, intended to use his high standing and reputation in international circles as an anthropologist to give 'considered opinion' to the campaign.²¹ The information Thomson and Duguid provided formed the basis of WILPF's opposition and was used by Blackburn in arguing against the range. Yet, as they operated within the Cold War discourse, their concern for the health of Aboriginal Australians was often discredited as being 'communist'.²²

The government commissioned a report to outline the potential impact on the Aboriginal population, prepared by a panel which included Professor Elkin, an anthropologist from the University of Sydney. He accepted the assurances of the government that it would protect the Indigenous communities, and defended the project from all critics.²³ Thomson and Duguid, who both opposed the testing site, presented their arguments to the panel, but the report, in the words of Robert Menzies as leader of the opposition, 'entirely disposed of the criticisms made and of the alternatives

18 Donald Thomson, 'Aborigines and the Rocket Range' May 1947; and Thomson, 'The Black and White of the Rocket Range', produced by WILPF, the Peace Pledge Union, and the Christian Pacifist Movement, Papers of A. Vroland Box 6/44 NLA. See also Charles Duguid, 'The Rocket Range, Aborigines and War', transcript of address delivered at Melbourne Town Hall, 31 March 1947, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

19 Charles Duguid to Miss White (later Vroland), 21 December 1946, and Donald Thomson to Mrs Vroland, 6 March 1948, Box 1726, Papers, WILPF, MS 9377, SLV.

20 Rani Kerin, *Doctor Do-Good: Charles Duguid and Aboriginal Advancement, 1930s–1970s* (North Melbourne, Vic: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2011), 16.

21 Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines* (Crowns Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 121.

22 Goodall, 'Colonialism and Catastrophe' in Darian-Smith and Hamilton, *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia*, 59.

23 Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 122.

suggested.²⁴ Blackburn had her dissent heard in parliament, reiterating her opposition to both the intrusion on Aboriginal land and the development of guided weapons. She stated:

I maintain that we have committed, or propose to commit, an offence on a weaker people who cannot speak for themselves, and I maintain that in the spending of millions of pounds for war in time of peace we are doing a great disservice to the Australian people.²⁵

Blackburn was one of the only Australian parliamentarians to object publicly.²⁶ At this stage, the parliament was assured that no atomic warheads would be used at the rocket range. WILPF released a flyer called 'The Black and White of the Rocket Range' noting 'it is incompatible with the spirit of the United Nations Charter'.²⁷ Their joint protest, supported by anthropologists and other protest groups, succeeded in so far as having the patrol officer Walter MacDougall appointed at Woomera to oversee the treatment of Aboriginal communities.²⁸

The Menzies Government won power in 1949 and sought to strengthen its ties to the British Government. Australia became involved in Cold War conflicts in Korea in 1950, which had a multinational character under the auspices of the UN, and the government believed that a partnership with Britain to help produce a nuclear deterrent would be in Australia's best interest.²⁹ In February 1952 the British and Australian governments announced their intention to test atomic weapons in Australia. The first of these trials, codenamed *Hurricane*, took place in the Monte Bello Islands off the coast of Western Australia. The second series of tests, called *Totem*, took place in 1953 on mainland Australia at a place called Emu Field, within the Woomera Rocket Range.³⁰

24 Robert Menzies, 'Question, Guided Weapons, Speech', *CPD*, House of Representatives, 1 May 1947, 1834. See also Wilson, *Different White People*, 105.

25 Blackburn, 'Question, Guided Weapons, Speech', *CPD*, House of Representatives, 1 May 1947, 1845.

26 Wilson, *Different White People*, 104.

27 Thomson, 'The Black and White of the Rocket Range', Papers of A. Vroland Box 6/44 NLA.

28 WH Edwards, 'Duguid, Charles (1884–1986)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (ADB), National Centre of Biography, ANU, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/duguid-charles-12440/text22369, published first in hardcopy 2007, accessed online 8 April 2015.

29 Arnold and Smith, *Britain, Australia and the Bomb*, 21.

30 Arnold and Smith, *Britain, Australia and the Bomb*, 50.



Protest against atomic bomb testing in Australia.

It is likely that the images are of the 1952 demonstration for disarmament, and protest against the testing of atomic bombs in Australia, organised by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. The protest meeting was held in the Assembly Hall, 156 Collins Street, Melbourne, 18 March 1952, and the demonstration appears to be near the Shrine of Remembrance, Melbourne.

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

Upgrading the site from conventional weapons testing to nuclear testing horrified but did not surprise the women of WILPF, who had never believed the assurances that no nuclear testing would take place at the site. The Aboriginal communities in the affected area had already been traumatised by an outbreak of measles in Ernabella in 1948, the first time that disease had struck Central Australia. It killed between one-quarter and one-third of the Anangu population who had no immunity.³¹ WILPF organised a public meeting on 18 March 1952 to express their outrage, with flyers stating 'Atom Bomb Test—How do YOU view this threat to Australia ... Help us to make a protest to be remembered—Tomorrow will be too late'.³² The meeting, chaired by Blackburn and held at the Assembly Hall on Collins St, began with messages of support from many prominent

31 Goodall, 'Colonialism and Catastrophe' in Darian-Smith and Hamilton, *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia*, 62.

32 WILPF Atom Bomb Test meeting flyer, 18 March 1952, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

people including Duguid.³³ His statement focused on the impossibility of the government guarantee that the affected areas would be cleared, noting 'no body of men however large, will be able to clear it of men, women and children, not to speak of animals'.³⁴ Blackburn addressed the crowd and raised her previous objections expressed in parliament:

Some of you will remember that in 1946 I took up in Federal Parliament the matter of the range for testing guided missiles. We were told there were to be no war-heads. All the time I believed this step would follow.³⁵

There were many speakers, including university lecturers, church leaders and pacifists, but the talk that was most widely reported in the *Argus* after the event was by Indigenous woman Margaret Tucker.³⁶ Her intimate connection with the problems of interventionist government policy resonated with the crowd:

My people will be the last to have faith in the Government's promises not to hurt any living thing. We have been promised so much ... When I was a child my sister and I were taken from our mother. No-one will ever be able to convince my mother, or my sister or me that that terrible separation helped anyone. I know people say that our aboriginal people did not develop Australia. According to other peoples' way of thinking I suppose this is true, but I don't think aborigines ever did so much harm to the country as atomic warfare of civilised nations will do.³⁷

A representative from the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) proposed a recommendation, unanimously accepted by the audience, expressing 'disapproval of the use of the atom bomb anywhere'.³⁸ The meeting believed it to be:

33 Edwards, 'Duguid, Charles (1884–1986)', ADB.

34 'Report Public Meeting of Protest Against Atom Bomb Test', 18 March 1952, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

35 'Report Public Meeting of Protest Against Atom Bomb Test', 18 March 1952, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

36 "Lilardia" is Angered by Bomb Plans', *The Argus*, 19 March 1952.

37 "Lilardia" is Angered by Bomb Plans', *The Argus*, 19 March 1952.

38 'Report Public Meeting of Protest Against Atom Bomb Test', 18 March 1952, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

against the best interests of the whole of the people of the Commonwealth, and one more betrayal of our responsibilities to guard human rights, especially the rights of aborigines [sic] who have no voice in the ordering of their own lives and who cannot defend themselves.³⁹

The meeting also recognised the international implications of Australia renewing its dependence on the empire in the age of rising decolonisation. Amelia Lambrick, who in the 1920s was a fierce opponent of the White Australia Policy (WAP), once more called for an end to the discriminatory policy and Rev. James Stuckey characterised the issue as a 'major insult' to our 'Asiatic neighbours': 'Do we imagine that these threats and insults will go unnoticed and un-remembered? Asia watches Australia'.⁴⁰

WILPF continued their advocacy on this issue throughout the 1950s. They sent a petition to be tabled in parliament in 1955 and maintained an extensive letter writing campaign to all members of parliament, asking them to consider the safety of the world.⁴¹ In 1956 they extended their campaign by writing to the British Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, requesting that he cancel the planned tests in Australia and the hydrogen bomb tests in the Pacific. WILPF noted that they should approach the Australian Government first, but stated: 'we address ourselves to you directly, because ... we believe the initiative came from your Government, to which the Australian Government is so closely linked in matters of defence and foreign policy'.⁴² WILPF only received a reply from the Office of the High Commissioner directed from Eden confirming that the UK was committed to the testing of nuclear weapons because they were 'the most powerful deterrent to war that exists in the world at the present time'. The letter included a statement from Eden, noting:

39 'Report Public Meeting of Protest Against Atom Bomb Test', 18 March 1952, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

40 Rev JM Stuckey, 'Report Public Meeting of Protest Against Atom Bomb Test', 18 March 1952, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

41 Mr Pollard, 'Atomic Weapons, Petition, Procedural Text', *CPD*, House of Representatives, 19 October 1955, 1659. See also WILPF Australia to all Members of Parliament, 'Those who use the sword—or the atom bomb—may well perish by the sword—or the atom bomb', 8 March 1952, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

42 WILPF Australia to UK PM Anthony Eden, 12 July 1956, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

the conviction that the radiation dose to human beings arising from the testing of megaton weapons at the present rate was insignificant compared with the radiation dose received from natural causes.⁴³

WILPF International did not accept these types of arguments. In 1954 Japanese fishermen on *Daigo Fukuryū Maru* (*Lucky Dragon 5*) were contaminated by fallout from US nuclear testing at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands, and one of the crew died of radiation poisoning that September. Immediately after this incident the Japanese section of WILPF helped with a mass petition drive, the 'Sugunami Appeal' led by 'housewives' calling for a 'ban on the A-bomb and H-bomb.'⁴⁴ The 'Lucky Dragon' incident was widely reported on in Australia and strengthened the case for caution.⁴⁵ In 1955 the WILPF International executive called on national sections to continue to prioritise mobilising public opinion against nuclear weapons, and at the 1956 congress it was the major topic of conversation.⁴⁶ The Australian section printed a pamphlet, originally written by the Swiss section, called *The Hydrogen Bomb: The World In Danger*, which used the example of the 'Lucky Dragon' incident to show the dangers of testing.⁴⁷ It described the health of the men 'whose state bears resemblance to those affected by the Hiroshima bombs, half of whom died', and detailed the fears WILPF had of food contamination, especially in the fishing industry.

Despite the protest, the Australian Government approved the Maralinga range as a permanent testing site in 1955. By 1957, however, Gallup polls showed public opinion was turning against the government's decision, with the majority against the testing in Australia.⁴⁸ In 1967 the agreement between Britain and Australia ended, and Australia was left to deal with radioactive contamination and fallout at the test sites. WILPF may not have successfully halted the testing at the time, but their sustained protests

43 WI McIndoe, Office of the High Commissioner for the UK in Canberra, to WILPF Au, 1 August 1956, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

44 Lawrence S Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993), 8. See also Vera Mackie, 'Radical Objects: Origami and the Anti-Nuclear Movement', *History Workshop Online*, 3 August 2015, accessed 29 November 2022.

45 For example see: 'Luckless Crew of Lucky Dragon Saw "Something Larger than the Sun"', *The Argus*, 7 August 1954.

46 Wittner, *The Struggle Against the Bomb*, 4. See also '13th International Congress of WILPF', 1956 Birmingham England, accessed through database edited by Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, *Women and Social Movements, International—1840 to Present*, 81.

47 *The Hydrogen Bomb: The World in Danger*, WILPF Australia section, 1955, accessed NLA.

48 In 1952, Gallup Poll showed 58 per cent in favour with 29 per cent opposed, by 1957 only 37 per cent were in favour, and 49 per cent opposed the testing. Arnold and Smith, *Britain, Australia and the Bomb*, 236.

kept the issue in the public arena and made the government constantly justify decisions that they would have preferred, and tried very hard, to keep quiet. In 1985 the government appointed the royal commission into British Nuclear Testing in Australia.⁴⁹ It found that the first atomic test on mainland soil in 1953 was ordered against meteorological advice that the plume of radioactive smoke would not disperse because of the strength of the wind, allowing the cloud to pass directly over known Indigenous communities of Mintabie, Wallatina and Welbourne Hill.⁵⁰ Eventually the Australian Government agreed to pay \$13.5 million in compensation.⁵¹

WILPF and communism

Cold War tensions not only played out in the testing of weapons and in the willingness to cooperate with Britain. Throughout the 1950s, the contentious issue of communism dominated the political landscape, and protest groups had to determine how to engage with this political struggle. The persecution and suspicion around alleged communist activities set limits on the activities of progressive and pacifist movements. WILPF had been concerned by the potential for communist infiltration of their organisation internationally for some time and had restructured their constitution in the interwar period to allow national sections with different sympathies to continue working together.⁵²

The ‘not infrequent accusation that it was a “communist” organisation’ was a problem for WILPF, having to deny allegations that it was linked with Comintern.⁵³ WILPF strongly rejected any link, and clarified that their only connection with Russia was through lobbying letters sent to delegations in Geneva, which were ignored.⁵⁴ This strenuous denial set the tone for

49 For discussion of the royal commission and impacts of the testing on Indigenous communities, see Wilson, *Different White People*, 180.

50 Goodall, ‘Colonialism and Catastrophe’ in Darian-Smith and Hamilton, *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia*, 55.

51 Jan Palmowski, ‘Woomera Rocket Range—Oxford Reference’, *A Dictionary of Contemporary World History*, 3rd ed., online version (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

52 Sheephanks to Moore, 16 July 1929, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

53 Bussey and Tims, *Pioneers for Peace*, 79.

54 Bussey and Tims, *Pioneers for Peace*, 79. In 1962 the US WILPF section hosted Soviet women at an informal conference to ‘discuss methods of alleviating the acute tensions between our two countries’. However, despite feeling the meeting was able to ‘differ without hostility’, the press and establishment ignored the conference and the joint statement produced, and the meeting contributed to the assumption that WILPF was connected to communist activities. Agnes Meyer, ‘Soviet and American Women Meet’, *The Peacemaker* (reprinted from *Four Lights*) 24, no. 3 (March 1962): 1.

future responses to allegations of communist sympathies as WILPF wanted to maintain its non-party political 'neutral' stance. They were motivated in this course of action by their desire to keep together fracturing sections. In Germany in the early 1950s the WILPF branch split into two opposing segments, each claiming to be the official representative of WILPF in Germany.⁵⁵ These responses led WILPF to stop focusing on economic arguments in debates on disarmament, and they shied away from using and critiquing terms such as 'capitalism'.⁵⁶

When Eleanor Moore led the Australian section, she shared the desire to distance the section from communist influences because she felt its promoters wanted to 'capture' pacifist groups for their own ends.⁵⁷ However in 1951, after Moore's death, the Australian section had to declare a public position on the Communist Party Dissolution Act and referendum which Prime Minister Robert Menzies made a significant political issue. This meant that while WILPF still asserted they were not affiliated with communism, they were obliged to campaign in favour of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) when civil liberties and the concept of freedom of association were under attack. To Menzies and his supporters, communism was a dire threat to Australian democracy as CPA members were disloyal to the nation and aligning themselves instead with Moscow. He attempted to capitalise on the fear, prevalent in the community, to push for the party's suppression.⁵⁸ The Dissolution Act which passed parliament in 1950 declared the Communist Party to be illegal and had provisions that allowed the government to target 'bodies that supported or advocated communism, were affiliated with the Party, or whose policies were substantially shaped by members of the Party'.⁵⁹ These wide-ranging provisions were a threat to civil liberties, which is why the leader of the opposition, HV Evatt, argued against them despite being an avowed anti-communist.⁶⁰

55 Catia Cecilia Confortini, *Intelligent Compassion: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and Feminist Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 38, doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199845231.001.0001.

56 Confortini, *Intelligent Compassion*, 38.

57 Moore, *The Quest for Peace*, 118.

58 George Williams, 'Communist Party Case 1951', in *The Oxford Companion to the High Court of Australia*, ed. Michael Coper, Tony Blackshield and George Williams, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 122.

59 Williams, 'Communist Party Case 1951', 122.

60 Williams, 'Communist Party Case 1951', 122.

WILPF also saw the legislation and the referendum as an attack on their freedom and joined the 'no' vote campaign in the referendum. They saw how its passing could affect their ability to organise, stating: "Peace" work in Australia is very difficult and, I fear, will be more so, if the proposals in the forthcoming Referendum are carried.⁶¹ They acknowledged that the principle was too important to ignore and campaigned against the referendum despite the potential for being labelled as communist. In a pamphlet produced in September 1951, WILPF urged the public to 'MAINTAIN FREEDOM! Vote NO!'.⁶² Clearly distancing themselves from being a 'communist front', they focused on how the referendum was 'complicated and confusing' and gave the government powers to 'label as "communist" any person or group who opposes the present drive to war'.⁶³ They campaigned on the idea that 'we are aware of the need to "cleanse and strengthen our political life" but this can be achieved only by free and intelligent citizens, not by police state methods'.⁶⁴ WILPF members were relieved when the referendum failed.

As most of the peace organisations in Australia were portrayed as 'communist front' organisations, many people were reluctant to associate with them, which only helped to keep the membership of WILPF and other organisations small during the Cold War years.⁶⁵ Histories of the 1950s peace movement often focus on the distraction caused by communist fears but WILPF women were nevertheless also working on serious campaign issues. WILPF decided to focus its activism on issues of disarmament, anti-conscription and Aboriginal rights, rather than heavily participating in the Australian Peace Council (APC), which prioritised the 'Stockholm Appeal' made at the World Peace Council meeting in March 1950.⁶⁶ Jessie Street and Faith Bandler were members of the APC, which they knew was seen as a 'dangerous Red organisation' by the Menzies Government.⁶⁷ WILPF

61 Helen Strong to Robinson WILPF Geneva, 12 September 1951, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

62 'Maintain Freedom! Vote No', WILPF Flyer, September 1951, Papers of Vivienne Abraham Box 64/8/2, NLA.

63 'Maintain Freedom! Vote No', WILPF Flyer, September 1951, Papers of Vivienne Abraham Box 64/8/2, NLA.

64 'Maintain Freedom! Vote No', WILPF Flyer, September 1951, Papers of Vivienne Abraham Box 64/8/2, NLA.

65 Barbara Carter, 'The Peace Movement in the 1950s', in *Better Dead Than Red: Australia's First Cold War, 1945–1953 Volume 2*, ed. Ann Curthoys and John Merritt (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 60.

66 The Stockholm Appeal made by the World Peace Council called for an absolute ban on all nuclear weapons, and societies affiliated to the WPC used it to campaign and collected signatures. Curthoys and Merritt, *Better Dead Than Red*, 61.

67 Marilyn Lake, *Faith: Faith Bandler, Gentle Activist* (NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 33.

internationally did not support the Stockholm Appeal because of its communist influences and the difficulty it gave to their own legitimacy as a peace organisation.⁶⁸ However, WILPF members in Australia participated in the 1959 Melbourne Peace Congress organised by the APC, bringing the organisation to the attention of ASIO.

ASIO was established in 1949 in response to a US ban on passing intelligence to Australia on the grounds of lax security. It sought to improve the government's capacity to gather information about Soviet intelligence officers conducting espionage in Australia.⁶⁹ But it quickly extended its activities. Using covert surveillance and methods of infiltration, ASIO created comprehensive files on individual members of the CPA or those connected to 'communist front' organisations. A file on Vroland in the National Archives shows the level of scrutiny she was under. A 1959 report showed that WILPF was under surveillance, but was seen as a 'legitimate international pacifist organisation for women' that came 'into contact with communist "front" organisations'.⁷⁰ The report noted that 'there is nothing to suggest that the WILPF in Australia is under Communist control'. Nevertheless, they were still watched because 'some of its members are known to be Communist Party of Australia members or sympathisers'.⁷¹ Vroland came to ASIO's notice specifically because of her association with WILPF. It was presumably the international nature of the organisation that kept WILPF under suspicion as well as an awareness of communist efforts to use the peace movement to advance its goals. ASIO kept notes on all their international travel, writing lists of each country the women visited.⁷² It was noted that Vroland was 'interested in the Communist Party in the 1930s', but had 'never been chosen as a delegate to anything'.⁷³ By 1961,

68 Bussey and Tims, *Pioneers for Peace*, 196.

69 David Horner, *The Spy Catchers, Volume I: The Official History of ASIO, 1949–1963* (Crow's Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2014), 1.

70 ASIO letter 13 January 1959, 'VROLAND Anna 1939-1970', National Archives of Australia (NAA): A6119, 2419.

71 ASIO letter 13 January 1959, 'VROLAND Anna 1939-1970', NAA: A6119, 2419.

72 Vroland file 21 March 1963, – 'Anna Vroland is now back in Australia after attending the WILPF conference in San Francisco USA. She then toured Canada, Europe and Asia.' ASIO file VROLAND Anna 1939-1970, NAA. In the US, WILPF similarly was not cited as a 'communist front' organisation, yet they were continually harassed by agencies such as the FBI because of their anti-war activities. See Helen Laville, *Cold War Women: The International Activities of American Women's Organisations* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, Distributed in the USA by Palgrave, 2002), 131.

73 Report no. 1226 'Anna Fellows Vroland', 16 June 1959, ASIO file VROLAND Anna 1939-1970, NAA: A6119, 2419.

however, suspicions of communist sympathies related to her work with WILPF caused a scandal for her teaching career and she was dismissed from her employment.⁷⁴

While WILPF remained vigilant about presenting a 'neutral' position and distancing themselves from communist activity, many members of the organisation felt that it needed to produce a definitive statement of their position. At 88 years old, Amelia Lambrick was a veteran WILPF member. In a letter to the Geneva headquarters she asked: 'what is to be our attitude towards communism?'⁷⁵ She was concerned that in an effort to remain neutral amidst the controversy, WILPF was failing to engage with an important debate about US world dominance. Lambrick wanted a statement on something 'deeper and wider than these [the CPA or Cominform] restricted groups'; she wanted the 'official attitude of the WILPF towards the spiritual concept of communism'.⁷⁶ Lambrick believed that if the US expanded its military presence in Asia from Korea to China, 'the whole of Asia will be behind China' and Australia would be forced to consider how to engage. This raised questions of racial inequality. Lambrick insisted that what was needed was to understand each other better, not to make restrictive decisions on the grounds of race, noting: 'We have insisted on our superiority in such a way that we have made ourselves ridiculous'.⁷⁷ She believed that blindly following the US on the grounds of race would be detrimental to Australia, as Australia did not realise 'how much the USA is hated in Asia.' Dismayed that the US blocked the People's Republic of China's entry to the Security Council of the UN, she saw the rise of communism in Asia as an extreme response to injustice and the unequal distribution of wealth. In proposing WILPF participate in this debate, Lambrick was insisting WILPF consider why communism was gaining such traction across the world and why capitalist nations so feared it.

74 Sitarani Kerin and Andrew Spaul, 'Vroland, Anna Fellowes (1902–1978)', ADB, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/vroland-anna-fellowes-12108/text21371, published first in hardcopy 2002, accessed online 4 February 2022.

75 Lambrick to Baer, 'What is to be Our Attitude Towards Communism?', 19 June 1952, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers. For more information on Lambrick, see: Amanda Rasmussen, 'Lambrick, Amelia (1864–1956)', ADB, National Centre of Biography, ANU, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lambrick-amelia-13038/text23575, published first in hardcopy 2005, accessed online 9 April 2015.

76 Lambrick to Baer, 'What is to be Our Attitude Towards Communism?', 19 June 1952, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

77 Lambrick to Baer, 'What is to be Our Attitude Towards Communism?', 19 June 1952, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

The WILPF International executive took this seriously and discussed Lambrick's letter at the executive meeting in Geneva in 1952. They agreed with its sentiment and understood the importance of better understanding the attraction of communism but felt that as 'the word implies so many different things for so many different people' it was difficult to even know 'exactly what we mean'.⁷⁸ A motion was put that WILPF write a public statement about communism, but it failed 9 votes to 13. It was generally agreed that more harm than good would come of a statement, and they resolved instead to continue to watch 'whether ANY government violated the Charter of Human Rights'.⁷⁹ The executive decided 'it would be advisable if the WILPF refrained from comments on communism in all written statements'. Nonetheless, Dr Bussey, on the international executive, maintained that members should be free to criticise both 'Russian Communism and American Capitalism impartially'.⁸⁰ WILPF members travelled and gathered information about Russia and China during these years to 'get as complete a picture as possible'. Among them were members of the British section, including Agnes Stapledon, who travelled on a Peace Delegation to Russia in 1952. That same year, Danish member Madame Zeuthen visited China.⁸¹

As the decade progressed, the Australian section of WILPF became more concerned about 'communist infiltration'. In 1945 WIDF formed and its presence divided women's international organisations into rival camps, drawing them into Cold War divisions. WIDF was primarily anti-fascist and widely considered a 'communist front'.⁸² Members of international women's organisations were often fiercely loyal. Even those who were members of multiple groups often had one with which they most strongly identified.⁸³

78 Resolutions adopted at the meeting of the International Executive Committee of WILPF in Geneva 6–11 August 1952, series I reel 12, WILPF Papers.

79 Resolutions adopted at the meeting of the International Executive Committee of WILPF in Geneva 6–11 August 1952, series I reel 12, WILPF Papers.

80 Resolutions adopted at the meeting of the International Executive Committee of WILPF in Geneva 6–11 August 1952, series I reel 12, WILPF Papers.

81 Stapledon, discussing Lambrick's letter at the exec meeting to Vroland, 26 August 1952, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers. Bussey and Tims, *Pioneers for Peace*, 216.

82 Leila J Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 47, doi.org/10.1515/9780691221816.

83 Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 44.

These loyalties meant that international women interacted but remained guarded and sceptical of the workings of one another. WILPF members were not impressed with the women of WIDF, whom they saw as uncritical of communism, stating:

It was difficult, and sometimes painful, to cast doubts on expressions of solidarity in the cause of peace, freedom and democracy that claimed a mass following in the Eastern-bloc countries and sought to extend this following to the West; but impossible not to do so when these expressions were so at variance with the real conditions of life behind the Iron Curtain and so lacking in criticism of provocative actions by Communist governments.⁸⁴

A major divide between the organisations was in their willingness to support violent decolonisation struggles. While WILPF sympathised with the oppression experienced, they could not support violent tactics as WIDF were willing to do.⁸⁵ WIDF were in turn critical of the older women's organisations like WILPF and the International Alliance of Women (IAW) for being too aligned with the 'West' and the status quo of US dominance. WIDF were given consultative status B to the UN before the others, and attempted to block WILPF and the IAW on the charge that they were 'reactionary and pro-Fascist'.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, when WIDF had their consultative status revoked by the UN because of Cold War tensions in the General Assembly, WILPF and Gertrud Baer strongly protested on their behalf, appalled at the undemocratic way the issue was handled.

Some sections of WILPF, anxious for cooperation with women in communist countries, believed that they should work closely with WIDF on the international stage. Other sections advocated absolute disassociation. The Australian section experienced a similar tension. In 1952, when Blackburn travelled to Europe on WILPF business, she met with Nancy Wilkinson, an Australian woman from Perth. Wilkinson was in London attending the Friends World Conference, the third international conference of the Quaker organisation, and met several WILPF women at a satellite meeting. She wrote that she was 'impressed with what they were doing', and in discussion with Blackburn 'agreed to gather some interested women

84 Bussey and Tims, *Pioneers for Peace*, 197.

85 Katharine McGregor, 'Opposing Colonialism: The Women's International Democratic Federation and Decolonisation Struggles in Vietnam and Algeria 1945–1965', *Women's History Review* 25, no. 6 (1 November 2016): 925–44, doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2015.1083246.

86 Bussey and Tims, *Pioneers for Peace*, 197.

in Perth to meet Doris on her way back to Melbourne.⁸⁷ The Perth branch was then reformed and the organisation began once more to grow in membership. In 1954 the Women's Peace Crusade of Adelaide decided to reconstitute itself as the South Australian branch of WILPF, claiming to be 'proud to become members of such a famous international family'.⁸⁸ That same year, a veteran member of the Perth branch, Miss Glasson, who was involved before its dissolution and again after its reformation, corresponded with Vroland about some misinformation regarding the WILPF and WIDE. She claimed to have read in a circular sent by Wilkinson, then heard Blackburn mention on the radio, that the Australian WILPF had affiliated with WIDE.⁸⁹ Miss Glasson was shocked by this and wrote: 'you can imagine my horror when I distinctly heard Mrs B make the above statement my first reaction was "so they have captured the old WILPF"'.⁹⁰ Vroland was quick to reply and to try to gather some proof of the incident. She noted that WILPF 'showed no sign of having changed its principles' and despite the confusion the two remained separate. Assurance that the information was wrong was very welcome to Glasson, who referred to Moore's memory:

I hope that as far as the Australian branch is concerned there will be no fraternisation whatever—I am sure dear Eleanor Moore would turn in her grave if there were to be.⁹¹

In September 1955 Vroland and Blackburn travelled to Adelaide to meet with the new section. Mary Broun from the Perth branch also joined them. Broun was 'shocked at the control that the communists had in the Adelaide branch' and wrote personally to Baer in Geneva to share her concern that the 'communist front organisations have decided that they need the prestige that the WIL can give to their movements'.⁹² Blackburn, she reported, seemed 'content with the new trend of all peace movements in together' but she, Broun, and her colleague Vroland were concerned about this direction and wanted to 'save' the league. Noting that 'we are dealing with people who are taught to disregard the truth, and to learn the answers to questions which serve the party policy', Broun's letter clearly articulated her anxiety about communists and sought advice on how to extract WILPF from

87 Nancy Wilkinson quoted in Heather Williams, *Women and Peace: WILPF an Australian Profile* (WILPF AU 1982), 9.

88 Phyllis Powell to Vroland, 13 July 1954, Box 1722, Papers, WILPF, MS 9377, SLV.

89 Vroland to Glasson, 11 January 1954, Box 1722, Papers, WILPF, MS 9377, SLV.

90 Glasson to Vroland, 16 January 1954, Box 1722, Papers, WILPF, MS 9377, SLV.

91 Glasson to Vroland, 16 January 1954, Box 1722, Papers, WILPF, MS 9377, SLV.

92 Broun to Baer, 10 October 1955, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

their influence.⁹³ WILPF members were therefore not immune from the immense difficulties for peace activism in the Cold War era. They reinforced anxieties about communist affiliations by trying to shield themselves from association.

The Sydney branch and interstate conferencing

Taking over the administrative duties of the Geneva office from Gertrud Baer was a woman named Agnes Stapledon, International Vice-Chairman, who is often referred to in the history of WILPF as British. Yet, though married to Olaf Stapledon, a British pacifist and science fiction writer, she had a deeper connection with Australia that was obscured by her marriage. In fact, her youth was spent in Australia where she grew up as Agnes Miller in Sydney.⁹⁴ Correspondence during her administrative tenure often showed signs of a special kinship with Australian women though she had never met them:

I am an old Australian myself you know, from Sydney, and it is nice to get greetings from Australia. It helps to link the present with my childhood which sometimes seems so far away as to not belong to me!⁹⁵

By the late 1950s Margaret Holmes from Mosman in Sydney became interested in peace activism and joined several peace and justice organisations.⁹⁶ A mother of six, Holmes was in her middle years when her interest in peace activism intensified. By then her children were older and she had time to commit to travel. Learning about WILPF through the journal of the Federal Pacifist Council of Australia, *The Peacemaker*, edited by WILPF member Vivienne Abraham, Holmes joined as an international member and planned a six-month journey to Europe to attend the 1959 Stockholm WILPF congress.⁹⁷ In 1954 Holmes had met with the pacifist Professor Kathleen Lonsdale, president of the British WILPF,

93 Broun to Baer, 10 October 1955, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

94 For more on Stapledon, see Robert Crossley, *Talking Across the World: The Love Letters of Olaf Stapledon and Agnes Miller, 1913–1919* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987).

95 Stapledon to Janet Strong, 3 December 1952, series III reel 54, WILPF Papers.

96 Michelle Cavanagh, *Margaret Holmes: The Life and Times of an Australian Peace Campaigner* (Sydney: New Holland, 2006), 157.

97 Cavanagh, *Margaret Holmes*, 160. For more about *Peacemaker* and Vivienne Abrahams, who was a member of WILPF, see Bobbie Oliver, 'The *Peacemaker's* role in the Anti-Vietnam War Movement', in *Fighting Against War: Peace Activism in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Phillip Deery and Julie Kimber (Albert Park, Vic: Leftbank Press, 2015), 246.

when she visited Australia. It was Lonsdale who first alerted her to WILPF's international work. Holmes was given accreditation to be an 'official observer' and later an alternate delegate of the Australian branch at the 1959 congress. She attended alongside Nancy Wilkinson, president of the Western Australia branch, who acted as the official delegate.⁹⁸ Wilkinson gave a speech at the conference discussing the work of the Australian branch and promoting the campaign for justice for Australian Indigenous people. As a member of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), Wilkinson also raised the importance of working within the system and engaging with political parties as a way to achieve peace, accepting that 'peaceworkers are generally reticent to go into politics'. She implored WILPF women to 'take that risk', as 'continuous involvement at the highest level is the only level where total wars can be prevented.'⁹⁹

After the WILPF conference both Holmes and Wilkinson went to the Conference of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation in Austria before returning to Australia. For Holmes this capped off a long journey which included visits to Geneva, the USA, England, France, Germany, Russia, India and China.¹⁰⁰ Holmes' visit to Russia, despite the Australian travel ban that she overcame by applying for the visa in the UK, brought her to the attention of ASIO early in her pacifist activism. Most places she visited included meetings with WILPF women. While in New York she observed sessions of the UN and in London she attended lectures and absorbed campaign strategies from the WILPF women. She stayed in the home of Agnes Stapledon whom she announced the section should 'claim as an Australian'.¹⁰¹ The travel and opportunity to meet internationalist women had a profound effect on her and she stated when interviewed: 'well, I got so excited and impressed by this marvellous collection of women, I thought "This is what I've been waiting for all my life"'.¹⁰²

Once Holmes returned she was motivated to start building a Sydney branch by the many WILPF women she had met while overseas. Prior to planning her travel in 1959, Holmes met with Vroland in Sydney where they discussed the prospect of inaugurating a Sydney branch. Holmes was drawn to the

98 Wilkinson to Vroland, 12 August 1959, Box 1722/25, Papers, WILPF, MS 9377, SLV.

99 Wilkinson, 'Open air meeting—Stockholm 28 July 1959', series III reel 55, WILPF Papers. Wilkinson's husband, Laurie Wilkinson was an ALP senator for Western Australia in 1966–74.

100 Holmes to Tapper, 13 April 1959, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

101 Holmes to Hilda Vroland, 8 July 1959, Box 1722/25, Papers, WILPF, MS 9377, SLV.

102 Siobhan McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts: Australian Women and the Vietnam War* (Sydney: Doubleday, 1993), 203.

organisation because of WILPF's neutral position in the Cold War discourse, noting that she felt the World Peace Council had the 'reputation of being communist controlled' and she wanted to offer hesitant women 'another, and possibly less militant and more truly peacemaking, organisation and such we believe the WIL to be.'¹⁰³

Gertrud Baer supported Holmes' recruitment attempts, replying; 'we are CERTAINLY NOT COMMUNIST CONTROLLED! I do hope that the material of forty-three years work will convince possible members of that fact.'¹⁰⁴ Holmes was keen to keep the organisation free from suspicions of communism. Even ASIO's reports on Holmes' 'subversive activities' showed the extent to which she was intent on keeping the communist agenda out of WILPF and guarded its non-party affiliation: 'HOLMES is not a member of the CPA, but is very active in the Mosman Peace Group. She is endeavouring to prevent this group becoming a left wing organisation.'¹⁰⁵ The organising practices of communist-controlled groups, which followed centrally dictated lines, were inimical to the philosophy of WILPF. It laid great emphasis on the exercise of individual conscience and sought consensus and cooperation.

In February 1960, Holmes convened a gathering for interested women to meet Blackburn and Miller.¹⁰⁶ They encouraged the women to form a branch and gave them all the information they needed about how to proceed and where they would fit in the national and international structure. The first official Sydney branch meeting occurred on 9 March 1960 at Holmes' house on Military Road in Mosman.¹⁰⁷ Reflecting the non-hierarchical feminist principles of organising which sought to avoid the dominant male forms of politics, the branch decided 'that there should be no vote taken at meetings, but to try for full agreement'. If no agreement could be reached then the proposition should be reframed.¹⁰⁸ The branch meeting also discussed other working examples to model themselves on: 'the British

103 Holmes to Baer WILPF Geneva, 20 February 1959, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

104 Baer to Holmes, 6 March 1959, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

105 Holmes ASIO file volume 1, NAA: A6119, 3362, 25.

106 Annual Report 1961–62, MLMSS 5395/Box 01, State Library of New South Wales (SLNSW). See also Margaret Holmes and Elspeth Christiansen, 'History of WILPF and Activities of NSW Branch', 1990, MLMSS 5395/Box 01, SLNSW.

107 Minutes of the first Sydney branch meeting, 9 March 1960, minute book, MLMSS 5395/Box 01, SLNSW.

108 Minutes of the first Sydney branch meeting, 9 March 1960, minute book, MLMSS 5395/Box 01, SLNSW. See Amy Swerdlow, 'Motherhood and the Subversion of the Military State', in *Women, Militarism, and War: Essays in History, Politics, and Social Theory*, ed. Jean Bethke Elshtain and Sheila Tobias (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988), 3.

section is well informed before writing any letters of support or protest. We should restrain ourselves from such until we have more time to work out details.¹⁰⁹ Following their example the branch appointed a 'Hansard reader' to keep abreast of issues and perspectives discussed in parliament.¹¹⁰ Holmes recorded in a history of the branch written in 1990 that within the first year the branch membership grew to 40.¹¹¹

By 1962 there were active WILPF groups in Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Perth. Though the Tasmanian branch had disbanded in 1942, active international members such as Dr Edith Emery remained in contact with other branches. The Tasmanian branch reformed in 1963, as did a branch in Queensland.¹¹² With women such as Wilkinson, Margery Bowen and Irene Greenwood in the WA branch it became very active, publishing a monthly journal *Peace and Freedom* that was edited by Evelyn Rowland and Greenwood. It became the mouthpiece of the Australian section.¹¹³ Vroland continued to write updates on 'Political Trends in Australia' for *Pax Et Libertas*, the international WILPF paper.¹¹⁴ Increased activity in disparate locations prompted the branches to turn their energy towards federating the section. Blackburn helped form a provisional committee in 1956 to look at federating, even suggesting two separate east and west branches to accommodate the vast distances needed to travel. WA, however, did not support this suggestion.¹¹⁵ An Australian constitution was written up and accepted which stated that a national conference was needed to appoint office bearers and executive members.¹¹⁶ By the 1960s, momentum had at last gathered for WILPF Australia to institute formal section structures. Wishing to federate the branches at a face-to-face meeting the NSW branch organised an interstate conference for 1962, after the international triennial congress held in California.

109 Minutes of the first Sydney branch meeting, 9 March 1960, minute book, MLMSS 5395/Box 01, SLNSW.

110 Annual report WILPF NSW 1963–64, MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.

111 Holmes and Christiansen, 'History of WILPF and Activities of NSW Branch', 1990, MLMSS 5395/Box 01, SLNSW.

112 See Williams, *Women and Peace*; and Linley Grant et al., *Prevailing for Peace: The History of the WILPF Tasmanian Branch 1920–2013* (North Hobart: WILPF, 2015).

113 *Peace and Freedom*, journal published by WILPF, 1956–present, accessed NLA.

114 Vroland, 'Political Trends in Australia', *Pax Et Libertas* 28, no. 3 (July–September 1963): 10. Accessed at NLA.

115 Blackburn to WILPF international executive, April 1958, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

116 Provisional Australian section constitution, as adopted at meeting of the provisional executive committee 16 May 1959, agreed to by majority discussion at meeting of representatives of South Australia, West Australia and Victoria, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.



Mrs Irene Greenwood, President Peace and Freedom League, Morgan Street, Shenton Park, presents Mrs Pandit with a basket of Western Australian wildflowers.

Source: Image courtesy of the National Archives of Australia. NAA: A1501, A6529/20. See Appendix for a short biography of Irene Greenwood.

The Australian section sent invitations to the international executive suggesting that ‘some of the delegates to next year’s Congress in California [could] continue or divert their journey to Sydney, New South Wales, before they return home.’¹¹⁷ Vroland, Jan Symons and Mary Howie were all Australian delegates attending the Californian conference. The west coast of the US was chosen specifically to make it easier for women from the Pacific region to attend, with six women from Japan, three from India, three from Australia and one from New Zealand being able to make the journey.¹¹⁸ The international congress accepted two new sections, one in Nigeria—

¹¹⁷ Hilda Vroland to members of the International Executive, 17 July 1962, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

¹¹⁸ Else Zeuthen, ‘Women Meet in Sydney’, *The Peacemaker* 24 (September–October 1962), 3.

the first African nation to join and the other from Lebanon, the first Arab section.¹¹⁹ Vroland, in her national section report on Australia, invited any international WILPF member to attend the planned Sydney meeting.¹²⁰ Accepting the invitation were Else Zeuthen from Denmark, International Chairman of WILPF, and Stapledon from Britain, international vice-president. Dr Muriel Lloyd Prichard from Auckland University, a senior lecturer in economics, travelled from New Zealand to play a prominent role in the gathering which included women from NSW, WA, SA, Victoria, ACT and Queensland.¹²¹ Baer intended to travel but was prevented at the last minute.

The conference was held at the Women's College at the University of Sydney in August and the Lord Mayor of Sydney, Henry Jensen, welcomed international and interstate visitors at a reception.¹²² Blackburn chaired and Dr Prichard addressed the audience about the economy of armaments and the need for centralised planning to avoid mass unemployment after total disarmament. Labor MP Tom Uren spoke of the ALP's position opposing nuclear testing.¹²³ *The Peacemaker* reported on the gathering, summarising Zeuthen's address to the 100-strong audience about the political aspects of disarmament, where she acknowledged the difficulties of convincing the US and the USSR to total disarmament when they were so distrustful of each other's intentions. She noted that 'disarmament would mean the abandonment of the old power order which would have to be replaced with some new order. This could be the slow development of the UN into a world government'.¹²⁴ Zeuthen had a sobering message for the people of the region, noting how 'she had got the impression that some people thought that Australia and New Zealand would not be affected if a war broke out'.¹²⁵ Referring to the science fiction novel *On the Beach*, published in 1957 by Australian author Nevil Shute, which described a nuclear war

119 '15th International Congress of WILPF report', California 1962, Sklar and Dublin, eds, *Women and Social Movements*, 8.

120 '15th International Congress of WILPF report', California 1962, Sklar and Dublin, eds, *Women and Social Movements*, 8.

121 'Women Meet in Sydney', *The Peacemaker* 24 (September–October 1962), 3. More information about Dr Prichard found in *The University of Auckland Calendar 1961*, 25. Accessed 12 September 2016, cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/calendar/archive/1961-calendar.pdf.

122 'Women Meet in Sydney', *The Peacemaker* 24 (September–October 1962), 3. Information on 'Henry Jensen', accessed 16 May 2017, www.sydneyaldermen.com.au/alderman/henry-jensen/.

123 'Women Meet in Sydney', *The Peacemaker* 24 (September–October 1962), 3.

124 'Women Meet in Sydney', *The Peacemaker* 24 (September–October 1962), 3. Zeuthen received other media in the mainstream press, see: 'Nuclear Test Ban "Solution for Peace"', *The Canberra Times*, 22 August 1962.

125 'Women Meet in Sydney', *The Peacemaker* 24 (September–October 1962), 3.

in the northern hemisphere and the gradual contamination of Australia by radiation and nuclear fallout, she mentioned that WILPF UK member and scientist Kathleen Lonsdale had read the manuscript before publication and confirmed that 'the story was scientifically possible'.¹²⁶ Stating this possibility reiterated to the section the urgency required in campaigning against nuclear warfare and forced consideration of how Australia would be affected by a nuclear conflict. The tyranny of distance which had for so long plagued and protected Australians offered little comfort in the atomic age.

The conference elected Elspeth Christiansen as president of the Australian section, Holmes as secretary, and Gladys Armstrong as treasurer, effectively moving control of the section away from Melbourne towards Sydney, where all three lived. Holmes observed how the conference motivated WILPF: 'all branches report increased enthusiasm following on the conference, and here in Sydney several new sub branches are about to form.'¹²⁷ With tighter networks in place, stronger communication with the international headquarters, institutionalised frameworks for organising, and energised members, the WILPF branches were ready to engage with the serious international issues about to captivate the world's attention.

French nuclear testing in the Pacific

At the 1962 California congress, Baer gave a presentation about the 'extraordinary' progress of the world in the three years since 1959. She pointed out that at least 20 new states had gained independence and were admitted to the UN, as well as drawing attention to the many advancements in technology that proved that 'man *can* conquer and is now conquering time and space.'¹²⁸ Yet in certain ways the new modern world was failing:

the bombing tests are following one another, carried out under instructions which cynically sweep aside the warnings of experts, of sane men and women, of masses of men and women around the globe. Research in atomic biological and radiological warfare is consuming millions of dollars and rubles and francs paid by the very taxes of the future victims of these lethal weapons.¹²⁹

126 Nevil Shute, *On the Beach* (Heinemann, 1957). 'Women Meet in Sydney', *The Peacemaker* 24 (September–October 1962), 3.

127 Holmes to Tapper, 15 October 1962, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

128 '15th International Congress of WILPF report', California 1962, Sklar and Dublin, eds, *Women and Social Movements*, 24.

129 '15th International Congress of WILPF report', California 1962, 24.

The Australian section had campaigned vigorously against British nuclear testing on Australian soil in the 1950s and was resolute in their support of total nuclear disarmament. By 1963, however, over 600 atmospheric nuclear tests had been conducted around the world by the US, USSR, UK and France.¹³⁰ To the dismay of the Australian section, France announced its intention to build a testing facility in the Pacific in 1963 to continue its nuclear program.

During the nineteenth century France had incorporated groups of islands in the South Pacific into its empire, and at its height in the 1930s was the second largest overseas empire in the world.¹³¹ After World War II, following the brutal experience of German occupation, France was convinced that it should remain a global power and be buttressed by its own nuclear deterrent. It first tested atomic bombs in Algeria in 1960, tests which were conducted during a UN-endorsed moratorium on testing from 1958 to 1961 which the US, USSR and UK all observed.¹³² In 1962 Algeria declared independence after a decade of appalling conflict, and France announced construction of the Centre d'Experimentation du Pacifique on the atolls of Mururoa and Fangataufa with administration buildings in Tahiti.¹³³ In addition, France and China both shunned the Test Ban Treaty of 1963, signed by the US and the USSR, which prohibited testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere. This announcement sent the Australian section into action, prompting them to protest and attempt to reason with the French before the testing began. They sent letters to all members of the Australian parliament and maintained a consistent letter writing campaign to the press.¹³⁴ WILPF's opposition to the tests was based on two sets of objections. Firstly, they were against all nuclear testing, promoted total disarmament, and felt every nation should do all that was possible to encourage the US and USSR to sign the test ban treaty. Secondly, they were concerned that these tests were to take place in the South Pacific region and considered the proximity to Australia to be a risk to public health.

130 For a visual representation of all nuclear bomb tests see: '1945–1998' by Isao Hashimoto, multimedia artwork '2053'—This is the number of nuclear explosions conducted in various parts of the globe up to 1998. Accessed 29 November 2022, www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjAqR1zICA0.

131 Robert Aldrich, *France and the South Pacific Since 1940* (London: Macmillan, 1993), xviii, doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-10828-2.

132 Ramesh Chandra Thakur, *The Last Bang Before a Total Ban: French Nuclear Testing in the Pacific*, Working Paper, No. 159 (Canberra: Peace Research Centre, ANU, 1995), 2.

133 Aldrich, *France and the South Pacific Since 1940*, 83.

134 For example, see Margaret Holmes, 'Nuclear Test Ban', *The Canberra Times*, 11 November 1963.



'Don't let Strontium 90 poison our children': Women for Peace rally, Sydney, 196-?.

Source: Held in Photographs and slides relating to the peace movement in Australia, ca. 1930–1982, created by the Association for International Co-operation and Disarmament (N.S.W.) Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW PXE 1463.

At their first public demonstration against the testing, WILPF gathered outside the French Embassy in Canberra in June 1963 handing out leaflets outlining their concerns. Margaret Holmes and Dorothy Bendick met with the French Consul-General who, while remaining 'non-committal', agreed to pass their protest on to the French government.¹³⁵ To reinforce their concern about contamination of the region by fallout, the women left bottles of milk outside the consulate labelled 'radioactive Strontium 90—causes bone cancer and leukaemia'.¹³⁶ In January 1964 the section sent letters to every French company operating in Australia, threatening boycotts of French goods and services. They wrote hoping the 'commercial representatives of France' would urge the government to 'cancel the proposed

135 'Sydney Women for Peace say "Aust. Has Purest Milk In World—Let's Keep it That Way"', *Peace Action*, July 1963. Found in Holmes ASIO file NAA: A6119, 3362.

136 'Sydney Women for Peace say "Aust. Has Purest Milk In World—Let's Keep it That Way"', *Peace Action*, July 1963. Found in Holmes ASIO file NAA: A6119, 3362. See also; Holmes and Christiansen, 'History of WILPF and activities of NSW Branch', 1990, MLMSS 5395/Box 01, SLNSW.

test and sign the Partial Test Ban Treaty', noting: 'National prestige is an empty thing if it is built on the resentment and active hostility of millions of people'.¹³⁷

A pamphlet published by the Melbourne branch targeted women to join the campaign, stating: 'French perfume? Yes! French Bomb Tests? No!'. It was a strategic campaign that mobilised the image of French luxury and femininity to encourage women to think more broadly about protest and testing.¹³⁸ Holmes and other WILPF members tried a creative spin on the campaign and commissioned a four-page illustrated comic strip called *The Choice*. The comic, drawing on the idea of the sanctity of the family and the image of the vulnerable child, told the story of a family which becomes politicised over the issue of the French testing before ending with two possible outcomes—children dying of leukaemia with anguished parents asking 'oh, why didn't we do something when there was still time?', compared with healthy children playing. The information in the comic made clear the anger at the decisions not just of the French Government, but the inaction of its Australian counterpart. It aimed to call people to action and upheld the power of a women's choice in caregiving responsibilities. The women distributed the pamphlet with a note that it was 'written financed and produced by a group of Sydney mothers because of our concern to warn people of the dangers'.¹³⁹

WILPF members attempted to telephone French President Charles de Gaulle with no success. Members Lorraine Moseley and Jean Richards decided to organise an 'Unofficial Mission to France' which was conceived, not as a protest, but an 'APPEAL for a new spirit in the conduct of national and international affairs'.¹⁴⁰ Richards, a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), travelled to Paris in March 1964 hoping to use techniques promoted by Quaker ideology to informally meet with de Gaulle. The mission was funded by donations sent in after an appeal that indicated how it would 'give expression to faith in spiritual values, spoken not by a functionary or deputation of citizens to a potentate but by one of God's creatures to

137 NSW Branch WILPF to the Manager, Comptoir National d'Escompte de Paris, Sydney, 2 January 1964, MLMSS 5395/Box 01, SLNSW.

138 'Women Say French Perfume? Yes!', November c 1963, Papers, WILPF, MS 9377, SLV.

139 *The Choice*, comic strip financed by 'Sydney mothers'. Copy in Margaret Holmes's ASIO file, NAA: A6119, 3362, 98.

140 Moseley, appeal for sponsorship for Unofficial Mission to France, 13 January 1964, Holmes ASIO file NAA: A6119, 3362.

another'.¹⁴¹ Richards could not meet with de Gaulle, but she felt her mission was not wasted as news of her journey was published in Paris newspapers, and de Gaulle sent her a letter which the women felt showed 'that he did, indeed, understand the spirit of the Mission.'¹⁴² She travelled through France, England and Scotland spreading her message, and on return gave a talk in which she proclaimed the importance of such tactics:

Before distance shrank under the advance of technology, and man's destructive power grew to its present capacity, it may have been legitimate to leave international concerns in the hands of governments and diplomats, but it is not so today.¹⁴³

The first test occurred in 1966 in the South Pacific. The section continued to monitor the situation and by the 1970s supported union actions such as the mail boycott to France, sending any letters to the French section care of Geneva.¹⁴⁴ They were also very supportive of the Australian and New Zealand governments' challenge in the World Court at The Hague on the issue.¹⁴⁵ Western Australian WILPF member Betty McIntosh noted that WILPF's strength was in 'bringing peace groups together', and that they 'played a big part in getting the cooperation of the trade unions in Australia to go to the World Court and try to stop the French atmospheric testing.'¹⁴⁶ The Australian section of WILPF used their international network to impress on the French section how urgent the situation was, and had the international section urge the French section to take action.¹⁴⁷ As the tests

141 Moseley, appeal for sponsorship for Unofficial Mission to France, 13 January 1964, Holmes ASIO file NAA: A6119, 3362.

142 Moseley to The Editor *Woman's Day*, 15 October 1965, MLMSS 5395/Box 01, SLNSW. 'Mrs Newson reported she had written to Mrs. Furrer and Mrs Furrer in turn had sent to news of Jean Richards proposed visit to Paris to newspapers which had published the news.' 12 May 1964 General Meeting minutes MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.

143 Jean Richards, paper presented at the CICD Congress 27 October 1964, 'Peace Research and international co-operation—the role of the individual and the churchman', CICD papers, Box 49, Melbourne University Archives.

144 Forte to Ballantyne, 26 August 1973, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

145 International Court of Justice, Australia vs France application submitted 9 May 1973, New Zealand vs France, 1974, accessed online, 29 November 2022, www.icj-cij.org/en/case/59.

146 Betty McIntosh interview: Catherine Foster, *Women For All Seasons: The Story of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 174. Australian Dr Helen Caldicott was prominent in this campaign, educating against the nuclear testing. She received a WILPF Peacewoman award in 2015 presented by former Governor General Quentin Bryce. For more on Caldicott see: Helen Caldicott, *A Passionate Life* (Milsons Point, NSW: Random House Australia, 1996). Australian section WILPF Centenary Peacewoman awards, Dr Helen Caldicott 2015, accessed 29 November 2022, www.helencaldicott.com/wilpf-australia-peacewomen-awards/.

147 International Chairmen Ellen Homgaard, Katherine Camp, and Eleanore Romberg, 30 November 1971, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

continued intermittently well into the 1990s, after most other established nuclear powers had ceased testing, this was an ongoing campaign for WILPF. It contributed to their cynicism about the misuse of science and technology, prompting the section to create the Committee Against Chemical and Biological Warfare. The committee published leaflets in 1969 titled *What is CBW?* and *New Perversions of Science* which used statements by experts, not just on nuclear weapons and their health impacts, but other forms of germ and chemical warfare which they observed in the Vietnam conflict as defoliants became a characteristic weapon of American modern warfare.¹⁴⁸

US bases in Australia: Pine Gap and Omega

Connected to the campaign to stop bomb testing and ease tensions during the Cold War was WILPF's opposition to US military installations in Australia and worldwide. Just as the Pacific became a pivotal part of France's military future, so too did it interest the US in the era of decolonisation. After World War II, when the military had fought through various Pacific islands as it advanced on Japan, the US became more involved in the administration of several sites in the region, notably the Marshall Islands which became their 'trust territory'. These islands, inhabited by the Micronesians, comprised several small atolls. From 1945 onwards the US started using the atolls for their own nuclear test programs, the most significant being Bikini atoll where 23 atomic tests were carried out.¹⁴⁹ Escalating involvement in regional conflicts, such as in Korea and Vietnam, called for a more established military presence in the Pacific region. The US maintained bases in Japan on Okinawa, at Sasebo (near Nagasaki), Misawa, Atsugi and Yokosuka. After Curtin's statement that Australia 'looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom' in December 1941, many negotiations occurred for US military installations to be placed on Australian soil to increase the US presence in the Pacific.¹⁵⁰ This made Australia part of the 'Pacific Rim' security chain that 'must be strung with a necklace of American-controlled

148 *New Perversions of Science*, printed by WILPF AU, July 1969, and *What is CBW?* Printed by WILPF AU, March 1969, Papers, WILPF, MS 9377, SLV.

149 Richard Rhodes, *Dark Sun: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 229.

150 John Curtin [First published in *The Herald* (Melbourne), 27 December 1941], in *Great Words: Speeches That Stirred Australia*, ed. Michael Cathcart and Kate Darian-Smith (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 189.

military bases: from Anchorage to San Diego, Hawaii, Vladivostok, Seoul, Yokohama, Cam Ranh Bay, Subic Bay and Clark, Wellington, Belau and Kwajalein.¹⁵¹ By 1989 the US maintained 1,500 military installations on foreign soil, with 144,000 soldiers deployed in Asia and the Pacific.¹⁵² The feminist international relations scholar Cynthia Enloe has noted that the international women's movement opposed the maintenance of military bases, not just because they represented 'military politics', but because they created social upheaval as 'artificial societies created out of unequal relations between men and women of different races and classes.'¹⁵³

By the 1980s there were dozens of US military installations in Australia, but the ones that attracted most concern were:

the communications station at North West Cape in WA; the satellite ground station at Pine Gap in the Northern Territory, and the satellite ground station at Nurrungar Valley in the Woomera area in SA.¹⁵⁴

These three bases were the focus for the peace movement as well as an academic community interested in analysing Australia's defence system because the bases were 'vital elements of the US strategic command, control, communications and intelligence system which support[ed] the US strategic nuclear posture'.¹⁵⁵ Desmond Ball from the Peace Research Centre at ANU collated and analysed the available data surrounding the three bases in Australia and became the leading expert in public debate.¹⁵⁶ His contributions highlighted the extreme secrecy and lack of information provided by both the Australian and US governments. Pine Gap, noted Ball, was 'originally called merely a "defence space research facility"' and it

151 Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (London: Pandora, 1989), 85.

152 Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, 66.

153 Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, 2.

154 Desmond Ball, *A Base for Debate: The US Satellite Station at Nurrungar* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987), xiii.

155 Ball, *A Base for Debate*, 88.

156 Andrew Mack, *US 'Bases' in Australia: The Debate Continues* (Canberra: Peace Research Centre, ANU, 1988), 2. See also: Desmond Ball, *Pine Gap: Australia and the US Geostationary Signals Intelligence Satellite Program* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988); Desmond Ball, *The Strategic Implications of American Bases in Australia* (Clayton, Vic: Monash University, Faculty of Economics and Politics, 1974).

was not until 1988 that Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke gave ‘the most informative official explanation of Pine Gap’s purpose’ in a short statement that referred to the base’s function in intelligence data collection.¹⁵⁷

In response to the increasing number of US bases on Australian soil, and in an attempt to help disseminate much desired information about them, WILPF published a pamphlet in 1971 called *American Bases in Australia: Nuclear Target*.¹⁵⁸ With information assembled from newspaper articles by Peter Robinson in the *Australian Financial Review*, as well as those by Robert Cooksey and Desmond Ball in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, WILPF outlined the establishment of these bases, the ‘embarrassed secrecy’ with which they were shrouded, and set out WILPF’s platform for opposition. Noting that ‘*Three of these bases are multi-million dollar projects which are absolutely under American control*’ (original italics), WILPF echoed concerns that the sovereignty of Australian territory was compromised by the arrangement and that the close partnership hindered Australia’s ability to forge its own path in foreign policy relations.¹⁵⁹ Most concerning for WILPF was the fact that the bases at Pine Gap, Nurrungar and the North West Cape implicated Australia in the American nuclear weapons system of deterrence. They believed that it made Australia a nuclear target. Consistent with their modus operandi, WILPF sent the pamphlet to all members of the federal parliament.¹⁶⁰

The pamphlet described the defence capabilities of each base, starting with the Northwest Cape which was the first US base to open with obvious ‘defence significance.’¹⁶¹ The agreement to build the base was made in 1962 and it became operational from 1968. While negotiations were in progress in 1961, Holmes wrote to the Minister of Defence to gain information on the proposal as media reports speculated it could have been ‘the most important defence pact between Australia and the US since WWII’ but

157 Desmond Ball, foreword, in David Rosenberg, *Inside Pine Gap: The Spy Who Came In From The Desert* (Pahran, Vic.: Hardie Grant Books, 2011), vi. This account was published by an analyst who worked in Pine Gap. He was motivated to write his personal account after Pine Gap’s role was officially declassified in 2008, because he attended an exhibition by the Jessie Street National Women’s Library in 2009 called ‘Remembering Pine Gap’ about the women’s peace protest, ‘was surprised to hear several misconceptions’ and he felt he needed to ‘set the record straight’, 144.

158 Robert Cooksey was a lecturer in international relations at ANU. *American Bases in Australia: Nuclear Target*, WILPF SA Branch, 1971, NLA.

159 *American Bases in Australia: Nuclear Target*, WILPF SA Branch, 1971, NLA.

160 Forte to Ballantyne, 2 November 1971, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

161 *American Bases in Australia: Nuclear Target*, WILPF SA Branch, 1971, NLA, 3.

received no reply.¹⁶² Pine Gap was subsequently established after an agreement in 1966 and became operational in 1969. While the agreement was signed in Canberra, it was not brought before parliament. The Labor member for Yarra, Jim Cairns, a leading member of the party left, spoke out in parliament from opposition about the controversy surrounding the base. He was particularly concerned about Australia's financial contribution to it, and, most importantly, the suggestion that it would increase the likelihood of Australia becoming a target for a nuclear attack.¹⁶³ The Minister for Defence, Allan Fairhall, replied that its function was to 'carry out pure research into those aspects of space phenomenon which may have a bearing on the defence of this country'.¹⁶⁴ He reiterated that any further information would be 'of assistance to this country's potential enemies'.¹⁶⁵ This response illustrated once more the secrecy surrounding the project. The same year Pine Gap became operational, the base at the Woomera facility was announced. Fairhall, speaking in defence of the facility, explained cryptically that 'the functioning of this station will make a contribution to free world defence, but I wish you would not ask me how'.¹⁶⁶

In its final section, the WILPF pamphlet set out what the organisation knew about the proposal for the Omega station which at the time was projected to be established either in NSW or Tasmania. Omega was described as 'a very low-frequency (VLF) radio navigation system' intended to 'aid commercial shipping and aviation'.¹⁶⁷ Designed to network with eight other transmitting stations, four of which by 1970 were operational in Hawaii, the US, Trinidad and Norway, the system was intended to provide worldwide coverage improving accuracy of navigation, both militarily and commercially.

WILPF members were sceptical of the claim that this was intended for merchant shipping. From 1970 onwards, when the first media reports and discussions in Hansard about the possibility of a new base were appearing, WILPF monitored and questioned the Omega proposal and helped set

162 *American Bases in Australia: Nuclear Target*, WILPF SA Branch, 1971, NLA, 3.

163 Jim Cairns, 'Question—American Installation at Pine Gap—Speech', *CPD*, House of Representatives, 26 February 1969, 155.

164 Allen Fairhall, 'Question—American Installation at Pine Gap', *CPD*, House of Representatives, 26 February 1969, 155.

165 Allen Fairhall, 'Question—American Installation at Pine Gap', *CPD*, House of Representatives, 26 February 1969, 155.

166 *American Bases in Australia: Nuclear Target*, WILPF SA Branch, 1971, NLA, 6.

167 *American Bases in Australia: Nuclear Target*, WILPF SA Branch, 1971, NLA, 6.

up the Sydney-based Stop Omega Committee.¹⁶⁸ In 1973, when the new Labor Government inherited the plans for the Omega installation, they referred the issue to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence for an inquiry.¹⁶⁹ WILPF presented to the government inquiry by providing a written submission, and Holmes drove to Canberra to appear as a WILPF witness before the committee on 9 October 1973 along with Keith Suter, activist and WILPF supporter, who appeared for the Stop Omega Committee.¹⁷⁰ Grateful that the Labor Government was not insistent on secrecy, which characterised the establishment of the other foreign bases, the WILPF submission focused on how this base would continue to 'draw Australia—unwillingly now, we hope—into the big power balance of terror'.¹⁷¹ Explaining that WILPF already felt Australia was 'compromised by the numerous US bases scattered about the continent', they concentrated their opposition on the idea that strengthening ties with the US reduced independent foreign policy initiative in the region. They wrote:

can we expect to be taken seriously by our neighbours when we express for; the ASEAN declaration of S.E. Asia as a zone of peace and neutrality; the Sri Lanka proposal that the Indian Ocean be a zone of peace, and our willingness to serve on the UN ad hoc committee to consider the latter proposal?¹⁷²

They then set out to question the assertion that the system was for the purpose of civilian use, asking why the US defence department was so heavily involved and why they would be so willing to 'foot the bill if this is only a peaceful aid to merchant shipping'.¹⁷³ WILPF then followed up

168 Cavanagh, *Margaret Holmes*, 277.

169 Gough Whitlam, 'Question—OMEGA Navigational Base—Speech', *CPD*, House of Representatives, 26 September 1973, 1507.

170 Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, *Omega Navigational Installation Report from the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence* (Australian Government Publishing Service, 1975), 116.

171 Wendy Wheelwright to Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, 'WILPF Australia Submission on the Possibilities of the Establishment of an Omega Navigational Station in Australia', 2 July 1973, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

172 Wendy Wheelwright to Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, 'WILPF Australia Submission on the Possibilities of the Establishment of an Omega Navigational Station in Australia', 2 July 1973, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

173 Wendy Wheelwright to Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, 'WILPF Australia Submission on the Possibilities of the Establishment of an Omega Navigational Station in Australia', 2 July 1973, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

their appearance at the inquiry with advertisements purchased in major newspapers that encouraged members of the public to send the form open letter to the prime minister saying 'No to Omega'.¹⁷⁴

WILPF's presentation gave voice to a number of anxieties. First, it showed how they believed, along with foreign policy experts, that having too close a relationship with the US jeopardised Australia's ability to engage independently in the Pacific region. They recognised the contrast between many other nations stridently calling for self-determination in an era of decolonisation while Australia secretly and willingly ceded sovereignty to the US for military purposes. This position followed the tradition of WILPF asserting that Australia should engage more productively in the region, but it also illustrated a tension in their internationalist ideals. WILPF recognised that campaigning was more likely to hit its mark when the Australian Government had sovereign control over military decisions, whereas their protest would fall on deaf ears in Washington. Second, WILPF was concerned that both governments were attempting to categorise the installations as civilian-focused initiatives when they were in fact an insidious extension of militarism.

To WILPF, the secrecy surrounding the establishment of the bases, and the insistence that the Omega VLF system was not for military purposes, were attempts to subvert the democratic process and allow military hardware to be built without proper endorsement by parliament or oversight from the public. These new bases and VLF systems were central to Western military communication and control, as was the satellite SIGINT information collected at Pine Gap. This kind of technology ultimately made weapons more accurate. The support lent by such facilities for space based reconnaissance, so-called 'national technical means', also helped 'the verification of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) constraints on strategic offensive nuclear forces, and other arms control agreements', a point that emerged as a rationale for the bases.¹⁷⁵ Later evolution of global positioning systems (GPS), brought the world closer into line with ideals of international humanitarian law because precision diminished the extent of civilian casualties. Yet WILPF believed such technology enabled weaponry that lowered the threshold for when states were prepared to resort to force. The organisation remained committed to complete disarmament.

174 'NO TO OMEGA: An Open Letter to the Prime Minister', *The Australian*, 17 August 1973.

175 Ball, *Pine Gap*, 2.

Finally, and most fearfully, WILPF saw the increasing presence of the US in Australia as connected to the threat of nuclear war. The pamphlet noted how 'it seems that the umbrella of American security bears a frightening resemblance to a mushroom cloud.'¹⁷⁶ Campaigning against the presence of US military bases in Australia during the Cold War was inextricably linked to the fear of the atomic bomb. The women feared not only that nuclear war was possible, with a necessarily devastating impact on the world, but that Australia would also be involved more deeply as a consequence of its integration if such a war ever eventuated. The prospect was something they could not stay silent about.

The increasing prevalence of military bases around the world became a focal point for the international women's movement and other anti-nuclear activists. By the 1980s a number of women's peace camps had been set up around the world to make a statement about the uncertainty and fear of nuclear weapons.¹⁷⁷ The most famous and sustained of the camps was Greenham Common in Berkshire UK. This protest was in response to a decision by the UK parliament to allow the US to base nuclear cruise missiles at the Royal Air Force base.¹⁷⁸ The peace camp started in 1981 and though it began with only a small number of women marching from Cardiff, it continued for 19 years with hundreds of women involved at various times. UK WILPF members were actively engaged, though not the lead organisers, and it motivated them to create the 'Stop The Arms Race' campaign.¹⁷⁹

The Greenham Common started as a mixed-gender group, but after frustrations that men were doing all the public talking, it became a women-only camp from 1982.¹⁸⁰ Gender, as a result, subsequently became a defining part of the message. Scholars who have written about the peace camp movement in the 1980s note that a major rhetorical strategy was to claim that 'women were acting as guardians of future generations of children, appealing to a maternal function and maternalist feminism.'¹⁸¹ The international women's peace movement showed solidarity to the women at the peace camp: the Australian section acknowledged their support in

176 *American Bases in Australia: Nuclear Target*, WILPF SA Branch, 1971, NLA, 14.

177 Cynthia Cockburn, *From Where We Stand: War, Women's Activism and Feminist Analysis* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 174, doi.org/10.5040/9781350220287.

178 Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, 76.

179 Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 229.

180 Cockburn, *From Where We Stand*, 174.

181 Alison Bartlett, 'Feminist Protest and Maternity at Pine Gap Women's Peace Camp, Australia 1983', *Women's Studies International Forum* 34, no. 1 (January 2011): 33, doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2010.10.002.

May 1983 reporting that ‘most branches joined other women’s groups in actions expressing solidarity with the women of Greenham Common.’¹⁸² This rhetoric and the momentum for action flowed into the organising of a peace camp at Pine Gap in Australia in 1983.

The Pine Gap Peace Camp was organised by a coalition of women’s groups that took the name Women for Survival. In November 1983 on Remembrance Day, almost 800 women converged at the base, which ‘caught the nation’s attention through the spectacle of the hundreds of women in the desert’.¹⁸³ This protest drew direct inspiration from the Greenham Common peace camp in the UK, once again illustrating the international collaboration of the protest against nuclear weapons. Messages of support were sent to and from both camps, and a sign was put on the fence at Pine Gap with the words ‘Greenham Women Are Everywhere’.¹⁸⁴



Margaret Bearlin, Australian WILPF member, in a Russian fur hat, written on the back ‘it was very cold’, at Encirclement of Greenham Common, England, 12 December 1982.

Source: Photo courtesy of Margaret Bearlin.

182 Australian Section report, ‘22nd International Congress of WILPF “Women Save the World”, Sweden 1983, accessed through Sklar and Dublin, eds, *Women and Social Movements*. 42.

183 Bartlett, ‘Feminist Protest and Maternity at Pine Gap Women’s Peace Camp, Australia 1983’, 31. See also Megg Kelham, ‘War and Peace: A Case of Global Need, National Unity and Local Dissent? A Closer Look at Australia’s Greenham Common’, *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 19 (2013): 76–90.

184 Bartlett, ‘Feminist Protest and Maternity at Pine Gap Women’s Peace Camp, Australia 1983’, 32.

WILPF women in Australia supported the Women for Survival group. Member Yvonne Cunningham attended the protest and was arrested along with 110 other women for breaching the base grounds. Cunningham wrote about the experience for WILPF's international journal, *Pax et Libertas*.¹⁸⁵ As part of the messaging of the protest, she defined herself as a mother protesting to protect the future.

I am the mother of Justine, Martin and Elizabeth. At 40 I felt the growing of a deep sense of foreboding for the future of our planet. Pine Gap (Australia) Peace Camp gave me the opportunity to physically express my abhorrence to the nuclear and military madness.¹⁸⁶

Cunningham drove to Alice Springs with five other women and in her report, she detailed the 'demoralising conditions' that the women arrested experienced at the hands of the police. Most of the 111 women gave a false name, 'Karen Silkwood', and were harshly treated for their failure to comply with procedure.¹⁸⁷ Deeply affected by the experience, Cunningham later wrote: 'Pine Gap and Alice Springs exemplify for me the multitude of injustices that plague our society. Racism, sexism, violence and militarism are all bedfellows'.¹⁸⁸ The Pine Gap Peace Camp lasted only two weeks, but has become a highly symbolic event in the history of the Australian women's peace movement. As with many of their previous engagements in public protest, WILPF participated and supported, but were not solely organising the event. Their commitment to long-term education and understanding root causes of conflict meant they continued to campaign on these issues long after the peace camp packed up, and, indeed, well after superpower arsenals were stood down from a near instantaneous posture for attack.

The fear of nuclear war from the 1950s onwards impressed new urgency on women involved with WILPF. This reinvigorated their activism; the campaigns against the arms race became a way for women to avoid feeling helpless and to try to make a difference. The new branch established in Sydney saw the membership grow and these women helped to create more

185 Yvonne Cunningham, 'Peace Camps Proliferate ... What I Found at Pine Gap', *Pax et Libertas* 49, no. 2 (June 1984): 10.

186 Cunningham, 'Peace Camps Proliferate ... What I Found at Pine Gap', 10.

187 Karen Silkwood was an American chemical technician and labour union activist who died in mysterious circumstances in 1974 after raising concerns about health and safety of workers at a nuclear factory. The use of her name highlights again the transnational nature of the protest against nuclear weapons. Cunningham, 'Peace Camps Proliferate ... What I Found at Pine Gap', 10.

188 Cunningham, 'Peace Camps Proliferate ... What I Found at Pine Gap', 10.

official national branch structures that professionalised Australian WILPF in line with the international branch and their guidelines. In their campaigns against the bomb testing by the British at Emu Field and Maralinga on mainland Australia, and by the French in the Pacific, WILPF often highlighted their roles as the guardians of children whose futures were being placed at risk by nuclear testing, by constant militarisation and, ultimately, by the potential for nuclear war itself.

The campaign against testing on the Australian mainland raised concerns about the treatment of Indigenous communities and their land, which continued WILPF's involvement in campaigns for Indigenous rights. Taking up the fight against the French testing continued WILPF's focus on regional politics. Yet, this 'Cold War' era stretched over decades, and WILPF soon realised that any protest against the threat of nuclear war brought them under suspicion of being 'communist sympathisers'. To remain politically neutral, WILPF tried not to be associated with either communism or capitalism, and they hesitated when criticising or discussing the excesses of the US capitalist system. Coming to terms with this scrutiny and reflecting on the purpose of their protest had a lasting impact on the organisation.



Irene Greenwood's 85th birthday at Cockburn Sound women's peace camp 1983 in Western Australia.

Source: Photo courtesy of Margaret Bearlin, photographer.

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