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## The anti-Vietnam War movement and women's liberation

One day in 1965, 56-year-old Margaret Holmes hurried towards North Head in Sydney Harbour, where a huge crowd had gathered to mark the departure of a troop ship setting sail for Vietnam. She was accompanied by a small group of middle-aged women carrying a large banner between them. Eventually, when they finally reached the top, the women found themselves standing above a 'more or less just open cliff'. As Holmes later recalled, 'they didn't have fences and things like they have now'.<sup>1</sup> Preparing to unfurl a banner, the women assured onlookers they were simply farewelling the troops as they made their way to the edge and flung the banner down. Luck was not on their side, however, and the banner became caught on a bush. 'I hung on to my young daughter', Holmes would later recall, 'and leant over with my leg and kicked this jolly bush and kicked at the wood—really, I was mad!—and finally it loosened itself and fell right down'.<sup>2</sup> The banner, positioned to be seen by those on the departing troop ship, offered one final message to the departing soldiers: 'YOU GO TO AN UNJUST WAR'.

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1 Margaret Holmes, quoted in Siobhan McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts: Australian Women and the Vietnam War* (Sydney: Doubleday, 1993), 211.

2 Holmes, quoted in McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts*, 211.

On her way home, Holmes contacted the media. ‘Oh, a terrible thing has just been done on North Head’, she exclaimed, in a manoeuvre that only helped garner further publicity for her daring action. With her activism, Holmes regularly baffled people who assumed she was a well-to-do middle-aged Christian woman. When she went to collect the banner and found an angry group about to tear it down, she ‘helpfully directed them to the spot and urged them to cut it, which they did—whereupon Margaret rolled it up, hollered “Thank you” and left’.<sup>3</sup>

During the 1960s, the roles and expectations of protesters were fluid and demonstrations with only a small numbers of participants could still gain widespread publicity within the changing media landscape.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in 1965, Holmes made front page news for staging an action where six women held a banner challenging Dr Hugh Gough, the Anglican Primate of Australia, on his views on Vietnam.<sup>5</sup> Such was the intensity of the public reaction to the Vietnam War that it incited individuals to radical action in spite of the associated risks.

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The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1965 as the nation became embroiled in another war. In 1962 Australia followed the US in committing advisers to the conflict in Vietnam. By 1965 Australia’s involvement had escalated alongside the US, which had by then committed 200,000 troops. Conscription was introduced in 1964 without a national plebiscite, a decision which only exacerbated social and political opposition to the war. The introduction of conscription in Australia stirred the dormant Australian peace movement into action. WILPF’s membership increased as women were politicised by anti-war campaigns. They used newspaper advertising and letter writing to influence public opinion, while their vigilance in documenting and understanding the conflict in Vietnam saw them become one of the first organisations to denounce Australia’s involvement.

3 Holmes, quoted in McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts*, 211.

4 Sean Scalmer, *Dissent Events: Protest, the Media and the Political Gimmick in Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002), 43.

5 ‘Protests to Dr Gough’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 November 1965, 1.



**Celebration of 50th anniversary of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 28 April, 1965.**

Left to right: Lorraine Moseley, Wendy Wheelwright, Janet Finlay, Elspeth Christiansen, Margaret Holmes, Betty Gale, Betty Phillips.

Source: Compiled by Margaret Holmes, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (NSW Branch) [PXB 726].

The Vietnam War was a conflict complicated by Cold War tensions in an era of rapid decolonisation. Charges of 'communist sympathies' were rife, and different political alignments caused intense debate within the movement. The Australian peace movement was made up of a constellation of groups and organisations that represented a broad cross-section of views relating to peace. WILPF remained opposed to all violence and war, and was criticised within the movement for being too moderate. Working within a reinvigorated peace movement involved cooperation with groups that had different perspectives, some of whom opposed the Vietnam War but not necessarily all war. Others opposed conscription but supported the intervention. The broader peace movement included the New Left, student groups, and other women-focused groups such as Save Our Sons (SOS) and Women for Peace (WFP).

For WILPF, the debate about how best to articulate dissent and with whom to work was revived. Insistent on producing 'well considered and thoroughly investigated' work, WILPF wanted to present themselves as 'sensible' and

'not revolutionary'.<sup>6</sup> As a consequence of their quest for moderation and stance in favour of nonviolence, they did not support the National Liberation Front, or Viet Cong, the underground South Vietnamese communist force that was supported by some radical groups. Nevertheless, WILPF still had to find ways to work alongside the other groups, despite some viewing WILPF as old-fashioned and overly bureaucratic.<sup>7</sup> Added to this was pressure from Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) surveillance that disrupted everyday activities.

In direct response to the sexism many women experienced within the anti-war movement, women on university campuses began organising the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) from 1969. This new enthusiasm for women's liberation caused a paradigm shift in thinking about women's oppression and challenged the maternalist campaign strategies that WILPF had historically used. WILPF found this confronting and initially had difficulty engaging with new groups involved in the WLM. Holmes recalled their efforts as seeming 'respectable' and distinct from the new generation of radicals 'so that people wouldn't be able to say that the war was only opposed by a ratbag lot of youngsters'.<sup>8</sup> After prioritising involvement with the UN Decade for Women 1975–1985, which required collaboration with other non-government organisations (NGOs), international civil servants, national governments and other feminist groups, WILPF's ideology began to change. This chapter will detail WILPF Australia's involvement in anti-Vietnam War protests, as well as their subsequent transformation after the explosion of feminist activism from the WLM led them to adopt a new language that helped to adapt and renew their radical critique of gender relations and war.

Because of the wider mobilisation of peace activism during the Vietnam War, there has been a large amount of historical scholarship on the peace movement of the 1960s and early 1970s. With widespread opposition to the conflict, pacifists, church groups, political organisations, students and scholars all combined their efforts to end the war.<sup>9</sup> Much of the scholarship published has come from former participants in the movement. Historian

6 Agnes Stapledon, 'Head of British Peace League: Left Sydney 40 Years Ago', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 November 1966.

7 Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 9.

8 Margaret Holmes, 'Proud to be a Proper Peacenik', *The Australian*, 18 July 1990, 3.

9 Kenneth Maddock, 'Opposing the War in Vietnam—The Australian Experience', in *Vietnam and the Antiwar Movement: An International Perspective*, ed. John Dumbrell (Aldershot, Hants, England; Brookfield, USA: Avebury, 1989), 142.

Ann Curthoys published widely about the complexities of writing history as a past participant in the events.<sup>10</sup> She analysed how memory of the events posed a danger of 'self-indulgence' when writing and that it was crucial to 'counteract a tendency to practise selective amnesia, to construct unthinkingly an account of ourselves which is pleasing and comforting'.<sup>11</sup> Curthoys observed in 1992 that 'the dominance by men of the anti-war movement itself seems, so far, to have been reproduced in subsequent historical reconstructions of it'.<sup>12</sup> Histories published by former activists such as Gregory Clark, Michael Hamel-Green and Ralph Summy highlight various aspects of the movement in Australia, such as conscription, the role of students, and the relationship to the longer history of the peace movement.<sup>13</sup> This is important work but as none of these authors were a part of WILPF, they have failed to offer a detailed account of women's contributions. Other works written at the time completely ignored WILPF.<sup>14</sup>

Ann-Mari Jordens and Curthoys have attempted to 'correct the historical impression that the anti-war movement was largely a youth and student movement' by emphasising the role of groups such as WILPF and SOS, the latter a predominantly women's organisation that has recently attracted a detailed study by Carolyn Collins.<sup>15</sup> Michelle Cavanagh and Siobhan

10 Ann Curthoys, 'History and Reminiscence: Writing About the Anti-Vietnam-War Movement', *Australian Feminist Studies* 7, no. 16 (December 1992): 116–36, doi.org/10.1080/08164649.1992.9946666; Ann Curthoys, 'Mobilising Dissent: The Later Stages of Protest', in *Vietnam: Remembered*, ed. Gregory Pemberton (Sydney: Weldon Publishing, 1990): 138–63; Ann Curthoys, '"Vietnam": Public Memory of an Anti-War Movement', in *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994): 113–33; Ann Curthoys, 'The Anti-War Movements', in *Vietnam: War, Myth, and Memory: Comparative Perspectives on Australia's War in Vietnam*, ed. Jeffrey Grey and Jeff Doyle (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1992): 81–107; Ann Curthoys, interviewed in Greg Langley, *A Decade of Dissent: Vietnam and the Conflict on the Australian Homefront* (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 13.

11 Curthoys, 'The Anti-War Movements', in Grey and Doyle, *Vietnam*, 81.

12 Curthoys, 'Vietnam', in Darian-Smith and Hamilton, *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia*, 116.

13 Gregory Clark, 'Vietnam, China and the Foreign Affairs Debate in Australia: A Personal Account' and Michael Hamel-Green, 'The Resisters: A History of the Anti-Conscription Movement', both in *Australia's Vietnam: Australia in the Second Indo-China War*, ed. Peter King (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1983); Ralph V Summy, 'Militancy and the Australian Peace Movement, 1960–67', *Politics* 5, no. 2 (November 1970): 148–62, doi.org/10.1080/00323267008401209.

14 For example see pamphlet: JP Forrester, *Fifteen Years of Peace Fronts* (Sydney: McHugh Printery, 1964).

15 Ann-Mari Jordens, 'Conscription and Dissent: The Genesis of Anti-War Protest', in Pemberton, *Vietnam*: 60–81; Ann Curthoys, '"Shut Up, You Bourgeois Bitch": Sexual Identity and Political Action in the Anti-Vietnam War Movement', in *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 311–41; Carolyn Collins, *Save Our Sons: Women, Dissent and Conscription During the Vietnam War* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2021).

McHugh have each given some attention to the role of WILPF in the anti-war movement. Cavanagh published a biography of WILPF activist Margaret Holmes in 2006 and McHugh's earlier *Minefields and Miniskirts* (1993) relied heavily on interviews with WILPF members to document their involvement in Vietnam protests.<sup>16</sup> These works focused largely on the Australian context of women's peace activism. This chapter contributes to this scholarship by examining the way WILPF engaged in the anti-war campaigns, not just transnationally by adopting some of the techniques of American campaigns, but internationally. WILPF used their international networks to motivate their engagement and directed their energy towards serving as a 'watchdog' of national policy for the international headquarters of WILPF.

## Early interest in the Vietnam War

After decades of uncertainty before and during World War II, politicians placed great emphasis on security and prosperity in the postwar years.<sup>17</sup> A long economic boom increased production of goods and services, allowing most Australian families to improve their standard of living and access to consumer goods. Suburbs expanded around major cities, and the population grew from 7.5 million in 1945 to 11.5 million by 1965, with a significant increase in home ownership.<sup>18</sup> Liberal Party leader Robert Menzies, serving from 1949 to 1966, became Australia's longest-serving prime minister. His retirement and the replacement of Opposition Leader Arthur Calwell with Gough Whitlam in 1967 became a symbol of change.<sup>19</sup> The increased accessibility of university education led to a larger population of students, many of whom were interested in challenging the status quo. According to the historian Marilyn Lake: 'convention and security had become suffocating; youth demanded its day'.<sup>20</sup>

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16 Michelle Cavanagh, *Margaret Holmes: The Life and Times of an Australian Peace Campaigner* (Sydney: New Holland, 2006); McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts*.

17 PG Edwards, *A Nation at War: Australian Politics, Society and Diplomacy During the Vietnam War 1965–1975* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1997), 3.

18 Edwards, *A Nation at War*, 11.

19 Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Marian Quartly, and Ann McGrath, *Creating a Nation* (Ringwood, Vic: McPhee Gribble, 1994), 299.

20 Grimshaw et al., *Creating a Nation*, 299.

It was during this time of transition that Australia's involvement in Vietnam was announced. At first there was little reaction. While the Australian Labor Party (ALP) was steadfastly opposed to conscription for overseas military service, branches were divided over questions of communism and foreign policy. Various peace conferences in the 1950s and the early 1960s saw the creation of the Association for International Cooperation and Disarmament (AICD), a group WILPF worked closely with. WILPF member Phyllis Latona became the AICD vice-president.<sup>21</sup> However, the AICD and other groups were more concerned with immediate crises relating to nuclear weapons and were slow to grasp the significance of Australia's entry into Vietnam. It was not until Menzies announced the introduction of conscription in late 1964 that the peace movement moved into full swing and began campaigning specifically around the issue of Vietnam.

WILPF reacted earlier to Australia's involvement in Vietnam because of their attention to government policy, and because their international network was already well established. The women of WILPF received their information about the situation in Vietnam from international sources and personal travel experiences. Correspondence between the Australian section and the international headquarters show how eager they were to receive up-to-date reports and articles. This helped them gain a better picture of international events and ensured that their knowledge was not dependent on the Australian press or politicians. Airmail was not cheap for the small budgets of the branches, but it was prioritised as accurate and timely information gave their organisation an informed platform from which to campaign and meant that information would arrive 'while the news is hot'—within days rather than months.<sup>22</sup>

The contact between branches of the organisation, both in Australia and with the headquarters overseas, proved to be WILPF's great strength. Many members subscribed to international papers such as the French newspaper *Le Monde* which had an anti-war editorial position. The national branch of WILPF also received the US pacifist publication *Four Lights*.<sup>23</sup> International information was integral to WILPF's understanding of the severity of the conflict in the early 1960s. Most of their fellow Australians gave little attention to the developments in Vietnam, even as Australia

21 Curthoys, 'Shut Up, You Bourgeois Bitch', in Damousi and Lake, *Gender and War*, 319.

22 Tapper to Hilda Vroland, 5 June 1961, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

23 Holmes interviewed in McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts*, 204. Moesley to Dorothy Hutchinson, 8 April 1967, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

gave token support to the French struggle against nationalist forces in the 1950s.<sup>24</sup> Believing that conflict in Vietnam had the potential to erupt into a major war, WILPF in Australia responded to reports of the escalation of Western intervention. As early as 1961 they were expressing concern about US involvement. Secretary Hilda Vroland, sister-in-law of Anna, wrote to WILPF headquarters in Geneva after news that President Kennedy was considering sending additional 'military advisers' to Vietnam: 'We want to add the voice of our Section to any protest you are making or will be making.'<sup>25</sup>

By 1962 Australia had committed to the conflict by sending 30 'advisers', but again this gained little attention from the wider public.<sup>26</sup> The following year the Australian section received reports from Dr Gertrud Woker, from the University of Berne in Switzerland and chairman of the WILPF Committee Against Scientific Warfare, detailing information about defoliants used in conflict zones in Vietnam that was not being reported on widely. WILPF International passed an emergency resolution and wrote to the International Red Cross pleading with them to take action and investigate.<sup>27</sup> Before other protest groups had formed, WILPF members were meeting with government officials to discuss Vietnam and express their concerns over the use of chemical weapons. They argued the conflict was not about a 'communist threat' but rather was a civil war, a position that they came to after studying the history of the country and its decolonisation struggle.<sup>28</sup> They continued to call for an international investigation into the use of chemicals, referred to by the government as simply 'commercial weed-killers', and called for the Australian advisers to be withdrawn, even though their presence had 'passed almost unnoticed' by the wider public.<sup>29</sup>

24 Edwards, *A Nation at War*, 24.

25 Hilda Vroland to Mrs Olmsted Geneva office, 18 November 1961, series III reel 55, 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.

26 Jordens, 'Conscription and Dissent', in Pemberton, *Vietnam*, 62.

27 Gertrud Woker to the International Red Cross, 12 June 1963, WILPF papers MLMSS 5395/Box 02, State Library of New South Wales (SLNSW).

28 '1964–65 NSW WILPF Annual report', MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW. Holmes corresponded and met with assistant secretary Mr J Waller from the Department of External Affairs, see Holmes to Mr Waller, 16 August 1963, WILPF papers MLMSS 5395/Box 02 SLNSW and Mr Waller to Holmes, 30 August 1963, MLMSS 5395/Box 02 SLNSW.

29 Holmes to Sir Garfield Barwick, 23 August, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.



Australian WILPF prepared a dossier of their information in July 1964 to send to parliamentarians. Despairing at the lack of information available and the silence surrounding the issue, they felt an 'urgency to take positive action' to make the public and MPs aware of the 'true situation'.<sup>30</sup> The material was sent to the politicians before debate intensified in federal parliament and WILPF was gratified that the Labor opposition used their material in debates. WILPF noted how 'it was thought by many—including the MPs who used our material—that the WILPF was the only source of reliable and valuable information.'<sup>31</sup> Soon more people in the peace movement began to take notice of the conflict. After the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964, which occurred just days before Hiroshima Day, a day of remembrance observed by the peace movement, anti-war groups in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane turned their attention to Vietnam. Labor MP Jim Cairns spoke to a large crowd in Melbourne about the incident and echoed many of the concerns WILPF had voiced. Cairns was increasingly recognised as a leader in the anti-Vietnam War protests after this event and always responded positively to WILPF's letter writing.<sup>32</sup>

On 11 August 1964, the Minister for External Affairs, Paul Hasluck, gave a speech to the House of Representatives supporting the notionally retaliatory action by the US. He claimed :

there is no current alternative to the effort of assisting in South Vietnam to preserve its independence and there is no current alternative to using force as necessary to check the southward thrust of militant Asian Communism.<sup>33</sup>

This announcement spurred WILPF to action and four days later the Australian section paid for an advertisement in the *Australian*. In bold font they asked: 'Is there a current alternative to force in Asia? Yes Mr. Hasluck there is!'<sup>34</sup> They called the US presence 'provocative' and upheld the Vietnamese people's right to self-determination.<sup>35</sup> The advertisement asked people who supported their view to cut it from the paper, add their name

30 '1964–65 NSW WILPF Annual report', MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.

31 '1964–65 NSW WILPF Annual report', MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.

32 Paul Strangio, *Keeper of the Faith: A Biography of Jim Cairns* (Carlton South, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 146; Edwards, *A Nation at War*, 25.

33 Paul Hasluck, 'International Affairs—Ministerial Statement', *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD)*, House of Representatives, 11 August 1964, 21.

34 'Is There a Current Alternative to Force in Asia? Yes Mr Hasluck There Is!', *The Australian*, 15 August 1964.

35 'Is There a Current Alternative to Force in Asia? Yes Mr Hasluck There Is!', *The Australian*, 15 August 1964.

and send it to the minister as a protest against the sentiment expressed in his speech. The office received over 200 copies and Hasluck decided to respond to each one, against the advice of the department, because he felt:

the cheapest and most effective propaganda is bought with a fivepenny stamp. A large percentage of people who write are not firm in their views and many of them are 'suckers' for organised anti-Western campaigners and a prompt and friendly letter often converts them.<sup>36</sup>

WILPF also received many letters of support and financial contributions for future advertisements, with one correspondent noting: 'I found the lead given by you to be very inspiring'.<sup>37</sup> They regarded this protest as one of their great successes.

After these public protests, the Congress for International Cooperation and Disarmament (CICD, later AICD) held its peace conference in Sydney in October 1964. WILPF sponsored the event along with other organisations, and Holmes served as a member of the preparatory committee.<sup>38</sup> Betty Gale, a member of WILPF, gave the only talk at the conference on Vietnam. The rest of the papers given by activists focused on nuclear disarmament and other areas of conflict such as Indonesia and Malaysia.<sup>39</sup> Gale had visited Vietnam and other countries in South East Asia and she drew on this experience for her talk.<sup>40</sup> Just a few weeks later, on 10 November, Menzies announced the introduction of 'selective conscription' that included overseas service as well as substantial increases to the defence budget.<sup>41</sup> This announcement was not immediately linked with Vietnam, as Menzies referred to Indonesia's 'Confrontation' of the new state of Malaysia and described the pressures of 'cold war and anti-insurgency tasks' on the current force.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless this decision mobilised other sections of the pacifist community who opposed conscription, though not necessarily war,

36 Edwards, *A Nation at War*, 25.

37 F Davis, to WILPF NSW, 17 August 1964, MLMSS 5395/Box 02 SLNSW.

38 Letter about CICD Preparatory Committee attempting to meet with the Prime Minister, and the PM requesting brief information about who they were, 15 May 1964, 'Holmes, Margaret Joan Volume 1' (Canberra, 1964 1957), A6119, 3362, National Archives of Australia (NAA).

39 Jordens, 'Conscription and Dissent', in Pemberton, *Vietnam*, 62. Curthoys, 'Shut Up, You Bourgeois Bitch', in Damousi and Lake, *Gender and War*, 318.

40 B Gale, 'Summary of paper presented by Mrs. B. Gale at Seminar on 26 October on Australia's Relations with Asia', Australian Congress for International Cooperation and Disarmament, Box 49, Series 3/51 CIDC Collection Melbourne University Archives.

41 John Murphy, *Harvest of Fear: A History of Australia's Vietnam War* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 114.

42 Murphy, *Harvest of Fear*, 114.

and reminded Australians of the anger and division around conscription dating back to World War I. The ALP strenuously opposed conscription despite being more reserved in debates about Australia's involvement in Cold War era conflicts.<sup>43</sup> The introduction of conscription energised the peace movement and significantly increased opposition to the war in Vietnam.

## WILPF, Women for Peace and Save Our Sons

Until the WILPF advertisement in the *Australian*, the Australian section's protests against the Vietnam War mainly consisted of letters to members of parliament and international agencies, talks, conferences and study groups among like-minded sympathisers, and research to obtain more information about the conflict. These were activities that did not generally attract the attention of the press. When it was clear that public opinion was changing, especially on the issue of conscription, WILPF had to decide if it wanted to act as a protest group or remain a 'watchdog', sending letters and hosting meetings but refraining from demonstrations or direct action. Dorothy Bendick, who had been prominent in protest against French nuclear testing, firmly advocated for WILPF to become an organisation for action. She wrote to Holmes after WILPF's advertisement, full of excitement at the fact that many of the letters to the editor supported WILPF's position, exclaiming that WILPF's 'moment in history has arrived. Destiny has presented us with the opportunity to step forward and lead.'<sup>44</sup> Bendick was encouraged by WILPF's prominence in being among the first to agitate on Vietnam.

But not everyone wanted to be part of the protest. Lorraine Moseley, honorary secretary of the NSW branch, believed that WILPF should focus instead on mediation and 'thoughtful negotiation' rather than aggravating tensions through protest. She proudly claimed during her tenure as secretary that she never once sent a 'letter of protest' because 'certain members of the WILPF are only too eager, and too emotionally moved to do anything but condemn'.<sup>45</sup> Moseley was convinced that WILPF's history expressed a conciliatory tradition and their work should be for mediation, though she acknowledged that 'this often makes some of our members impatient ... because they want to take a stand, but I am convinced this is not how the WILPF has worked over the last 50 years.'<sup>46</sup>

43 Murphy, *Harvest of Fear*, 115.

44 Bendick to Holmes, 17 August 1964, MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.

45 Moseley to Marjorie Spencer, 10 March 1965, MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.

46 Moseley to Marjorie Spencer, 10 March 1965, MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.



**Margaret Holmes, Vigil for Peace in Vietnam, Wynyard, Sydney, 12 April 1967.**

Source: Item 197: Tribune negatives including a Roland Wakelin art exhibition and Vigil for Peace in Vietnam, Wynyard, Sydney, April 1967 (12 April 1967) / Call Number ON 161/Item 197 (Image 32 of 36) Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales and Courtesy SEARCH Foundation. See Appendix for a short biography of Margaret Holmes.

Debates over whether WILPF would be more effective adhering to traditional ideas of how women should behave in public, or whether it should challenge them, caused anxiety among the membership. WILPF women's views did not represent the majority, and research showed that women's attitudes to the Vietnam War in the early 1960s were not significantly different from those of men.<sup>47</sup> Though women's participation in public life was rapidly increasing, women were still received with suspicion and subjected to criticism about their behaviour when showing passion or interest.<sup>48</sup> In a public meeting addressed by Menzies in 1964, a young woman who expressed her opposition to government policy was described by the *Sydney Morning Herald* as 'hysterical'.<sup>49</sup>

47 Jordens, 'Conscription and Dissent', in Pemberton, *Vietnam*, 76.

48 Some women were not so quiescent, but mainstream Australia still responded anxiously to passionate and outspoken women. See Grimshaw et al., *Creating a Nation*, 300.

49 'Women in Black Hoods Fail to Shake Menzies At Poll Rally', in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 November 1964.

In 1964 WILPF's national branch sent a questionnaire to members asking: 'do you think the WILPF should take part in public demonstrations?' and 'would you be willing to take part yourself in a vigil, march, or deputation to Canberra?'<sup>50</sup> The survey suggested that WILPF understood many of the women involved in WILPF were not willing to engage in any public protest that might compromise their 'respectability'. Holmes envisaged a branch that would appeal to 'the professional women, wives of businessmen, who also long for peace but steer clear of the usual peace organisations.'<sup>51</sup> This attitude reinforced the gendered assumptions about what was considered appropriate for women in public life and what women were capable of. The NSW branch turned down an invitation to visit Vietnam by the Federated Trade Unions of Vietnam after Gale's talk at the CICD conference as

it was decided a WILPF delegate would be faced with many difficulties, not the least, being a woman. It was also felt trade union representatives would carry a greater impact and be representative of a much larger and more influential group in the community.<sup>52</sup>

Many of the women involved were middle-aged and had personal experience of the two world wars. Moseley's husband was blinded in World War I, which no doubt motivated her involvement against war and violence. My husband 'has never seen his two children', she wrote in a letter to the Returned Servicemen's League. 'I want them to grow up being taught to love their fellow-men—not hate them—so that they will help create a better world.'<sup>53</sup> The women's movement in Australia during the 1950s and 1960s was also affected by Cold War tensions as 'feminism was increasingly identified with subversive forces, threatening the stability of family and community'.<sup>54</sup> Feminist agendas were not popular in the mainstream press, which partly explains why Holmes was so prescriptive about the type of women WILPF should aim to recruit. Nonetheless Gertrud Baer explicitly stated in 1962 that in spite of difficulties for the movement caused by global tensions, she hoped that WILPF women would own the feminist label. Acknowledging that even WILPF members 'pretend that equality has been acquired' and 'even asseverate that they are not "feminists"', she went on to describe her

50 'Special Notice Sent to Branch Members', c1964, MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.

51 Holmes to Tapper WILPF Geneva, 18 March 1959, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

52 'NSW WILPF Executive Minutes', 4 November 1964, MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.

53 Moseley to Returned Servicemen's League, 16 July 1964, MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.

54 Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 204.

pride at having a 'militant feminist' mother and declared herself 'a feminist as long as I can remember'.<sup>55</sup> Baer saw feminism as essential to WILPF's core purpose, noting that 'only if we can speak for the millions of women still inarticulate are we women entitled to demand from and bear influence upon, those in power at home and at the United Nations'.<sup>56</sup>

In NSW, however, there was an impression that the organisation 'drew most of its membership from Sydney's well-to-do North Shore'.<sup>57</sup> Their concern about presentation meant that their group remained small while other groups were created around them.<sup>58</sup> Many members wanted to make a nonviolent but visible stand. Among them was Ann Michaelis, a psychologist, who felt constrained by the excessive caution of other WILPF NSW members. She was a WILPF representative to the AICD and noted that instead of strictly representing WILPF she 'represented what [she] thought needed to be done for the people of Vietnam'.<sup>59</sup> She felt it was 'ridiculous' to be overly concerned with 'offending anyone' or being thought of as a communist.<sup>60</sup>

For women such as Michealis and Bendick who wanted to demonstrate their opposition to war more actively, a new 'WILPF inspired' organisation was created called Women for Peace (WFP).<sup>61</sup> WFP had many WILPF members and even held organising meetings at Holmes' house. Holmes argued that WFP should dissolve and work through WILPF but the group decided against this course.<sup>62</sup> It saw itself as a movement rather than an organisation, with 'no dues, no memberships, no board, no officers. Each community's women are organised as much or as little as they like'.<sup>63</sup> They modelled themselves on the group Women Strike for Peace (WSP) in the US, sharing solidarity with their concept of a women's strike 'against the unprecedented threat to life from a nuclear holocaust' which held major

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55 Gertrud Baer, report on Commission on the Status of Women, '15th International Congress of WILPF' California 1962, accessed through database edited by Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, *Women and Social Movements, International—1840 to Present*, 53.

56 Baer, '15th International Congress of WILPF', 53.

57 Curthoys, 'Shut Up, You Bourgeois Bitch', in Damousi and Lake, *Gender and War*, 322.

58 Curthoys, 'Shut Up, You Bourgeois Bitch', in Damousi and Lake, *Gender and War*, 322.

59 McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts*, 250.

60 McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts*, 250.

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

62 'Holmes, Margaret Joan Volume 1' (Canberra, 1964 1957), A6119, 3362, NAA. This ASIO file showed that meetings were held at Holmes' house.

63 'Women Strike for Peace in Victoria', August 1963, Box 1723/16, Papers, WILPF, MS 9377, SLV.

rallies in US cities with mothers and children in strollers in 1961.<sup>64</sup> The WSP in the US, not unlike WFP in Australia, was created in response to growing discontent with WILPF's hierarchical structure. In Australia the main membership of WFP were WILPF members who wanted a way around WILPF's resistance to protest. It gave active members 'interested in taking part in demonstrations' a forum to engage without upsetting those WILPF members who felt the organisation should remain 'respectable' and focused on international advocacy at the UN.<sup>65</sup>

The WFP's first actions were the 'women in mourning' protests in November 1964 which featured over 40 women wearing black veils in a silent but visually powerful statement against conscription.<sup>66</sup> First protesting at a campaign speech by Menzies in Hornsby on Sydney's North Shore, the women stood during his talk and filed out of the room, causing uproar at the meeting.<sup>67</sup> Advertisements placed in local papers such as the *North Shore Times* explained that the women were in mourning for 'the youths who will be trained to kill their brother man' and 'for the loss of the individual's right to decide how best to serve his country'.<sup>68</sup> They continued the metaphor at actions in shopping centres where they also handed out leaflets to the public. This was the first recorded public opposition by Australian women to the reintroduction of conscription.<sup>69</sup>

Conscription motivated many other groups to oppose the militarisation of Australian society. Another group comprising mostly married middle-aged women, Save Our Sons, drew a large following after its creation in 1965. Founded by Joyce Golgerth and Noreen Hewett from the Union of Australian Women (UAW) in Sydney, the non-party affiliated organisation opposed conscription but did not have any official policy on the war.<sup>70</sup> Critics accused the organisation of being a self-interested group of mothers who were over-protective of their own sons. Indeed, some members did drop out of the movement once their sons were not directly threatened.<sup>71</sup>

64 'Women Strike for Peace in Victoria', August 1963, Box 1723/16, Papers, WILPF, MS 9377, SLV. See also 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), 202; Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, x.

65 '1964-65 NSW WILPF Annual report', MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.

66 '1964-65 NSW WILPF Annual report', MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.

67 'Women in Black Hoods Fail to Shake Menzies At Poll Rally', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 November 1964.

68 'We are Women in Mourning', *North Shore Times*, 2 December 1964.

69 Collins, *Save Our Sons*, 2.

70 Jordens, 'Conscription and Dissent', in Pemberton, *Vietnam*, 79.

71 McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts*, 208.



However, for many of the women who joined, 'sons' was a figurative term that conveyed their opposition to any individual forced into combat. Women gained experience and confidence from the movement which encouraged their wider participation in political activity.<sup>72</sup> SOS groups formed in Newcastle, Wollongong, Adelaide, Perth, Townsville and Melbourne, and although they collaborated on federal representations to parliament, each group set its own agenda.<sup>73</sup> Men were permitted to join as associates, but the leadership roles were reserved for women. Jean McLean, a member of the ALP and later a Victorian Legislative Councillor, founded the Melbourne group after hearing an address by Nola Barber who was president of the Victorian ALP Women's Central Organising Committee. The Melbourne group had a close relationship with the ALP.<sup>74</sup>



**'Mothers reject conscription': 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.

<sup>72</sup> Jordens, 'Conscription and Dissent', in Pemberton, *Vietnam*, 79; McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts*, 206.

<sup>73</sup> Collins, *Save Our Sons*, xii.

<sup>74</sup> Murphy, *Harvest of Fear*, 142. 'Jean McLean profile', The Australian Women's History Register, accessed 12 December 2016, [www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE1230b.htm](http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE1230b.htm).



Not unlike WILPF, SOS women were concerned with the way that they were depicted by the media. At their first meeting in Sydney they discussed the need to 'preserve our reputation' and to be tactically prudent in order to maintain an image of respectability and avoid 'being dismissed as militants'.<sup>75</sup> One activist of the era recalled that their strategy was a 'hats and gloves' approach: to 'infiltrate "nice" society and show them that people who really cared were opposed to the war and, as such, they weren't necessarily to be feared'.<sup>76</sup> This group was similar to the US group WSP, who saw their protest as 'feminine, not feminist', and defined their role as mothers and caregivers of society.<sup>77</sup> Sydney women were certainly aware of the work of WSP, as the US WILPF member Ava Pauling had talked about her experience of a WSP conference at a meeting arranged by WILPF when she was in Australia for the CICD 1964 conference. Her husband Linus Pauling, a well-known scientist and peace activist, was presented at the CICD as an international guest.<sup>78</sup> Amy Swerdlow, who was herself a participant in WSP from its formation in 1961, noticed that the women who joined WSP were expressing their 'sense of male betrayal of the agreement they, as women, had made with society to sacrifice their own personal interests and career goals in favour of raising the next generation'. At the same time, they 'were trying to speak to the American people in a language they believed would be understood and accepted'.<sup>79</sup>

WSP, SOS and WILPF in Australia all used maternalist arguments against nuclear warfare, conscription and the Vietnam War, even as they tried to understand and redefine the limited role 'respectable' women were expected to fulfil in public. Moseley wrote often about her motivation in joining WILPF as a mother and grandmother not wanting her 'beautiful new grandson [to] grow up in a world made ugly and terrifying because mothers and grandmothers did not try to stop it when they had the chance'.<sup>80</sup> Building on traditional ideas of feminine identity, as earlier women's rights activists had done, and emphasising the importance of women's roles as mothers, this rhetoric helped to reinforce gender roles. Such activities received criticism

75 Murphy, *Harvest of Fear*, 143.

76 Curthoys, 'Shut Up, You Bourgeois Bitch', in Damousi and Lake, *Gender and War*, 325.

77 Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, x.

78 These connections show once more the wide and diverse networks of international WILPF, connected through marriage, friendship and other means international leaders of the peace community. Ava Pauling to Moseley, 15 June 1964, MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.

79 Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace*, 235.

80 Moseley to The Editor, *Woman's Day*, 15 October 1965, MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.

from detractors who rejected their political action with accusations of: 'why aren't you at home doing the washing'.<sup>81</sup> This stereotyping was something that women in the emerging WLM reacted strongly against.

WILPF collaborated closely with SOS and other groups such as the UAW and Christian Women Concerned in organising events to protest the Vietnam War.<sup>82</sup> Both WILPF and SOS organised silent vigils and attended court proceedings for conscientious objectors. They also both referred young conscripts to WILPF member Vivienne Abraham, a lawyer and editor of *Peacemaker*, who helped give advice on their rights.<sup>83</sup> But WILPF also separated itself from SOS by focusing on their international significance, historical network and commitment to understanding the root causes of war. Honorary secretary of the NSW branch, Michaelis, wrote to the *Sydney Morning Herald* to clarify when the paper had confused and conflated the organisations explaining that 'the two organisations are quite independent, and neither is an offshoot or subsidiary of the other'.<sup>84</sup> She pointed out how SOS women were specifically opposed to conscription while WILPF recognised conscription 'as one aspect of a total situation'.<sup>85</sup>

WILPF's history was a strength that members were eager to promote as it connected their current activity to an international movement with traditions that outlived any controversy over communism. To raise awareness of this history, the NSW branch placed another paid announcement in the *North Shore Times*, reprinting the 'I Am Woman' article written by Eleanor Moore in 1916 about the conscription plebiscite during the World War I. Titled 'Women ... Think!' it explained the origin of the piece and wondered whether society had really 'progressed at all'.<sup>86</sup> WILPF women also dressed as suffragettes and paraded on a lorry singing 'we'll bring the boys back' at a demonstration on the wharves when the first conscripts were sent overseas in April 1966. It was, perhaps unconsciously, echoing a similar protest WILPF made at a May Day march in 1924, when women dressed in white and holding placards rode on the back of a 'peace lorry' decorated

81 Curthoys, 'Shut Up, You Bourgeois Bitch', in Damousi and Lake, *Gender and War*, 325.

82 Fiona Wilson, 'Women in the Anti-Vietnam War, Anti-Conscription Movement in Sydney 1964–72' (BA (Hons) thesis, University of New South Wales, 1985), 32.

83 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), 257.

84 Ann Michaelis, to the editor *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 April 1966, MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.

85 Ann Michaelis, to the editor *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 April 1966, MLMSS 5395/Box 01 SLNSW.

86 'Women ... Think!', in *North Shore Times*, 23 November 1966.

with wisteria blooms.<sup>87</sup> In 1966, however, Michaelis and Elizabeth Morrow radicalised the image by attempting to chain themselves to the gates of the dockyard where they were freed by the police using bolt cutters. They were arrested but later dismissed without charge.<sup>88</sup>

## Under surveillance: ASIO and WILPF

The women involved in WILPF suspected that their activities were being monitored and several made vocal disavowals of communist connections. Government files were kept on all those actively involved in WILPF with many containing lists of participants at meetings as well as reports on discussions and planned actions.<sup>89</sup> In certain files it is clear that the information was used by government ministers to assess whether particular protesters were communist; for example, Menzies asked for information on the CICD delegation he declined to meet. He 'requested advice on the security status of the persons named' which, when sent to him, described WILPF as 'an organisation penetrated by the Communist Party of Australia'.<sup>90</sup> It was also presumably penetrated by ASIO. The thought of being under surveillance unsettled many WILPF women who were concerned about maintaining a respectable middle-class reputation. In a later interview, Michaelis recalled that awareness of surveillance prompted members to suspect each other of being agents of ASIO and she wondered herself if Holmes was a plant.<sup>91</sup> This mirrored the events in the US, though on a smaller scale, where the WILPF section was nearly paralysed by the anti-communist paranoia of the McCarthy era.<sup>92</sup> One incident worth recounting occurred in 1966 and involved files on Michaelis, leading to a public discussion on the nature of information gathered by the organisation, who had access to it, and for what purpose it was to be used.

87 Eleanor M Moore, *The Quest for Peace, As I Have Known It in Australia* (Melbourne, 1948), 84.

88 McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts*, 212. 'R-Riot Ends Clash', *The Australian*, 16 April 1966.

89 For example see 'Holmes, Margaret Joan Volume 1' (Canberra, 1964 1957), A6119, 3362, NAA; 'VROLAND, Anna' (Canberra, 1970 1939), A6119, 2419, NAA; 'Phyllis LATONA' (Canberra, 1962 1926), A6119, 565, NAA.

90 Holmes NAA file, ASIO report on Australian Congress for International Co-operation and Disarmament, Prime Minister's Enquiry, 15 May 1964, A6119, 3362, NAA.

91 McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts*, 240.

92 Harriet Alonso, 'Mayhem and Moderation', in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 129.

Michaelis' teenage son Robert attended Sydney Grammar School where cadet training was part of the curriculum. Unimpressed with this requirement, he decided to make a stand and refused to participate when the cadets were ordered to 'take part in a "search and destroy" exercise against soldiers dressed as Vietcong'.<sup>93</sup> The headmaster took a hard line and declared that Robert would have to participate or leave the school.<sup>94</sup> This protest became public with national newspapers reporting that he faced expulsion and that his mother supported his stand. The ALP member for Grayndler, Fred Daly, opposed to the war in Vietnam, supported the boy's stand in parliament, only attracting more publicity to the family.<sup>95</sup> This led the Minister for the Army, Malcolm Fraser, to respond by suggesting that the protest was coordinated by the boy's mother and he provided information about her in parliament that noted her membership with the AICD and WILPF.<sup>96</sup>

Labor member Tom Uren praised WILPF and the AICD, calling them a 'distinguished group of women' associated with the UN.<sup>97</sup> Prime Minister Harold Holt, however, defended Fraser's actions and restated the ASIO information, including Michaelis' street address in parliament. He argued that the minister had to 'test the good faith' and the 'genuineness of the episode' because it had received widespread publicity.<sup>98</sup> Some newspapers such as the *Telegraph* wrote sensationalist articles about Michaelis' alleged 'red' leanings.<sup>99</sup> Yet the majority of public criticism shown in letters to the editor and from the Labor opposition was aimed at Holt and Fraser for misusing ASIO information. Church groups held rallies in support of Michaelis, with Reverend Alan Walker noting that the incident 'raised serious questions concerning the activities of the Security Service and the use of security dossier material by politicians.'<sup>100</sup> The *Australian* newspaper denounced the government's 'stupidity' and both the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, which had editorial lines supportive of the war, called the event 'unfortunate' and 'distasteful'.<sup>101</sup> This is an example of where WILPF played strongly on their respectability to secure public sympathy and support, leading parts of the establishment to concede that the suspicion of 'communism' went too far. Robert transferred to the local public school.

93 'Cadet Faces Expulsion Threat', *The Canberra Times*, 26 September 1966.

94 McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts*, 225.

95 Fred Daly, *CPD*, House of Representatives, 28 September 1966, 1401.

96 Malcolm Fraser, *CPD*, House of Representatives, 28 September 1966, 1403.

97 Tom Uren, *CPD*, House of Representatives, 29 September 1966, 1497.

98 Harold Holt, *CPD*, House of Representatives, 29 September 1966, 1416.

99 'Mother in Red-Inspired Committee', *The Telegraph*, September 1966.

100 'Attack on School Cadet System at Church Rally', *The Canberra Times*, 10 October 1966.

101 Edwards, *A Nation at War*, 128.

## How Australia's involvement in Vietnam influenced WILPF

The Vietnam War lasted seven years, making it Australia's longest overseas military conflict at the time. Murray Goot and Rodney Tiffen have shown that opinion polls during this time are unreliable as true indicators of public opinion because of politically loaded 'wide-ranging and clear-cut cases of manufacture of opinion'.<sup>102</sup> That said, the trend in opinion did show a shift from majority support for Australian and American intervention from 1965 to majority support for a withdrawal from 1969 onwards.<sup>103</sup> The peace movement contributed to this overall shift, though polls also showed that attitudes towards anti-war demonstrators were negative, illustrating why WILPF and more middle-class protesters often tried to distance themselves from more radical parts of the movement.

Nevertheless, in 1970 and 1971, WILPF became a sponsor of the moratorium marches, demonstrations that attracted huge crowds and entrenched the anti-war movement in historical memory as a high point in peace activism. The protests included actions by many new groups at this time, such as the manifold movements of the New Left, conscientious objectors, draft resisters, and the student movement on university campuses which, in many ways, changed the political landscape in Australia. Though WILPF aimed to remain a respectable organisation within this changing milieu, their growing connections to a radical section of society highlight their determined, if still restrained, desire to be part of these momentous social changes. Ted Wheelwright, a lecturer in economics at the University of Sydney, was one of the first academics at the university to radicalise students during 'teach ins'.<sup>104</sup> Many students from conservative families did not join the movement straight away, contrary to the impression of the era being 'flower-bedecked, long-haired student radicals'.<sup>105</sup> Wheelwright was in fact married to Wendy Wheelwright, the treasurer of NSW WILPF and editor of *Peace and Freedom* journal in 1983.<sup>106</sup> By examining radical

102 Murray Goot and Rodney Tiffen, 'Public Opinion and the Politics of the Polls', in King, *Australia's Vietnam*, 164.

103 Goot and Tiffen, 'Public Opinion and the Politics of the Polls', in King, *Australia's Vietnam*, 164.

104 'Giant Man with a Mind to Match', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 August 2007, accessed 29 November 2022, [www.smh.com.au/national/giant-man-with-a-mind-to-match-20070810-gdqtnx.html](http://www.smh.com.au/national/giant-man-with-a-mind-to-match-20070810-gdqtnx.html).

105 Jordens, 'Conscription and Dissent', in Pemberton, *Vietnam*, 75.

106 Australian Section report, '22nd International Congress of WILPF' Sweden 1983, Sklar and Dublin, eds, *Women and Social Movements*, 42.

activity through familial relationships we can see how interconnected groups were, and how discussion, education and debate flowed through personal connections and shaped political commitments.

By 1969 the changing attitudes to Vietnam were beginning to favour the ALP electorally and in December 1972 Labor, led by Gough Whitlam, was elected to government in a victory that ended a long succession of Liberal governments. Many WILPF women were connected with the ALP and shared the optimism for progressive change ushered in by the new government. 'It is a great and exhilarating feeling to win an election when you know it is going to mean so much', wrote Evelyn Rothfield.<sup>107</sup> WILPF women were pleased with Whitlam's initial response to the Vietnam War, not least as he released all draft resisters in his first few days of office. In January 1973 the government declared an end to Australia's involvement and the troops were withdrawn by June. WILPF pointed out how worthwhile the victory was in terms of Australia becoming more clearly aligned to the UN, as the government took a 'stand on declaring the Indian Ocean a zone for peace' and started the process of establishing diplomatic relations with China.<sup>108</sup> At both national and international levels, WILPF felt very strongly that China should be recognised by the UN. In their eyes, the institution could only work if it were truly representative. As they had noted in 1971: 'any disarmament question or other world problem cannot be fully solved without the active participation of the People's Republic of China, with a population of one quarter of mankind.'<sup>109</sup> Whitlam's victory encouraged WILPF Australia to enter the era with a sense of optimism.

The dramatic federal reform implemented by the new government exacerbated a long-running tension in the ideology of WILPF. They felt the more progressive side of politics was listening to their proposals, which gave the organisation confidence that they were helping to shape the future towards their goals. Some realised that promoting local candidates whose views were aligned with their own would have a greater impact on policy than focusing on the international networks. As a result, the nation-state increasingly shaped their activism. Around the issue of the Vietnam War their action often had a national focus as WILPF campaigned against conscription and Australian involvement in the war. Yet the organisation still wanted to promote an international understanding of the conflict,

107 Rothfield to Ballantyne, 6 December 1972, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

108 Rothfield to Ballantyne, 6 December 1972, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

109 *Peace and Freedom* 8, no. 1 (March 1971), series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

as did many members who became frustrated by the obsession with local parochial politics at the expense of a more internationalist mindset. Many members remained focused on their international connections, while others joined with WFP to undertake creative actions against conscription and the war within a locally minded peace movement.

While the international connections remained strong, some believed that there should be a sharper focus on the local and national. In May 1966 Holmes wrote to the Geneva headquarters to explain that they could not increase their international membership fees because

Australia is AT WAR and we are fighting a desperate struggle against our own government and our country's ever-increasing involvement in United States policy, and we must have money to carry on this struggle.<sup>110</sup>

For members like Lorraine Moseley, the international was more important, and the focus on the local was a frustration that diverted the energy of the section:

I did not want to continue on just to be busy, or to make myself feel better, but rather to work with others with an INTERNATIONAL AND GLOBAL viewpoint. Ah! But there's the rub! I found people in WILPF so concerned with local affairs that they had no time for a global viewpoint.<sup>111</sup>

Moseley became an international observer for WILPF at the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East Conferences in 1968 and 1969 in Canberra, and used this as a way to keep her attention on regional internationalism while others focused on local issues.<sup>112</sup> It was a challenge to engage with internationalism as most political engagement required action at the national level. This debate would surface again over the next decades when WILPF became more focused on their lobbying efforts at the UN and their evolving identity as an NGO.

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110 Holmes to Stahle, 22 May 1966, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

111 Moseley to Ellen Holmgard, 18 March 1972, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

112 Heather Williams, *Women and Peace, WILPF An Australian Profile*, accessed through WILPF, 1982, 13.

## The women's liberation movement

By 1970 new energy was being injected into the organised women's movement through the radical experiences of women activists in the peace protests against the Vietnam War. Life was changing for women in Australia. Scientific developments offered the promise of revolutionary emancipation in sexual relationships, with reliable contraception in the form of the pill as well as effective and rapid treatment for sexually transmitted diseases that were prevalent at the time.<sup>113</sup> While many of the ideas about sex and sexuality had been championed by radicals long before the 1960s, the wider acceptance of various social changes, along with the radicalising protests of the Vietnam War, turned the decade into an era 'encrusted with legend'.<sup>114</sup>

Ground-breaking feminist books gave a new language to the women's movement. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, published in 1949 and translated into English in 1953, was still influencing other writers such as Betty Friedan, who published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. The latter articulated the limitations of women's social role within the family, calling it 'the problem that has no name'.<sup>115</sup> Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, published in the US in 1969, popularised the term 'patriarchy' as a way of understanding male power and privilege, while Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, published the following year, became an international bestseller.<sup>116</sup> These were radical and provocative books that had far-reaching impacts. Beyond the sexual revolution they also stimulated new interest in women's history. It was not long before new histories of women were having a significant impact on the understanding of women's place in society in Australia and abroad.<sup>117</sup>

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113 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 220.

114 Frank Bongiorno, *The Sex Lives of Australians: A History* (Collingwood, Vic: Black Inc, 2012), 222.

115 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1952); Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1963).

116 Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1970), 25; see discussion of this in Susan Magarey, *Dangerous Ideas: Women's Liberation—Women's Studies—Around the World* (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Barr Smith Press, 2015), 7, doi.org/10.20851/dangerous-ideas; Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (London: Paladin, 1971). For more information see biography of Greer, Christine Wallace, *Greer, Untamed Shrew* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 1997).

117 Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, 2nd rev. ed. (Camberwell, Vic: Penguin Books, 2002); Beverley Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter, and Poor Mary Ann: Women and Work in Australia* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson Australia, 1975); Miriam Dixon, *The Real Matilda: Woman and Identity in Australia 1788 to the Present* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1976); Edna Ryan and Anne Conlon, *Gentle Invaders: Australian Women at Work 1788–1974* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson Australia, 1975).



The latest wave of women's organising, inspired by novel theories of gender and equipped with a new language of 'sex roles' and 'sexism' to discuss it, began on university campuses and within peace movements in the late 1960s. 'Sexism' in particular offered a framework in which to discuss structural inequalities, though analysis usually focused on the individual rather than women's role in the family. Sexuality and bodily autonomy were primary concerns. This emphasis differed from previous women's rights campaigns in acknowledging women's desire for sex and aiming to achieve sexual liberation through access to contraception and abortion rather than through repression.<sup>118</sup> Women also had new economic and career aspirations that underpinned their call for change. As the historians Patricia Grimshaw and Marilyn Lake (among others) have shown, the WLM was a 'generational rebellion' that rejected women's biological destiny as mothers as well as the demands and expectations of motherhood.<sup>119</sup>

Women who engaged in the Vietnam War protests were encouraged to think about oppression from the perspective of the national struggle of the Vietnamese. Through direct experience and theoretical contemplation in the anti-war movement they began to think more deeply about their own liberation. The name women's liberation movement (WLM) was consciously chosen to mirror the Vietnamese liberation movement. Many young women became frustrated with the condescension from male comrades in the peace movement. Activist Kate Jennings gave a speech at a Vietnam War moratorium march in Sydney in 1970 that controversially pointed out the inconsistencies of men in the New Left. Jennings proclaimed,

[O]ur brothers of the left and in the peace movement ... will think that what I am about to say is not justified, this is a moratorium ... Women are conscripted every day into their personalised slave kitchens. Can you with your mind filled with the moratorium, spare a thought for their freedom, identity, minds, and emotions?<sup>120</sup>

Women like Jennings wanted to have a louder and distinctive voice in the male-dominated anti-war campaigns. They also did not want to be subordinated to perform menial tasks within the movement.

118 Marilyn Lake, 'Sexuality and Feminism: Some Notes in Their Australian History', *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, no. 7 (1991): 29. See also Lake, *Getting Equal*, 223.

119 Grimshaw et al., *Creating a Nation*, 301.

120 Kate Jennings, *Trouble: Evolution of a Radical: Selected Writings 1970–2010* (Melbourne, Vic: Black Inc, 2010), 8.

## WILPF and its interaction with the WLM

For WILPF, whose membership in the 1970s consisted primarily of older married women, some of the views being promoted by the WLM were confronting. The focus on abortion, contraception and sexuality certainly challenged some church-going members. In Australia and internationally, WILPF was not at the forefront of the WLM. That said, many WILPF members had been the targets of insults as a result of their efforts in the Vietnam peace movement, similar to those endured by the politicised WLM women. Holmes and other members bristled at being asked to 'why aren't you back at home looking after your husbands and kids?'<sup>121</sup> Though women like Holmes sympathised with WLM women, they had grown up in an era of rigid gender segregation and did not politicise the experience in the same way as the younger generation, instead seeking to instrumentalise the philosophy and values underpinning a more traditional gender order to advance their politics. WILPF saw itself as a peace organisation. When it was clear that women's suffrage 'had not put an end to or even diminished wars', their commitment to their feminist identity was constantly questioned.<sup>122</sup>

The rising transnational WLM provoked WILPF to reassert its identity as a peace organisation, rather than a feminist one. In fact, serious discussions took place about whether it should remain a women's group at all. In 1968 British WILPF member Margaret Tims wrote a circular letter to the international membership advocating that WILPF should no longer be a women's organisation, because 'the two causes—of peace and freedom in the general sense and of women's freedom in the particular sense—are no longer synonymous and should be treated separately.'<sup>123</sup> As women were no longer 'outside' politics but part of the system as enfranchised citizens, they had joint responsibility for its failures and achievements. With more women in positions of power, especially in Australia—not least as a result of the rise of 'state feminism' instituted by 'femocrats' working within the political system and the rising critique of white feminists by Indigenous activists—it became harder for WILPF to assert that they spoke for all women, or to argue that women were not complicit in decisions about war and violence.<sup>124</sup>

121 Holmes quoted in McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts*, 239.

122 Catherine Foster, *Women for All Seasons: The Story of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 40.

123 Margaret Tims, April 1968 circular letter to WILPF, quoted in Foster, *Women for All Seasons*, 55.

124 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 253. Patricia O'Shane, *Aboriginal Political Movements: Some Observations* (Armidale, NSW: University of New England-Armidale, 1998).

The ambitions of the peace movement did not necessarily align with those advanced by feminists. For example, when the Australian feminist Anne Summers made a proposal in the 1990s that women should be admitted to full combat duties, arguing that 'women were getting killed anyway; but as long as their access to the military was restricted, they were being denied the opportunity to rise up the ranks of an important public service employer', she was advancing a feminist argument that directly contradicted WILPF's stance against normalising militarism in society.<sup>125</sup>

Tims' suggestion that WILPF women should abandon their status as a women's organisation was not acted upon; however, the Danish section did remove 'Women's' from their title in 1969. They were congratulated by the international chair, Elise Boulding, for doing so. '[P]erhaps our sisters are right and its time for women to become people', wrote Boulding.<sup>126</sup> By 1974, when Kay Camp was international president of WILPF, her husband William Camp became a member of WILPF. More men also joined, including the Australian pacifist Dr Keith Suter after hearing about Camp's membership.<sup>127</sup> Some WILPF leaders such as Baer determinedly tried to maintain the link between women and peace, but the League gradually 'evolved into being a peace organisation whose members happened to be women', though with the acceptance of male members even this had changed.<sup>128</sup>

Although some WILPF members were sceptical and somewhat defensive about associating with the WLM, they still promoted women's issues and equality more generally. Their concerns about new feminist ideologues were with their insistence on an equality that did not account for women's 'difference'. The US section of WILPF wrote about the relationship of WILPF with the WLM in 1970, noting that: 'WILPF was born of the suffrage movement ... Our criticism is that some feminists equate equality and similarity—the idealization of masculine attributes.'<sup>129</sup> When members of WILPF were asked if they were feminists, many were quick to draw the distinction between the organised WLM, with which they were not involved, and general support for women's equality. As Betty McIntosh, president of the WA WILPF branch in the 1970s, explained:

125 McHugh, *Minefields and Miniskirts*, 263.

126 Foster, *Women for All Seasons*, 56.

127 Cavanagh, *Margaret Holmes*, 302. Erika Rathgeber to Edith Ballantyne, 5 July 1978, Box 53/4 WILPF, SCPC, University of Colorado at Boulder Archives (CU Archives). Ballantyne reply, 10 July 1978, WILPF, SCPC, CU Archives.

128 Foster, *Women for All Seasons*, 32.

129 Foster, *Women for All Seasons*, 56.

I don't feel I want to drop other things I'm doing for the sake of pursuing feminism, and yet I have always been strongly in favour of women's rights and personally involved in a number of areas where recognition of women is very important ... I think there's a difference between organised feminism and feeling the strength of feminism. I think when we use the term loosely, we do refer to organised feminism. And I've just never had the time to devote to that.<sup>130</sup>

While WILPF leaders ensured that the organisation kept its distance from the WLM, the new movement energised individual members. Irene Greenwood, in her 70s at the time, enjoyed the new 'awakened consciousness' fostered by WLM but felt it was 'no new phenomenon'.<sup>131</sup> She nonetheless saw the new wave's differences, with its 'advantages of higher education, knowledge of the realities of economics and politics, experience in student militancy, and financial independence from their parents' control.' Greenwood specifically acknowledged their mobility. The new generation of activists

poured across national and international borders and met, speaking and singing together, picking up the phrases of a new culture: 'We shall overcome'. The words on their banners might have been different, but the expression was, like the Women's Movement I grew up with, for freedom and a challenge to power systems.<sup>132</sup>

A certain intergenerational solidarity connected some WILPF women with WLM.

This solidarity, significant though it was, did not resolve the tension between the two organisations. WILPF's reluctance to become involved with this new wave of organised women's groups points to the difficulties women had organising across generations with different motivations, perspectives and experiences. Indeed, Stella Cornelius, the Australian vice-president of WILPF in 1987, believed that WILPF members tended 'to be matriarchs', and while they would 'very happily [work] with other women's groups that attract younger women', they were more 'like a motherly organisation in the women's activities for peace'.<sup>133</sup> Suellen Murray has noted that in the women's peace movement of the 1980s, 'while many involved ... would not

130 Betty McIntosh interviewed in 1985 in Foster, *Women for All Seasons*, 176.

131 Irene Greenwood, 'Chronicle of Change', in *As a Woman: Writing Women's Lives*, ed. Jocelynnne A Scutt (Melbourne: Artemis Publishing, 1992), 113.

132 Greenwood, 'Chronicle of Change', in Scutt, *As a Woman*, 113.

133 Stella Cornelius, 'Peace Worker and Businesswoman', in *The Matriarchs*, ed. Susan Mitchell (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 1987), 130.

have claimed to be radical feminists, the politics of radical feminism was influential'.<sup>134</sup> WILPF was not intimately involved in the new direction of the movement, but they were starting to reconceptualise the indissoluble links between violence and gender. Influenced by feminist theory, WILPF began articulating the link between international violence and domestic forms of violence such as rape and battery. The US section held a conference in 1967 called 'Women's Response to the Rising Tide of Violence'.<sup>135</sup> And in Western Australia in 1971 the WILPF branch held a symposium called 'The Understanding of Human Aggressiveness' where they invited a sociologist, psychologist, psychiatrist and biologist to address the issue. While it was not made explicit that it was male violence and aggressiveness under examination, the report used gendered pronouns throughout to discuss 'mankind', 'man' and 'his very nature'.<sup>136</sup>



**Anti-nuclear march through George and Pitt Streets, Sydney, the AICD banner celebrating 20 years dates this picture as 1979.**

Source: 'Women's International League for Peace and Freedom', 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.

<sup>134</sup> Suellen Murray, "Make Pies Not War": Protests by the Women's Peace Movement of the Mid 1980s', *Australian Historical Studies* 37, no. 127 (1 April 2006): 81, doi.org/10.1080/103146106008601205.

<sup>135</sup> Foster, *Women for All Seasons*, 41.

<sup>136</sup> Roma Brown and Betty King, *The Understanding of Human Aggressiveness Seminar Report*, 24 June 1971, Western Australian Branch of WILPF, NLA.

The membership of WILPF was aging, and many sections had difficulty recruiting a cohort of younger members. In the Australian branch, new member Jennifer Fischhof joined after the Vietnam War protests. Her youth and vitality were much feted by the older membership, with members writing: 'She is just the sort of woman we need, young, active and tremendously motivated.'<sup>137</sup> Fischhof became active in WILPF and tried to engage older members with the campaigns run by the WLM. She was a member of the newly formed Women's Electoral Lobby, which was established in 1972. She spoke of the difficulty she had in interesting older members in the WLM in a letter to Edith Ballantyne at the Geneva office:

WILPF in Australia is unknown!!! I have tried hard this year to put WILPF on the map in Australia, but there seems to be a fear that by working with other groups that WILPF will lose its identity. I feel discrimination against women is a WILPF issue, but cannot get anyone in WILPF to work with Women's lib and a new big group here, the Women's Electoral Lobby.<sup>138</sup>

Just as many WILPF women involved in peace activism did not want to engage directly with the WLM, many in women's liberation were sceptical of joining the peace movement. There was a concern that 'peace activism could be tied too closely to particular discourses about femininity, ones that feminists were working hard to challenge.'<sup>139</sup> Maternity and nurturance were often invoked in discussions of peace. This did not serve the interests of feminists preoccupied with 're-imagining gender well beyond the confines of motherhood and wifedom'.<sup>140</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s, with the emergence of SOS and the Pine Gap Peace Camp that referenced maternalism as a rhetorical device, the equality/difference debate again divided feminists and pacifists. For some Women's Liberationists there was a fear 'that any form of women's pacifism may be positively subversive of feminist purpose'.<sup>141</sup> However, unlike other more conservative women's groups such as the National Council of Women (NCW) and the Country Women's Association, WILPF did not expressly criticise the aims of WLM, despite the difficulty they often had in finding a place for themselves within their

<sup>137</sup> Rothfield to Ballantyne, 11 May 1974, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

<sup>138</sup> Jennifer Fischhof to Ballantyne, 15 February 1974, series III reel 55, WILPF Papers.

<sup>139</sup> Suellen Murray, 'Taking the Toys from the Boys', *Australian Feminist Studies* 25, no. 63 (March 2010): 5, doi.org/10.1080/08164640903499893.

<sup>140</sup> Murray, 'Taking the Toys from the Boys', 5.

<sup>141</sup> Jo Vellacott, 'A Place for Pacifism and Transnationalism in Feminist Theory: The Early Work of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom', *Women's History Review* 2, no. 1 March 1993: 24, doi.org/10.1080/09612029300200021.

ranks.<sup>142</sup> Fischhof remained involved in both peace activism and feminism, and attended international meetings in the UN Decade of Women. She was among a small handful of young women who remained committed to participating in both WILPF and the WLM, working to weave together the rhetoric of peace and feminism.

While WILPF may not have been at the forefront of second wave feminism, the wider social and political transformations triggered by the movement nevertheless substantially transformed the organisation. Increased scholarship on gender and peace, largely produced by women who were beginning to establish themselves in university departments, gave WILPF a new lens through which to examine their core purpose. In 1983 Cynthia Enloe, an American academic and member of WILPF, published *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarisation of Women's Lives*, which explored how militarism relied upon individual men and women performing conventional gender roles.<sup>143</sup> Such scholarship prompted WILPF to rethink the nature of their organising. Also relevant in connection with WILPF's relationship to contemporary feminism was the work of the philosopher Sara Ruddick and her book *Maternal Thinking*, which revived the maternalist perspective and helped encourage the transnational WLM to reflect on the strengths of WILPF's approach.<sup>144</sup> Ruddick, in her description of motherhood and the politics of caring, maintained that men could fulfil the roles traditionally left to women. In such ways, entire patriarchal order was under scrutiny, and WILPF did try to find ways to bring their own activism into dialogue with wider public debates. At the 1986 WILPF triennial congress in the Netherlands, the keynote speaker, Dr Catharina Halkes, gave a speech that unpacked the word 'patriarchy'—made popular in the 1970s by feminist scholars—and linked it to the idea of peace.<sup>145</sup> Her talk sought to understand how the structure of patriarchal societies was a major root cause of war, and explore how this could help provide the justification for WILPF's decision to organise autonomously.

142 The NCW often forwarded letters from affiliates to politicians critical of the WLM, and a new group Women Who Want to be Women would purposely sabotage WLM conferences, see Judith Smart and Marian Quartly, *Respectable Radicals: A History of the National Council of Women of Australia 1896–2006* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2015), 390 and 396.

143 Cynthia H Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarisation of Women's Lives* (Boston: South End Press, 1983).

144 Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace* (London: Women's Press, 1990).

145 Catharina JM Halkes, 'Women's Work for Peace in a Patriarchal Society', in '23rd International Congress of WILPF "Women Unite for Justice and Peace"', The Netherlands, 1986, Sklar and Dublin, eds, *Women and Social Movements*, 26. This talk was edited and reproduced as 'Peace and Patriarchy', *Pax et Libertas* 51, no. 4 (December 1986).



Halkes said that the 'rigid role distribution' that made women 'accustomed to think that they have to keep peace only in the house, in the family and in personal relations' which would 'influence their husbands and children ... to help avoid war' was wrong.<sup>146</sup> Women, she argued, were not inherently more peaceful than men. Rather, the 'differences between the sexes stem from social conditioning—learned behaviour by which women and men come to see the world, and act in it, in substantially different ways.'<sup>147</sup> Halkes reinforced the idea that it was not men who were the problem, but 'the patriarchal system which dehumanizes many men' and encourages them to 'kill the enemy of tenderness, love and care within themselves. The linking of male sexuality to aggression is the root of both patriarchy and war'.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, Halkes suggested that 'peace is not possible in a patriarchal society' and that opposing male aggression with 'feminine motherliness' only reinforces patriarchal ideas about men and women having different moral codes. The way forward for peace was to 'throw off shackles of fear and lack of self-confidence'.<sup>149</sup>

From 1989 onwards, all congresses of WILPF referred to 'patriarchy' as a root cause of war and recognised the need to dismantle the oppression of women as part of their program to move towards a more peaceful society. Though it did not happen all at once, and while WILPF was not immediately on board with second wave feminist activism, WILPF eventually adopted a radical interpretation of feminist theory into their core ideas and vocabulary.

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With the anti-war movement running parallel to rapid changes in women's social position, the WLM began to discuss ideas about femininity, women in the workforce and family responsibilities. Curthoys has noted that the older women in the anti-Vietnam War movement, especially WILPF, with its legacy stretching back to World War I, came from a 'more sharply sexually segregated culture than their younger sisters' and 'tended to take for granted the necessity to work with other women to achieve political goals'.<sup>150</sup> New political ideas about equality meant that radicalised young feminists found the value of female solidarity 'less obvious'.<sup>151</sup> Their concept

146 'Peace and Patriarchy', *Pax et Libertas* 51, no. 4, December 1986.

147 'Peace and Patriarchy', *Pax et Libertas* 51, no. 4, December 1986.

148 'Peace and Patriarchy', *Pax et Libertas* 51, no. 4, December 1986.

149 'Peace and Patriarchy', *Pax et Libertas* 51, no. 4, December 1986.

150 Curthoys, 'Shut Up, You Bourgeois Bitch', in Damousi and Lake, *Gender and War*, 338.

151 Curthoys, 'Shut Up, You Bourgeois Bitch', in Damousi and Lake, *Gender and War*, 338.



of autonomous collective action, while drawing on ideas of sisterhood, came from experiences of marginalisation rather than from ideas of maternalism. Engaging with this new and subversive movement in the 1970s required a change in WILPF's approach.

Herself a participant in the 1970s WLM, Curthoys recognised how women in the movement 'anxiously distinguished' themselves from activists who had come immediately before them in established groups such as the UAW and WILPF.<sup>152</sup> She described the lack of knowledge and arrogance the movement showed in thinking it was an entirely new as 'matricidal feminism', with women 'shaking hands with our sisters yet rejecting our mothers.'<sup>153</sup> The movement fragmented, with different groups promoting different priorities, all responding to backlash and criticism from outside the movement and from other women.

WILPF was confronted by this 'matricidal feminism', which they felt excluded their ideas and devalued their history. Yet, despite this rejection, the organisation eventually absorbed ideas generated by the WLM. The concept of 'patriarchy', in particular, gave WILPF the language to articulate the gendered focus of their organisation and interpret their activities with a radical framework seeking to dismantle gendered oppression.

The Vietnam era changed Australian society. Newly politicised university students became vocal and sometimes militant opponents to the status quo while young women spoke out about the marginalisation they experienced in Vietnam War protests. This altered configuration posed a challenge to WILPF, which was confronted by new ideas about gender equality and feminism.<sup>154</sup> Recruiting younger women remained a problem for the organisation. Margaret Forte, who was a long-time secretary in the SA branch, argued in the 1980s how necessary it was for WILPF to embrace new techniques and engage with the WLM. She believed 'the old secretary's day is done'.<sup>155</sup> Certainly, it was not easy for women with careers to give leadership to voluntary organisations, but this was the challenge they must meet. 'We must stop building up files of papers and be out in the community, speaking on television and from public platforms, organizing

152 Ann Curthoys in preface to Barbara Curthoys and Audrey McDonald, *More Than a Hat and Glove Brigade: The Story of the Union of Australian Women* (Sydney: Bookpress, 1996), ii.

153 Curthoys, *More Than a Hat and Glove Brigade*, ii.

154 Lake, *Getting Equal*, 221.

155 Margaret Forte, *Peace and Freedom*, 1985, papers of Meredith Stokes Box 5/35 NLA.

conferences and demonstrations,' Forte declared. We must be 'seen and heard.'<sup>156</sup> WILPF, along with other voluntary organisations like the NCW, trade unions, political parties and even religious congregations, began experiencing 'organisational decline' from the 1960s onwards. Despite their efforts to engage younger women, this would continue to pose a threat into the twenty-first century.<sup>157</sup>

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156 Margaret Forte, *Peace and Freedom*, 1985, papers of Meredith Stokes Box 5/35 NLA.

157 Smart and Quartly, *Respectable Radicals*, 419.

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