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World war and worldly women: the Great War and the formation of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Australia

World War I had a transformative impact on Australia's international standing. After the war, the ideal of internationalism moved to the centre of discussions about how to secure future peace and postwar reconstruction, especially following the Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles, the creation of the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization (ILO).¹ With its new independent status at the League of Nations, Australia came of age diplomatically.² The war changed ideas about Australia's place in the world and the shift from imperial dependency to independent representation on new international bodies helped to shape the image of Australia as an autonomous state.

While participation in the British imperial force paradoxically intensified a sense of national identity, the war also provoked more people to think in international terms. This was the case for politically engaged women like Vida Goldstein and Eleanor Moore, who came to understand the Great War as an example of the dangers of empire and called for Australia to exhibit more international independence. Goldstein explicitly encouraged readers of her wartime *Woman Voter* newspaper to 'fight for internationalism, against imperialism' and, in doing so, she both exemplified and pre-empted Australia's transformation after the war.³

Internationalism was a popular political movement at the turn of the century, and the growing threat of war made it an attractive instrument

for trying to enforce permanent peace, especially for those activists and intellectuals who abhorred the atrocities that they believed were committed in the name of nationalism.⁴ As historian Glenda Sluga has shown, engagement in the international sphere was attractive to men, women and, especially, anti-colonialists, 'who had limited political representation in nation-states and empires'.⁵ Moore and Goldstein were activists who recognised the promise of internationalism after experiencing difficulty in influencing the domestic political sphere, despite the extension of federal political rights to women in 1902. Their internationalism was strengthened by the emergence of anti-war activism that was stimulated by the cataclysm of World War I.

Moore and Goldstein established the anti-war organisations the Sisterhood of International Peace (SIP) and the Women's Peace Army (Peace Army) in Melbourne in 1915. These groups later became the Melbourne branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), which is still in existence today. Despite this influence and longevity, discussion of the SIP and the Peace Army in histories of Australia during the Great War has been limited. Writing in the 1930s Ernest Scott, the official home front historian, did not find the contributions of these groups worthy of note.⁶ Later historians such as Joan Beaumont, Malcolm Saunders and Ralph Summy, Hillary Summy, Judith Smart, Joy Damousi, and Marilyn Lake have examined the women's groups in the Victorian peace movement in order to understand Australia's conflicted response to the war.⁷ Yet, even in most recent general histories, such as Michael McKernan's *Victoria at War 1914–1918*, published in 2014, reference to the SIP and the Peace Army's activities has been omitted, reinforcing the mainstream intellectual tradition that found them inconsequential in the wider history of the home front.⁸

The most detailed work on the SIP and the Peace Army occurred some time ago in a study by Darryn Kruse and Charles Sowerwine, and another by Malcolm Saunders.⁹ Kruse and Sowerwine discussed the women's peace groups in Melbourne in order to illustrate the first-wave feminists' belief in the inherent peacefulness of women.¹⁰ Saunders, by contrast, focused on the SIP to present a more complex picture. In his article, 'Are women more peaceful than men?', he showed that Eleanor Moore and the SIP were sceptical of the assumed link between women and peace, but had other reasons to organise in a gender-specific way.¹¹ Saunders also discussed the differences and debate between the SIP and the Peace Army.¹²

In this article, I build on this earlier work by examining the international dimensions of the SIP and Peace Army through their correspondence with the precursor to the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom



Committee of the Sisterhood of International Peace, 1915. Records of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, State Library of Victoria, MS9377/PHO1

in Geneva. This international archive contains a wealth of frank correspondence between the local groups and the centralised international organisation. I give attention to the common interests of the Peace Army and the SIP as well as their differences, focusing on their mutual commitment to internationalism and the ways by which both groups paved the way for the growth of international engagement on the part of Australian women during the twentieth century.

The history of international women's organisations has grown as a field of study in recent years. For example, historian Leila Rupp's influential *Worlds of Women* compared the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the International Council of Women and the International Alliance of Women to show the importance of women's transnational organising in the early twentieth century.¹³ In Australia, Judith Smart and Marian Quartly have discussed 'mainstream' women's organisations, focusing on the National Councils of Women (NCW) and their affiliation to the International Council of Women (ICW).¹⁴ Other historians, such as Marilyn Lake, Ann Curthoys, Fiona Paisley and Joy Damousi have also contributed to the historiography of Australian women and international engagement.¹⁵ Glenda Sluga's recent

book, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, has added to our understanding of internationalism as a political ideal and the interplay and tension between nationalism and internationalism.¹⁶ It is clear from these studies that the emergence of internationally oriented organisations and ideologues began to capture the imagination of Australian women and came to provide a forum for them to express their point of view.

Building on this work, this article will examine more closely the development of the Australian branch of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), and the women who lived internationalism through it. The ideological and organisational differences between the SIP and the Peace Army were well known, yet both groups believed in the political philosophy of internationalism, both became affiliated to the International Women's Committee for Permanent Peace (IWCPP) in 1915, and both committed to send delegates to the international conference in Zürich in 1919. The SIP was the more long-lived and, in 1919, it voted to change its name to the Australian Section of the WILPF, which had been formed in 1919 out of the IWCPP.¹⁷ Nevertheless, both the Peace Army and the SIP played pivotal roles in the foundation of WILPF in Australia, for their collaboration and confrontation defined the Australian Section's orientation during this globally tumultuous time. The interplay between the two groups also illustrates the range of strategies arising from the complexities of protesting against war when the national government granted itself increased powers to prosecute opponents under the *War Precautions Act*.

The Women's Peace Army

Vida Goldstein's involvement in the Australian women's suffrage movement has been well documented.¹⁸ In 1903, one year after Australian women were granted full political rights nationally, she formed the Women's Political Association (WPA) and became its president. It was specifically a 'non-party' organisation, which acted as a lobby group outside the major parties. The association supported Goldstein's several bids for parliament between 1903 and 1917. In July 1915, the Women's Political Association formed a dedicated peace group, the Women's Peace Army, to protest against the war and its impact on women. With Goldstein as the president, it attracted other prominent women from the suffrage movement. Adela Pankhurst became the secretary, and Cecilia John – an accomplished contralto singer – the treasurer. Thus, in a way that was similar to the formation of women-only peace groups overseas, the Peace Army grew out of the women's suffrage movement and emphasised the allegedly innate peaceful qualities of women. Not all members

of the Women's Political Association supported the new campaign for peace. In November 1914, three months after the outbreak of the war, two executive office bearers felt compelled to resign on the grounds 'they were out of sympathy with the anti-war campaign of the WPA', stating 'any opposition to compulsory military training and to militarism at this juncture might tend to weaken England's opportunities for obtaining volunteer military service in the present war'.¹⁹ Clearly some feminists were still swayed by patriotism and support for the war. Thus the WPA moved to establish the Women's Peace Army as a separate organisation, using the same acronym (WPA) for name recognition. It also meant that those 'who do not approve of our non-party political policy [could] unite with us in regards to peace'.²⁰ This meant Labor Party women, proscribed from joining the Women's Political Association, could now join the Peace Army without risk of expulsion from the Political Labor Council.

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

The time has come for women to show that they, as givers of life, refuse to give their sons as material for slaughter, and that they recognise that human life must be the first consideration of nations ... The enfranchised women of Australia are political units in the British Empire, and they ought to lead the world in sane methods of dealing with these conflicts.²¹

The political philosophy of the organisation focused on women's advancement, and the leadership remained in women's hands, although the organisation allowed men to join as members.²² In working for women's advancement, the WPA had previously promoted the benefits of women's internationalism, as for example when the *Woman Voter* reprinted an article from *Jus Suffragii*, the journal of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, in 1913 stating: 'The curse of women has been her isolation ... But at last the cry has sounded "Women of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains".'²³ Following in this tradition, for the WPA, internationalism might thus provide a solution to the evils of imperialism, as well as to the general oppression of women.

The Sisterhood of International Peace

While peace groups became active in all states, the most vocal women's groups formed first in Melbourne before spreading to other states.²⁴ This was facilitated by the patronage of the Reverend Dr Charles Strong, the first

president of the Peace Society in Melbourne and the founder of the Australian Church, a breakaway congregation from the Presbyterian Church, which was designed to engage 'in harmony with and expressive of, the free, democratic and progressive spirit of Australia'.²⁵ The Australian Church in Flinders Street, Melbourne, attracted a congregation of about a thousand including the families of activists Eleanor Moore and Vida Goldstein, though Goldstein became a Christian Scientist in 1899.²⁶

Eleanor Moore, who wrote a memoir of the peace movement in 1948 called *The Quest for Peace as I Have Known it in Australia*, was closely aligned with the Australian Church and the Reverend Dr Strong.²⁷ Unlike Vida Goldstein, Moore had not been active in other women's groups. Her peace activism began in middle age. As a member of Strong's Peace Society, she opposed compulsory military training for cadets aged between 12 and 18, which was instituted in Australia in 1911.²⁸ Politicised through the Australian Church, Moore was moved to organise around the goal of peace because of her Christian ideals. In March 1915, Dr Strong approached her and other active Australian Church members suggesting they form a women-only peace group. Thus, the first meeting of the Sisterhood of International Peace (SIP) was convened, with the motto 'Justice, Friendship, and Arbitration'.²⁹

Members of the SIP argued that, until the outbreak of the Great War, Australia had been at peace. Their motivation to action was to counter the habit of 'always waiting for a lead from abroad' when discussing Australia's role in combat, which along with the focus on 'arbitration' showed their interest in foreign policy.³⁰ They concentrated on the domain of the international as a way to understand the conflict and to insist that Australia should engage with arbitration and diplomacy rather than blindly follow the military expectations of Empire. In a letter to American pacifist Jane Addams, Moore wrote of the need to join the international community to strengthen their cause:

As you will readily understand, the hearts of many women here, as doubtless in all combatant countries, are torn by conflicting feelings, and we recognise that such organisations as ours, if they are to have any influence in future crises, must be linked up in close bonds of sympathy and understanding with one another all over the world.³¹

Moore's role in the SIP was as corresponding secretary. Other women involved included Mrs Lucy Paling as president, Mrs Janet (Jessie) Strong as general secretary, Mrs Mabel Drummond and Mrs Jane Kerr. The membership of the group grew to around 200.³² They stayed in close contact with Dr Strong's Peace Society and, according to Moore's biographer,

Malcolm Saunders, the two organisations 'enjoyed a brother-sister relationship, jointly organising many activities and sharing responsibility for the monthly pacifist journal, *Peacewards*.³³ Like the Women's Political Association, the SIP was conscious and proud of the status of Australian women as voters. Unlike the members of Vida Goldstein's organisation, however, SIP followers also felt the weight of responsibility as voters and a corresponding need to have absolutely fully formed opinions and accurate information before making decisions:

The situation of Australian women is peculiar. We are, as you know, fully enfranchised, therefore our actions have political significance, and since our country is one of the belligerents, it is by no means easy to know always what is the right and wise attitude for us to adopt.³⁴

While other women's peace groups believed that women had a natural affinity with peace, the SIP was more sceptical of this claim, acknowledging that there was no guarantee that women would automatically vote for peace. While women might be more pacifist in orientation, their opinions could be just as vulnerable to manipulation and political persuasion as those of men. If adequately educated and properly informed, however, they would come to understand that a 'martial spirit' was essentially foreign to women's nature:

The women of Australia, being fully enfranchised, have a double privilege and responsibility but naturally, here as elsewhere, many are still completely under the sway of the traditional belief that war is the only honourable way of settling international disputes ... The improved education which girls in all civilized lands have received of late years, aided by the increasing industrial freedom of women, must lend to more independent thinking on their part, in which the true instincts of their sex will find expression, and since women nowhere band themselves together for the destruction of other women, it is evident that a martial spirit is really foreign to their nature.³⁵

The Sisterhood of International Peace was formed not just because of the belief that women might exercise a moderating influence on decisions about war. Its founders also believed that separate women's organisations allowed for greater autonomy and influence in the peace movement, as women in mixed organisations were rarely able to take on leading roles, or feel as comfortable expressing their opinions. Moreover, they believed that women suffered more in war than men. Malcolm Saunders noted that the SIP claimed 'a special right to struggle for peace, but no special ability to achieve it'.³⁶

The decision to remain apart

The two Melbourne groups were aware of each other and sometimes cooperated but saw their goals as different. The Women's Peace Army understood its role in protesting against the war as an extension of its public agitation for women's rights. The language of the Peace Army members was intentionally combative, as in the name they adopted and their insistence on the need to 'fight' for peace and internationalism. In the *Woman Voter* they attacked government recruitment talk by arguing: 'brave men are enlisting to fight, to kill other men, so, they honestly believe, that they may further the cause of freedom. Shall brave women not enlist to fight for Peace and Internationalism, which will prevent the slaying of our fellow men?'³⁷ Their strategy was to call women to action, with high-profile activities aimed at changing minds and defying government propaganda. The Sisterhood of International Peace (SIP), in contrast, believed it would be most effective after the war had ended and was engaging in the international movement to put itself in a good position, once hostilities ceased, for educating people about the requirements for lasting peace. Their goal was to achieve social change, albeit slowly. Intimidating potential members was against their non-confrontational style. Eleanor Moore recognised the different strategies of the two organisations in her book, suggesting that the SIP preferred persuasion through reason and education rather than provocation: 'When public opinion is inflamed, there are two ways of seeking to influence it. One is to be provocative, taking the risk of reprisals, in the hope of making converts on the recoil. The other is called educational.'³⁸

The women involved in the SIP were drawn to oppose violence through Christian pacifism. Many members had no previous experience of protest. Moore was conscious of this, noting: 'there are many women who would sever their connection with the peace movement entirely if they thought it meant an open clash with their already harassed government'.³⁹ With limited history of activism, such women found campaigning in the divisive political atmosphere confronting, especially because the government had granted itself increased powers to prosecute dissent under the *War Precautions Act*.

This legislation, which was passed by the government of Prime Minister Andrew Fisher in October 1914 and progressively extended, gave the authorities wideranging powers to restrict civil liberties.⁴⁰ It allowed the censoring of media reports that were likely to 'cause disaffection or alarm' and provided for the monitoring and prosecution of anyone deemed guilty of prejudicing recruiting.⁴¹ The Act specified prohibited acts of protest, including 'tearing down recruiting posters' and 'disturbing referendum meetings'.⁴²



Disarmament Sunday, Yarra Park, 6 November 1921. Records of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, State Library of Victoria, MS9377/PHO2

The Women's Political Association (WPA) was prone to disagreements with the authorities over activities that allegedly contravened the Act. Vida Goldstein published many blank columns in the *Woman Voter* to make a statement about the arbitrary way the publication was being censored.⁴³ Though Adela Pankhurst had left the WPA when she was taken to the High Court over a public demonstration in 1917 for being in violation of the section of the Act prohibiting public gatherings of over 20 people, her resistance was supported by Goldstein and many WPA members.⁴⁴ Jennie Baines, one of the other participants named, was in fact a member of the WPA and a former suffragette colleague of the Pankhursts.⁴⁵ The informant in the case, the arresting constable, reported:

Shortly after three o'clock the three accused, with several other women, came into the Treasury Gardens. There were between five thousand and six thousand people present, and the defendant Adela Constantia Mary Pankhurst got up on a seat and addressed the people assembled, and told them all to follow her to Parliament House in defiance of the police and to break in if necessary, and see what Billy Hughes was going to do to get cheaper food for the starving people ... then Adela Constantia Mary Pankhurst and Alice Suter and Jennie Baines went towards the steps of Parliament House arm-in-arm, and followed by the crowd of people.⁴⁶

There were increasing numbers of reports of violent behaviour on the part of returned soldiers who had become more threatening to women opposed to the war and conscription.⁴⁷ The Sisterhood of International Peace determined that the organisation's activities should remain legal and beyond suspicion. Eleanor Moore carefully scripted any pamphlets that were released under the Sisterhood's name, taking care to avoid the possibility of censorship and complying with the censor when changes were requested. She noted in her memoir the need for caution. There was room for the different organisations but:

they are better to work apart, especially at a time when a severe penalty may follow an unwise word. If one is to go to gaol for hindering recruiting, or to be ducked in the river by indignant men in uniform, it is something to know that the trouble springs from the assertion of one's own principle and not from the indiscretion of a colleague.⁴⁸

Although the two groups were happy to work apart, some women joined both organisations. One such was Clara Weekes, a teacher who was involved in the Sisterhood of International Peace as well as being an active Women's Peace Army member and participant.⁴⁹

The Women's Peace Army formed in direct response to the war and folded in 1919 when the war ended, as did the organisation that gave birth to it, the Women's Political Association. The SIP, on the other hand, maintained its activity after the war and, while it might have been seen as more 'conservative' or 'cautious', it was able to secure a place in the anti-war movement as a moderate voice for peace. It focused on education and recruiting members more interested in the 'slow burn' of activism, holding course in times of crisis and maintaining support when peace returned. Both groups produced pamphlets, and their members spoke at various public engagements. Eleanor Moore and the other international secretary of the SIP, Mabel Drummond, were good speakers and were invited to address numerous audiences alongside representatives of the Peace Army, the Peace Society and the umbrella organisation set up late in 1914 to coordinate activities, the Australian Peace Alliance.⁵⁰

Attempting to amalgamate, affiliating to the ICWPP

The impetus to consider amalgamation was the news about the international women's gathering that occurred at The Hague in April 1915.⁵¹ Both groups heard about this conference long after April, as information was not extensive in the mainstream media. When the Sisterhood of International Peace (SIP) and the Peace Army learned about plans for another conference at the conclusion of the war, to be organised by the International Women's

Committee for Permanent Peace (IWCPP), both expressed their intention to become involved. Examination of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) international archive, divided into sections with each country's correspondence filed in order, reveals how active Victorian women were compared with those from the other Australian states. Following the IWCPP's initial contact with known local campaigners, most of the letters discuss the complexity of the relationship between the SIP and the Peace Army and consider ways in which the two groups could affiliate separately.⁵²

Towards the end of 1915, the Peace Army suggested amalgamation as the 'Victorian Branch of the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace', and the SIP agreed to form a provisional committee to discuss the proposal. The Peace Army also committed to sending Adela Pankhurst to Sydney and Brisbane to set up more branches, in the hope of forming a national committee that could affiliate to the international.⁵³ The ICWPP supported the move to set up a national structure and distributed a memorandum to help coordinate the interest in Australia.⁵⁴ The Peace Army saw the SIP as a 'sort of Peace Kindergarten, as they themselves assert', but was happy to amalgamate in order to smooth arrangements for international affiliation. The SIP, however, decided against amalgamation, fearing it would be subsumed into the Women's Peace Army. Vida Goldstein, annoyed by this rejection, wrote to the secretary of the ICWPP:

The Sisterhood does not do any public propaganda in Victoria, let alone other states, and joint actions with them in Victoria can have little practical value. It is very nervous about being publicly criticised and ridiculed because of association with us, who are anathema to the militarists. Nevertheless it can do good educational work on ethical lines, in its quiet way, and we must carry on the political part of peace work, and continue our organisation's efforts in the other states. We are on the friendliest terms with the Sisterhood, keep in touch with it, and confer with it when possible.⁵⁵

The 'friendly terms' did not last long. Members of the Peace Army were more accustomed than the SIP to public criticism, having dealt with the backlash from the public during the Women's Political Association campaigns for women's right to vote in Victoria before 1908 and for the election of Goldstein to public office. After August 1914, they were often criticised in the mainstream press and by those organising recruitment efforts for the war. While members of the Peace Army were thus accustomed to such misrepresentation, they were not prepared to tolerate similar treatment from the SIP.

Early in 1916, Eleanor Moore wrote a letter for inclusion in the *International*, the publication circulated by the International Women's Committee for Permanent Peace (IWCPP). It was designed to give an update on the state of affairs in Australia and explain the existence of two peace groups in Victoria, but it unwittingly inflamed animosity. Moore wrote that two of the Peace Army meetings had 'ended in disorder', as the group 'felt a duty to try to influence men not to enlist', which 'brought them into collision with the authorities'. She proudly noted that the SIP had 'not been in any way interfered with'.⁵⁶

The Peace Army was upset by this characterisation, and not just because women who should have been more sympathetic to their cause were joining mainstream critics in demonising their activities. It was also a serious allegation, as hindering recruitment was an offence under the *War Precautions Act*, punishable by fines and, potentially, gaol time.⁵⁷ Moore apologised for the slight and wrote to the IWCPP to request an amendment to her paragraph.⁵⁸ The incident demonstrated once again how different the two groups were. The SIP, unaccustomed to the discretion required in making public statements, had criticised the Peace Army in terms similar to those of the conservatives, whose attempts to discredit the Peace Army women implied that they were shrill and unladylike and their methods disruptive. The SIP's criticism thus revealed a deeper belief that women in the protest movement should be reserved. Some women who were members of both organisations saw Moore's actions as an 'endeavour to aggrandise the Sisterhood at the expense of a sister society', given the wide international circulation of the publication.⁵⁹ Peace Army treasurer Cecilia John wrote sharply to the IWCPP: 'For your private information I may tell you that the Sisterhood of Peace is unknown even in our own city and has never held a public meeting. I could write at length about it but I do not desire to say more'.⁶⁰

Moore and other SIP members offended the Peace Army in describing their activities in negative terms, but this is explicable in terms of the type of women who joined the Sisterhood rather than the Peace Army – most were not public agitators for feminist causes. They vehemently opposed the war and conscription but felt justified in avoiding aggressive retaliation by the anti-war campaigners. Many of the women who were active in the SIP were reluctant to become public targets, shown most obviously by their hesitation to take a public stance on the conscription referendum of 1916. The Peace Army saw the referendum as a core issue for action from the time of its announcement. The SIP, by way of contrast, was initially reluctant to commit to a position but gradually came to advocate a 'No' vote. Moore wrote:

The Australian Peace Alliance and the Women's Peace Army threw themselves heartily into the struggle against the proposal, as did a newly formed No-Conscription Fellowship. The Sisterhood hesitated. Its members had been enrolled on the understanding that the society, as such, would not pronounce on questions directly connected with the waging of the war ... But, as controversy increased, everyone had to take one side or the other, and so it came about that all the most active members of the Sisterhood found themselves linked up with the anti-conscription movement.⁶¹

Fear of retribution was soon put to the side. SIP member Mabel Drummond wrote about the conscription meetings in her diary, giving some insight into the passion and controversy aroused by the political divisions. She noted in 1916 that, at one meeting, 'all rose to speak but they did not utter a word as the crowd howled them down, yelled and screamed TRAITOR and so on'. Furthermore, 'when some of us stood up against the motion of conscription, they howled around us like a pack of wolves'.⁶² By the second vote in 1917, the SIP and Moore had joined the Peace Army in stressing the gendered reasons to vote 'no', and took an official position.⁶³

International travel: Zürich 1919

The activities of the Sisterhood of International Peace (SIP) and the Peace Army had, until 1919, been confined to the home front. This meant that, during the war years, their interactions were defined by their contrasting reactions to the domestic political culture and the *War Precautions Act*, which kept them divided. When the war ended, both groups rejoiced not just at the end of the hostilities but because the resumption of peace gave them the opportunity to translate their internationalist politics into practice. It was their common international agenda that had caused the two groups to consider collaboration and merger in 1915 and 1916, though the pressure and complicating factors of the war had prevented union. But with these factors now gone, internationalism was able to bring the WPA and the SIP together.

The International Women's Committee for Permanent Peace (IWCPP) convened another international congress in Zürich in 1919. Eleanor Moore, Vida Goldstein and Cecilia John travelled as Australian delegates. Thus, the two Melbourne groups were both represented. The journey took over 10 weeks each way and was funded by generous donations from both organisations, and money raised through special appeals.⁶⁴

Once at the conference, SIP and Peace Army rivalry was no longer so pertinent for the three Australian delegates. They graciously shared notes to

ensure they all heard the news of the conference. As Moore had arrived earlier and was able to transcribe notes from the first days, the *Woman Voter* acknowledged her for supplying them with material, such as Jane Addams' address, which they printed in full.⁶⁵ Goldstein noted that they were encouraged and supported by each other. She was pleased to see Moore: 'It was good to see an Australian comrade in that great gathering. Seats were found for us with her, and we felt there was quite a home atmosphere around our table'.⁶⁶

The Australians came well prepared for the conference, compiling a memorandum to be tabled that included reports from their meetings and petitions from Australian women in support of the conference deliberations.⁶⁷ The three delegates presented joint motions and a section report on behalf of Australia, not just on behalf of their own organisations.⁶⁸ As Australian women enjoyed the franchise, their presence and expertise were seen as distinctive. Moore and Goldstein were asked to give speeches about Australian suffrage at conference dinners.⁶⁹ Moore used her speech as an opportunity to convey her experience of and doubts about the inherent peacefulness of women. Her talk began with the observation that, once women started to vote, none of the 'dreadful results predicted' about how women would become unfeminine, or how it would destroy family life, came to pass and so there would be no dire consequences when women of all nations finally voted. But then she offered more qualified reflections about the failure of women's enfranchisement to fulfil all the expectations of women. Party politics, she claimed, had intervened:

Woman suffrage having been once established among us, no one has ever raised an agitation to have it repealed. On the other hand, we cannot claim that the woman's vote has done all that some expected or hoped from it. It happened there as it is likely to happen elsewhere. A large section of the women had no confidence in their own judgement, and allowed the strength of their vote to be drawn wholly into the party politics of the day, in which any special value it might have had was lost.⁷⁰

Moore's solution was education. Her address concluded by stressing that women would only use the vote to their best ability when they had been educated on how to do so:

To you younger women of Switzerland who eagerly look forward to voting, I would say, gain the right as soon as you can, use it, but do not overestimate its power. Think out now what your principles are to be on the great questions of the time, then remember that in giving you a vote, your country asks for *your* thought, not that of some relative, or orator, or newspaper. It has those already.⁷¹

Special Appeal by Women to Women

MANIFESTO

Australian Women's Peace Army.

CONSCRIPTION.

VOTE NO.

Australian Women's Peace Army/Vida Goldstein, 'Manifesto',
Melbourne: Fraser and Jenkinson Printers, c. 1916, from p. 1 (detail).
Riley and Ephemera Collection, State Library of Victoria

Sadly, Swiss women were forced to wait until the 1970s before they finally gained the opportunity to vote.

Vida Goldstein's talk concentrated on militarism in Australia and, rather than talking about women's franchise, she focused on the fight against compulsory military training for young boys. She appealed for international support for these Australian causes, noting: 'these conferences ... do help to breakdown barriers between nations. We can never at the order of our governments become enemies of each other. We want more of these congresses – everything that will tend to develop the international conscience, instead of the selfish spirit of nationalism.'⁷²

The conference overall seemed to deeply affect the Australian delegates, as is evident from the way that they described the events to their constituents at home. They actively engaged in the discussion, putting forward their experiences for the conference to deliberate on, and overall found the experience challenging and worthwhile, reaffirming their internationalism. Eleanor Moore noted that the greatest thing to observe was that the debates and interactions between nationals were characterised by 'a persistent refusal to be dominated by inflamed race feeling', something that confirmed to her the potential of internationalism for a new kind of peace and world order.⁷³

When the conference was over, the travelling Australians confronted obstacles to their ability to get home quickly. Moore spent some time in Paris, after which she went back to London only to find that 'there was no hope of

passage to Australia for months to come'.⁷⁴ She received an invitation from Emily Greene Balch, the new secretary of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Geneva, to volunteer at the International Bureau but, once again, found difficulty in getting there. To Moore, the barrier of passports and borders was more than just an inconvenience. She described it as 'obstruction-mongering', an intentional thwarting of the kindly impulses found when people were able to 'move about freely, find affinities and form ties which are of lasting pleasure and benefit on both sides'.⁷⁵ This practical representation of nationalism demonstrated a 'hardening of the heart and a narrowing of the mind', causing her to muse 'we are meant to be servants one of another, not of abstract collectivities'.⁷⁶

Nonetheless, Moore made it once more to Switzerland, where she worked and lived with Balch for eight weeks. Together, they got the material from the conference ready for publication. Her descriptions of this time show a real sense of acceptance and a love for the mixture of nationalities in the 'harmonious international circle' in which she found herself.⁷⁷ She began to have troubles with her health, however, and, when she was given notice that passage back to Australia was available, she took it.

The time spent at the international headquarters deepened Moore's commitment to internationalism. The friendship that she formed with Balch became a motivation for activity; as they wrote to each other in their official capacities (as secretaries of their respective sections), they discussed more than just business. They asked each other's advice on decisions, gave lengthy descriptions of people and events, related stories they thought would interest each other, and spoke with affection about personal issues.⁷⁸ They were not to meet again, but their friendship remained strong and supportive, and is an example of how these internationalist women found so much in common with women outside the bounds of arbitrary national borders. It was to Balch that Moore mused about her disappointment that Australia did not understand its place in the world, or realise its potential for a wider role in the international arena. Here she clearly appreciated how beneficial travelling had been to her understanding of internationalism, and she commented further on the responsibility she felt for enabling the rest of the population to benefit from the knowledge she had gained:

Coming back to this, and picking up again our old familiar newspapers, I feel at once our isolation and remoteness from the main currents of the world's affairs. Similar causes are producing similar effects, in a modified way, but there is very little sense of the vital importance to people abroad of what is

done even in this 'corner'. I am going to try and do what in me lies to stir not only the sense of world responsibility, but to open the eyes of Australians to their opportunities to give a lead, at least in some directions.⁷⁹

Vida Goldstein did not return to Australia straight away. The Peace Delegation Fund of the Peace Army was unable to raise enough money for her return fare, and she requested that no more money should be sent to her as she was severing connection with the Women's Political Association.⁸⁰ Travelling around Europe after the conference allowed her to experience the impact of war on society as a whole, not just on women, and she also saw the failure of governments to meet the needs of injured and returned soldiers in finding them employment. She became profoundly disillusioned with the peace plans and the lack of influence the women's movement was able to have on them. She recalled that her decision to remain in England, rather than immediately return to Australia, was partly because she felt she could 'no longer work in the political field because the people did not seem willing to tread this path'.⁸¹ She turned her energies instead to her Christian Science faith, though continuing to advocate peace and internationalism.⁸² Once back in Australia, Goldstein still participated in occasional meetings organised by the new Women's International League for Peace and Freedom group, but she never took on any public or organisational roles.

Cecilia John returned to Australia and decided to devote her energy to the 'Save the Children' movement; in 1922 she took charge of the London Save the Children Fund.⁸³ Without Goldstein's oversight, and with public sentiment moving on from the crisis of the war, the Women's Political Association and the Women's Peace Army decided to disband.⁸⁴ As the only women-specific peace group left, the Sisterhood of International Peace became the natural inheritor of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom functions and moved to adopt the title of 'Victorian Branch of the Australian Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom'.⁸⁵ They kept the Sisterhood of International Peace motto as a subtitle and made a point of calling themselves the 'Victorian Branch', to acknowledge and encourage peace groups in other states to complete the Australian Section. The new society, now officially part of the structure of the international organisation, wasted no time in beginning peacetime operations.

Conclusion

When historians have discussed the Sisterhood for International Peace (SIP) and the Women's Peace Army, much has been made of the divisions between the two groups, despite their similar goals. The international archive

reinforces how deeply the divide ran, with sentiments of frustration spilling over into letters sent to the confused international organising committee. My research shows, however, that the divided domestic political environment of the World War I exacerbated those divisions and that, once the war came to an end, internationalist women from both groups were able to come together as a united delegation at the 1919 conference. While the SIP officially took over organising in Australia and became the local section of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the influence of the Peace Army, and the defining role it also played in the anti-war movement during the Great War in Victoria, was just as important and relevant as that of the Sisterhood to the new organisation's development. Many of the members of the WPA remaining in Victoria joined WILPF (for example, Mary Fullerton and Clara Weekes remained active in WILPF), and functioning WPA groups in other states, such as the Queensland Rockhampton branch, affiliated with WILPF in a federated national body.

World War I encouraged the women's peace organisations in Australia to focus their attention on the promise of internationalism to secure a speedy end to the war and focus on permanent peace. While the two groups demonstrated complexity and disunity over competing strategies and models of organisation during the tumultuous war years, they joined together over the practice of internationalism, showing political acumen in embracing it as a counter to war and violence. As internationalism was still a novel concept, distrusted by nationalist governments and only beginning to be embraced by organisations set up during the war years, the absolute devotion to it by women's groups such as Women's International League for Peace and Freedom contributed to giving the movement momentum. The network of like-minded women from all over the world also gave purpose to the women of Australia, who, because of the international support for their ideas, did not become overwhelmed or disheartened by the domestic nationalism and opposition to their activities. World War I thus stimulated the women's peace movement to become international, and the movement carried this inspiration on throughout the twentieth century, for, as Eleanor Moore realised 'in matters that concerned all countries they [women] had very little means of making their opinion heard except through their international organisations'.⁸⁶