

**Entry type:** Event  
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## The Australian Women's Conference for Victory in War and Victory in Peace

(1943 - 1943)

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**Born** 19 November, 1943, Sydney New South Wales Australia

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**Died** 22 November, 1943, Sydney New South Wales Australia

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**Occupation** Conference, Feminist conference

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### Summary

The Australian Women's Conference for Victory in War and Victory in Peace was held in November 1943, organised around the theme 'A War to Win, a World to Gain'. In a feat of organisational excellence, given the restrictions placed on interstate travel during war time, ninety-one women's organisations from around Australia met in Sydney, Australia, to discuss post war reconstruction and the 'problems that will effect women and children in the post war period.' The Australian Women's Charter, which documents the resolutions brought forward during the conference and is considered a landmark feminist manifesto, was an important outcome of the conference.

## Details

Described as 'the largest and most representative feminist conference held until that time', the 1943 Australian Women's Conference for Victory in War and Victory in Peace brought together representatives of over ninety women's organisations across a range of political ideologies to consider the problems of post war reconstruction, and the role of women within the 'new order' when peace returned. Organised by the President of the United Associations of Women, Jessie Street, the conference, held in Sydney, New South Wales in November 1943, has been referred to as 'the high point of feminist solidarity and political mobilisation in the twentieth century'. Organised at a time when planning for peace was a politically bi-partisan priority, the conference addressed the complexity of women's lives and interests but focused on one over-riding question: how would these be advanced in the planning of post war reconstruction? An important outcome of the conference was the development of a charter of rights for women in the post-war world. The Australian Women's Charter, regarded as a land-mark feminist manifesto, was endorsed by the conference and represents a moment in time when Australian women prioritised the single category of gender over other political categories.

The conference did not emerge from a vacuum. As early as 1941, the United Associations of Women (U.A.) had begun discussing the needs and roles of women in post war reconstruction. A Women's Forum for Social and Economic Reconstruction was established; this forum held several important discussions. In 1942 the U.A. called a conference to consider 'problems concerning women under war conditions'. Given the wide ranging subject matter which included: the status of Australian girls marrying American troops; the need for canteens in factories and schools; the provision of crèches and kindergartens etc. for the children of working women; the investigation of conditions surrounding rationing and the brownout, the conference attracted a lot of attention and left a lot of matters unresolved.

The women of the U.A. decided that a national conference was required. A separate committee, comprised of women from the U.A., as well as non-members with connections to a wide range of women's groups, set about organising the conference. Preparation for the conference included consulting with as many women's organisations as possible prior to the conference, in order to amass the resolutions which, when adopted, became the Australian Women's Charter.

After the conference, 20,000 copies of the Charter booklet were distributed to individuals and organisations in Australia and overseas. The Australian Women's Charter Movement was established to provide concrete follow-up activity based on the resolutions outlined in the Charter. State conferences were organised, charter deputations lobbied members of the federal parliament on specific points and a follow up conference was organised in 1946. Representations of fewer organisations attended this conference, held in Sydney, New South Wales, in August 1946, however, there were a number of overseas delegates in attendance. Nevertheless, while it is true that the 1943 conference reflected the politics of unity that accompanied some forms of war-time political activism, the 1946 conference reflected the changes in the global political climate that developed in the post war period. Representatives of some of the more conservative women's organisations had difficulty finding common ground with women like Jessie Street, president of the U.A., given their leftist connections. Maintaining a united feminist front became increasingly difficult as the world plunged into a new, cold war.

In order to demonstrate the extent of unity amidst diversity that was present at the conference, the following list names all the organisations that were represented at the conference:

### New South Wales:

- Austral India League
- Australian Institute of Sociology
- Australian Railways' Union – Women's Auxiliary
- Australian Labor Party (Official)
- Australian Labor Party (State)
- Australian Labor Party (Concord West Branch)
- Australian Federation of Women Voters (N.S.W. Committee)
- Australian Association of Scientific Workers (N.S.W. Division)
- Australian Women's Party
- Amalgamated Hospital Employees' Association
- Amalgamated Engineering Union
- Board of Social Studies
- Balmain Council – Alderman Gallimore
- Bankstown Women's Committee
- Communist Party
- Care of the Child in Wartime Committee
- Commonwealth Temporary Clerks Association
- Council for Women in War Work
- Christian Social Order Movement
- Domestic Employees' Union
- Fellowship of Australian Writers
- Friendship with Russia League

Federation of Infants' School Clubs  
Friday Club  
Girls Friendly Society  
Glebe Council – Alderman Pitt  
Greenwich Women's Committee  
Guildford Comforts Fund  
Granville Mothers' Club  
Hairdressers' Union  
Hotel, Club and Restaurant Employees' Union  
Humane Movement  
Ironworkers' Union  
Municipal and Shire Council Employees' Union  
National Council of Jewish Women  
New Education Fellowship  
Our New Order  
Presbyterian Women's Federation  
Printing Industries Union  
Roseville Group, United Associations of Women  
Recreation and Leadership Movement  
Seamen's Union, Women's Auxiliary  
Sheet Metal Workers' Union  
Sydney Women's Cooperative Guild  
Teachers' Federation  
Textile Workers Union  
Travellers' Aid Society  
United Associations of Women  
Women's Christian Temperance Union  
Watson Labor Women's Auxiliary  
Widows of the A.I.F. Association  
Women for Canberra  
Y.M.C.A.

## Country

Newcastle Housewives Association  
Newcastle Social Hygiene Committee  
Women' Auxiliary, Coal and Shale Employees Federation, Newcastle  
Crippled Children Society, Newcastle  
Newcastle Trades Hall Council  
Katoomba P. & C. and Mothers' Clubs  
Katoomba Crippled Children's Society  
Katoomba R.S.S.I.L.A., Women's Auxiliary  
Katoomba Congregational Church, Women's Guild  
Lithgow Child Care Committee  
Democratic Housewives Association, Wollongong  
Goulburn A.R.U. Women's Auxiliary  
West Maitland Branch, United Associations of Women

## Queensland

National Council of Women  
Y.W.C.A.  
Women's Auxiliary, Townsville Trades and Labor Council  
Women's Auxiliary, Maryborough Trades and Labor Council  
Federated Clerk' Union  
Storemen and Packers' Union  
Town and Country Women's Association

## Victoria

Women's Christian Temperance Union  
Council for Women in War Work  
Communist Party  
Munitions Workers Union

## Tasmania

Housewives Association  
R.S.S.I.L.A. Guild of Remembrance  
National Council of Women  
Council for the Mother and Child  
Women's International League

## South Australia

Adelaide Jewish Women's Guild  
Jewish Red Cross Society  
Women's Christian Temperance Union  
League for the Protection of Aboriginal Women  
Communist Party

## West Australia

Hotel, Club and Caterers' Union  
Council of Churches  
Housewives Association

## Published resources

### **Resource Section**

DRB Mitchell to Director, Commonwealth Investigation Branch, 7 June 1941, National Archives of Australia,  
<http://www.uncommonlives.naa.gov.au/detail.asp?exID=93&iID=346&eID=&lID=3&cID=36>

Jessie Street (left) with delegates to the second Australian Woman's Charter conference in Sydney in 1946., National Archives of Australia,  
<http://www.uncommonlives.naa.gov.au/detail.asp?iID=367&lID=3&cID=29>

Jessie Street, National Archives of Australia, 2018,  
<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/snapshots/uncommon-lives/jessie-street/life.aspx>

### **Edited Book**

Jessie Street : documents and essays, Radi, Heather, c1990

### **Book**

Getting Equal: the History of Australian Feminism, Lake, Marilyn, 1999

### **Book Section**

Girdled for War: Women's Mobilisations in World War Two, Saunders, Kay and Bolton, Geoffrey, c1992

## Archival resources

### **State Library of Western Australia**

[Records, 1960-1991 \[manuscript\]](#)

### **Mitchell and Dixson Libraries Manuscripts Collection**

[United Association of Women - Records, ca.1930-1970](#)

### **National Library of Australia, Manuscript Collection**

[Papers of Jessie Street, circa 1914-1968 \[manuscript\]](#)

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