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Portland: Struggle Left.

International Women's Day: 1945

With the end of the War in sight, Katharine saw a danger to her hopes for reconstruction through a Socialist Australia. Before resuming work on the second volume of her goldfields trilogy, Katharine made this appeal to Australian women.

THIS YEAR. International Women's Day is being celebrated in an atmosphere of hope that this terrible war will soon end. The horror and suffering of five years of war still lies heavily on our minds and spirits and must never be forgotten. As the glorious promise of peace draws nearer, we must pledge ourselves, by the memory of the millions who have died in the fight against fascism, the millions who have been maimed, blinded and broken in health – by the whole tragedy of ruined towns and devastated countries, we must pledge ourselves to work so that when Victory is proclaimed, the basis for a sound and constructive peace will be assured.

That is what International Women's Day is for. That is why women in all democratic countries are meeting today to declare their unity for Victory and Peace. They know that the hope of the mothers of the world lies in the utter defeat of fascism, and in the measures which must be taken to insure that another generation is not swept into the barbarous business of war.

The spirit of International Women's Day is anti-fascist, because intelligent women everywhere realize that fascism is the enemy of peace and progress. Fascism glorifies war and reduces all human material to the level of scrap for

war purposes.

It is no longer necessary to explain just what fascism is and what it does, as we used to in the years before the war. But still many people, and particularly women, do not realize the tendencies in their own countries which lead to suppression of the democratic rights of the people, and that fascism, under some other name, may still attempt to prevent women playing a full and equal part with their men in Humanity's progress towards a new and better way of life.

If women are to wield a powerful influence for good in the period of reconstruction which will follow the end of the war, they themselves must recognize the need to do so.

It always fills me with shame when a woman says: "Oh, but I'm not interested in politics!" To say such a thing is such a denial of her birthright as a human being with brains and ability to serve the best interests of her children and of humanity. We must always point out to women who say they are "not interested in politics" just what it means to refuse to think about matters of national and international importance.

This is the first essential for women in the period of reconstruction, it seems to me. That they should think, seek information on national and international affairs, and be prepared to act vigorously and courageously to give effect to their conviction.

The second essential is that they should so organize their domestic affairs, that they can give time to read and attend meetings, join in the activity around movements for the improvement of local conditions. I understand the difficulties which most women have to overcome in this respect. But isn't it a fact that many of these difficulties are caused by a too conscientious devotion to household duties, so called social duties, shopping excursions and desperate attempts to keep up with changing fashions? So much futile polishing, shopping and

refurbishing of garments, wastes the priceless thought and energy of women. If only most women would keep their minds as clean and tidy as they keep their houses, we would get somewhere.

We are approaching one of the most important periods in the history of mankind. Great changes can be made for the benefit of the Australian people and for the welfare of all peoples. And it is true, that every single individual can help to bring them about by clear thinking, and by honest and sincere action.

At the same time many dangers confront our people, and also the democratic peoples of other countries. The struggle between the forces which oppose human progress and those which are always striving to clear the way for human progress goes on. But the forces of reaction are forced to cloak themselves and their purposes with liberal names and ideas which will deceive the people as to their real objectives. This is what the Nazis in Germany did in order to mislead the people. In Italy and Japan, the same methods have been employed.

In order to see clearly we must look behind names, and statements of policy, in order to understand what is happening. We must study the record of men and women who profess to serve the interests of the nation, and are actually serving the financial interests of big combines, interests which are opposed to the welfare of the people.

It is difficult for ordinary men and women in out of the way places of Australia, to realize what the Anglo-Soviet Treaty, Teheran Agreement and the Crimea Conference mean to them. To realize that these treaties entered into by representatives of the United Nations, pledged to respect democratic principles, provide a better foundation than we have ever had for the future development of all peoples, on lines that are in accord with progress.

To have won recognition of the four freedoms expressed in the Anglo-Soviet Treaty is one of democracy's most

of democratic nations demonstrated their always growing desire for recognition of these rights. The unity of the Allied powers in military action to ensure victory, ratified by the Teheran Agreement; and the decisions arrived at by the Crimea conferences reflect the will of the people, in so far as organization for victory and peace are concerned. They represent a definite move forward on the part of governments which had to satisfy the democratic feeling of their peoples that the purpose of the war was to smash fascism forever.

But already, we know there have been moves to underestimate the Anglo-Soviet Treaty, to foment disunity between the Allied Nations, and to discredit organizations which exist to protect the democratic rights of the people in our own and other countries.

One of the dangers, at present, is talk of "a soft peace." All manner of well-meaning people may allow themselves to be swayed by the fact that some churchmen have lent themselves to this point of view. But what are the facts underlying such a policy? That is what we have to ask ourselves. It savours of the old disastrous appeasement - of handling fascism with velvet gloves. That is not the treatment for criminal gangsters, or for men and women who have supported a regime based on the lust for power and maintained by the most atrocious brutality and violence.

We all know something of what the peoples of occupied countries have suffered. We know something of the destruction of towns and villages, the massacre of men, women and children, how they have been tortured and forced to labour for the Nazis. But we don't know the whole story. Our minds simply cannot conceive the pain and horror that these fiendish soldiers of Hitler have brought to hundreds and thousands of defenceless men and women.

I have just been reading the report of a commission which was investigating Nazi crimes in Lublin, Poland. In many Russian towns and villages whole populations were slaughtered with the same ruthlessness.

And there are people who talk of "a soft peace!"

It is evident that we must support conditions of peace which will ensure that never again will persons capable of committing such inhuman barbarities, have power to cause such havoc, or to plunge the nations of the world into war, as the Nazis boasted they would – and will again if the remnants of their economic, social and political system are permitted to survive.

The only way to ensure their utter defeat is to strengthen the power of the people's parties – the parties which in every country recognize that control by the people of their economic, social and political life, will eradicate every vestige of fascism, Nazism – under whatever seemingly patriotic and liberal names they may hide.

And yet in Great Britain, America and Australia – as well as in Belgium and Greece – there are already campaigns to discredit this movement of peoples for a fuller measure of democratic control which is the only reply to fascist tendencies.

This is another danger about which intelligent women have to concern themselves.

As the United States Secretary of State, Mr. S. Stettinius, warned the Inter-American Conference, recently:

"The Nazis might attempt to establish a base in the western hemisphere for an ultimate 'comeback.'

"The Axis leaders, of course, will attempt to escape the consequences of their crimes, and we still face the danger of a secret Nazi-Fascist infiltration into the political and economic life of this hemisphere."

What applies to America, in this connection, applies also to Australia.

Mr. Joseph Davies, who was Ambassador to the Soviet Union a few years ago, and wrote the now famous *Mission*

to Moscow, pointed out in an article in the American press not long ago that the Nazis had used Red baiting to create hostility to the Soviet Union and the Anglo Soviet Treaty. Red baiting, he said quite definitely, was a secret weapon used by Hitler to create disunity among the peoples of the Allied Nations. Red baiting fights for Hitler, not us!

The United Nations stand pledged to a world peace organization which will prevent future wars, and will combat hunger, poverty, ignorance and disease. The most bigoted reactionaries cannot deny the part that the Red Army of the Soviet Union has played in the winning of victory and peace. On the front pages of our daily newspapers we have seen glowing tributes to the Red Army "the Greatest Offensive in History," and the triumphs of Soviet strategy. Mr. Churchill has said that the Red Army has torn the guts out of the German war machine. This is not Red baiting.

No. But turn to other pages of these newspapers, and you will find attacks on working class organizations, the Labour Government, trade unions, and the Communist Party of Australia. We find that Red baiting no longer applies to the Soviet Union – because the case for Communism has been proved in the magnificent organization of the Soviet peoples which has defeated Hitler. Red baiting has become the major activity of all those who fear the democratic power of the people. They use any and every means to discredit any move that is made to strengthen the power of the people, and usually announce that communist influence is responsible for these moves.

Well, communists appreciate the compliment that nothing is done for the good of the people, that they have not got something to do with: but how ludicrous are these attacks on communists and the Communist Party of Australia when we know that their purpose is to weaken control by the people of their economic, social and political

affairs. These attacks serve the interests only of those individuals in the community who profit by war, ignorance, and suppression of the democratic rights of their own and other peoples.

You see where the danger lies. That many people may be misled by scandalous and lying statements about communists in Australia, just as they were a few years ago about communists in the Soviet Union. The bright idea now is to pretend that communists are different in the Soviet Union to communists in Australia. The fact of the matter is that communists, the world over, are inspired by Marxist-Leninist principles for organization to improve the living conditions of the working people who are a majority in every country, and on whose health and energy the prosperity and peace of a nation depend.

The people who indulge in Red baiting are usually associated also with attempts to prevent women from qualifying for any work for which they may be physically and mentally fitted: and also to prevent them from earning the rates of pay men obtain for similar work. They would like to force women out of certain industries in the post war period, and make economic necessity a reason for concentrating on "home duties" as "most productive of personal well-being and national security."

We know how stupid and illogical these arguments are – but there are many women who do not realize the real danger to the future of our country and to reorganization for a better world which underlie these tendencies I have briefly outlined.

Because of that, on International Women's Day, we must reaffirm our resolution to throw from our minds the veils of ignorance and apathy, to think and work for fulfilment of all that we believe this war is being fought to win. And we must help all honest and sincere women to understand how much their help is needed to ensure that fulfilment.

We greet the women of Great Britain, of France, of

Czechoslovakia, of Greece and China who have worked so splendidly to hasten victory. The heroism of Soviet women, both in the production of food supplies and munitions, and in the resistance of fighting partisan groups, has been almost unbelievable; but we must remember too that Soviet women have had greater opportunities to serve their country than have been granted to the women of other nations, because they are trained for so many jobs that we are unaccustomed to; and because community organization relieves them of many time-wasting "home duties."

In Australia, hundreds of women and girls have been doing war work. In industry, they have increased production of supplies and munitions: in the services, have released men for the battle areas. These Australian women have shown what they are capable of during the war. We are proud of them. Will they work as strenuously for fulfilment of the purposes of the war? Will they identify themselves as nobly with work for national welfare, security and international peace as they have done to assure victory? I believe that they will if we can reach them: if we can help them to realize the real issues at stake.

You women of Newcastle have accomplished a great deal by co-operative effort to improve local conditions, I know. But I can imagine how much more you could have accomplished had you been assisted by many more women who perhaps have not thought it necessary to take an active part in public affairs. I hope that the end of the war and the new perspective which peace promises, will make them realize how necessary, both for themselves and for all of us, their participation in movements for community welfare really are.

As Mohammedan women threw off their veil on International Women's Day in Moscow many years ago, so let us throw off from our minds the veils of ignorance and apathy which for so long have prevented us seeing clearly

that women must think and work strenuously, if ever the world of peace and security which we dream about is to become a reality. The chance of making it so lies before us. Dare we refuse to take advantage of every opportunity to prevent the outbreak of future wars? Dare we allow the untold suffering and horror of this war to happen again – without doing our utmost to prevent it: by defending the democratic rights of the people; preventing the growth of any fascist tendencies – whatever they may call themselves – in our midst; and by seeking to promote every movement designed to strengthen a people's control of their own way of life, in Australia, and in all other countries liberated from the scourge of fascism.

*International Women's Day Message – Newcastle,
N.S.W., March 8, 1945*

About Australian Women

Requests for articles on aspects of Australian life from Soviet periodicals were a constant drain upon Katharine's time, but she welcomed the opportunity to record the contribution of some of the selfless and unrecognized workers for the causes that she held dear.

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN pride themselves on being among the first in the world to win the right to vote in elections for parliament on the same terms as men.

They were not, it seems, the first. In the State of Wyoming, U.S.A., women were granted a vote in 1869. New Zealand was the first country to introduce womanhood suffrage in 1893, and South Australia followed its example a year later, although it was not until April 25, 1896, that women voted in elections of that State.

It is sometimes said that the franchise fell into our lap without a struggle. But that is not so. There was a struggle led by Mrs. Catherine Spence of South Australia and Mrs. Catherine Low of New South Wales. It was not so prolonged, however, and did not meet with such fierce opposition as womanhood suffrage did in Great Britain and America.

Mrs. Spence, a writer and courageous champion of the rights of women, was chiefly responsible for what was done in South Australia. Then when the Federal Constitution, which united the States of Australia, was being drawn up the electoral rights of South Australia had to be conceded and the electoral rights of other States brought into line with those of South Australia. Thus, in 1901, adult suffrage and voting rights for every man and woman over