

## ON PEACE

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### ***“All Wars are Fought Against Children.” (UNESCO 1950)***

Federation has a long and proud history of involvement with the Australian peace movement, and indeed, the international peace movement.

In the 1930s, led by former Federation President Sam Lewis and other teachers active in the peace movement and, in particular, in the Australian Movement Against War and Fascism, Federation’s Executive established a Peace Committee.

The Committee was a forerunner to Federation’s Special Interest Group on Peace and Disarmament established in 1982. This group is today known as the Peace Environment and International Issues Special Interest Group.

In 1947, Sam Lewis, as President of the Australian Teachers Federation (ATF), the national education branch, attended the second conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), in Mexico City.

*“Not long after he (Sam) returned from the conference in Mexico, UNESCO declared that “All Wars Are Fought Against Children”. Sam ensured that this concept was embedded into the political psyche of the NSW Teachers Federation. In recognition of his influence in this regard, in 1983 the Federation established the annual Sam Lewis Peace Award, which gives children in NSW public schools an opportunity to express a message of peace, tolerance and hope through art.”<sup>1</sup>*

In the late 1960s and ‘70s, Federation members were enthusiastic participants in the **moratorium movement against the Vietnam War**. In addition to joining mass demonstrations and rallies, teachers joined their students in schools in wearing moratorium badges against departmental directives.

In the late 1970s and 80s, peace activists in Federation were heavily involved in the emergence of the Australian anti-nuclear movement, in opposition to uranium mining, nuclear proliferation, the presence of US bases on Australian soil, and French atomic testing in the Pacific. Mass rallies were organised to coincide with Hiroshima Day and Palm Sunday, annual events that continue to be supported by Federation and attended by members.

Delegates at Federation’s 1982 Annual Conference endorsed the union’s first comprehensive policy on peace, disarmament and peace education, despite many of the activities contained in the resolution having been conducted by members without significant controversy, at least after the McCarthyist years had passed.

At the 1984 Annual Conference, it was moved that every Association be encouraged to elect a Peace Contact, a practice that continues to this day.

### **No to War**

In 1991, Federation State Council passed a motion calling for an immediate ceasefire in the Gulf. Federation also intervened in the “weapons of mass destruction” war in 1998 writing to Federal Defence Minister Alexander Downer calling for the immediate withdrawal of all Australian troops in the Gulf. Federation wrote: *“Federation also notes that the United States of America has the largest stockpile of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons in the world.”*

The decision in 2003 to once again send Australian troops to war in Iraq at the behest of the US resulted in a significant mobilisation by Federation in conjunction with the broader peace and trade

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<sup>1</sup> Mulheron, M (June 2022), “Sam Lewis: A Biography”, Semester 1 2022 Journal of the NSW Teachers Federation Centre for Professional Learning

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union movements. When war was declared in March of that year, Federation encouraged all members to attend their nearest rally against the war that same afternoon.

Later in the same year, Federation wrote directly to the leader of the “Coalition of the willing”, George W. Bush, with respect to the Israeli government’s raids on Syrian territory, calling for “*an end to the apartheid wall*”, and for the “*US to cease funding the imperialistic policies of the Israeli government and ensure that no intelligence is passed on to the Israeli government which could facilitate attacks on neighbouring states*”.

Federation Council moved motions of condemnation against the Israeli government in 2010 and 2014, expressing particular concern for the Palestinian children of occupied Gaza, who have been subject to collective punishment and constant militarised coercion. Their human rights, including their right to education, continue to be attacked by the expansionist Israeli state and their illegal occupation of Palestinian territories.

## **AUKUS**

The AUKUS announcement in September 2021, regrettably, made clear that once again the peace movement, including Federation, would be required to mobilise against the warmongers who seek to line the pockets of the vested interests in the global weapons manufacturing industry, as well as other various rent seekers, at the expense of government spending on education and other social services and investment in mitigations and solutions to the real threat – the climate emergency.

Annual Conference joins the growing chorus of concern that the AUKUS security pact signed by Australia with the US and the UK, made in secret with no public consultation or parliamentary debate nor scrutiny, compromises the pursuit of an independent foreign policy and has the potential to drag Australia into foreign conflict and war once more.

Under the AUKUS deal, Australia is set to spend **at least** \$368 billion, plus a “contingency” of \$123 billion, on between three and five Virginia-class nuclear-powered submarines from the US from 2030 before building between three and eight SSN-AUKUS boats with a British design and US weapons systems by the middle of the 2050s, by which time the technology may well be obsolete.

The submarines will also impose an extraordinary economic burden on the Australian people for decades to come, with the health, education, aged care and social services budgets likely to be the first to be sacrificed.

This has been a consistent concern of the union throughout its history: the massive diversion of government spending towards an illogical and dangerous arms race, away from spending to address “*human needs, especially overcoming poverty, hunger and disease in developing countries*”, as identified by the 1984 Federation Annual Conference.

AUKUS also poses a serious threat to the health and safety of people and the environment. The submarines would be fuelled by weapons-grade, highly enriched uranium and would leave a legacy of high-level nuclear waste requiring careful management, on Australian soil, for many thousands of years, as well as the radioactive parts from decommissioned SSNs.

Annual Conference notes with concern that advocates for nuclear power and nuclear weapons have become emboldened by the AUKUS agreement.

The Medical Association for Prevention of War (MAPW) has stated that the proposed acquisition exploits a loophole in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and undermines the treaty itself. According to MAPW, it is unprecedented for a non-nuclear armed nation to acquire nuclear-powered submarines. The UK and US submarines use uranium that is highly enriched to 93-97 per cent, which is nuclear-weapons grade. Each submarine is estimated to carry enough of this material for 20 nuclear weapons.

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Australia's unflinching support of the US has increased instances of racism against Chinese Australians that was already heightened at the onset of the COVID pandemic.

It has caused unease and uncertainty amongst leaders in the Pacific, who want the Australian government to focus on climate mitigation not nuclear proliferation.

On 4 March 2022, mere weeks before the federal election, in the dying days of his prime ministership Scott Morrison told the Lowy Institute in a speech that the government *"has decided to establish a Future Submarine Base on the east coast of Australia to support basing and disposition of the future nuclear-powered submarines"*.

In a complete shock to each community and their democratically elected representatives, Morrison went on to state that: *"Following significant work by Defence reviewing 19 potential sites, three preferred locations on the east coast have been identified. They are Brisbane, Newcastle, and Port Kembla."*

However, in its response to the Defence Strategic Review release last month, the Albanese Government said it would not be until later this decade before a final decision on the location would be made.

Regardless, Annual Conference affirms its opposition to the establishment of a nuclear submarine base in Australia, – not in Port Kembla, not in Newcastle, not anywhere.

This position is consistent with the decision of the 1982 Annual Conference which stated: *"Conference opposes the involvement of Australia in the US military strategy through bases, landing rights for bombers and facilities for nuclear-armed vessels. These facilities, apart from infringing the sovereignty of our country, make Australia a potential target in the event of a nuclear war."*

AUKUS would again make Australia a nuclear target if it is allowed to proceed.

### **Educate for peace, not war**

At its 1983 Annual Conference, the ATF endorsed the main recommendations of the 1982 Hiroshima Symposium, which stated that: *"Teacher unions should both take an active part in the general peace movement of the country, as well as work to have peace and disarmament education introduced in a systematic way into schools and colleges by the actions of teachers themselves."*

Federation expresses its opposition with what appears to be an increasing militarisation of education across the schools and tertiary sectors. The weapons industry is emboldened by the AUKUS decision and their attempts to push their way into public schools, TAFE and universities must be rejected.

Encouragingly, opposition to the deal is growing. Annual Conference congratulates the Illawarra Teachers Association for their role in this year's May Day March in Port Kembla in opposition to AUKUS, the nuclear submarine deal and Port Kembla as a possible site. Further, Annual Conference congratulates the South Coast Labour Council and the Wollongong May Day Committee for their leadership on this issue. Federation stands in solidarity with all workers who are fighting off this nuclear threat against their communities.

Further, Federation applauds members of the Australian Labor Party, led by the newly established Labor Against War, former MPs and former ministers who are calling on the Albanese Government to withdraw from the AUKUS alliance and cease any program in pursuit of the acquisition of nuclear submarines.

### ***NSW Teachers Federation 2023 Annual Conference Decision***

Federation reaffirms our commitment to campaigning for Australia to become a signatory to the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and will continue to support the work of International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, Australia (ICAN).

Federation will continue to work with the anti-war, peace and broader union movements to expose and oppose the threat inherent in this rise in militarism. Our participation will include, but will not be limited to, the following:

- encouraging all interested members to join the Peace Environment and International Issues Special Interest Group;
- each Association encouraged to elect a Peace Contact to assist the union to organise future teacher solidarity and supported by developing a comprehensive role statement for Association Peace Contacts as a matter of priority in conjunction with members of the Special Interest Group;
- members and Associations actively encourage students to send entries to the Sam Lewis Peace Awards each year;
- continuing to promote and support activities, rallies, events and publications that inform and encourage the participation of members and the wider community around peace and the risks posed by AUKUS, including with financial support, where appropriate and as determined by the Senior Officers and Executive; and
- development of a Trade Union Training campaign course that may include focus on the teaching of peace in the curriculum and the history of peace in Federation and broader trade union movement.

That this decision of Annual Conference be provided to the Australian Education Union, Education International, Unions NSW and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) as a matter of urgency in order to further strengthening the broader union movement's opposition to war, growing militarisation and nuclear proliferation.

Updates on the progress of these matters will be the subject of reports and recommendations to Executive and Council as appropriate.