22.10.3 Women and the war effort

Some 3000 Australian women travelled overseas with the Australian Army Nursing Service. They served in all theatres of the war and on transport and hospital ships. These nurses worked under extreme conditions tending the wounded after battles. Several nurses were wounded and 13 were killed. However, the Australian government refused to allow women to serve in any direct roles in the armed forces. As the men went off to war, many women entered the paid workforce. Thousands more helped with recruiting campaigns, fund-raising and charity work. A few women were able to replace enlisted men in fields such as banking, bookkeeping and typing. For many women, this was not enough. Recognising that the government and military were hostile to the idea of women taking on ‘men’s roles’, women applied for clerical and cooking jobs in the military. However, they were not accepted and this greatly disappointed many who were aware of how different the situation was in Britain. There, women were employed as munitions workers, drivers, and in factories and on farms. Some British women actually gained military roles as drivers and radio operators when the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps was founded in Britain in 1917.

Voluntary work

Thousands of women helped troops by providing extra clothing, tobacco, medicines and other comforts that the army failed to provide. They also made clothes for Allied refugees. Many other women cared for returning invalids through the Red Cross, including in the Australian Red Cross Voluntary Aid Detachment. They met returning hospital ships and provided kitchens and rest homes. The Red Cross raised 12 million pounds during the war to pay for this work.

Women for and against the war

Women were among the war’s fiercest supporters. They helped in recruiting campaigns, issuing posters and pamphlets and speaking at rallies. Some women shamed men into enlisting by handing out white feathers — a symbol of cowardice — to those who had not volunteered. The Australian Women’s National League campaigned for conscription. Women were also among the war’s strongest critics. Vida Goldstein was among those who formed peace organisations and campaigned against conscription.
The greatest contribution of women, however, would hardly ever be spoken of. It was the lifelong care thousands gave to their fathers, husbands, sons and brothers who returned with terrible physical, emotional and mental wounds from the horrors of war.

**SOURCE 7** The arrival of the first Australian wounded from Gallipoli at the Third London General Hospital, by George Coates, 1915.

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### 22.10.3 Activities

To answer questions online and to receive immediate feedback and sample responses for every question, go to your learnON title at www.jacplus.com.au. *Note: Question numbers may vary slightly.*

**Check your understanding**

1. Approximately how many Australian women served overseas as nurses during World War I?
2. Describe other ways in which Australian women contributed to the war effort.

**Using historical sources as evidence**

3. Look closely at Source 7. The nurses depicted in this artwork were members of the Australian Army Nursing Service. Use the details, your knowledge and imagination to describe what they would have thought about their work and the suffering of their patients.

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### 22.10 Putting it all together

**Identifying continuity and change**

1. Using the sources and other information in this subtopic, and your answers to activities, identify what appears to have remained the same and what appears to have changed in Australia during World War I in each of the following areas:
   - (a) attitudes to the war
   - (b) racial attitudes
   - (c) roles of women.

**Analysing cause and effect**

2. Explain how the war contributed to social conflict in Australia.

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**learnON** RESOURCES -- ONLINE ONLY

- Complete this digital doc: Worksheet 22.10: Reflection