

Australian Trades Union Anti-Conscription Congress

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

Manifesto to Trades Unionists.

Comrades.—The time for jubilation is not yet. The Referendum is over, but the struggle to defeat conscription must go on until every possibility of its imposition on the Australian people has disappeared. For us to slacken off and regard the issue as ended would be suicidal—nay, it would be the surest guarantee of our ultimate undoing, for the enemy has not yet capitulated. Prior to the Referendum significant and sound resolutions were made by the responsible leaders of military and naval organisations. "Should by any chance the vote be against conscription I will make one to disseminate the decision," said Sir William Irvine. Mr. J. A. Boyd, M.L.A., made his refusal to accept a negative vote. On the Monday following the plebiscite the newspaper agencies behind the conscription conspiracy brazenly invited the Government to ignore the vote and act as though the country had overwhelmingly accepted the slave policy. It is very apparent we are not yet out of the wood.

Vigilance and steadfast determination to hold to what has been gained can alone save and serve us. In each State there must be maintained and strengthened the organisation which so magnificently acquitted itself in the great fight. To definitely shape a policy the National Executive has decided on the following arrangements:—

- (1) Immediately summoning to Melbourne the Interstate representatives on the Executive for consultation and negotiation.
- (2) The holding of Trades Union Conferences in all States on Saturday, 11th November, to receive from Interstate delegates reports covering the situation and the suggested course of action.
- (3) Thereupon convening special meetings of all Unions represented on the State Industrial Conferences, so the rank and file may know the character of our reports, and determine to support or reject our proposed basis of a common policy.
- (4) Holding a second Industrial Conference of Unions in each State on Saturday, 25th November, to present the result of the decision Unions have arrived at, and centrally to declare a policy in keeping therewith for the State as a whole.

It is further proposed that, in order to make the National Executive completely and equally representative of the State Industrial Conferences, the present personnel of the Executive be replaced by two delegates chosen by the State Conferences convened for Saturday, 11th November, thus ensuring equality of representation and establishing a national authority representative of and directly derived from the Unionists of the Commonwealth.

The work in hand is of the most vital moment. Of chief importance is that of terminating the operation of the Proclamation

compulsory calling men up for military training for service overseas. Service overseas is not and must not be made a compulsory obligation on the citizens. It is therefore inconceivable that men should be compulsorily trained for overseas service when overseas service is itself not compulsory. It is inconceivable that a military camp should be called a military camp when it is not a military camp. We have declared our opposition to any declaration of a state of emergency, and we have declared our opposition to the introduction of the War Precautions Act, which is expected in this struggle. Whether the declaration of a state of emergency is enforced or it is not enforced, the people are down and out, and the referendum a sham, a mockery, and a delusion, meaningless in itself and destitute in principle.

Therefore we are called on to lay the ground work of the campaign from the polls the tests has been laid down by Parliament. What the Prime Minister can do is to give the people a chance to grant he must not take it away from them. And for us there are no witnesses, no jury, no court, no appeal, no appeal is full of grave perils. We must have a referendum against such a policy, and we must have it now. Our first task is to insist that the referendum should be held. The Government's proposal should be rejected. The referendum policy has been a failure. The referendum should not be a failure. The Ministers should be definitely pledged to fight and execute the people's will, which is No Conscription. What the Government of Australia is in the hands of conscription, there is no security that the democratic verdict will be upheld.

Upon this transfer of the power to rule much depends. To effect it calls for the most powerful exercise of our strength and influence. Our supreme requirement is the maintenance of the spirit and purpose which inspired the magnificent vote on 28th October. The threat of dictatorship—whether by means of the War Precautions Act, a Hughes-Cook coalition, or the filling of vacant Ministerial portfolios with conscriptionist and expelled Labour politicians—has to be fought to the last ditch. Prepared and organised it will fall to the ground; otherwise the military octopus spreads its tentacles and grasps the body of Australian liberty, never to let go.

Of vital importance is the insistence that Parliament shall remain in constant session. Government by regulation must not be permitted in any circumstances, and neither House of Legislature should adjourn for any period of time. Parliament and not the Government Cabinet should alone legislate in this crisis. Whatever influence amongst us is able to wield should be directed towards ensuring the continuance of Parliamentary activity. While Parliament is in session every regulation of the Government may be debated and refused. When Parliament has adjourned the people are at the mercy of the conscriptionist Government.

In these circumstances the National Executive Committee will make a point of attending each Land meeting, and thus assist in consolidating the forces of Labour. Decisions of far-reaching significance will need to be arrived at, and it is essential that you exhaust every possible means of contributing to our ultimate success. These are the most wonderful days our history has ever seen, and it is to the great heart and mind of the men and women who labour the Executive turns with its cry to courage and preparation.



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Authorised by J. CURRY, Secy.

1914-15. National Executive Committee of the Australian Labor Party, Melbourne.

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