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A Story of the 1916 and 1917 Campaigns in Victoria

45 by Bertha Walker

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October, 1968.

"War prevents us from slipping into the abyss
of degeneracy and from becoming flabby....

"War like the glorious beams of the sun has
dried up mists of suspicion with which class
regarded class....

"War has purged us, war has saved us from
physical and moral degeneracy and decay."

* * * * *

THIS is not a quotation from a ranting Hitler.
It is an extract from a speech made in London
in 1916 by W. M. Hughes, Prime Minister of
Australia.

CONSCRIPTION -- THE GREAT ISSUE

"No event in the history of the Commonwealth
of Australia created more feeling and interest
in the community than the two referenda in 1916
and 1917 on conscription" so wrote Dr. Leslie C.
Jauncey in his book, "The Story of Conscription
in Australia."

In fact, the conscription campaigns engendered
almost as much bitterness as a civil war, and a
large part of its violence and injustice. As in
a civil war, the people were divided without
regard to class or creed. Large and small
communities and even families were split on the
issue.

* * * * *

HOW TO DEFEAT CONSCRIPTION

IT was the first and only time that any country in the world was permitted to vote on whether it would conscript its young men for war.

Defeated in the 1916 Plebiscite the Government again called upon the people to vote in 1917 and referring to the Polling Day of 1916 as a black day for Australia, Hughes said, "It was a triumph for the unworthy, the selfish and treacherous in our midst."

Who were the "unworthy", the "selfish" and treacherous"? From the ranks of those active in the anti-conscription army came many people who were significant in later years. Three became Prime Ministers, 12 became State Premiers, one an Attorney General of the Commonwealth and one a Judge.

DIVERSITY

THE anti conscription army was sufficiently diverse to include Archbishop Mannix, the Coadjutor of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Melbourne and Eureka veteran Monty Miller, who was gaoled in Western Australia at the age of 83 and struck off the pension. In Melbourne it had the first woman to graduate from the Melbourne University, Mrs. Bella Lavender M.A. (1883) and Vida Goldstein, the first woman to stand for Parliament in the English speaking world (1903).

It had the support of soldiers at the front, of whom the Director General of recruiting, Mr. Donald Mackinnon, said:- "I am certain, too, that the attitude of the soldiers who are abroad - as disclosed by their vote - has influenced public opinion, and renders any proposal to resubmit compulsory service to a popular vote impossible."

SHIRKERS? COWARDS?

THE anti conscriptionists were labelled as shirkers and cowards but they suffered arrest, bashing, goal sentences, sacking, dousing in the University lake, immersion in the River Yarra, tarring and feathering and deportation.

Never before or since have the people as a whole been stirred to such spontaneous demonstration in Australia. Two mighty armies, one under the NO banner, the other with the weight of the Government and bulk of the Press behind it, under the YES banner were soon locked in combat.

The Yarra Bank was filled to overflowing Sunday after Sunday, with attendances up to 100,000. The Exhibition Building was crowded with an estimated 50,000 people, addressed by politicians and trade union leaders from ten platforms and attended by 50 police, several detectives and plain clothes constables. Dr. Maloney ("the little doctor") chaired Exhibition and many other meetings.

Country and suburban meetings were held where they were never held before. Many women for the first time left the domestic circle to take part in a political movement.

EARLY YEARS

EARLY in the 1914-18 War the Labor Party was in power in the Senate, House of Representatives and all States with the exception of Victoria. Until the issue of conscription arose the Labor Governments showed themselves to be thorough war Governments. Andrew Fisher as Prime Minister promised "the last man and the last shilling" in support of the war.

In November 1914, three months after war commenced, 30 ships crowded with troops had been sent to war and a constant stream of reinforcements was kept up for nearly two years.

At the end of 1915 Fisher was made High Commissioner for the Commonwealth in London, and William Morris Hughes supplanted him as Prime Minister.

On March 6th, 1916, four days after England began to enforce conscription, Hughes arrived in England and attended the War Conference in London. His fervour for the war increased. He addressed patriotic meetings around the country and was feted.

Before leaving Australia he had given no hint of favoring conscription for overseas service - in fact he had said in the House on July 16th 1915 ... "In no circumstances would I agree to send men out of this country to fight against their will."

HUGHES HOME

HE came back to Australia a rabid conscriptionist. Legally Parliament could have amended the Defence Act to provide for conscription for overseas service but there were factors which made Hughes hesitate.

Mainly, the large campaign against conscription which had developed during his absence in London.

Much credit goes to Maurice Blackburn, M.H.R. He initiated a move that letters be written to Federal Labor members of Parliament asking them to pledge themselves to oppose conscription. Many were tied down in this way. Some of the State branches of the Labor Party had bound their Federal members. Annual conferences of the Victorian, Queensland and N.S.W. Labor Party branches had declared against conscription.

Hughes knew he could not count on the full support of the House of Representatives and even if a Bill was passed by it he could not count on the Senate. Hence the decision to hold a referendum on October the 28th, 1916.

UNITED THEY STOOD

MEN and women who were in the thick of the campaigns comment today that the greatest single feature of the campaigns was the way in which people of the most diverse interests combined together on this special issue. Catholics, Protestants, Atheists, Trade Unionists, Labor Party members, Socialists, Industrial Workers of the World members, Pacifists, some war supporters all worked wholeheartedly for the common goal. Those who believed in refusing to fight in all circumstances (the pure pacifists) were able to work with I.W.W. members and Socialists who believed they might support a different type of war at some future date.

The No Conscription Fellowship, an organisation existing in England and brought into being in Melbourne by Bob Ross had a pledge made by thousands which included the words - "We refuse to take human life." After some months a resolution was carried that this part of the English pledge be struck out. An opposition had grown declaring that the time might come that they felt justified in taking human life.

BOY CONSCRIPTION

THE Australian public was prepared by earlier events for a fight against conscription. By operation of the Defence Act 1903-10, the first army formed under compulsory training in the British Empire was brought into existence. Training covered the ages 12 to 26.

Opposition was widespread and organised mainly by the Society of Friends, especially in South Australia. 25 Ministers of religion signed a manifesto against the Act known as Section 125.

Prosecutions for non-compliance averaged 266 per week in 1912-13 and 269 in 1913-14. During the first 3 years 27,749 were prosecuted.

"SOLITARY" IN A MILITARY FORTRESS

REMINISCENT of the early convict days, lads were put in military fortresses and if in "solitary" for such an offence as refusing to drill, they were on bread and water, slept on the floor with one blanket in a cell to which they were confined for 22 hours per day. This was suffered by lads as young as 15 years.

THE CHURCHES

THERE was an entirely different situation in the religious community from that existing today. The Protestant Ministers who protested on this issue could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Their congregations were conservative - only the courageous followers of Christ opposed them and they were likely to lose their living for their efforts. The Rev. Charles Strong of the Australian Church, whose activities inspired many, was one who lost his living. The Rev. Fred Sinclair belonged to a small progressive Church, "Free Religious Fellowship" and had the support of most of his Congregation in his stand against conscription.

The Anglican Synod and Protestant Churches of all kinds declared for conscription. The Society of Friends being a notable exception. It was claimed by some churchmen that God was on their side. They said God was a conscriptionist because He gave His only Begotten Son.

DR. MANNIX

IT was a different story with the Catholics. There was a strong Irish vein in the Church smarting from the brutal treatment meted out by the English in Ireland during the Easter Rebellion of that year.

Archbishop Mannix, as the spokesman of the Catholics, played a sterling part in the campaigns. He did not speak on political platforms but whilst performing the ordinary offices of the Church, opening bazaars and laying foundation stones, he made his own attitude clear.

His first statement was made when opening a bazaar in the Albert Hall at Clifton Hill on Saturday Sept. 16th, 1916....

"I am as anxious as anyone can be for a successful issue and for an honourable peace. I hope and I believe that that peace can be secured without conscription.(applause). For conscription is a hateful thing, and it is almost certain to bring evil in its train. (applause)

I have been under the impression, and I still retain the conviction, that Australia has done her full share -- I am inclined to say more than her full share -- in the war. (applause) ... Australians, brave as they have proved themselves to be in the field, are a peace loving people. They will not easily give conscription a foothold in this country (applause) ... We can only give both sides a patient hearing, and then vote according to our judgment. There will be differences among Catholics, for Catholics do not think or vote in platoons (applause) and on most questions there is room for divergence of opinion.

But, for myself, it will take a good deal to convince me that conscription in Australia would not cause more evil than it would avert (applause) ... And I incline to believe that those who propose it have misjudged the temper of the Australian people in the mass and their passionate love for freedom." (loud applause)

THE SMALL NATIONS

ON another occasion the Archbishop said that it was a war to protect small nations, or so he had been told. Well, then, they could start with Ireland. He would not favour the sending of troops overseas as long as the causes and purpose of the war were suspect.

DR. MANNIX UNDER FIRE

THE Archbishop roused the ire of the Protestant Churches, the Press and all forces for conscription.

An Editorial in the Argus of 19/9/16 referring to the statement of Dr. Mannix that Australia was doing more than its share said the burning words upon that point delivered by the Prime Minister should put the Archbishop to shame and compel him to at least be silent during the campaign.

Archdeacon Hindley of the Church of England said in a speech "If ever we had the misfortune to have an archbishop whose loyalty could be seriously questioned, we would send him back to England (hear hear) -- or we would send him back to Ireland (laughter and

applause.)" Other Catholic Bishops were neutral but Archbishop Clune of Perth was a bitter opponent of Dr. Mannix.

THE WOMEN'S PEACE ARMY

WOMEN in Australia had never before participated in large numbers in any social movement. Many of those who took part in the campaigns were inspired by the efforts of the suffragettes in England.

Three days after the war began the Women's Peace Army was formed, its slogan "We war against war". It ranged itself in the anti-conscription campaign. Vida Goldstein, with electioneering experience (she stood for the Senate in the first election after Federation and was Editor of "The Woman Voter",) was President, Adela Pankhurst (of the famous suffragette family) was Secretary and Cecilia John was Organiser.

The Women's Army had a flag of its own - purple, white and green. Purple for the royalty of international justice, white for the purity of international life, green for the springing hope of international peace. Cecilia John defended this flag by turning a fire hose on soldiers who tried to wrest it away. A splendid contralto, she would sing at meetings, "I didn't Raise my Son to be a Soldier", one of the many songs of the campaign.

On one occasion Vida Goldstein prevented a riot at the Bijou Theatre in Bourke Street, when soldiers were breaking up a meeting.

Another famous woman was Eleanor M. Moore, Secretary of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, an organisation active before the war and active today.

LABOR WOMEN

WOMEN well respected in the Labor movement for their vigorous role were May Francis, Jennie Baines, Jean Daley and Muriel Heagney.

The women were not given "soft" treatment, probably the reverse. Muriel Heagney, active throughout the whole campaign, whilst at the same time earning her living in the Defence Department, relates an incident during a march organised by the Women's Peace Army just prior to the first referendum.

There was an opposition march of YES women at the same time and feelings ran high. Muriel was marching with her mother when a soldier grabbed her mother's umbrella, broke the top off (knob type) and struck Mrs. Heagney on the forehead. With blood

streaming from her forehead she insisted on continuing the march.

TRADE UNIONS

THE Trade Union Congress in Melbourne in May, 1916, convened to determine the attitude of organised Labor in Australia towards conscription for overseas service, recorded its uncompromising hostility to any attempt to foist conscription upon the people. The Congress issued a Manifesto and Report. In an attempt to suppress this document military squads raided the Melbourne Trades Hall Council and the Labor Call printery and seized all printed matter and type related to the anti-conscription Congress.

E. J. Holloway, then Secretary of the T.H.C., was awakened from his bed by a Lieutenant in charge of the raiding party and taken to the Trades Hall so that printed literature could be confiscated. Nonetheless a quantity was circulated.

John Curtin, who became Australia's wartime Prime Minister in the later war against fascism, was engaged by the Melbourne Trades Hall Council as a full-time secretary to concentrate upon the conscription fight.

If any Union could be singled out for tribute it would be the Australian Workers' Union.

A one-day strike was called in Melbourne but only a few unions observed it.

The part played by the Trade Union movement can be read in E. J. Holloway's pamphlet, "The Australian Victory over Conscription in 1916-17" published in 1966 in commemoration of the Jubilee of the first plebiscite. (price 25c.)

FIRST STREET BATTLE

THE very night the press announced Hughes' statement that a referendum would be taken the No Conscription Fellowship made an early ending to a meeting being held under its auspices in the Guild Hall in Swanston Street and hundreds of people carrying banners marched down Swanston Street and up Bourke Street to Parliament House.

As the procession moved along an immense crowd followed. When the marchers reached the top block of Bourke Street the police began vigorous action. There then took place round the steps of Federal Parliament House and down to Exhibition Street a riotous scene in which military patrols assisted a large body of police to prevent the demonstration reaching the doors of the House.

Processionists and onlookers were batoned mercilessly and a number of arrests were made.

HEADQUARTERS

FEDERAL Parliament then met in the State Parliament House building in Spring Street, where it met until it moved to Canberra.

In effect Melbourne was the Capital City. It was also the headquarters of the military forces and the demonstration therefor was of extreme importance in letting the whole of Australia know that there was considerable and vigorous opposition to conscription. It played a part of major importance in setting the "NO" army in motion.

AFTERMATH IN COURT

THERE were 5 arrests on familiar charges - Frederick Austin Holland, secretary of The No Conscription Fellowship and Harry Barnes, "hindering a constable in the execution of his duty"; Mary Grant "obstructing the carriageway in Spring Street"; John Victor Martin, "obstruction" and Daniel O'Connell "behaving in an insulting manner" was reported to have called out "Boo, hoo, get down and walk you cur" to a mounted trooper.

"The City Court proved a magnet that drew a crowd" reports the "Argus" 2nd September, 1916. J. V. Martin claimed the troopers were riding on the footpath and was asked satirically from the Bench -

"Then the police were the only disorderly persons there?" Martin was fined 40/- or 14 days. The other 4 were remanded for a week when they had A. W. Foster (later Judge) as their defender.

Holland and Barnes were fined 40/- or 14 days. Mary Grant claimed she was knocked down by a soldier and that a policeman had pinched her arm - fined £5 or one month.

D. O'Connell, rubber worker, said he was not in the organisation but followed the crowd out of curiosity. His defence was summed up in his statement to the Bench - "I was unfortunate and convenient." A remark that convulsed the Court. Fined 40/- or 14 days.

PROPAGANDA

THERE was, of course, no television, no radio, no amplifiers at

meetings and little use of film in this period. The written and spoken word in its simplest form was relied upon by the anti-conscriptionists to wage the propaganda war.

Whilst the conscriptionists had ranged with them by far the majority of the daily, weekly and monthly papers, the anti-conscriptionists had the "Evening Echo" Ballarat, the "Barrier Daily Truth" Broken Hill, the "Daily Post" Hobart, "Daily Standard" Brisbane and "Daily Herald" Adelaide, supporting their case.

The small gummed sticker slogans were popular. They could be easily handled and were pasted up everywhere.

Thousands of buttons with "VOTE NO" on them did effective work. A poster -

"TO ARMS! Capitalists, parsons, politicians, landlords, newspaper editors and other stay-at-home patriots, your country needs you in the trenches! Workers, follow your masters,"

got out by the I.W.W. leader in Sydney, Tom Barker, resulted in a six months' sentence or fine of £50.

BALLARAT EVENING ECHO

THIS paper had on its Board of Directors James Scullin, later to become a Prime Minister. As the only daily in Victoria against conscription it was rushed to Melbourne each day and sold on the streets to the number of 60,000 copies.

The members of the Australian Railways Union carried the paper (some say hidden under the coal in the tender), dropped it off at Dudley Street, from where it was taken to a stable in North Melbourne and there the work of distribution would be carried out. Under the leadership of Bert Walkinshaw about a dozen men shared the stable with several munching and sleeping horses. If they came out smelling of the stable they thought it worthwhile.

THE WORKER

A GREAT power all over Australia was the "Worker" organ of the A.W.U. Edited by a great man, Henry Boote, it attracted the best in intellectual talent - cartoonists, writers, poets - W. R. Winspear, Claude Marquet, Marie Pitt, Bernard O'Dowd, J.K. McDougall, E.J. Brady, Sid Nicholls, Mick Paul, Dick Ovenden, R.J. Cassidy, Francis Ahern and Dick Long, to name a few.

The "Worker" office alone printed 5 million pamphlets and leaflets, 400,000 "Protests" against conscription, over 100,000 extra copies of the "Worker", 500,000 "How to Vote" cards, 250,000 stickers, 50,000 Worker Specials and 25,000 referendum posters. In all this work the office had to submit to frequent raids and censorship.

CENSORSHIP

CENSORSHIP was strict and operated by the Military. Sometimes only a few words were left in an article or at other times the original intention of the article was distorted to mean its opposite.

INCENSED by the distortion of a speech by the Premier of Queensland, T. J. Ryan, a stalwart in the campaigns, some members of Parliament made an organised attack on censorship in the Legislative Assembly which was published in Hansard No. 37. Hughes was so annoyed he ordered Federal officers to seize from the Queensland Government Printers all copies. However, many thousands had already been distributed as propaganda.

PUBLISHING ASSISTANCE

MANY sympathetic printers in Melbourne gave tremendous help to the cause. Other printing shops, including the Government Printing Office gave unwitting help. The Melbourne Hospital served as a respectable store and distribution centre.

Number 47 Victoria Street, the Socialist printery, was a main centre of printing, under the management of Freddie Holland (whose father Harry Holland became Leader of the Opposition in New Zealand) and Norman Anderson. The printery received plenty of military attention and Holland and Anderson were charged from time to time. Secret printing was carried on outside the actual printery, in the yard. The military must have been naive because though stationed in the building they did not know what was going on out the back.

THE SOCIALIST

ORGAN of the Victorian Socialist Party, "The Socialist" also suffered persecution. On one occasion it was taken from a printing office out the back door whilst the Military was on guard at the front door. This issue was taken by horsecab to Highbury Street, Richmond and from there distributed.

ANOTHER influential journal was edited by Henry Stead and was known as "Stead's Review".

SEAMEN carried literature interstate in their ships.

THE BLOOD VOTE

E.J.HOLLOWAY in his pamphlet "The Australian Victory over Conscription in 1916-17" says "I still feel that the most effective single piece of propaganda for our side, which decided the votes of perhaps tens of thousands of women, was W.R.Winspear's poem, illustrated by Claude Marquet, entitled THE BLOOD VOTE.

There is no doubt this type of propaganda was influential for an analysis of the results of the two referenda shows that in conservative flag-waving areas where practically no-one would openly declare opposition to conscription a large vote was recorded against it. Many in doubt just could not bring themselves to drop a ballot paper in the box that could condemn a boy to death.

VIOLENCE

SOLDIERS have been mentioned in connection with most of the violence of the campaign. It was the soldier who had never been in battle, the new volunteer and the headquarter's seatwarmer, who were chief volunteers for active service on the home front.

As a procession was going past the Soldiers' Club in Swanston Street the soldiers would rush out and bash into the march. They attended the Yarra Bank and suburban meetings and generally behaved as larrikins.

Two men were tarred and feathered by soldiers. Fred Katz, Assistant Secretary of the Clerks' Union was attacked in Little Collins Street and suffered this treatment.

J. K. McDougall, Poet (author of two published books of verse) and Member of Parliament for Wannan lived at Narroona. He was set upon by 21 soldiers, bound, gagged and taken to Ararat where he was tarred and feathered, then flung out on the pavement and left, still bound and gagged. Hughes is said to have approved this, and some say, organised it.

An attempt was made to lynch a man near Port Fairy.

Platforms were set on fire. Speakers were thrown into the Yarra, one always had his boots unlaced in case he had to swim for it.

Guido Baracchi, son of the Government Astronomer, was thrown into the University Lake.

White feathers were handed out, to which the recipients often replied, "And did you get yours in the Boer War?" The Boer war was only 14 years' past and many of the jingoes had been eligible but restrained themselves from enlisting.

At the top of the stairs in the Socialist Hall Fred Riley stood guard over a large heap of blue metal which was kept as ammunition for defence against pursuing soldiers.

WOULD TO GODDERS

A WHOLE series of cartoons and propaganda arose around what was known as the "Would to God Brigade", that is the old men who said, "Would to God I was young" and the women who said "Would to God I was a man" and others, of similar ilk.

DEPORTATIONS

DEPORTATIONS were mainly from Sydney, from where 8 including Tom Barker were sent on the one ship to Chile. In Melbourne a well-known speaker whose only known name was "Whiskers" Hill, so named because of his fine red beard, was shanghaied aboard a ship at midnight. In the case of a deportation there is no trial or appeal, "shanghaied" is the only word for it. The Deportation of "Whiskers" became known because a baker who attended Yarra Bank meetings was delivering bread to the ship and saw him brought on board.

Some months later a letter arrived from "Whiskers" Hill telling of his fate. Another well known speaker deported was Jock Wilson, sent back to Scotland with another anti-conscription worker.

ALF (JUDGE) FOSTER

THERE were numerous raids, meetings prohibited, and arrests. Journalists were used as witnesses.

In a speech Alf Foster said:-

"Few public men on the anti-conscription side escaped prosecution or conviction, though they, as it turned out, represented the majority of citizens and soldiers. I myself was prosecuted and subjected to a long trial for a speech I made in a City hall, in which I had the audacity to criticize the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. W.M. Hughes.

Fortunately I escaped conviction. Rarely did any speaker of prominence deliver an address without the service of police officers as shorthand writers. Military squads were continuously posted in printing offices where anti-conscription literature was being printed. Matter for publication had first to be submitted to military officers for their approval, whose prohibition was final. No such requirement was placed upon the conscriptionists, who were free to publish what they would, whether it were true or not."

FRANK BRENNAN M.H.R. and FRANK ANSTEY M.H.R.

THE campaigns were crammed with incident, one such was that Frank Brennan (later Commonwealth Attorney-General) was called "a pig-eon-livered man" by W. Watt M.H.R., one of the most bitter conscriptionists, for saying he was not a fighting man and that if warlike people can do the business of war, we peaceful people can attend to other questions.

Watt picked the wrong man. Brennan called his bluff and challenged him by saying he would join up if Watt did too. He named a date and time but Watt did not turn up to the recruiting depot. The challenge repeated, Watt still did not show up.

MENTION must be made of Frank Anstey. As a Member of Parliament and splendid orator he played an influential part. His books "Money Power" and "Red Europe" were widely read after the war, and helped many readers assess the war.

THE OTHER ARMY

TO defend speakers, Broken Hill formed "Labor's Volunteer Army" and later Melbourne formed its "Anti Conscription Army." These armies both used white handkerchiefs tied around the arm to distinguish themselves from non-combatants. Many a speaker was sound in body and limb purely because of the energetic presence of the army.

In Broken Hill 2,500 joined this army whereas the call-up by Hughes in October brought forward only 206 of whom 75 were passed as fit and sworn in.

SOLDIERS FOR "NO"

THE anti-conscriptionists pursued the policy of having one Returned man speak on each platform and at the biggest of the Yarra Bank rallies one platform was entirely manned by Returned

men. Naturally there were more back home during the 1917 campaign and they were a valuable asset.

An attempt was made to use the name of Lt. Jacka V.C. (Australia's first V.C. winner) as a conscription supporter. His father labelled this as a lie on the "No" platform. The Jacka family were all strongly against conscription.

THE OLD RED HERRING

ON the eve of the poll in 1916 the authorities brought before the Courts in Sydney 12 I.W.W. men on charges of treason. The I.W.W. was the only party uncompromisingly against the war itself. During the last days of the campaign much use was made of evidence which later - after the twelve had served 4 years of their sentences of 5, 10 and 15 years, was proved to be framed evidence and the victims were released. The gaoling removed 12 valuable men from the campaign itself.

HUGHES' LAST MINUTE BLUNDERS

HUGHES made the incredible blunder of causing a proclamation to be issued on September 29 calling up single men and drafting them into camps in anticipation of a "Yes" victory. His purpose was to make people think the result of the referendum a foregone conclusion - it had the effect of mobilising people to vote "NO" on October 28. Many thousands refused to obey the callup. Those who obeyed were dressed in blue dungarees and were called the "Hugheseliars" and the "Bluebirds." In Sydney the day before the poll a battalion of these boys were marching through the city and made themselves known by chanting together "VOTE NO NO NO".

Hughes threatened that eligible single men who went to vote would be challenged at the booths. This was hastily withdrawn in view of the storm it caused.



Billy Hughes

THE VERDICT OF THE PEOPLE

State	THE VERDICT OF THE PEOPLE	
	For Conscription	Against Conscription
New South Wales	356,805	474,544
Victoria	353,930	328,216
Queensland	144,200	158,051
South Australia	87,924	119,236
Western Australia	94,069	40,884
Tasmania	48,493	37,833
Federal Territories	2,136	1,269
Totals	1,087,557	1,160,033

HUGHES IN HIS PROPER PLACE

AT a Caucus meeting on November 14th, 1916, after the Referendum, a motion was put that Mr. Hughes no longer possessed the confidence of the Party. Hughes did not wait for his defeat but asked all those who supported him to follow him out of the room. Over a score of members followed him and formed the National Labor Party, and became the Government with the support of the former Opposition.

A few months later a fusion took place between the National Labor Party and the Liberal Party. Shortly afterward a special conference of the Australian Labor Party, held in Melbourne, expelled all Federal members who had supported conscription and who were members of any other political party. A split occurred in all States.

THE SOLDIERS

HUGHES had great plans for the soldier vote to be taken early, and anticipating a good result, use it to influence the home vote. Voting in the trenches was to begin on October 16th.

General Birdwood, Commanding Officer of the Australian and New Zealand forces, who was in London, had been pressed by Keith Murdoch and Lloyd George to send a cable to the Australian people supporting conscription in the name of the soldiers. Birdwood refused. He thought it might be regarded in Australia as being an order to his men. Lloyd George agreed.

HUGHES' ADDRESS

IN a special statement the Prime Minister concluded "Soldiers of Australia, your fellow citizens, confronted with the greatest crisis in their history, look to you for a lead. Your votes are being taken first. I appeal to you who have gone to fight our battles, who have covered the name of Australia with glory, to lift up your voices and send one mighty shout across the leagues of ocean, bidding your fellow citizens to do their duty to Australia, to the Empire, to its Allies, and to the cause of liberty and vote 'YES.'"

At the same time he cabled Birdwood.

Burnie, Tasmania.
14th October 1916.

GENERAL BIRDWOOD,
"Headquarters, A.I.F. France"
Secret and Personal.

"It is absolutely imperative in imperial interest as well as Australian interests that the referendum should be carried by a large majority. Opposition to it here still very strong owing to wilful misrepresentation disseminated by certain sections which include Syndicalists, Sinn Fein and Shirkers.

The first and last, and the second have contrived to capture Labour organisations and consequently hundreds of thousands of loyal patriotic men and women seem likely to vote NO. The overwhelming majority of the Irish votes in Australia, which represent very nearly 25 per cent of the total votes, has been swung over by the Sinn Feins, and are going to vote NO in order to strike a severe blow at Great Britain. If referendum defeated it would be disastrous, not only dishonouring Australia, but would have far-reaching effects on the cause of Great Britain and the Allies. What is wanted is a lead from the men at the front. May I ask you to use your very great influence to the very utmost to ensure an overwhelming majority of the Australian soldiers.

I know how dearly you value the reputation, the honor, of Australia. In the present crisis I ask you to act without regard to precedent. Reply urgently required. HUGHES, Prime Minister."

GENERAL BIRDWOOD'S MESSAGE

BIRDWOOD felt unable to resist this patriotic plea and he prepared a message to the troops which asked them to vote according to their own consciences but he also told them of the considerations perhaps better known to him than to them which rendered urgent the needs for reinforcements.

The A.I.F. Headquarters in London informed him that they could not get the message through to France that night and Birdwood then ordered the postponement of the Poll for a few days to enable the men to get his message. However, when this order arrived it was found that some units had already voted. Voting was then broken off.

FRONTING THE TROOPS

IN the meantime several prominent Australians then in England, through the activity of Keith Murdoch, were allowed by Sir Douglas Haig to go to France and address the men.

Sir Frederick William Young, Agent General of South Australia, addressed part of the 6th Brigade (with no officers present on the orders of Haig), and quite frankly put it to the men that he wanted a message from them to send to Australia, at least for reinforcements to be sent.

Hope of securing the desired resolution soon vanished. The soldiers, who had established themselves as great fighting men were not prepared to draft their younger brothers into the blood-bath.

MISFIRE

ON November 3rd, a special regulation under the War Precautions Act was issued stating that the soldiers' votes were to be added to their States of enlistment.

Considerable suspicion surrounds the vote as there is much evidence that the soldiers voted NO.

THE TRUTH?

ON January 5th, 1917, the "Freeman's Journal" in Dublin issued the following statement:-

"It is a remarkable fact that the figures of the voting by the Anzac troops in the Australian Referendum on Conscription have never appeared in the British Press, although two months have now elapsed since the referendum was taken. It will be remembered that when the early figures of the voting in Australia itself were published and showed a relatively small majority against conscription the advocates of that policy expressed the confident hope that when the votes of the men actually serving and other Australians resident abroad were counted they would be found to reverse the decision of their fellow countrymen at home. The failure to publish the voting of the troops was itself extremely significant, but we are now in a position to give the figures, which were:

For Conscription	40,000
Against	106,000."

Finally, on March 27th 1917, five months after the poll the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth announced that the soldiers' vote was:

For Conscription	72,399
Against	58,894

MR. LAWSON, Chief Returning Officer for Victoria admitted under cross-examination that the votes of troops on six transports at sea were not included in the total, and that the votes of all civilian staff in London including nurses and doctors, and those at Rabaul, New Guinea and in Egypt were included.

OFFICIAL INDICATION

IT would appear that the first polling boxes were counted during the cessation in polling. In "The Official History of Australia during the War of 1914-18, Dr. C.E.W.Bean says: (page 891) Vol. 3. in reference to the Birdwood message - "The Australian soldier was, like most others, resentful of any attempt by his officers to interfere with his free judgment as a citizen, and the experiment was therefore dangerous. Probably it turned a few voters either way, but the early polls foreshadowed a ten per cent majority against conscription."

SOME REASONS

WHEN seeking reasons for the soldiers' vote it should be borne in mind that whilst the army was theoretically a "Volunteer" army, in reality, there was a good proportion of conscripts - economic conscripts. The employers pursued a policy of sacking the "eligible man". Anyone of war age was likely to be tossed out in the street, and work was far from plentiful. Naturally prospective employers also boycotted the "eligibles". There was not much choice but to join up and kill to live. There was also conscription by moral suasion, particularly in the small country town. It was a strong man or boy who could stand out against the whole population whose sons were joining.

It was unfortunate for the conscriptionists that their best patriots were mainly at home.

1917

THE Hughes' Government attempted to turn its 1916 defeat into victory in 1917 by holding a second plebiscite. Instead, the Government was more thoroughly beaten than in 1916.

When P.M.Hughes opened the second campaign on November 12th 1917 at Bendigo, he said:

"October 28th 1916 (date of first plebiscite) was a black day for Australia. It was a triumph for the unworthy, the selfish and treacherous in our midst....."

If this were so, then on the Prime Minister's reasoning the res-

ults of the referendum showed that the majority of Australians were unworthy, selfish and treacherous.

At the Bendigo meeting Hughes also said, "I tell you plainly that the Government must have this power. It cannot govern the country without it, and will not attempt to do so."

The 1917 campaign was even more intense than the campaign of 1916.

HUGHES BENDS OVER BACKWARDS

TO reverse the Poll result, Hughes tried to make conscription more palatable. He promised to call up single men only, and none under the age of 20, to exempt some members of households which already had a member in the Services, exempt certain industries, and he announced that the total requirement would be less than half the stated requirement in 1916.

THE "FOREIGNER"

HE disfranchised many voters. Every naturalised British subject born in an "enemy" country and every person whose father was born in an "enemy" country was disqualified excepting in cases where it could be shown that one-half of the sons in a family, between the ages of 18 and 45 had enlisted or been rejected.

The Poll, on December 20th, was held on a Thursday instead of Saturday, thus making it more difficult for workers to record a vote.

ANOTHER RED HERRING

A MONTH before the Poll, Henry E. Boote, editor of the "Worker" was arrested for violating the censorship regulations by publishing an article attacking the proposed method of selecting conscripts as THE LOTTERY OF DEATH. As in the I.W.W. trial it was an attempt to silence a very valuable voice.

The result of the poll was a much greater victory for NO supporters.

State	For Conscription	Against Conscription
New South Wales	341,256	487,774
Victoria	329,772	332,490
Queensland	132,771	168,875
South Australia	86,663	106,634
Western Australia	84,116	46,522
Tasmania	38,881	38,502
Federal Territories	<u>1,700</u>	<u>950</u>
Totals	1,015,159	1,181,747

THERE was a 2% swing in the actual totals of 1,160,033 increased to 1,181,747 of NO voters, that is 22,000 more supporters.

Actually the figure is an understatement because 51,000 fewer people voted, therefore the YES figure was only 93.3% of the 1916 vote whereas the NO figure was 101.8% compared with the 1916 vote.

VICTORIA EXPIATES ITSELF

VICTORIA played a big part in 1917. It had been a YES State in 1916 with a majority of 25,714 for conscription - this was converted into a 2,718 NO victory with nearly 20,000 less voting.

THE THIMBLE AND PEA TRICK

HUGHES had said the Government would not attempt to govern without the power of conscription.

In January 1918 Hughes resigned his office and on the same day reformed his Ministry. NOT A SINGLE ALTERATION in the personnel of the Cabinet resulted from this resignation.

THE REWARD

IT has been claimed that according to his lights, Hughes was a patriot -- and what golden lights! In 1920 he was happy to accept a gift of £25,000 (big money then) from a group of capitalists, as a reward for his war work. There was a public row about it but Mr. Hughes did not donate it to the nation, or for the welfare of Returned men.

CONCLUSION

VICTORY could be ascribed to several factors.

1. Good preliminary work before the actual issue arose. The work of the opponents of "Boy" conscription in the compulsory training scheme from 1910 onwards. The calling by The Socialist Party in the first week of the war of a meeting of peace bodies which formed the Australian Peace Alliance.
2. The early work of Maurice Blackburn and the Trades Councils, Unions and Labor Party Branches anticipating Hughes' change of front whilst he was still in London.
3. The participation of women and young people.
4. Individual selflessness and bravery on the part of political and church people and hitherto non partisan citizens.

The results cannot be overstated in giving a tradition to the labor movement.

The educational effect of the campaigns was indicated in the large numbers who evolved from being simply "anti conscription" to "anti war", and the large number of personnel trained to take leadership in union and parliamentary spheres.

It cleansed the labor movement of many weaklings and opportunists.

Above all it showed that UNITY IS STRENGTH.

* * * * *

A few people and organisations are referred to by name in this text, but hundreds, if not thousands of people and numerous organisations should have tribute paid them.

It would be impossible to include such a Roll of Honour without the danger of omitting some. The making of a complete record is a task in itself.

Here we must be content to simply pay tribute to ALL those who, under difficult circumstances, created a tradition of anti conscription in Australia.

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THE BLOOD VOTE

"Why is your face so white, Mother?

Why do you choke for breath?"

"O I have dreamt in the night, my son,
That I doomed a man to death."

"Why do you hide your hand, Mother?
And crouch above it in dread?"

"It beareth a dreadful brand, my son:
With the dead man's blood 'tis red."

"I hear his widow cry in the night,
I hear his children weep,
And always within my sight,
O God!

The dead man's blood
doth leap.

"They put the dagger into my
grasp,

It seemed but a pencil then,
I did not know it was a fiend a-gasp
For the priceless blood of men

"They gave me the ballot paper,
The grim death-warrant of doom,
And I snugly sentenced the man to death.
In that dreadful little room.

"I put it inside the Box of Blood
Nor thought of the man I'd slain,
Till at midnight came like a whelming
flood
God's word—and the Brand of Cain.

"O little son! O my little son!
Pray God for your Mother's soul,
That the scarlet stain may be white again
In God's great Judgment Roll."



Written by W. R. Winespear, and drawn by Claude Marquet, St Andrew's Place, Sydney.



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For the National Executive,
J. CURTIN, Secretary.

This is a reproduction of "The Blood Vote" referred to on page 12.