

*The Australian  
Victory over  
Conscription  
in 1916-17*

By  
E. J. HOLLOWAY

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PRICE

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**THE AUTHOR**

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*Born in Hobart, Tasmania, on April 12, 1875.*

*President of Melbourne Trades Hall Council, 1914-15.*

*Secretary of Melbourne Trades Hall Council, 1915-29.*

*Member of House of Representatives for Flinders, 1929-31.*

*(Defeated Prime Minister, Stanley Melbourne Bruce).*

*Member of House of Representatives for Melbourne  
(Ports), 1931-51.*

*Cabinet Minister for nine years in Scullin,  
Curtin and Chifley Ministries.*

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Anti-Conscription Jubilee Committee  
to commemorate the success of the Australian people in  
defeating the Conscription proposals of  
November, 1916 and December 1917.

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1966

## *War and Anti-Conscription Fights*

IN July, 1914, I was installed as President of the Trades Hall Council. Almost immediately we — the Trade Union Movement no less than the rest of Australia — were involved in World War 1, its problems, and in due course, its aftermath.

The Fisher Government, returned to office and power in the election of September 5, 1914, decided that Australia should take an active part both on land and sea and planned for the organisation and training of an expeditionary force to serve overseas. This had followed his pledge, made during the election campaign in progress when war broke out that "Australia is in the war to the *last man and the last shilling.*"

Not every famous statement has necessarily been a wise one, and it will always remain a matter of opinion whether such sweeping declarations as this one should be so described. But no one who knew Andrew Fisher doubted his honesty and/or loyalty, and there was no doubt about the response of the Australian Trade Unionists. As soon as the call was made for volunteers for overseas service, members of the unions flocked to the colors in their thousands, in spite of the widespread conviction of most Labor men that the 1914 War was in its origins and its essence based on trade and commercial rivalries and the drive towards imperialistic aggrandisement which they breed or feed.

### **THEY DID NOT ASK THE REASON WHY**

The great Australian Workers' Union, the A.W.U., alone had 30,000 of its members join the A.I.F. There were so many of them that I asked the Minister for Defence, Senator George Pearce, at the union's own request, to try to form a complete and distinct division of A.W.U. men. However, this was not possible. The Australian Railways Union had an equally outstanding record; nearly 20,000 of its members joined up.

The other unions could show a roughly proportionate A.I.F. contribution. If you inspect the Melbourne Trades Hall today, room by room, you will find in one after another Honor Boards filled with the names of unionists of that generation who of their own free choice joined up, fought overseas and in all too many cases never lived to return. There never was any doubt about the response of Australian men and women to the call for more and more volunteers.

Against that background, nevertheless, rumblings began to be heard late in 1915, growing louder in 1916, about the necessity for conscription. So much so, we became convinced that efforts actually to introduce conscription would be sure to follow. Our suspicions were soon enough confirmed and so, in the very early years of my leadership of the industrial and political wings of the Victorian Labor Movement. I was thrust also into the leadership of the greatest and most

bitter battle in its history. That was the fight to prevent that evil thing from the Old World, conscription of human life for wars beyond one's own frontiers.

In 1915, while Andrew Fisher was still Prime Minister of the Federal Labor Government a deputation of which I was a member, waited on him and urged him to make a public statement setting out the Government's policy on this vexed question. I well remember Fisher saying that he already had, under the existing Defence Act, all the power necessary for the conscription of every man in Australia for her own defence, if it were ever necessary.

To an interjection from myself that we draw a clear distinction between that and conscription for war overseas, Fisher replied that we could rest assured that so long as his Government remained in power it would never conscript human lives for service outside our own country. *And he never did.* Andrew Fisher never broke his word.

In October, 1915, Fisher, irritated beyond patience by some of his colleagues in Cabinet and Party led by W. M. Hughes who was hankering for power, resigned the leadership to serve as High Commissioner in London and William Morris Hughes reigned in his stead. When Fisher resigned we lost a man whose word was his bond. When Hughes was elected we got a man whose word was much more flexible.

Early in 1916, Hughes went on a visit to Britain and some of his pronouncements there, in conscriptionists' company, convinced us that he had conscription for Australians in mind. Here in Australia, State Labor Conferences and Trade Union Conferences showed an overwhelming opposition to conscription. These culminated in an All-Australian Trade Union Conference, which I had been instructed to call together in Melbourne, to which delegates came instructed from their unions as to how to vote on the issue of conscription for service overseas. This Conference met on May 10, 1916. After a long and serious discussion several resolutions were adopted by Conference. The first resolution declared:

*"That this Conference records its uncompromising hostility to conscription of human life and Labor and, on behalf of the industrially organised workers of Australia, resolutely declares its determination to resist any and every attempt to foist it upon the people of Australia."*

On a card vote this was carried by 208,018 votes to 753. The second motion was to the effect—

*"That a referendum of union members be taken for instructions as to the willingness to declare an Australia-wide general strike in the event of an attempt being made to enforce conscription."*

This was also carried almost unanimously.

In August, 1916, Hughes returned from Britain and late in that month made his first definite statement that he intended to introduce into Australia conscription for overseas service. This was the confirmation we of the Australian Labor Movement had been waiting for and we were convinced that a life and death struggle could not be avoided. Hughes, to gain moral support for his policy, announced he would seek approval of the Australian people, voting by referendum, for his policy.

In Melbourne, the executive officers of both the political and industrial wings of Labor hurriedly got together to plan the launching of the greatest campaign in our history — for a "NO" vote. We hated the

old world conscription we had seen, and some of its brutalities we had read about.

While we were still at the planning stage, however, the Prime Minister asked Mr Stewart, the Victorian State (and, as it happened, also the Federal) Secretary of the Labor Party, whether he could address the twenty members of the State Central Executive privately. Stewart consulted me as President and we agreed to give Mr Hughes the chance to put his case.

Accordingly, on Friday, September 1, 1916, at 8 p.m., twenty members of the Political Executive seated in the Council Chamber of the Melbourne Trades Hall, with me in the Chair, waited for Mr Hughes. He arrived punctually and for an hour he addressed members, trying by every one of his many oratorical, logical and political tricks, to convert all, or at least some, of the Executive members to support his referendum campaign. He told us that France was on her knees, that she had only old men and children left to call on, but we did not believe him. And we were right, for at that time she had not fought the great battles at Verdun, which made her famous.

He concluded his address by saying that he was going to travel from one end of Australia to the other urging a "YES" vote. He said he was going to fight as though he were fighting for his very life. "And," he wound up, "if you men have the courage to come with me, ninety per cent of the Australian votes will come with us." We knew that on the last point he was probably right. But, to our everlasting credit (as I still firmly believe) no converts were made that night. Not a single man was impressed in the slightest degree and it became apparent to the Prime Minister that his mission was a miserable failure.

In closing the meeting I asked Hughes a question. "Mr Hughes, we too are going all round Australia and we too are going to seek the people's vote against conscription as though we too were fighting for our very lives. If we succeed in winning a majority vote for "NO," what will you do then?" In answering my question, Hughes said this:

"If the people of Australia do not want conscription, I will not force it on them." And to his everlasting credit he faithfully carried out that promise, though I know a good deal of pressure was used to try to get him to do it by legislation or regulation or whatever method was feasible.

During his attempts to win the conscription campaigns of 1916 and 1917, Hughes resorted to all the tricks he knew, and some of them were pretty unscrupulous, but I am quite sure that, in keeping this particular promise, he avoided a good deal of bloodshed in Australia. Our people would never have obeyed conscription orders without a fight.

Hughes did not, of course, sit down under his failure to deter or dissuade the Victorian Executive from a unanimous rejection of his appeal and their subsequent pledge of solidarity to fight to the last ditch to prevent the introduction of conscription for overseas service into Australia. He went straight to Sydney, where he asked for and was granted a similar meeting with the N.S.W. State Executive of the Labor Party.

We in Victoria, knowing the Prime Minister's unlimited supply of guile, sent our Secretary, Arch. Stewart to Sydney also, to make sure he did not give the N.S.W. men the impression that we in Victoria were with him. We knew he was quite capable of this and the rigors of his wartime censorship made it impossible to be sure of conveying news otherwise than directly by person. This move in fact greatly upset Hughes' morale at the Sydney meeting and paid us handsome dividends.

A vote as to whether the N.S.W. Labor Party Executive favored Mr Hughes' proposals was overwhelmingly "NO." After this effort to win over, or at the very least to divide, the two leading State Executives had failed, both sides threw themselves into the fight with ever-growing intensity — one swelling force urging "NO" to conscription for overseas service, the other "YES."

The overwhelming vote at the May Conference, to which I have already referred, had made it quite clear where the industrial wing stood. So it was now decided by the several central executive bodies of the political and industrial wings throughout Australia to have their representatives meet together to plan and carry out an anti-conscription campaign, cost what it might in money or in the physical liberty of its leaders. Accordingly a conference was held and one all-embracing executive constituted and entrusted with the work of unifying and inspiring the nation-wide fight against conscription.

C. J. Bennett and I were elected President and Secretary respectively. I was Secretary of the Trades Hall Council at the same time, so later when the work developed further, John Curtin was engaged as a full-time secretary to concentrate upon the conscription fight, and he did a wonderful job. His flare for journalism was of untold value. He was a colleague of mine in both the industrial and political fields for the next thirty years and a warm and intimate personal friend until he died.

His life was an outstanding demonstration of the truth that circumstances make the man, for his great characteristics of leadership almost seemed to lie dormant until some great crisis such as the conscription issue of 1916-17 or the wartime leadership of 1941-45 presented itself. Nobody knows better than I — for I worked with him through both crises — how he rose to the occasions with marvellous efforts which were sustained at a tremendous pitch until the end.

Equally, only those who were his close colleagues know of the peculiar and devouring strain which used to burn up his nervous and emotional reserves in those crises. During the critical years of 1942, 1943 and 1944, alone he lived (figuratively) one hundred years. Under such strain, his vivid imagination fed his anxiety for our fighting forces, and—up to the battle of the Coral Sea—for our men and women and children at home, all of whom looked to him for leadership and all of whose fates were in more or less direct senses dependent upon decisions he had to make. In the end he died at peace with himself, apparently quite happy and resigned, and seemingly, too, with little pain.

Indeed, to his wife and friends he always pretended he was getting on well, but he knew his heart was giving out. At his own request I talked with him for an hour, two or three days before he died and I left him, assured that he felt his work was done, that he knew what the end would be though like Roosevelt, for whom he had a real affection and whose death greatly shocked him, he would not live to see it.

I was glad I was able to stand beside Mrs Curtin on the tarmac at Canberra as the great plane took him home for burial in the west and give some little consolation to his lonely little wife. It was one of the saddest days of my life to part with such a mate in the fight for the underdog. Despite his eminent qualities he was yet such a man as Lowell had in mind when he wrote—

*"Far from his kind he never sank or soared,  
But sat an equal at every board."*

I must, however, resume the conscription story.

The first duty of the national Anti-Conscription Executive was to draft, print and distribute to every corner of Australia, hundreds of

thousands of copies of our Manifesto, engage halls and theatres, plan thousands of meetings, both in city and country towns, design and exhibit posters, and foster solidarity and morale amongst our supporters by exchanging leading speakers amongst the States. Some speakers even came from New Zealand. Labor Newspapers such as the "Australian Worker" in all States, the "Labor Call," the "Ballarat Echo" and others did wonderful work, issuing special articles by the hundreds, to the exclusion of other features. For all this work, scores of thousands of pounds had to be collected and spent.

The Manifesto we quietly and quickly got printed and some hundred thousand of the first issue planted in an empty building not far from the printing office which produced it. We already had reason to know Hughes' somewhat limited notions about free speech and free press. Despite all our precautions, on the night of the day when we got the first packages of copies wrapped and addressed there was a military raid on the printing office. The type was destroyed but all efforts to find the bulk stocks of the Manifesto failed. After the type at the "Labor Call" printing office had been destroyed, the armed guard marched to the Trades Hall. They had information that there were some packages there — how, is a mystery; but it looked as though "enemy" agents, then as now, can be found in every camp.

Lieutenant Taylor, who was in charge of this raid, on finding the office locked up, sent Detective Bell, by military car (complete with armed guard) to my home in William Street, Abbotsford. He urged me — for his sake as well as mine — to accompany him back to the Trades Hall so that he could introduce me to Lieutenant Taylor! I had been in bed, but quickly dressed and accompanied him. When we arrived, Taylor asked me to open the door so that he could get the parcels which he had been informed were there and take them to Victoria Barracks. I refused to open the door and he then showed me his warrant, which read:

"To enter and search, if needs be by force," I still refused, on the ground that the property did not belong to me and I had no authority to open doors or give him parcels. When he replied that he would have to ask the soldiers to break down the door with the butts of their rifles if I continued to refuse to open it, the caretaker opened it because he said that it was at any rate his duty to protect the property. Taylor, who was certainly a gentleman as well as an officer, took the packages — about ten thousand copies of the Manifesto, wrapped and addressed (the men of the Railways Union were to deliver them for us), gave me a receipt for them, and never attempted to touch any other papers in the office. I went home to bed again.

Then the Minister for Defence banned the Manifesto. The raid and the ban were manna from Heaven for our Executive. Indifference in many was suddenly turned to curiosity and interest. All the world wanted copies. We and our work and our Manifesto all took on an air of martyrdom in spite of ourselves. I even sent copies to interested newspapers in Britain which printed it in full without hindrance from the British Government.

I give you our Manifesto in full because of its historical significance and because it gives you something of the temper of our appeal at that time. I should add that Senator Pearce's ban extended to the whole Manifesto, except the last page of voting advice and so on:—

## ANTI-CONSCRIPTION MANIFESTO

Fellow Citizens,

Two years ago Australia engaged in the war with Germany because she loved civil liberty and loathed tyranny. In those two years our country has seen that civil liberty, for which she fought, assailed by her own leaders. She has no longer a free press; public meetings, even private homes, have been invaded by police and armed soldiers executing military orders.

The work of debasing Australia to the level of Germany has already gone too far. It is proposed to complete this work by conscription.

From the earliest times it has been the duty of Englishmen to bear arms for the defence of their homes against the invader. This duty has been inherited by Australians. Before Federation, the statutes of several colonies recognised this duty, and it is now embodied in our Defence Act.

### HOW THE ACT STANDS

Our Act provides that men between 18 and 60, with certain exemptions, may be called upon to enlist in time of "War." "War" in this Act means:—

"Invasion or apprehended invasion, or attack or apprehended attack, on the Commonwealth or any territory under the control of the Commonwealth by an enemy or armed force." The men of Australia can be called out only against an invader of Australia. To call them out, with a view to sending them overseas, is fraud upon the Defence Act.

There is no enemy at Australia's gates against whom these men are wanted. They are called up for use at the other end of the world.

Having in camp all single men between 21 and 45, the Government, on October 28, will ask the people to say "YES" to the following question:

*"Are you in favor of the Government having in this grave emergency the same compulsory powers over citizens, in regard to requiring their military service for the term of the war outside of the Commonwealth, as it now has in regard to military service within the Commonwealth."*

Before you vote "YES," remember that if there be a majority for "YES" the Government will have power to call upon all men, not exempted by the Act, between 18 and 60, single and married, with dependents or without dependents.

### POWERS OF GOVERNMENT

The Government will have power to send all these men to the other end of the world. The Government will have the power to make them work in factories, farms and mines under military law, for military pay, on conditions prescribed by the military authorities. Such things have been done in the country of our democratic ally, France. The Government can keep workers quiet by such threats of court-martial, as this very Government made to the Seamen's Union. The Government can compel enlisted men to take the places of dissatisfied unionists, as this very Government did in the case of the "Barambah."

The Government may promise, or suggest, exemptions of boys under 21, of married men, of men with dependents, of this, that or the other class of people. Before you are duped by this, remember that the man who now promises, or hints at these exemptions made a solemn promise last year, which he has broken. He said—"In no circumstances would I agree to send men out of this country to fight against their will." (Hansard, July 16, 1915, page 5066.)

You can trust to no promises of exemptions which are not contained in the Defence Act. Politicians, Clergymen, Judges and Magistrates, Prison Officials, Lighthouse Keepers, and men physically unfit, are the only persons absolutely exempt. Hospital doctors, nurses, religious objectors and men of non-European race, are exempt from combatant service only.

### EXAMINE THE FIGURES

But those who examine the figures given by Mr Hughes to the House must see that the single men, whom he proposes to call out, will be exhausted before January. There are 152,910 single men, he says, between 18 and 44. Half of these, it is estimated, are under 21, or will, for other reasons, be rejected. The rejections are now much more than 50 per cent. This leaves 76,455 men; of these, 32,500 are wanted this month. That leaves 43,955 which, at the rate of 16,500 a month, will not last the year out. Before January, the classes to which Mr Hughes now hints exemptions will be called upon.

The authority which the Government have asked of the people, they may abuse as they have abused the authority which Parliament, by the War Precautions Act, gave them. There is no guarantee that the conscripts will be released as soon as the war is over. Under the Defence Act and the War Precautions Act, they can be kept until the Government proclaims the end of the state of war. The cessation of hostilities between Germany and Great Britain will probably be followed by such great distress and trouble, as followed the Battle of Waterloo, in England.

And why is Australia to repose this blind trust in the Government? Why is she to pour her sons to fight at immense distances from their homes, which France and Germany have never done? The colonial armies of France and Germany are volunteers. The German troops in China, in 1900, were volunteers. Lincoln's conscripts fought on American soil.

### IN THE DARK

**Why accept this responsibility at the bidding of the Government which keeps you in the dark. The Government knows the facts. The Government will take no responsibility for Conscription. The people do not know the facts. The people are to take responsibility for Conscription. Are you prepared for that responsibility?**

We demand for soldiers' wives increased separation allowances; for soldiers' widows and dependents increased pensions; that those who have made such great sacrifices shall be secured at least a living wage. For that we fight, and will continue to fight. But what chance is there of getting even this measure of justice to the soldiers and their dependents if we pour thousands of men and millions of money into the bottomless pit of the European hell? Nay, more. What chance is there of the fulfilment of even the present promises to soldiers?

### FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE AND LIBERTY

You prize freedom of conscience. Conscription is the enemy of freedom of conscience.

You prize civil liberty. Remember that Conscription is the enemy of civil liberty. It has destroyed civil liberty in Germany, and is destroying it in England.

You prize the conditions of Labor, won by the Trades Unions. Remember, that Conscription is destroying trade unionism in France.

You prize a conscience blameless for the deaths of others. Remember, that next year the casualty lists will show the names of the men whom your votes sent to their death.

**Parents! Will your anguish be soothed by the knowledge that your votes have made other men and women childless?**

**Widows! Will your sorrow be less if your votes have widowed other women, have orphaned other children?**

**Australians All! In the name of LABOR, of LIBERTY, of CONSCIENCE, and of our COMMON HUMANITY, we urge you to answer NO!**

Authorised by Arch. Stewart, Sec. P.L.C.,  
Trades Hall, Melbourne.

#### VOTE THUS:

**Saturday, October 28, 1916**

**Hours of Polling: 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.**

#### QUESTION:

*"Are you in favor of the Government having, in this grave emergency, the same compulsory powers over citizens in regard to requiring their military service, for the term of the war, outside the Commonwealth as it now has in regard to military service within the Commonwealth?"*

#### HOW TO VOTE AGAINST CONSCRIPTION

Put an X in the square opposite NO. Thus—

[ ] YES

[X] NO

J. Ashton, Printer,  
Labor Call, 22 Patrick St., Melb.

Authorised by Arch. Stewart,  
Trades Hall, Melbourne.

The campaign meetings were a great success. 30,000 to 60,000 were the common totals for Yarra Bank or Sydney Domain rallies. The largest halls in every Australian city were filled to capacity. The campaign was purely one against conscription, seeking a "NO" vote from the electorate. Ours was not an anti-recruiting or an anti-war drive.

Meanwhile, the military raids continued upon our printing offices. On August 5, the premises of the Victorian Socialist Party in Elizabeth Street, Melbourne, were the target; a few days later it was the "Worker" office in Sydney. On August 11, a deputation from the Melbourne Trades Hall Council, the Victorian Labor Party and Victorian Federal Parliamentarians waited on the Minister for Defence to protest against the raids, the seizure of our literature, and his own recent charges that we were guilty of sedition and disloyalty.

We pointed out that half the rooms in the huge Trades Hall building already had Honor Boards hanging on their walls and gave him the statistics of trade union enlistments. Pearce denied that he had made his charges against men at the Trades Hall and promised to make inquiries into the raids. He said we could print the Manifesto as it had been altered by the Censor, but I pointed out that only the title and printers name were left.

Pearce said he did not believe that representative men with official positions in the trade unions or political executives would sign such a document, to which I immediately retorted that he well knew I was the Victorian President of the Labor Party and Secretary of the Trades

Hall Council, while Frank Anstey (also in the delegation) was a Federal Member and we had both signed it. Frank had been on the drafting committee, while I was secretary of the Executive. He would not raise the ban; it did us more good than harm.

The tempo and excitement mounted. Arch. Stewart and I were instructed to hire the Melbourne Town Hall with the Auditorium Hall in Collins Street for the overflow. The Lord Mayor (Hennessey) and Tait Brothers let their respective halls to us on usual business terms but with satisfactory deposits against possible broken chairs and other fittings.

The meetings were successes beyond our wildest hopes—both halls overflowed and the crowds outside were addressed by further speakers. I presided at the Town Hall where Frank Anstey and Senator Findley excelled themselves. A third speaker was the New Zealander, Robert Semple, soon to serve a long gaol term for fighting conscription in New Zealand. The greatest ovation was, however, reserved for the father of Albert Jacka, Australia's first V.C., who read a sworn declaration denying our opponents' statements that he and his fine family of fighting sons were conscriptionists.

Another great rally took place at the Melbourne Exhibition, where 50,000 people heard addresses from ten platforms erected inside and outside that huge building. Such meetings were duplicated in other capitals and, on proportionate scales, in towns and villages. I particularly recall conveying a fraternal message from Melbourne to a huge crowd being addressed from four large platforms in Hyde Park, Sydney. So dense was the crowd, that it took several men to force a passage for me from one platform to the next.

It would be invidious to single out men for special praise when so many were constantly risking physical violence and loss of personal liberty. Yet I cannot forebear to mention some of my mates who bore in a special measure the burden and heat of those days. There was Tom Ryan, Premier of Queensland, who alone of Labor Premiers and Opposition Leaders stood by the Labor Movement on this occasion: I shared platforms with him in many parts of Australia and his courage, his persistence and his plain straightforward speeches made a tremendous impression.

In Western Australia, where we were in a minority even in the Party and the issue was declared an open one for our members, "Texas" Green, later to become M.H.R., and Don Cameron, later Senator (the latter from Victoria) did untiring work, often risking physical violence and not always escaping it. Henry Boote, of the Sydney "Worker," James Scullin, of the "Ballarat Echo," the "Labor Call" team in Melbourne, Henry Kneebone, of the Adelaide "Daily Herald," Bob Ross, of Broken Hill, who was editor of the "Socialist," and Ernest Lane, of the "Queensland Worker," gave an indispensable lead in spreading our case, despite constant harassment from Hughes' corps of censors.

Amongst the trade unions, the A.W.U. (led by Barnes, McNeil, Lundy, Theodore and their colleagues) must take pride of place, for its newspapers and its funds, and its organisers and network of communications and influence outside the capital cities made it probably the greatest single force on our side. But we can never forget the work of the Australian Railways Union in distributing literature up and down Australia in the face of Hughes' restrictions and under the very noses of his unsleeping agents.

## LEG-IRONS FOR AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS

*Six men had been sent into the desert in Egypt with three days supply of water to dig trenches. They finished the water in a day and a half, and when they could not get water for the balance of the three days they ceased work. There were court martialled and sentenced to terms ranging from two to five years.*

*"After being landed in Long Bay Gaol, Sydney, the soldiers were removed to the Goulburn Gaol, shackled by a blacksmith."*

And yet Australia, in proportion to population, led the Dominions by voluntary methods of recruitment!

Hughes and those who had ratted on the principles of the movement merged with Labor's opponents to form the Nationalist Party and they made a further bid in 1917, and we had to face the same conflict all over again. This time Hughes' Nationalists wrapped the bitter pill around with even more tricks than before—only single men were to be called up, all married men would be exempt. Every effort was made to break down the opposition, to make one section enslave another.

We were not backward. Many returned sick and wounded soldiers, led by Colonel Richard Crouch, a Victorian Western District solicitor in other days, took the platform and fought against conscription. We raised money, organised, wrote, printed handbills and leaflets. It was 1916 all over again except that, if possible, Hughes had the gloves off even more completely than before. We, for our part, had to counter his divisive tactics. Here, for instance, is a pamphlet we got out to counter his bribe to married men:

### LISTEN, MARRIED MEN!

An appeal is now being made to your *selfishness*. You are assured that whatever may happen to others, *you are safe*. The Government has pledged itself that *you will not be called to arms*.

And fortified by that promise of personal immunity you are exhorted to send the other fellow to the battlefield by your votes.

Do you feel flattered by this attempt to work upon your *meanest instincts*? Is it a compliment to your *manhood* to ask you to use your franchise to compel fellow citizens to face danger and deprivation on the understanding that you shall be exempt?

The pledge has been shouted from the housetops. *Do you reckon* it is the decent thing to be influenced by it?

Is it in accord with the spirit of the Anzac breed to force others into perils you do not mean to face yourselves?

Married men *play the game!* Don't give a vote you will one day be ashamed of. *Don't act the coward's part*, and believing yourselves to be secure, impose upon others *a fate you are thankful to escape*.

Under the voluntary system *the single men have done well*. Out of every 100 recruits at least 86 are single, and *not more than 14 are married*.

Give the single men a chance. They are as much entitled to love and happiness as you are. They have as much right to fulfil their natural destiny as you have. Prevent them, and you, who are blessed with children, will be guilty of a crime against nature.

From the non-Labor press we received no co-operation, even at a commercial level. It is, however, pleasant to recall that on one occasion during the second referendum of 1917 we approached the advertising chief of the Melbourne "Herald," a fine man by the name of Davidson, and asked him for a quote for a full page advertisement in three daily issues commencing with the following Saturday. He gave us the quote and agreed to handle an advertisement for which we would take the usual responsibility. He said that as far as he was concerned the whole affair was a purely business transaction.

We gave him our cheque and when Saturday's issue appeared he had been as good as his word—there was a well set-up full-page advertisement presenting conclusive proof that Senator Pearce had lied about the existence of a Sixth Division. This caused such a stir that on Sunday people at the Yarra Bank kept asking us whether the "Herald" had come over to our side. But that was the end of it. Though I am sure he did not suffer for his action, Davidson had to toe the line and no more such advertisements appeared. But that one issue on that Saturday evening had been worth its weight in gold.

And so the 1916 fight reached the last round, a fight which had not only split the Australian Labor Party but the whole nation. Hughes and some 24 Federal Members left the Party on the morrow of the referendum, as did some Labor Premiers and Ministers in some of the States. Outside Parliament, too, a small proportion of members of the movement broke away. Labor suffered from the split for years as far as electoral fortunes were concerned. But on October 28, men and women went to the ballot box and voted as their convictions and their consciences told them to do. We were not allowed to know the result until the Monday morning but then we knew that the victory lay with us. The figures we read were as follows:

State	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

And so we thought the great fight against conscription for overseas service had been fought and won. We felt that the people of Australia were entitled to breathe a sigh of relief that this disrupting issue of conscription was dead. Nor did we feel that, in view of the wonderful success of the voluntary system in Australia there was any reason for anything but satisfaction at its passing from the scene. At the time of the 1916 poll Australia's figures showed her doing better, proportionately, than her sister Dominions, all of whom had done well.

### Numbers on Active Service, October, 1916

Australia .....	286,000
Canada .....	284,000
New Zealand .....	64,000

These Australian figures had been achieved despite such news items as the following (this particular one actually dates from the following March 22 and comes from the "Sydney Morning Herald"):



Raise your voice for "NO" on this momentous question. *Your honor is involved.* Those who want to conscript Australia are not appealing to your patriotism, to your passion for liberty, to your courage, to your spirit of self-sacrifice. No! It is to the *worst* side of you they direct their eloquence.

"We won't take *you!*" they say. "Help us to get that other fellow, and we'll leave you alone."

Poltroons might be influenced by this base form of bribery. Don't let it be said, married men, that *you* were caught by the despicable inducement of personal safety.

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:

### 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 a ballot paper,  
The grim death warrant of doom,  
And I smugly 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.*

At all events, the vote on December 20, 1917, resulted as follows:

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	1,700	950
Totals	1,015,159	1,181,747

The two most notable features of these results were that we had drawn Victoria, even if very narrowly, into the "No" column and we had significantly increased the over-all margin for "No." The latter achievement sealed the fate of the conscription issue "for the duration."

I have seen men's loyalties tested in several crises during my lifetime in Labor's ranks. Never have I seen anything to compare, in that regard, with the conscription crisis. I have often been asked the question whether I think all the sacrifices made during that period were worthwhile and I have always replied "I do."

One of the lessons we should learn from the history of all such periods of conflict is the great danger of hasty and often unnecessary, unjust and cruel decisions made in conditions of an unnatural and almost hysterical public psychology, fanned by such biased and even fanatical agencies as a popular press—decisions which in retrospect and in the light of subsequent events come to look quite ludicrous.

We have had a few cases already, even in our young country. Thus Peter Lalor, of Eureka fame, had a price on his head, dead or alive, yet some time later he was elected to the Victorian Parliament, was soon elected by the Legislative Assembly its Speaker, and was finally voted a sizeable retiring allowance when ill-health compelled his ultimate retirement.

Again, at the beginning of this century Edward Findley, editor of a Melbourne Labor paper, reprinted an article from an Irish newspaper. He was called to the Bar of the Victorian Legislative Assembly of which he was a Member. There he was taxed with sedition and ignominiously expelled by Labor-haters posing as patriots. Yet before many months were past he had been triumphantly returned *at the top of the poll* to the Federal Senate by the people of the whole of Victoria. Before long he was a Minister of the Crown.

Or I can cite my own experience. During the great timber workers' strike in 1929, against the unjust award by Judge Lukin which reduced their then miserable wage by 5/- a week and extended that week from 44 to 48 hours, I was prosecuted by the Prime Minister, Stanley Bruce, and fined £50 for counselling the men not to offer for work. I refused to pay and have never paid to this day. At the ensuing election, only a few weeks later, I stood against the Prime Minister in his own "blue ribbon" electorate of Flinders and he was swept not only from office but from Parliament itself.

Such incidents clearly show how those in authority can in small things, as in great, completely misinterpret the real minds of people apparently or actually agitated by dramatic events.

For all that, men did suffer in short and sharp outbursts of violence during the 1916 and 1917 campaigns, though fortunately the British weapon of fists was fairly uniformly adhered to. On the lighter side, it is true that a few mature eggs rent the air, the most publicised being those which were aimed at the Prime Minister at Warwick, Queensland, whence hatched the Commonwealth Police Force. Scores of anti-conscriptionist speakers and workers were fined; some served small sentences in prison.

And there were bitter personal tragedies within Labor's ranks. I vividly and painfully recall the case of George Elmslie. At the time, in 1916, when the Australian Labor Movement had decided to fight conscription to the limit, Elmslie was Leader of the Labor Party and Leader of the Opposition in the Victorian Legislative Assembly, which then met in the Exhibition Building because the Federal Parliament was in possession of the permanent State Parliament House at the top of Bourke Street.

All State Labor Members, as well as Federal men, were bound by the decision of State Executive and Conference. Elmslie, a fine honest Labor man, found himself in very grave trouble over the Party's decisions. I knew him well and felt sure that personally he was just as strongly opposed to conscription for overseas service as I was; but some influence stronger than his own will-power had him in its grip.

He asked Arch Stewart and me (as Secretary and President of the Victorian Executive) to meet him so that he could make his position clear. We met him in his office at the Exhibition Building, where he informed us that it was impossible for him to join us in the anti-conscription campaign. On the other hand he declared he would not come out in opposition to us.

It was evident that he was very upset and broken-hearted about the situation. We urged him to sleep on it and meet us again later, but he said he had had several sleepless nights worrying about it already and there was only one upright thing left for him to do—to resign immediately from the Party. He had made up his mind to do so at once. He asked us to accept his resignation; then he broke down completely. But to his great credit he kept his word never to take part on one side or the other in the terrific fight over conscription, nor did he then or later come out as an opponent of Labor.

I had other painful moments of this sort, though there were, of course, political Labor men who were solid, as well as those who left us. The decision of the Party was conveyed about the same time to Victorian Members of the Federal Parliament and Federal Labor Cabinet. At first our Victorian Executive, in consultation with Frank Tudor and Senator E. J. Russell, decided that these two Victorians should not withdraw from the Hughes Cabinet until the die was irrevocably cast.

When the time seemed ripe, I, as President, was instructed to meet Tudor and Russell at the Federal Treasury and advise them to put in their resignations. I can still recall how relieved and happy Frank Tudor was to get the word. He said he was anxious to make his position clear at the earliest moment and would hand Hughes his resignation as soon as Cabinet convened that day. But what of Senator Russell? He took up a different attitude. He simply said, "All right, E.J., I know your wishes, but I do not think the position has quite crystallised." I could sense at once that he had already made promises to Hughes.

Senator E. J. Russell was the youngest member of Cabinet, a popular and capable young man, for whom the Party had done much to secure a future political career. But at the first test of Party solidarity which threatened him with a little temporary loss of privileges and income, he refused to accept the majority Party decision.

It was a great pity from every point of view. He was never a happy man again. He turned away from his friends and not long afterwards became mentally unbalanced. To the genuine sorrow of his relatives and friends of earlier days he never recovered. I had grown up with him—we had attended the same study circle at one time—and knew him well. I am sure he really hated conscription as I did, but he was over-persuaded and enticed away from his own.

Of just one more for whom I felt and have continued to feel great sorrow, I must say a word. W. G. Spence, M.H.R., was a real Labor man and a founder and stalwart of the A.W.U. and its Federal President; a tireless organiser, a powerful writer and one whose whole life had been spent in and for the Australian Labor Movement. He was a very old and close colleague and friend of W. M. Hughes. I am certain it was his strong personal attachment to that enormously strong-willed man which overrode his judgment and his attachments to the Union and the Party he had done so much to build.

Many years after the split there was a ceremony at the Coburg Cemetery when Senator Barnes and John McNeil, M.H.R., both veterans of the A.W.U., were planting a wattle tree on the grave of a life-long union mate, Senator Andrew McKissock. McNeil, Barnes and McKissock, three great Australian trade unionists from the A.W.U. had, many years before, made a pact that the remaining member of the trio would plant an Australian wattle tree over the graves of the two who "went before."

Several hundred Labor men stood round the grave at Coburg. Then someone drew my attention to the lone figure of a pathetic old man standing 50 yards away. It was W. G. Spence, drawn irresistibly across the years to that gathering for his old mates, yet cut off by the unbridgeable gulf of the vote on conscription from those who carried the Labor banners on.

Whatever its effects on political institutions generally, the conscription struggle undoubtedly had a shattering effect on the Labor Movement, or rather on its political wing. On July 1, 1916, Labor commanded a majority of Australian Cabinets, Federal and State. Six months later Labor commanded only that of Queensland. Of the men who led Labor in the various Parliaments on July 1, 1916, only T. J. Ryan, of Queensland, entered 1917 in our ranks. In the Federal Parliamentary Party, though 40 men had stood staunch and true, 24 followed Hughes to the opposing camp. In the Federal sphere Labor never had power again for more than a quarter of a century (though it held office from 1929 to 1931 and from 1941 to 1944 without majorities in both Houses). In some of the States the picture was not much better.

For all that, there were compensations. The ranks were closed and we sensed a purifying effect: in the wilderness we looked to higher standards of unity and solidarity as we set about rebuilding. It was decided, as early as December, 1916, when a Special Federal Conference was convened in Melbourne to deal with the crisis, that a firm and lasting basis for the future should be laid by constitutionally defining the extent of the purge which had actually occurred. I was in the chair on that occasion and presided over a long and business-like

discussion of a resolution moved by the future Labor Prime Minister, J. H. Scullin, and seconded by my old colleague, Arch Stewart, who was both Federal and Victorian State Secretary of the Australian Labor Party:

*"That as compulsory military service is opposed to the principles embodied in the Australian Labor Party's platform, all Federal Members who supported compulsory overseas military service, or who left the Parliamentary Labor Party and formed another political party are hereby expelled from the Australian Labor Party."*

Lynch, Burchell and Cornell—Western Australian conscriptionists and the first two of them Members of the Federal Parliament—abstained from voting. The other three Western Australians—in whose State the A.L.P. branch had declared conscription an open question—and Senator Gardiner, of New South Wales, opposed the motion, which was carried by 29 votes to 4.

Senator Lynch fought throughout the discussion to retain his membership of the Party and I have often thought how much more than favorably his attitude compared with the spinelessness of some others. The Conference lasted several days and I met with some criticism for giving Senator Lynch more time than he was strictly entitled to. I took the attitude, however, that in view of the great majority he so evidently had against him, it was my duty to accord some leniency towards the minority. The majority could protect itself. The minority, on the other hand, faced ultimate and final expulsion by the supreme authority of political Labor and I wanted there to be no ground whatever for saying that they had not been given the fullest opportunity to put their case. In retrospect even my Conference critics acknowledged the rightness of that attitude.

When the vote had been declared by me from the chair, Senator Lynch rose in the most dramatic manner from his seat and asked me what his position now was. I told him that, in view of the vote just taken he and Burchell and their Parliamentary colleagues who had supported overseas military conscription were no longer members of the Australian Labor Party. This placed him automatically outside the Conference from that moment. Lynch replied, "Very well, Mr Chairman, I bow to your ruling." He then walked to the Press table, filled a glass with water, turned to me, and raising his glass above his head said, "Here's good luck to you, Sir. You will need it all, and remember you will come to Paddy Lynch before Paddy Lynch comes to you."

There have, of course, been other splits in the Labor Movement since 1916-17. None was more bitter nor yet more damaging than that which commenced the wrecking of the Scullin Government in 1931. On that occasion I was on the "inside" of the Parliamentary events. I have painful memories of the Caucus meeting held when J. A. Lyons, J. E. Fenton and J. A. Guy—the first two, Ministers—left the Party to cross the floor and sit with J. G. (later Sir John) Latham and his Opposition. I was quite sure then, and I am now, that it was not a sudden conversion on their part.

One could feel that negotiations were going on to disintegrate the Government for some time before the resignations occurred. Dinners and conferences were being held in Melbourne and several other members had been sounded out to see whether they would join a revolt. Charles Frost, one of the Tasmanian Labor Members and an old colleague of Lyons and Guy, had been pestered to take part in the secret

talks in Melbourne and while travelling by ship to and from Tasmania. No threats, cajollery or inducements could make him turn his coat: he told me that he had given a short answer to the effect that he had been elected as a Labor man and when his time came to go out he would go out a Labor man. And so he did—many years later.

Meanwhile Lyons and Fenton, for some weeks preceding their defection, were very evidently under strain. On the fatal day when Jim Fenton made his conclusive statement that he was finished with us and would never come back again to our Party meetings, I followed him from the Party Room and urged him not to break with his life-long friends. Quite unlike his usual gentlemanly self he violently refused to discuss the matter—in a manner which convinced me that he had already made a pledge he could not break.

As for Lyons, whom I knew and liked well, I feel certain that he was never really happy afterwards about his breach with the Party. He had done great things for Labor in Tasmania, where he had been State Premier, and was a capable member of the Federal Party, but—as we saw it—offers of a short cut to even greater fame won him over.

If at times Lyons and Fenton showed signs of the strain and the break, Guy and J. L. Price seemed to me at any rate to reflect no disturbance in their intellectual and emotional calm.

I had suggested that in most great crises such as those I have described in this chapter, outside pressure and enticements play the role of Party wrecker. I am sure this is so. I cannot speak from first-hand experience in the sense of having ever been subject to it personally. No overtures have ever been made to me over all my years in the Movement. Perhaps this is because I have never been a member of any society or organisation, religious, social or economic other than the Labor Movement itself. This has made me more difficult to approach, or (and I hope this was the case) they knew beforehand what my reaction would be. My knowledge of the processes of wrecking have been based rather on close-up observation and proofs supplied me by colleagues and friends. Unencumbered by outside affiliations and sitting so long at the centre of political and industrial Labor, I have been able to tell in advance in nine cases out of ten how my colleagues would react when the pressure of a crisis was on.

Such knowledge has been anything but a consolation. Politics, which should be the noblest of all callings because of the great power which it affords to determine the happiness or otherwise of our people, and of other peoples, has been all too often degraded by these miserable little demonstrations of disloyalty or worse. Such personal frailty saps the faith and confidence of people in their institutions. Such a reaction, of course, could, if sufficiently developed, undermine democracy itself.

### SIDELIGHTS OF CONSCRIPTION FIGHT

During the later periods of the two conscription fights I was often surprised and sometimes shocked to discover how much hypocrisy was hidden behind the support for conscription. Large numbers of public men, businessmen, professional men and churchmen secretly helped our anti-conscription fight by handing donations to our fighting fund with a promise that their names should not be made known, and I am glad to say those promises were kept.

Churchmen, faced with fanatical congregations, had to hide their deep-seated hatred of conscription. Businessmen, faced with a boycott supplies and loss of customers, had to pretend, or risk bankruptcy. Professional men had to listen to the ravings of their clients and hide

their own feelings. Public men—lord mayors, councillors and parliamentarians—had to sit on conscription platforms and sometimes speak in favor rather than face the risk of liquidation from public life. Some brave men, several church leaders, took all the risks for principle's sake. But as always voluntary martyrs are very rare, which should mean all the more glory for the few. I knew three men who did much to help keep conscription out of Australia — Archbishop Mannix, Dr. Charles Strong and Samuel Mauger. I met and knew men in all the classes mentioned and I will give two illustrations to show how it was done.

I was in the "Sydney Worker" newspaper office with that great man, Henry Boote, the editor, discussing the campaign. He showed me a very long list of typed names and addresses. I asked him what it was all about. Boote replied that it had been sent to him by one of the largest clothing emporiums in Sydney, with instructions to send a copy of our paper to all the people named (and there were some hundreds). I asked him what was the idea. Boote said it was their way of giving us a donation and, second, to get the anti-conscription case to their staffs. If conscription was carried, cheap Asiatic or Maltese labor, which would be sure to come, would not buy their goods. The firm he referred to was Mark Foy's, Sydney.

On another occasion I was paying for the hire of the Melbourne Town Hall for anti-conscription meetings and in conversation with the Lord Mayor, he remarked that he did not know how we would pay for all this. He meant sending more and more men overseas. I then told him how costly it was to carry on our anti-conscription campaigns. Then, to my surprise, he gave me the name and address of one of his relatives, so I could send one of our trustworthy collectors there and get a donation.

The Melbourne Chamber of Manufactures naturally was strongly behind Mr. Hughes' conscription demands. At that time I was constantly meeting the executive members of the Chamber in connection with industrial problems. After one meeting one of the manufacturers gave me a lift in his car, during which he said the conscription atmosphere was nauseating him and asked me if a few pounds would help our fighting fund. He suggested I send a collector to his son's surgery in Collins Street to get a donation. He said, "My two sons are over in France, but they went voluntarily and I will not vote to send other sons by force." The principals in these examples are dead, so no harm can come to them if people should guess their names.

### SIR HENRY LAWSON WAS A GOOD AUSTRALIAN

Soon after the end of the war, the Melbourne Trades Hall Council decided to have the results of both conscription campaigns painted in gold letters upon the wall just inside the main entrance to the building, facing Lygon Street. It was a splendid piece of work of which we are proud—as we were and are of the victory it depicted. I mention this, because at that time Sir Henry Lawson, then Premier of Victoria, visited the Trades Hall to discuss a gasworkers' dispute which caused the Government a lot of trouble. When I escorted him to the front entrance I pointed to the wall and said, "Sir Henry, if we never do anything else we feel that that victory was worth doing. We saved our country from being smeared by that old world curse of human conscription." The Premier raised his hands and said, very sadly, "I wonder." I knew him well and I am sure he was glad that he was not the only one whose private feeling was opposed to their public actions at that time.

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## POSTSCRIPT

There are strong moral reasons why conscripts should not be sent overseas to fight a war that means nothing to them or to Australia.

The Liberal-Country Party Federal Government refuses to consider the morality of conscription; it has decided upon an easy way out.

The Government has failed to convince the people of Australia that the Vietnam war is just and worth fighting for.

It has failed to attract volunteers to fulfil commitments into which it has blindly rushed.

The moral issue goes even deeper because the vast majority of Australians are against conscription for Vietnam, but their opinion is being ignored. This is a contradiction of democracy.

The Government has got itself into a mess internationally and has involved Australia in a cruel, dirty, unwinnable, civil war.

Conscription under such conditions is indefensible and it appears even worse when the young victims of this policy are selected in a lottery.

The Labor Party's attitude on conscription has been attacked by all sorts of grizzly old warmongers who, in their younger days, decided not to volunteer for overseas service during the two World Wars.

These people were perfectly entitled to stay at home if they felt that way, but they are not entitled today, when they are no longer fit for military duties, to support and urge the conscription of younger men for service in the current civil war in Vietnam.

For all such people, I have nothing but loathing and contempt.

A. A. Calwell, M.H.R.,  
October, 1966.



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