

Australian Peace Alliance.

ELECTION MANIFESTO

TO THE PEOPLE OF AUSTRALIA.

Men and Women of Australia,—

Our country is on the eve of an election which promises to be the most stubbornly fought contest in the history of Australian politics.

You have read the manifestoes of the Fusionist and Labor parties, as well as those of other candidates. No doubt you have been struck by the similarity of claims and professions of the first two. Each of these parties claims to be a genuinely National Party, and to have subordinated all else to a vigorous war policy.

It is clear that the election will be made to turn upon the question of conscription. The Fusionist Party is rightly or wrongly suspected of covertly aiming at a reversal of the people's decision last October, and the Australian Labor Party will look for its main source of strength to the strong feeling against conscription.

POLITICAL SITUATION UNSATISFACTORY.

For a long time the political situation in Australia has been not merely unsatisfactory from a political point of view, but profoundly discreditable and humiliating from a moral point of view. The air has been full of accusations and insinuations against prominent members of both parties. The result has been to shake faith in both political parties, and to create an atmosphere of cynical suspicion with regard to political integrity which is poisoning our national life. The public decency, which we are vitally concerned to protect, has been outraged almost daily. One glaring instance must suffice. Since the Referendum was taken all sorts of rumors have been abroad concerning the soldiers' vote. Our Prime Minister stated in the House that the figures were being withheld at the instance of the Imperial Government. But in the Imperial Parliament Mr. Walter Long gave precisely the opposite reason for their non-publication in England, namely, the wish of the Commonwealth authorities. After five months two conflicting statements have been made, one by the Prime Minister, the other by Mr. Higgs, who up to the eve of the Referendum was Mr. Hughes' colleague. It is humiliating and degrading to the people of Australia, first, that they should so long have been kept entirely in the dark about this matter, and that even now they should have to choose between the flatly contradictory statements of two of their foremost public men. Information in plain matters of fact should come to the people from sources which are above the suspicion of lying and petty trickery, and it should be given to us formally through the proper official source, not tardily doled out to us piecemeal in the midst of electioneering harangues. This matter of the soldiers' vote is only one of many instances of the manner in which the rights of the community are being flouted, and its self-respect destroyed.

A PEACE POLICY IMPERATIVE.

The Australian Peace Alliance is not a partisan body. Its object is indicated by its name, and that aim is the organisation of the forces which make for international peace. Both political parties are out of touch with that growing public opinion which the Alliance voices. A party which is to be truly democratic, in the sense of consulting the real desires of the people, must now be more than merely an anti-conscription party. It must have a peace policy. For the real issue at the present time is between a policy which involves the indefinite prolongation of the present war, followed by a trade "war after the war," and a constructive peace policy, aiming first at the ending of the war at the first possible moment by the rational method of frank and open negotiation, and, secondly, at laying the foundations of permanent peace in mutual trust and understanding.

THE PEOPLE WANT PEACE.

The outstanding fact is that neither political party voices the true feeling of the mass of the Australian people. For in spite of the warlike phrases which are coined in our newspaper offices, the supreme desire of the vast majority of our people is for an immediate peace. They are not seeking for victory, for they know that the victories of modern warfare have no sweets, but are as dearly bought by the victors as by the vanquished, and that the hope of

future peace does not rest upon terms dictated by a victor, but upon mutual concessions, free and open discussion of differences, and a united effort to repair the wreckage of our common civilisation. We have been told that to stop short of victory would be an act of treachery to the dead and a betrayal of the unborn. Never was a more hideous sophistry spoken. We are to placate the spirits of the dead by pouring upon the earth libations of kindred blood! We are to fulfil an obligation to posterity by bequeathing to them for their common heritage a wrecked world, haunted by hideous shapes of fear, hatred, and revenge, and for their individual portion a burden of debt, disease, and loathsome memories. If there is anything in the world of to-day which our children's children will not regard with horror, it will be the memory of those who, in a world gone mad with fear and hate, strove to arrest the stampede into barbarism, and to stand firm for the elementary sanities and decencies of human intercourse.

NOT A PEOPLE'S WAR.

The war is no longer, if it ever was, a people's war. It is a journalists' war, a diplomats' war, a financiers' war, a traders' war—but not a people's war. Let us not be deceived by newspaper phrases. They do not express the soul of any of the belligerent peoples. The war has no longer behind it the will of any of the peoples involved. They are all awaiting—and none more earnestly than the men who are fighting—the advent of the statesman or people who shall have the courage to speak the word Peace. When a few weeks ago the American President spoke of "peace without victory" his utterance was welcomed by every democracy in the world, and nowhere more eagerly than among the men who are being kept at their task of slaughter by anti-democratic forces. It is clear to anyone who is not deceived by meaningless phrases that there can be no such thing as a fight to a finish. Sooner or later the belligerents will have to negotiate. Neither side can gain any real advantage by prolonging the sacrifice of life and accumulating the burden of debt. Both sides know this perfectly well, but neither has the courage to be the first to admit it.

AUSTRALIA'S OPPORTUNITY.

Here is Australia's opportunity. This is the great and noble part which our country is called upon to play in this crisis in the history of civilisation. Let us not believe that it is our destiny to be dragged at the heels of the Northcliffe press, or to have our policy dictated to us by the reactionaries of the old world. Let us not be content even to follow tardily the great awakening of the peoples which is at hand—an awakening out of the nightmare world of bloodshed into the world of international brotherhood. The war must now be ended by the intervention of the people. In every country there are clear signs that the intervention is at hand. Shall Australia wait for a lead from Russia or Germany? Or will she herself fulfil her destiny and give the lead? When the history of the war comes to be written, our Australian soldiers will have won their place in the story. But a more glorious garland awaits the nation that shall be remembered as the first to point the way to peace. The world is waiting to follow in our lead, if we have the courage to give the signal.

AUSTRALIA FOR PEACE.

We therefore urge upon the electors of Australia the duty of not allowing the coming election campaign to degenerate into a mere orgy of vituperation. The people of Australia must not be led on a false trail away from their duty to the world. As a nation, we are now called upon to stand for principles which are high above the region of party politics. The world in which we are called upon to play a part is now most vitally interested, not in conscription or anti-conscription, but in peace. Let the election be an opportunity for the people of Australia to declare to their political leaders, and to the world, that they are concerned very little with the claims of contending parties, and still less with intrigues and petty recriminations, but that they are alive to their responsibility to the world. The one service which Australian democracy is now called upon to render to the world is to raise its voice for an immediate and lasting peace, based upon the democratic principle of fraternity. Every true democrat, every man or woman who has pondered upon the part which Australia has to play in the fellowship of nations, knows that this, and not a "win-the-war" policy, is the true fulfilling of Australia's destiny.

Signed on behalf of the Victorian Council of the Australian Peace Alliance,

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