



The moral and political issues involved in Vietnam and Conscription are vital to our nation. None of us can afford to evade them. Here, 45 life and death questions are posed. Please read the answers. And think.

- 1 What is conscription?**
Conscription is the compulsory enlistment of men for service in the armed forces.
- 2 Who is liable to be conscripted?**
Under the present legislation, all men who reach the age of twenty years, whether married or single, must register for military service.
- 3 Will everyone be conscripted?**
No. The government decides from time to time how many men it needs, and calls up only that number.
- 4 How are the conscripts selected?**
They are chosen by ballot. Marbles with dates on them are placed in a barrel. Those whose birthdays fall on the dates drawn from the barrel are required to present themselves for medical examination.
- 5 How many young men are in fact conscripted?**
So far, 40,000 young men have been notified that they are liable to be called up; over 2,000 have actually been conscripted. More will follow if Australia's commitment in Vietnam expands.
- 6 What is the objection to conscription?**
Conscription is an invasion of personal liberty. Conscription takes young men, at the beginning of their adult lives, away from their chosen occupations, their families and friends. Conscription may force young men to fight against their will.
- 7 Is conscription ever justified?**
Yes; conscription for national defence may be justified when there is a **clear and present danger to the security of the nation.**
- 8 What is the Australian record on conscription?**
Conscription for home service was first introduced in 1911; the system was abandoned in 1929. There was a compulsory call-up — for home service only — in 1916. Attempts to introduce conscription for overseas service during World War I were defeated by popular vote in 1916 and 1917. Conscription for home service was introduced during World War II; the area in which conscripts were required to serve was later extended to cover the whole of the South-West Pacific. Conscription for home service was re-introduced in 1950, but abandoned ten years later. The present conscription was introduced in 1965.
- 9 Do Australians support conscription?**
No — generally they have opposed it.
In 1912-13, hundreds of young Australians were gaoled for refusing to be conscripted.
In 1916 and again in 1917 the majority of Australians voted against conscription for overseas service.
In 1916 and 1917 the majority of Australian soldiers on active service voted against conscription.
During the Second World War, when the Japanese Army and Navy were close to Australia's shores, Australians accepted conscription as necessary for national defence.
In 1966, public opinion polls show that 57% of Australians are OPPOSED TO CONSCRIPTION FOR VIETNAM.
- 10 Why do young men have to be conscripted for the war in Vietnam?**
Because the government has not been able to convince enough young men that this is a war essential to Australian security. Australians have a long and proud record of voluntary military service. If they were convinced that the country was in danger, they would volunteer.
- 11 Is it right for young men who have no vote to be conscripted?**
No. If a man is old enough to fight, he is old enough to vote. For older men, who have no part in the fighting themselves, to tell young men that they must fight is both unjust and undemocratic.
- 12 Will the government's new legislation change this?**
No. The government is proposing to give the vote to young men who have already been conscripted for service in Vietnam. But this is too late — it does not give them a vote on whether they should be conscripted or not. If the government were genuine in its democratic pretensions, it would give the vote, or at least the chance of participating in a referendum, to the whole of the 20-year age group.
- 13 Why does not the government hold a referendum on conscription, as was done in 1916 and 1917?**
Because it is afraid that it would lose.
- 14 Is conscription at present necessary to Australian defence?**
The answer to this depends on the nature of the threat to Australia's security. If there is a real and present danger to Australia's security, then conscription may be justified. If there is no such threat, then conscription is not justified.
- 15 Is the war in Vietnam a threat to Australian security?**
No, it is not. Australian security is more likely to be threatened by our **involvement** in the war than if we were to stay out.
- 16 But is not the war in Vietnam a case of "Chinese Communist aggression"?**
No. The simple fact is that there are no Chinese troops in Vietnam.
- 17 Is it not then a case of one state, North Vietnam, invading its independent neighbour, South Vietnam?**
No. It is not. In the first place, according to the Geneva agreements of 1954 (which wound up the war of Vietnamese nationalists against the French who then ruled Vietnam) North and South Vietnam are NOT two separate states. In the second place, there is no evidence that North Vietnamese troops are anything but a small fraction of the "Vietcong" forces in South Vietnam. Recent American estimates suggest that, of a quarter of a million "Vietcong", only 20,000 are from the North Vietnamese armed forces. **There are twelve times as many American troops in South Vietnam as there are North Vietnamese.**

- 18 Then what is happening in South Vietnam?**
The war in South Vietnam is essentially a popular revolt of the South Vietnamese people against an unpopular, corrupt, and undemocratic government (or rather series of governments, for there have been no less than nine military and civilian dictatorships in South Vietnam over the last few years). In this war, the "Vietcong" (more properly called the National Liberation Front) control most of the countryside and have strong support in the major Vietnamese cities.
- 19 Are we fighting for democracy in South Vietnam?**
No. Not one of the governments which have ruled South Vietnam since 1954 has been democratic. All have ruled by military force and have forcibly suppressed opposition.
- 20 Then why are the Americans in South Vietnam?**
Because they are committed to the "containment of Communism" in every part of the world, regardless of the will of the people directly concerned.
- 21 Why has the Menzies-Holt government committed Australian troops to this war?**
Because the government believes that Australia must blindly follow American policies in order to consolidate the Australian-American alliance, which the government regards as necessary to Australian security.
- 22 Does the government seriously believe that Australian security is threatened in Vietnam?**
No. If the government were convinced of this, they would be guilty of grave dereliction of duty if they confined Australia's effort to the present insignificant proportion.
- 23 Are we fighting in Vietnam because of our commitments under SEATO?**
No. The SEATO Council — that is, the full meeting of the member nations of SEATO — has never been called on to support American and Australian intervention in Vietnam. The reason for this is that at least two of the SEATO powers (France and Pakistan) do not support that intervention.
- 24 Is the government right to believe that we must at all costs follow American policies?**
No. The American alliance is valuable to Australia. But no alliance should be followed to the point where the nations involved themselves threaten national security.
- 25 Why is Australian involvement in Vietnam a threat to Australian security?**
Because Australia is, for all time, an island-continent off the coast of Asia, and our security demands that we seek the friendliest relations with the nations of Asia. Most Asian nations disapprove of the war in Vietnam. Our intervention in that war helps to isolate us from Asia.
- 26 How long will the war in Vietnam continue?**
American estimates (which may be optimistic) talk of five to ten years.
- 27 How many Australians will be involved?**
Already the number of Australian troops committed to Vietnam has multiplied three times in twelve months (from 1,500 to 4,500). American Defence Secretary McNamara has recently stated that American forces, now 250,000 strong, will be increased to 400,000. The Australian commitment is likely to follow suit.
- 28 Is American opinion wholeheartedly in support of present American policies?**
No. Important and influential sections of American opinion, headed by Senator William Fulbright (chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the U.S. Senate) and Senators Robert and Edward Kennedy (brothers of the late President John F. Kennedy) have opposed the present policies of the American government.
- 29 Why does so much American, Australian and world opinion oppose intervention in the war in Vietnam?**
Because they believe that the war may "escalate" and so provoke a world war. Because they regard it as wrong for outside nations to intervene in a civil war. Because they think of the war in Vietnam as a "dirty war". Because they regard the war in Vietnam as "unwinnable".
- 30 Why does the war in Vietnam threaten world peace?**
Because increased American commitment in the war may cause increased North Vietnamese participation and may provoke Chinese intervention. If this happens, world war could result.
- 31 Why is it wrong to intervene in a civil war?**
Because we claim the right for ourselves — and are prepared to fight for this right — to choose our own government and way of life, and must be prepared to extend this same right to the people of other countries.
- 32 Why is the war in Vietnam called a "dirty war"?**
Because of the weapons used — weapons like the chemicals which destroy crops, the gases which paralyse men, napalm (jellied petrol) which incinerates those on whom it is dropped, and the bullets fired by the Armalite rifle, which are an improved version of the universally-condemned "dum-dum" bullets. Because the "Vietcong" are so inextricably intermingled with the peasants and villagers of South Vietnam that, to destroy the Vietcong, it is necessary to destroy whole villages — old and young, men, women and children, "innocent" and "guilty" alike.
- 33 Why is the war in Vietnam called "unwinnable"?**
Because, although it is possible for the Americans to "win" the war in the military sense, they cannot win it in the political sense. An American victory would mean the American military occupation of South Vietnam. But this would even further alienate the South Vietnamese people. This occupation would have to contend with a permanently hostile population, and a permanent guerilla war.

- 34 Is there any way out of this unwinnable war?**
Yes. Influential American political leaders have suggested that the American forces withdraw to a series of "beach-heads" and declare themselves in favour of negotiations between the leaders of the present South Vietnamese military government, the leaders of the South Vietnamese Buddhists, and the leaders of the National Liberation Front. Such negotiations could lead to a truce and to a political settlement in South Vietnam.
- 35 What sort of a future should South Vietnam have?**
This is a matter for the people of that country. If they desire to reunite their country with North Vietnam, under a pro-communist government, that is their own affair, and we must accept their decision. If they desire to maintain the division of their country, and to "neutralise" South Vietnam, we must respect that decision, too.
- 36 But what would then become of South-East Asia? Would it not all fall to the Communists?**
That depends on two things — first, on the internal condition of the countries of South-East Asia; and secondly on the nature of the political settlement.
- 37 Is Communism a threat in South-East Asia?**
Of course it is. But it is only a threat in countries where the conditions under which the majority of the people live have become intolerable. Where there are progressive governments, working to end poverty and for social justice, communism is not a serious threat. Western policy in South-East Asia should be directed towards these ends. Military intervention against popular revolutions makes the threat worse rather than better.
- 38 What sort of a political settlement is possible in South-East Asia?**
Such world figures as General de Gaulle of France, Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia, and Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, have already suggested a possible political future for South-East Asia. This future would end the present tragic war, and would ensure that South-East Asia is left to solve its own tragic problems in its own ways. It is the "neutralisation" of South-East Asia, based on an agreement among the nations directly concerned, and the great powers, to respect the neutrality and independence of the area.
- 39 Is such a solution practicable?**
No-one can say until the possibility is explored. There should be talks between the nations of South-East Asia and the great powers (America, Russia, France, England and Communist China) to find out.
- 40 Why have no such talks been held?**
Because at present we refuse to recognise Communist China, and to talk seriously with her.
- 41 What should Australia do?**
Australia should withdraw its conscripts from Vietnam. Australia should seek to disengage itself from its whole military involvement in Vietnam. Australia should raise its voice in the councils of the world in support of an end to the war in Vietnam and a peaceful future for the whole of South-East Asia.
- 42 Does this mean ending the American alliance?**
No. An alliance is a two-way affair. Australia should use its "special relation" with America to convince the American government that our mutual interests would be best served by such a policy as this.
- 43 Would such a policy threaten Australian security?**
No. A peaceful South-East Asia, taken out of the maelstrom of the cold war, would contribute greatly to Australian security.
- 44 But what about Australian defence?**
Until the world agrees to disarm, this country, like all other nations, must have its defence forces. The Menzies-Holt government has shamefully neglected Australian defence. Our forces must be built to the level required to protect our national integrity. We must prepare to defend ourselves on the ocean and in the air to the north of Australia. We cannot hope to defend ourselves by holding an untenable defence line on the mainland of Asia.
- 45 How should Australia stand with Asia?**
Australia must end the present government's apathy about Asia. We must set out, by economic aid, cultural exchange and other peaceful means, to establish friendly relations with all the nations of Asia. Australia must end the wishful thinking that we can survive in Asia merely on the basis of alliances with Great Britain and America. We must strike out on our own path — the path of peace and friendship with the whole of Asia.