

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

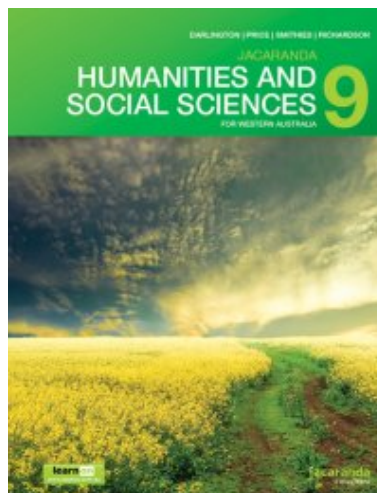
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22.11 The conscription issue

22.11.1 Support for conscription

Of all the armies fighting in World War I, only the AIF was formed entirely from volunteers. But by mid 1916 recruiting campaigns were no longer convincing enough men to enlist. When Labor prime minister William Morris ('Billy') Hughes decided that Australia should follow Britain's example by introducing conscription, divisions in Australian society became very bitter. The Australian Labor Party (ALP) was against conscription, but Hughes went against party policy and tried to win public support for conscription through two bitterly fought **referendum** campaigns in 1916 and 1917.

A divisive issue

Conscription was among the most divisive issues in Australia's history. Divisions between social classes and between those holding different religious and political beliefs became more intense. Supporters of conscription argued that Britain was in peril and many Australians were already fighting and dying, so others who had not stepped forward should be forced to do their duty. They called those who had not volunteered traitors and cowards or accused them of being supporters of **Sinn Fein** or the IWW, or even of Germany.

SOURCE 1 *The Anti's Creed*, a leaflet supporting conscription in the 1917 referendum



The Anti's Creed, a poster outlining the supposed characteristics of the anti-conscriptionists

SOURCE 2 Conscription — for and against

YES!

Those supporting conscription:

- representatives of every political party except the Labor Party
- business organisations
- major newspapers such as *The Argus*, *The Age* and *The Bulletin*
- Protestant churches
- some returned soldiers.

Pro-conscription arguments:

- It was Australia's duty to support Great Britain.
- Conscription meant 'equality of sacrifice'.
- Voluntary recruitment had failed.
- Australia had a good reputation that had to be protected.
- Other Allied countries, such as Great Britain, New Zealand and Canada, had already introduced conscription.

NO!

Those opposing conscription:

- trade unions
- most of the Labor Party
- the Catholic Church (Melbourne's Archbishop, Daniel Mannix, led the fight against conscription) – Britain had suppressed the Irish uprising of Easter 1916 and executed its leaders; most Australian Catholics were of Irish descent and many resented Britain's treatment of Ireland
- the Women's Peace Army
- most working-class people
- some returned soldiers.

Anti-conscription arguments:

- No person had the right to send another to be killed or wounded.
- There would not be enough hands to farm if men were conscripted.
- The working class would unfairly bear the burden of the fight.
- Too many Australian men had already died or been wounded.
- Conscription would harm and divide Australia.

22.11.1 Activities

To answer questions online and to receive **immediate feedback** and **sample responses** for every question, go to your learnON title at www.jacplus.com.au. *Note:* Question numbers may vary slightly.

Check your understanding

1. What was unique about Australia's army in World War I?
2. Why did Australian Prime Minister 'Billy' Hughes decide in mid 1916 that Australia should introduce conscription?

Using historical sources as evidence

3. Using Source 2:
 - (a) list the main supporters of conscription
 - (b) outline the main arguments for conscription.
4. Read Source 1.
 - (a) The IWW was an organisation called the Industrial Workers of the World, which campaigned against war and the exploitation of workers. Sinn Fein was a movement fighting for Irish independence from British rule. Nurse Cavell was shot by the Germans as a British spy. Explain why a pro-conscription leaflet would refer to these people?
 - (b) Identify the technique this leaflet uses to influence voters.

22.11.2 Opposing conscription

Opponents argued that there should be no conscription of working men when there was no conscription of the wealth of the privileged classes. Many feared that conscription would be used by employers to destroy rights won by Australian workers. In May 1916, conscription was used in Germany to destroy German workers' rights when striking munitions workers were conscripted and sent to the battlefield. Australian unions believed that conscription could be used for the same purpose here. They described supporters of conscription as destroyers of democracy, murderers and war profiteers. Most Australian Catholics were of Irish descent, and many became bitterly resentful when Britain executed several Irish rebel leaders after crushing the Irish uprising of Easter 1916. Melbourne's Catholic Archbishop, Daniel Mannix, quickly became the most outspoken leader of the anti-conscription movement.

DID YOU KNOW?

Billy Hughes' supporters, including many AIF soldiers, called him the 'Little Digger'. From November 1916 the labour movement, on the other hand, called him 'the Rat' and 'Judas'.

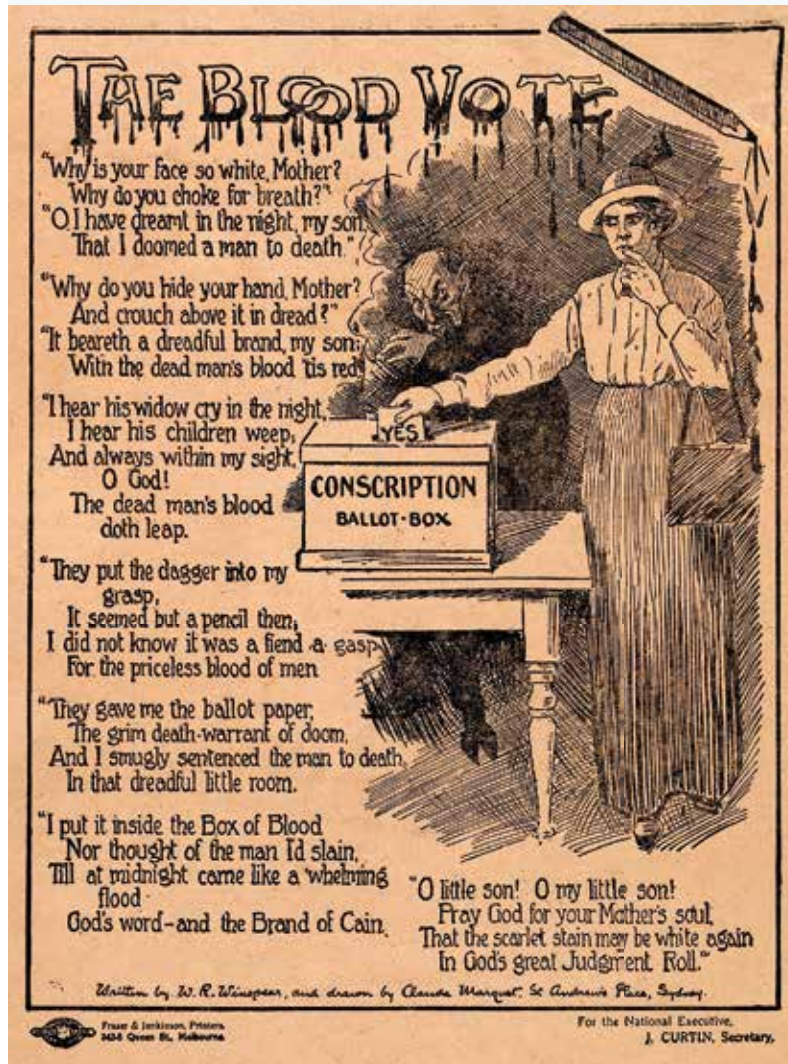
The people decide

Conscription was defeated in the referendum of October 1916 (1 087 557 Australians voted in favour of conscription but 1 160 033 voted against it). 'Patriots' blamed Catholics and Australian Germans and demanded that Mannix be deported. The Labor Party was split. Hughes and his supporters left the party in November 1916, before it could expel them, and merged with the Liberal Party to form the Nationalist Party. Led by Hughes, the Nationalists won the federal election of May 1917. However, at a second referendum of December 1917, conscription was again defeated, this time by 1 181 747 against to 1 015 159 in favour.

SOURCE 3 From speeches by Archbishop Daniel Mannix, reported in the *Advocate*: (1) 3 February 1917 and (2) 8 December 1917

1. The war was like most wars — just an ordinary trade war ... Even now, people were arranging how the vanquished nations — when they are vanquished — are to be crippled in their future trade.
2. [In] the daily papers of Australia ... there is no opening in their columns for those who want the answer on December 20 to be an emphatic NO ... [The] papers give plenty of space to any sort of silly twaddle on the other side ... The wealthy classes would be very glad to send the last man, but they have no notion of sending the last shilling, nor even the first ... the burden in the end will be borne by the toiling masses in Australia.

SOURCE 4 *The Blood Vote*, an anti-conscription leaflet



22.11.2 Activities

To answer questions online and to receive **immediate feedback** and **sample responses** for every question, go to your learnON title at www.jacplus.com.au. *Note:* Question numbers may vary slightly.

Check your understanding

1. What reasons did Australian workers have for opposing conscription?
2. Explain why many Australian Irish Catholics would have opposed conscription.
3. What event prompted Melbourne's Archbishop Daniel Mannix to become the most outspoken opponent of conscription?
4. What were the results of the two referenda on conscription in 1916 and 1917?
5. Describe the impact of the conscription referenda on the Labor Party.

Using historical sources as evidence

6. Using Source 2, identify the main groups opposed to conscription.
7. What arguments did Mannix make against conscription in Source 3?
8. Analyse the technique used in Source 4 to argue against conscription.