

Australian conscription debate

MANIFESTO TO AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS

From Mr. W. M. HUGHES, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth.

LETTERS OF AUSTRALIA!

AFTER more than two years of heroic effort, the day of battle, which we long for so, ... with the enemy, who had been prepared for and deliberately provoked war, turns slowly but surely in our favour. The results of the Great Offensive, during which you added fresh laurels to the glorious name of Anzac, have shown that if the Allies but give resolutely on, decisive victory must crown their heroic labours.

BUT though the valour and dash of the Allied forces have pushed her legions back along a wide front, the day of decisive victory is not yet in sight. No one of you who knows the tremendous resources of the enemy, his courage, his determination, will say that Germany is yet defeated.

YET she must be defeated.

THIS would require years for peace, but any peace would be but a hollow mockery, unless the great disturbance of the world's peace were first beaten to her knees. Until Germany is driven headlong from France and Belgium, and decisively beaten on her own soil, she will never consent to the peace that the Allies want and are determined to have.

IN order to ensure decisive victory the Allies have decided to put every available man into the field, so that their Armies may be kept at full strength, and every man in the trenches be kept fit by frequent action.

The Path to Victory.

WHEN you know all this, you know also that the path of victory lies stretched in front of you. You know it is on the Western Front that the crushing blow must be delivered. You know that more men are needed, and the British Empire must supply them.

FRANCE for nearly two years endured the heaviest of the most ferocious bombardments of the enemy. The bones of her gallant men strewn the soil of their dear France like shells on the sea shore. She has covered herself with imperishable glory. She was never so great as in this supreme hour of her trial. Despite these great losses, her glorious soldiers will fight on with unshaken resolution, and will fight with our Frenchmen, capable of bearing arms, remain alive.

NOW is the hour when our race must prove itself worthy of its traditions and its heritage.

This is our War, Soldiers!

THIS is Australia's war just as much as France's or Belgium's. Our liberties and our national existence are equally, nay, more at stake. Australia must do her share. Britain has told us what she expects us to do; it is not more than we can or ought to do; it is, indeed, much less proportionately than she herself has done.

WE have sent overseas and have in camp in Australia or in England and in the field less than three hundred thousand troops. Britain has sent millions under arms. If we had done so much we should have enlisted five hundred thousand instead of little more than half that number.

VOLUNTARY recruiting has, unfortunately, proved quite inadequate to supply the necessary number.

As the death-toll rose and the government failed to meet the high quota of recruits set by the British War Office, Labor Prime Minister Billy Hughes proposed that unmarried men aged 18-26 should be conscripted (forced by the government) to serve overseas.

The conscription debate bitterly divided Australia along the lines of class, politics and religious belief. Protestants and the middle class tended to vote 'Yes'. Catholics (who were mainly Irish) and the working class were more likely to vote 'No'.

Conscription was put to a national public vote twice, in 1916 and 1917, and was defeated both times. In 1917, the 'No' vote increased.

The majority of serving soldiers also voted against conscription.

1.

2.

AUSTRALIAN NATIONALISTS

Married Men are **EXEMPT** if the Government Proposals are **CARRIED**, but if they are **REJECTED**, **ALL** will have **TO GO**.

“**VOTE
YES
MUM**



or else
they'll take
DAD.”

**VOTE
YES**

3.

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Troedel & Cooper Pty. Ltd., Melb.

Moreland Remembers World War I



Australian Government
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Moreland City Council



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Image 1.
Manifesto to Australian Soldiers, from Mr WM Hughes, Prime Minister of Australia.
ca 1915 - 1918.
Source: State Library of Victoria, H15200.

Image 2.
Most Rev. D. Mannix, DD, Archbishop of Melbourne. ca 1913.
Source: State Library of Victoria, H2011.20/78

Image 3.
Troedel and Cooper Printers. ca 1916-1917.
Source: State Library of Victoria, Riley and Ephemera Collection.