

**SOLIDARITY? A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TRADES UNIONS IN THE  
CONSCRIPTION DEBATE IN NEW ZEALAND AND AUSTRALIA DURING  
THE GREAT WAR.**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS.

Abstract.	iii.
Declaration.	v.
Acknowledgement.	vi.
Explanatory notes on terms.	vii.
Abbreviations used in thesis.	ix.
Introduction.	1.
Chapter 1. Trades Unions positions before the declaration of war.	5.
Chapter 2. Compulsory Military Training prior to the outbreak of war.	31.
Chapter 3. Trades Unions position between declaration of war and conscription.	43.
Chapter 4. Military Conscription introduced in New Zealand and proposed in Australia.	85.
Chapter 5. Conclusion.	120.
Bibliography.	125.

## **ABSTRACT.**

This thesis is a comparative study of trades unions in the conscription debate in Australia and New Zealand during the Great War. The governments of Australia and New Zealand looked to conscription to maintain the supply of men in the war effort. However, when they declared conscription for overseas service was necessary, most unions opposed it, although some unions in both countries were divided over the issue. New Zealand's unions fought for the repeal of the Military Service Act, which compelled men between the ages of 20 and 46 years to register for overseas military service. Australian unions fought for the defeat of two plebiscites conducted by the government of the day regarding the invocation of conscription.

Several factors influenced unions to oppose conscription. Through the use of trades union and government archival material, particularly minutes of meetings, correspondence, annual reports, conference minutes, diary entries, government documents, pamphlets, biographies, union and contemporary newspapers, it is possible to establish why unions took their stance. In this thesis the factors that shaped the stance of unions on conscription are presented; including the circumstances of the formation of unions, their early history and influences, and their attitudes to compulsory military training. Evidence is also presented regarding the relationship between the union movement and the government of each country, and it is posited that these relationships were influential in the outcome of the conscription debate in the respective countries. Unions in both countries campaigned vigorously to stop conscription. Only in Australia were they successful.

When war was declared in 1914, unionists from both countries balanced union beliefs against other factors. Unionists were concerned that this war was a class war, incorporating inequality of sacrifice. Unionists were also concerned about provisions for families of those serving, the cost of living and loss of civil liberties; none of which were addressed by the governments of the day in the opinion of unionists. Unionists feared economic and industrial conscription. Other unionists simply lacked a belief in war and opposed it. Unionists, in general, opposed the manufacture of war materials. However, this war was also considered to be a necessary evil. Opposition to conscription was counter-balanced with patriotism and belief in the evil of Germany, with the result that many unionists enlisted voluntarily for overseas service.

When conscription became the issue, unionists in both countries opposed it. The New Zealand government legislated for a Military Service Act which the unions attempted to have repealed, but in Australia the government held two plebiscites on conscription to determine the wishes of the populace. Both were defeated, the unions claiming victory.

**THESIS DECLARATION.**

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Robert Anthony Pearce.

Dated. 17 / 6 / 2009.

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## **EXPLANATORY NOTES ON TERMS.**

Early in their history trades unionists coined a set of terms to describe themselves, their employers, others and events.

These terms are used throughout official union records and consequently used throughout this thesis. Because some of these terms are not in common everyday use it is opportune to explain them prior to the reading of this thesis in order not to corrupt the reader's mind when there is interchange of terms.

'Blackleg' is a person who works while fellow workers are on strike (see also 'scab').

'Capitalist', as used by unions, refers to any employer of labour, government, or the wealthy class who can rely on an income regardless of adverse conditions. In this thesis capitalists are perceived as profiteering from the war.

'Conscription of wealth' refers to the confiscation of enough of wealth to raise military pay and pensions to an acceptable level, eliminating profiteering and reducing economic inequality. (This term originates from a British Labour M.P. and is cited in Paul Baker, *King and Country Call*, 68.)

'Economic conscription' is the practice of terminating employment or reducing working hours with a subsequent loss of income, to force men to enlist in order to be able to support themselves and/or dependants.

'Equality of sacrifice' is the belief of the unions that the workers are fighting a war to safeguard the capitalists wealth, therefore the capitalist should be prepared to sacrifice his wealth to enable those fighting, and their dependants, to receive equitable pay and death and disability benefits.

'Industrial conscription' is the conscription of men from their chosen workplace and placing them in an industry the government deems to be necessary to the war effort.

'Labour movement' refers to employed workers. Interchangeable with 'worker', 'working class', 'unionist', and 'union' (see also Union).

'Scab' is a person who refuses to join a strike, tries to break a strike by working or refuses to join a union (see also 'blackleg').

'Strike' is the act of refusing to work because the capitalist refuses to accede to the union's demands.

‘Trades and Labour Council’ is the governing body of a group of unions.

‘Union’ is the governing body of a group of workers.

In addition to the above terms, the author uses the terms ‘Ideological Principles’ and ‘Ideology’ throughout this thesis. These terms refer to the unions’ belief that the working class should not engage in war. They should not manufacture war material nor should they fight their fellow workers in other nations. The more militant workers believe they should use war to advance their class war and defeat capitalism. ‘Traditional values’ has a similar meaning to “Ideological Principles” and “Ideology”.

Clarification is necessary as to the use of Labour and Labor. Labour and Labor both refer to the Labor Party in Australia. Prior to Federation the individual colonies had Labour parties, after Federation and until 1908 the Labour Party was spelt as Labour but changed in 1908 to Labor. Some Trades and Labour Councils retain the original spelling of Labour.



## **ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THESIS.**

ANZ	Archives New Zealand.
ATL	Alexander Turnbull Library.
AWU	Australian Workers Union.
CMF	Coal Miners Federation.
FL	Federation of Labour.
FOL	Federation of Labour.
FSU	Federated Seamen's Union of New Zealand.
HCA	Hocken Collections Archives and Manuscripts
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World.
LCN	Labor Council of N.S.W.
MTHC	Melbourne Trades Hall Council.
NBA	Noel Butlin Archives.
SDP	Social Democratic Party.
SUA	Federated Seamen's Union of Australia.
TTH	Tasmanian Trades Hall Council.
UFL	United Federation of Labour.
ULP	United Labour Party.
UTLC	United Trades and Labour Council of S.A. also known as Adelaide Trades and Labour Council.
WIU	Wharf Labourers Industrial Union.
WWF	Waterside Workers Federation of Australia.
WWFN	Waterside Workers Federation New Zealand.
WWU	Wellington Amalgamated Watersiders Industrial Union of Workers.

## INTRODUCTION.

This thesis is a study of the conscription debates in Australia and New Zealand during the Great War. It is a comparative study of Australian and New Zealand trades unions and their role in the conscription debate. It explores the reasons why there were different outcomes in the conscription debate between Australia and New Zealand and aims to uncover the underlying factors which were responsible for these different outcomes.

The Great War caused the labour movements of Australia and New Zealand to adapt to previously unknown conditions, and in particular, the threat and introduction of conscription for overseas military service. The governments of Australia and New Zealand felt there was a shortage of men volunteering to go to the front. Both governments considered conscription to overcome this situation. The majority of trades unions of both countries did not believe men should be forced to enlist and took action to defeat the government plan. The outcomes in these countries were different; New Zealand had conscription, Australia did not. Why was it that two youngest and smallest of Britain's dominions had different outcomes? Many historians consider that unionists opposed conscription in accordance with socialist ideals; principally, the notion of solidarity of the working class. In this thesis I seek to show that while this is partly true, other socio-economic and political factors were responsible for unionist opposition in the conscription debate, and influential in determining the outcome of this debate in each country.

In this thesis I have adopted a comparative approach because no such study of the conscription debates in Australia and New Zealand has been undertaken. Much has been written about conscription in Australia and New Zealand and its failure or success, but no comparative study has been previously written. Previous studies have concentrated on each country's perspective singly and only deal with the overall conscription debate. Paul Baker's *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War*<sup>1</sup> covers most aspects of the debate in New Zealand, including a reference to the economic plight of the workers and the political action they took but does not examine these as a reason for the opposition, nor does he make any comparison with Australia. Likewise, Owen Gager's unpublished thesis, "The New Zealand Labour Movement

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<sup>1</sup> Paul J. Baker, *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1988).

and War, 1914-1918”,<sup>2</sup> states the cost of living and a reduction of wages occurred but does not link these as causes for the trades unions’ opposition. J.R.D. Douglass, in his unpublished thesis, “World War One and its Effects on the Working Class in New Zealand, 1914-1919”,<sup>3</sup> also acknowledges the rising cost of living and reduced wages, but does not link these factors to the opposition to conscription, (nor is there any comparison with Australia other than an inaccurate reference to the percentage rise in the cost of living as opposed to New Zealand). William H Oliver, in *The Story of New Zealand*,<sup>4</sup> does not take into account the factors that caused the trades unions’ opposition. The New Zealand government was determined to bring the labour movement to subjection, a point which is conceded by the above writers, but seems to have been overlooked in the argument to place the blame on conscription for the relationship between government and the trades unions.

Writing of the conscription debate in Australia, F.B. Smith in his *The Conscription Plebiscites in Australia 1916-17*,<sup>5</sup> refers to the fact that real wages fell and there was profiteering in foodstuffs without any tightening of control of prices, but fails to investigate further to link these to union opposition nor does he make comparisons with New Zealand. Ian Turner in his book, *Industrial Labour and Politics : The Dynamic of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia, 1900-1921*,<sup>6</sup> alludes to the cost of living increase and reduced real wages but does not attribute these as a cause of the opposition to conscription, nor does he make any comparison with New Zealand. Leslie C Jauncey,<sup>7</sup> J.M. Main<sup>8</sup> and Keith Inglis<sup>9</sup> each provide a record of the conscription debate in Australia but they all ignore or downplay the economic and social reasons for opposition to conscription. Nor do they make comparisons with New Zealand.

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<sup>2</sup> Owen J Gager, “The New Zealand Labour Movement and War, 1914-1918”, (M.A. Thesis, University of Auckland, 1962).

<sup>3</sup> J.R.D. Douglas, “World War One and its Effects on the Working Class in New Zealand, 1914-1919”, (Dip. Arts Thesis, University of Otago, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> William H. Oliver, *The Story of New Zealand*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1960).

<sup>5</sup> F.B. Smith, *The Conscription Plebiscites in Australia 1916-17*, Second Edition Revised, (Melbourne: Victorian Historical Association, 1966).

<sup>6</sup> Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamic of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia, 1900-1921*, (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1965).

<sup>7</sup> Leslie C. Jauncey, *The Story of Conscription in Australia*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1935).

<sup>8</sup> J.M. Main, Ed, *Conscription: The Australian Debate*, (North Melbourne: Cassell Australia, 1970).

<sup>9</sup> K.S. Inglis, “Conscription in Peace and War”, *Conscription in Australia*, eds. Roy Forward and Bob Reece, (St.Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1968). Hereinafter referred to as Inglis/Forward & Reece.

In neglecting to compare outcomes in the conscription debate across countries where social and economic factors were similar but the outcomes different, the existing scholarship fails to differentially identify what factors might accurately be nominated as determining the outcome of conscription debates. Historians of the Great War are only now compiling comparative studies, mainly from the British, French and German perspective. No scholar has previously compared Australia and New Zealand. This thesis overcomes the lack of comparison between Australia and New Zealand and provides an opportunity to make sense of how outcomes could be different in geographically, socio-economically and socio-politically similar countries.

Part of the explanation for the outcome of the conscription debate lies within the earlier history of the trades unions in Australia and New Zealand. Chapter One will examine this history from the formation of trades unions to the outbreak of the war to ascertain whether there were similarities, or not, between the union movements of each country and whether union/government relationships were different in Australia and New Zealand. This might reveal underlying reasons for union objections to conscription.

The Australian and New Zealand governments considered the introduction of conscription during the Great War. There was a precedent in compulsory military training in both countries for the defence of the homeland. Chapter Two will examine this issue and the trades unions' response.

Conscription was not merely about military service. War brought certain hardships and socio-political realities. Trades unions were a representative force with their own beliefs concerning conscription and the socio-political realities. Chapter Three will examine the political and socio-economic issues trades unions considered to be more important than the conscription of men for military service.

Chapter Four will examine how the power the trades unions had over government reshaped the terms of the conscription debate and determined the different outcomes in each country.

The union response in each country was influenced by union ideology, socio-economic and political conditions. This thesis proposes that the respective relationship between the union movements and governments was the major determining factor in the union movement's objection to conscription.

In researching for this thesis I have relied on both primary and secondary source material. Primary source material used includes minutes of meetings, annual reports,

conference minutes and reports and decrees from executive bodies of organisations of labour. Correspondence, diary entries, government documents, pamphlets, biographies and books written by people involved and contemporary newspapers were also used. All of these sources enabled me to gain an insight into the reasons why organisations took a particular stance in the conscription debate. Secondary source material was mainly books written by historians of a particular facet in the early history of labour movements and to some degree the war and these were helpful in giving a varied insight into this history. Unpublished theses were also used as was limited access to the internet.

Various terms used throughout this thesis emanate from the trades union movement and were used to describe themselves, their employers, others and events during the period under study. These terms are used throughout official union records and an explanation and definition of these terms is included in 'Explanatory Notes on Terms' on pages vii & viii.

## CHAPTER 1.

### Trades Unions' positions before the declaration of war. 1850-1914.

In World War I most trades unions in Australia and New Zealand opposed conscription. In the words of Robert Semple, trades unionist and anti-conscription activist; "Conscription is the negation of human liberty. It means the destruction of every principle that is held sacred to the working class. ... It is the blackest industrial hell."<sup>1</sup> Yet for all the stark simplicity of Semple's formulation the relationship between labour and conscription was complicated. To understand why, it is necessary to look at their earlier history.

The history of labour in Australia and New Zealand is complex. There were three types of union: craft unions, trades unions and industrial unions. These were influenced by a variety of overseas sources, creating a situation where there was no cohesion in either country's labour movements. The relationship between labour and politics in both countries fluctuated as did their power over economic conditions. It is vital that the actions of the trades unions in each country, in response to these factors, be taken into account in order to understand their differing positions in the debates on compulsory military training and conscription.

One part of the complexity between labour and conscription can be attributed to ideology. An internationalist, socialist ideology influenced large parts of labour. This ideology resulted from resolutions of the Second International Socialist Congress which was held in Copenhagen in 1910.<sup>2</sup> These resolutions were to oppose war by holding a general strike, refusing to manufacture war materials and refusal to fight fellow working classes. War was to be used to advance the class war until capitalism was defeated. As we shall see, later, when war broke out and conscription was advocated by the Australian and New Zealand governments, divisions occurred within the labour movements; key aspects appear to have been ignored; ideology and practice were in conflict. Workers carried on in industry, and working class men went to war either as volunteers or conscripts.

The three types of unions were not entirely compatible. These different organisations were influenced by a variety of outside sources: Knights of Labour, Industrial

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<sup>1</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, November 17, 1915, 4.

<sup>2</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *Socialist Thought: The Second International 1889-1914*. Parts 1 & II, (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1956), Part II, 853; Cole, Part 1, 64, 69, 83-4.

Workers of the World (IWW) and Socialists. Their relationships with politics changed as did their power over economic conditions. One element that contributed to that change was the difference in the foundations of Australian and New Zealand unions. The Australian and New Zealand economies were different; Australia had both thriving pastoral and industrial sectors, whereas New Zealand was predominantly pastoral with only limited industry before the outbreak of the Great War. Despite their different economic bases, New Zealand and Australia both had active labour movements primarily based on trades unions. Shearers, seamen and miners from Australia frequently travelled and worked in New Zealand. As a result their unions were closely linked. Men from Australia also relocated to New Zealand and took up influential positions within the New Zealand trades union movement. These men helped to further the cause of trades' unionism in New Zealand.<sup>3</sup>

The New Zealand labour movement was also influenced by settlers from England and Scotland, together with those New Zealanders and Australians who had worked in the United States of America. The latter two groups had been inspired by radical organisations, the IWW and its predecessor, the Western Federation of Miners,<sup>4</sup> and they became active in the more militant unions. Despite the interaction between the two countries, the influence of Socialists and the IWW was more pronounced in New Zealand than in Australia.

Before 1850, craft and trades unions were formed in both countries in response to worker's desire for what they considered fair pay and conditions in the workplace. To achieve fair pay and conditions, the unions negotiated directly with the employers; if they failed in their endeavours they would strike. They were able to do this because of a shortage of labour, thus giving the unions power over the employers.

The early Australian unions were made up of craftsmen and semi and unskilled workers. The skilled craftsmen had their own 'closed shop' type craft unions, only admitting craftsmen to their union. The semi and unskilled workers were ineligible to be admitted to a craft union so they joined the trades unions.

In Australia, stonemasons, carpenters, engineers and typographers were skilled craftsmen based mainly in cities and towns. They had their own craft unions, which

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<sup>3</sup> Cole, Part II, 885: Erik Olssen and Richardson L, "The New Zealand Labour Movement, 1880-1920", in *Common Cause: Essays in Australian and New Zealand Labour History*, ed. Eric Fry, (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin Pty. Ltd., 1986), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Cole, Part II, 885-6.

made up the Amalgamated Societies of Craftsmen. The ‘New Model Trade Unionism’ introduced during 1848 in Australia by British working-class who had migrated, helped set the pattern for trades’ unionism in Australia.

The amalgamated societies were designed to protect the integrity of the craft. They had the power to control the influx of workers by an apprenticeship system, establish minimum wages and conditions upon which members were to be employed, and create benevolent funds to ease financial hardship in the event of unemployment, sickness or death of a member. In order to enforce their claims they would withdraw labour from any employer who failed to comply with their demands. The establishment of arbitration and conciliation bodies to rule on industrial disputes were among measures favoured by the societies for the protection of their members.<sup>5</sup> These urban workers were in a strong position to get most of their demands satisfied by industrial action, and achieved the highest standard of life of any working class of that period.<sup>6</sup> This situation had arisen from the chronic shortage of labour which had occurred during the decades following the gold rushes, and the rapidly growing manufacturing industry.<sup>7</sup> As a result they had the power to enforce trades union regulations without the need to involve the state; employers were obliged to accept union terms or lose their market share in the rapidly advancing economy.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1870s and 1880s the growth of wage labour in the Australian pastoral, mining, and transport industries promoted the formation of new unions of un-skilled and semi-skilled workers. The Amalgamated Shearers Union,<sup>9</sup> precursor to the Australian Workers Union (AWU) formed in 1886, was one of these new unions.<sup>10</sup> These new unions of un-skilled and semi-skilled workers encompassed shearers and shed hands, miners, seamen, waterside workers, general labourers, construction workers, and itinerant workers; anyone in labour who could not enjoy membership of a craft union. They were keen to make their mark and overcome the employers. With the increased union membership, labour’s aims broadened. They moved from the protection of craft inter-

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<sup>5</sup> Cole, Part II, 868-9. See also Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia 1900-1921*. (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1965), 7-8.

<sup>6</sup> Cole, Part II, 882

<sup>7</sup> Turner, 1-2. See also Cole, 869, 882.

<sup>8</sup> Turner, 7-8.

<sup>9</sup> Officials actually called it the Australian Workers Union although the AWU was not registered until 1895. W.G. Spence, *History of the AWU* (Sydney: The Worker Trustees, 1961), 64-5. Hereinafter referred to as Spence AWU; also E.H. Lane, *Dawn to Dusk: Reminiscences of a Rebel*, (Queensland: William Brooks & Co. (Q) Pty.), 249.

<sup>10</sup> Spence AWU, 5.



ests to the protection of working people in general. This also gave an opportunity for more militant organisations to enter the unions and educate the workers in more radical methods of achieving their goals.

Prior to this time several attempts had been made in Australia to establish socialist bodies; most failed. In 1887, however, a group of British immigrants founded the Australian Socialist League.<sup>11</sup> Socialism was to gain a foothold in the more militant unions; namely miners, shearers, and waterside workers. They were more militant than the craft unions, seeking every opportunity to enforce the union shop. They relied on collective bargaining backed by the threat of strikes if an employer refused their demands, in contrast to the craft unions, which would only boycott a non-conforming employer.<sup>12</sup> With the exception of the waterside workers, seamen, and those construction workers engaged in metropolitan works, these unions were mainly based in the country but still had a much broader appeal than the craft unions because they embraced all types of workers. They had little to do with the city-based councils of craft unions.<sup>13</sup>

Australian miners unions were more industrial type unions. Each mine had its own democratic lodge and embraced all workers at the mine, regardless of their occupation: miners, engine drivers, carpenters, or shot firers. Workers at a certain mine could stop work over a dispute without disrupting mine workers in other locations, unless of course it was to their mutual benefit to follow suit.<sup>14</sup>

In 1889, the Queensland Shearers Union formed the Australian Labour Federation. The aim was to unite all unions in Australasia into one strong body.<sup>15</sup> This would give added clout to the unions in their quest for power over the employers. This federation had as its object “the Nationalisation of all sources of wealth and all means of producing and distributing wealth”.<sup>16</sup> This was an adaptation of the IWW preamble, and promoted a more radical approach by the unions that joined the federation.

The Amalgamated Shearers Union, despite being a union predominantly for pastoral workers, had by 1890 become Australia’s largest union, and rapidly increased its

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<sup>11</sup> Cole, Part II, 869.

<sup>12</sup> Turner, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Turner, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Turner, 11.

<sup>15</sup> *The Worker Monthly Leader*, August 1890. [www.reasoninrevolt.net.au/pdf/a000034.pdf](http://www.reasoninrevolt.net.au/pdf/a000034.pdf). Taken from internet November 26, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Turner, 12. Citing W.G. Spence, *Australia’s Awakening*, 614. (The copy researched by me does not have 614 pages; I can only assume an error was made when citing the page number.)

membership from 1900 onwards.<sup>17</sup> This was because of amalgamation with the General Labourers Union in 1894, which culminated in the formation of the AWU.

In the 1880s a shortage of labour had enabled Australian workers to achieve a high standard of living through direct negotiation with employers. This shortage of labour, and the amalgamation of unions, gave them power over the employer. If their demands were not met strike action would occur. This power would prove vital in their later attempt to gain parliamentary representation and an arbitration system.

In the 1890s there was an economic downturn which caused important changes to the way Australian unions operated. The great maritime workers strike of 1890 and the shearers' strike of 1891 affected all sectors of the labour movement and unemployment rose substantially. Australian employers were able to employ workers on their own terms and seized this opportunity to break the power of the unions.<sup>18</sup> This brought about an important change in strategy by Australian workers. In an effort to defend their privileges, the workers turned toward political action. Their motivation was to regain the position they had previously enjoyed, rather than to change the structure of society.<sup>19</sup>

After the events of 1890-91 Australian trades unions looked toward the formation of labour parties in the various states, and while these were not fully socialist, a number of trade union branches did join the Australian Socialist League.<sup>20</sup> However a strong Irish Catholic membership served to reduce the influence of socialism within the labour movement. This was brought about by a high number of union leaders being Irish Catholics and the Roman Catholic Church's strong opposition to socialism.<sup>21</sup> Amongst the shearers, miners and waterside worker, leftism was mainly confined to strongly worded exhortations of class solidarity and hostility, and a vow to overthrow the capitalist system, but in reality the industrial workers only wanted to control their employers rather than to abolish them.<sup>22</sup> They said:

It doesn't do to wipe the capitalists out altogether, because if there were no

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<sup>17</sup> Turner, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Turner, 3-4; See also Cole, Part II, 882.

<sup>19</sup> Turner, 3, 8, 14. See also Cole, Part II, 882.

<sup>20</sup> Cole, Part II, 853,869.

<sup>21</sup> Cole, Part II, 854.

<sup>22</sup> Cole, Part II, 854.

capitalists there would be no one to employ us, and we would have nothing to do, because we can't live unless someone finds us work.<sup>23</sup>

This was a very moderate attitude by the unionists; they knew they were dependant on the employers, but still wanted to have some control over their destiny.

Parliamentary labour leagues were established in the separate colonies of Australia to facilitate the unions' desire to gain fairer representation in the parliament. Unionists became members of parliament. Their entry into the political arena strengthened their power which in turn increased the confidence of the unions to become more militant. Unions created Trades and Labour Councils in the major cities.<sup>24</sup> Their goals were to co-ordinate their affiliated union's demands, and ensure a united voice was presented to the various colonial parliaments. Pursuit of these demands emanated from the inter-colonial trades union congress of 1889, where it was resolved that "in order that the rights and the opinions of the working classes may be faithfully represented ... every effort should be made to obtain direct representation of labor in Parliament."<sup>25</sup> Further discussion at the 1891 Inter-colonial Trades Union Congress dealt with the question of equal representation between workers and capitalists. The congress required the matter be raised in the various colonial parliaments. As a consequence, in order to maintain and further unionism, the congress recommended that "The Australasian Federation of Labour" be constituted in order; "To improve the condition and protect the interests of all classes of Labour ...", and "to secure the direct representation of Labour in Parliament, and to promote such legislative reforms as will ensure social justice to Australasian workers".<sup>26</sup> Having secured some representation in the colonial parliaments, the focus now shifted to social justice for the workers, they sought a return to the economic position and working conditions they had prior to the downturn, but this was not to be attained until later.

By 1893 a consolidation of miners unions had formed the Amalgamated Miners Association with membership comprised of miners from both Australia and New Zealand. Its aim was to provide mutual aid to its members. Local branches which determined rates of pay and local policy were formed to facilitate this. It sought to recruit all

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<sup>23</sup> Spence AWU, 81.

<sup>24</sup> In Victoria the Trades and Labour Council was known as The Trades Hall Council.

<sup>25</sup> R.N. Ebbels, "Resolution of the Sixth Intercolonial Trades Union Congress, 1889", in *The Australian Labor Movement, 1850-1907*, (Sydney: The Noel Ebbels Memorial Committee in Association with Australasian Book Society, 1960), 100.

<sup>26</sup> Ebbels, 101-2.

workers at the mines; however the skilled workers (engine-drivers, shot firers, and carpenters) continued their allegiances to their own craft unions, thus hindering the possibility of full industrial unionism within the mining industry.<sup>27</sup> This action of the craft unionists created divisions and could have future consequences if a situation arose where worker solidarity was required.

A further consolidation of Australian labour was sought by union leaders because employers refused to accede to individual unions' demands. As a result, the Amalgamated Shearers Union and the General Labourers' Union merged in 1894. This merger formed the AWU.<sup>28</sup> This consolidated union stated its aims were: "Realising that all workers, no matter what their occupation or sex may be, have a common interest, the AWU aims at embracing all within its ranks"; while the preface to its Rules stated: "Alone we can agitate; organised we can compel."<sup>29</sup> Labour had broadened its base and sought to expand its claims. A further declared aim of this union was, "To gradually replace the present competitive system of industry by a co-operative system", and: "to endeavour by political action to secure social justice".<sup>30</sup> Later, William Guthrie Spence, president of the AWU, was to say it taught its members that:

To vote straight for Labor candidates is as necessary as to act straight in regard to Union rules and conditions industrially. The working man who supports any candidate for Parliament opposed to a Labor candidate is considered as politically blacklegging on his class.<sup>31</sup>

The AWU was setting the stage to consolidate all unions. It was closing in on industrial unionism. It was to involve all workers in a particular occupation in collective bargaining. If an employer failed to accede to the union's demands all workers in that occupation throughout industry would be called out on strike until the union demands were met. It was far more militant than craft unions, but was geographically handicapped by its membership and branches being scattered throughout the country. Although the

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<sup>27</sup> Turner, 11.

<sup>28</sup> Spence AWU, 19. There was a separate but parallel Queensland Shearers Union which encompassed shearers and shedhands. The AWU was formed in 1893. Spence AWU, 19; W.G. Spence, *Australia's Awakening*, (Sydney: The Worker Trustees, 1909), 49. Hereinafter referred to as Spence AA. According to Turner the AWU was formed in 1894, 10; E.H. Lane claims AWU registered in 1895, 249.

<sup>29</sup> Both citations from Spence AA, 51-2

<sup>30</sup> Both citations from Spence AA, 50.

<sup>31</sup> Spence AA, 50-2.

AWU consolidated the bulk of the labour movement there were still some radical influences involved in labour, which created divisions.

The consolidation of the Australian labour movement allowed it to use the power it had gained by political action. It became more inclined to advocate for social justice for the workers through organised action to compel employers to grant their demands. The increased unionisation of workers gave the labour movement a strong base on which to contest the actions of the various governments, and assisted it when the issue of conscription was raised.

By 1896, the Australian Socialist League appeared to be floundering. But it revived after launching a renewed campaign by way of publications at Newcastle. It became embroiled in a violent dispute with the trades' union leaders, accusing them of betraying the workers, by taking a cautious approach toward the mine owners.<sup>32</sup> Further attempts, in 1903, to convert workers to socialism failed, but did succeed in stirring up industrial militancy.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the economic setbacks of the 1890s, by 1900 Australia was back to the previous high production levels of 1889-91. The country changed from predominantly primary production to a manufacturing economy with a largely urban society.<sup>34</sup> Unemployment had fallen and unions which had fallen by the wayside, due to the previous economic climate, regrouped, and new unions were formed. Workers, through their unions, had been able to regain or increase their level of pay through a combination of careful persuasion and threat of strike action.<sup>35</sup>

After 1900 there were changes on the economic front for the unions. Trades unions in Australia looked to their governments to implement a fair system of arbitration. Arbitration was under the control of the several colonies prior to 1904, causing labour to suffer setbacks because of an unwieldy situation. Each colony's wages board set differing wages and conditions, which disadvantaged some workers in the separate colonies. There was growing labour unrest as the colonial Arbitration Courts and Wages Boards handed down increasingly unfavourable decisions against the workers. The power of the trades unions to enforce the high standards of life the workers enjoyed prior to the economic downturn of 1890 was undermined. The Labour Parties were afraid this could precipitate a return to the trades' union militancy which had existed

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<sup>32</sup> Cole, Part II, 870.

<sup>33</sup> Cole, Part II, 868.

<sup>34</sup> Turner, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Turner, 3, 7, 14, 33.

before 1890.<sup>36</sup> Militant trades unions suffered further defeats. Gains from the colonial Arbitration system became smaller and smaller, in comparison to their earlier successes, but on the whole many workers were content with their lot.<sup>37</sup> At least they had some permanency in their award wages, and prices were stable.

In 1901 the colonies of Australia federated with one federal parliament. This caused the colonial labour parties to consolidate into a Federal Labour Party, known as the Australian Labour Party. (In 1908 the party changed its name to the Australian Labor Party).

Australian trades unions affiliated with the Parliamentary Labor Party were strong in their control of party members and carried sufficient weight to enable them to influence the party; they flexed their muscle if it failed to acquiesce to their demands. This was because the Parliamentary Labor Party had been formed from the labour movement, which demanded complete control of the Party. The AWU had a strong representation in the federal party, and being the largest, most professionally organised, was able to admonish those politicians who did not follow the line dictated by the unions, and powerful enough to threaten the suspension of financial support.<sup>38</sup> The strength and control the AWU was able to bring to bear on the Federal Labor government during the conscription debates reinforces this assertion.

Australian unions, now able to exert some political pressure through their control of the Labour Party, wanted a fairer system of arbitration and moved through their domination of the party to gain a federal Arbitration system after Federation. The first Commonwealth Congress of the labour movement held in Sydney, in 1902, debated for the enactment of a Federal Arbitration Act.<sup>39</sup> It was not until 1904 that an Arbitration Act was passed in the federal parliament. The Federal Arbitration Act of 1904 was the embodiment of most trades union's desires. It encouraged state organisations to federate. By 1914, two thirds of unionists were members of 52 interstate unions while the remainder were members of 439 separate unions.<sup>40</sup> Most unions in New South Wales decided against the continued use of militant action, preferring arbitration instead.

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<sup>36</sup> Cole, Part II, 877.

<sup>37</sup> Cole, Part II, 883.

<sup>38</sup> Turner, 49.

<sup>39</sup> Spence AA, 320.

<sup>40</sup> Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics Labour and Industrial Branch, *Labour Bulletin*, No. 9, (Melbourne: McCarron Bird and Co, 1915), 8, and *Labour Bulletin*, No.13, (Melbourne: McCarron Bird and Co., 1916), 84.

Australian unions were more organised than their New Zealand counterparts. They had fought for a fair method of fixing wages and conditions. They had wanted fairer representation of the workers in parliament. They achieved both; capitalists could no longer dictate conditions and wages to the workers. Union representatives were in parliament. In 1904 the Federal Arbitration Act came into force allowing Australian unions to negotiate directly through the Arbitration Court. This and fairer representation in the federal parliament created a good relationship between government, the workers and trades unions. Political action in Australia gave additional strength to the labour movement and was to be a considerable weapon in its arsenal.

Nevertheless, some unions became dissatisfied with the Arbitration Act. Seeking to build on the success of labour, the northern New South Wales miners' union decided to bypass the arbitration system and take matters into their own hands. They were convinced that militant action was the only way to achieve their demands. With the support of the maritime unions and the Labour Council, the miners put their demands to the mine-owners. They threatened that the transport workers would stop work in one week unless their demands were met. This effectively would have prevented the shipment of coal from the northern mines. Despite the strike dragging on for three weeks, the transport workers were not called to strike, but arrests were made among the miners' leaders. William "Billy" Hughes, as secretary of the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF),<sup>41</sup> managed to keep his own union members at work but failed with the coal-lumpers,<sup>42</sup> who had sided with the miners.<sup>43</sup> The miners' leader denounced Hughes, who, looking for a party to blame for the strike, blamed the IWW for trying to create chaos, and bring about the demise of unionism.<sup>44</sup>

Militant industrial unionism was not only influenced by local events, but was also shaped by international forces. In 1907 the IWW (a United States based militant organisation) set up office in Australia and spread industrial unionist propaganda. The following year they claimed industry-wide unions would achieve victory for the work-

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<sup>41</sup> The Waterside Workers Federation, (Hereinafter referred to as WWF) comprised several unions whose members were employed on the waterfront.

<sup>42</sup> The coal-lumpers were responsible for loading coal to power the shipping. They had separate union leaders who could make local decisions separate to the Federation.

<sup>43</sup> Hughes later became Federal Attorney General responsible for the introduction of the War Precautions Act: as prime minister he attempted to introduce conscription: and as Federal President of the WWF he used his position to try and influence the labour movement to support his actions to win the war.

<sup>44</sup> Turner, 36-8. The IWW was later to become Hughes' supposed primary agitator of unionists during the later conscription debate.

ers, and that the Arbitration system penalised them rather than helped them.<sup>45</sup> The IWW, with its anti-militarist doctrine (it was against all forms of worker participation in wars which furthered the cause of capitalists to the detriment of the workers), had taken hold mainly among the waterside workers and miners. It advocated defiance of the call-up for military training. Most of the IWW's Australian followers demanded the creation of a revolutionary socialist party, reconstruction of the trades' union movement based on industrial amalgamation, and class war. They succeeded in getting favourable decisions for amalgamation and had a number of craft unions fused into industrial unions, allowing them to be influenced by socialism. They refused to relinquish their ability to take political action whenever they thought the situation demanded it.<sup>46</sup>

As has been noted, labour's militancy was shaped by the obstacles it had encountered in the past. In April 1911, the breakdown of Prime Minister Andrew Fisher's New Protectionism (the protection of Australian jobs by tariff protection and the centralisation of wage determination) caused militant industrial unionism to rise again.

In comparison to Australian unions, the early New Zealand unions were small in membership and weak. This was due mainly to the prominence of the pastoral industry where employment opportunities were limited. New Zealand's skilled workers had begun to organise benefit societies and trades unions in the 1860s and 1870s, but restricted membership to their trade. In reality these were craft unions; they only enforced their demands on individual employers. Like their Australian counterparts, they were able, by direct negotiation with employers, to achieve good wages and conditions. Failure of the employers to accommodate these demands resulted in strikes.<sup>47</sup>

There were strong links between Australian and New Zealand unions. The New Zealand unions of the 1880s, because of the interaction with their Australian counterparts, broadly followed the Australian unions but in a more leisurely fashion. They were inspired and encouraged by Australia's labour movement, and its mobility between colonies. They were also impressed by Australian unionists' ability to travel to New Zealand, allowing them to promote the advantages of unionism there. This occurred mainly amongst shearers, miners, and employees in the maritime industry.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> F. Cain, *The Wobblies at War: a history of the IWW and the Great War in Australia* (Richmond Victoria: Spectrum Publications Pty. Ltd., 1993), 41.

<sup>46</sup> Cole, Part II, 878-9; See also Turner, 56-9.

<sup>47</sup> Erik Olssen and L. Richardson, "The New Zealand Labour Movement 1880-1920," in *Common Cause*, ed. Eric Fry, (Wellington: Allen & Unwin/Port Nicholson Press, 1986). 2.

<sup>48</sup> Olssen and Richardson, 1-15.



In the 1880s, New Zealand's craft unionists in the cities formed Trades and Labour Councils, linking local unions, co-ordinating union activity, and encouraging the establishment of new unions. There was, however, no great effort to amalgamate into larger bodies linking all similar unions throughout the country. It meant any bargaining for better conditions or strike action remained within the local domain.<sup>49</sup> This probably was due to the fact communication was difficult. In the future this failure to amalgamate would have serious consequences. Splits would occur in unions, branches in one city would be in disagreement with their comrades in another city. This would result in a loss of power, and as we shall see later this lack of solidarity would allow the Reform government and employers to exploit the disunity especially when the issue of the Compulsory Military Service Act came about.

Similar to Australia, New Zealand unions during the 1860s and 70s had achieved by direct negotiation a high standard of living and some power over employers. But the consolidation of labour that occurred in Australia was not repeated in New Zealand. This failure to amalgamate into larger, stronger unions had detrimental consequences which allowed the employers, and later the Reform government, to exploit them.

During the 1880s and 90s a great change came over the New Zealand economy. The country underwent some manufacturing development, which in turn changed New Zealand labour. The introduction of refrigeration made it possible to export its meat and dairy products to the world.<sup>50</sup> This introduced semi-skilled and un-skilled labour to the industrial workforce and trades unionism. These semi and unskilled workers were not able to join the craft unions and were able to be influenced by international organisations because there was not the control craft unions exercised.

In the 1880s, some labour activists in New Zealand, under international influence, sought to create 'one big union' encompassing the entire labour movement. An organisation from the United States, the American Knights of Labour, instigated this movement. Under this union, if the demands of the union were not agreed to by the employers there would be large scale strike action. The aim was to benefit all workers by ensuring they enjoyed the wealth they had created. It was, after all, the workers who by their work ethic were responsible for a business' profitability. They were not sharing in the profits; the employer was keeping the profits to himself. They demanded nationalisation of all public utilities, equal pay for equal work, age pensions, the vote for

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<sup>49</sup> Olssen and Richardson, 1-15; Cole, Part II, 886-7.

<sup>50</sup> Cole, Part II, 886-7.

women, shorter working hours, and co-operative organisation of production. In short, they wanted socialism.<sup>51</sup> They attracted many radicals, but having created some stimulus within the labour movement the American Knights of Labour gradually faded away in the 1890s.

In 1889, a number of trades unions in Dunedin consolidated to form a Maritime Council. Its aim was to give power to all types of workers. Included were many railway men, miners and other groups. These were in addition to port workers and seamen. The council brought pressure to bear on any employer who was in dispute with any of these groups.<sup>52</sup>

As was the case in Australia, the 1890s economic downturn also occurred in New Zealand, and although unions there broadly followed Australian unions, they were not as quick to implement change. The great maritime struggle of 1890-91 spread to New Zealand's wharves and coal mines. Strikes and unemployment enabled employers to take back the advantages the unions had obtained and took advantage of the situation to break the power of the unions. In contrast to Australia, employers had a pool of workers they selected from to continue their business. This prompted New Zealand unions to reconsider their strategy, but they were hamstrung in their efforts to implement change because an alliance with the Liberal government meant that unions did not pursue political action.

The entire fleet of the Northern Shipping Company was laid up when their seamen walked off the job. The company had decided to transport non-union labour for the Union company. Availing themselves of a large pool of reserve labour, the employers took advantage of this pool of labour which aggravated the situation further. The strike ended in November 1890, but the Northern Company slashed wages, and refused to employ unionists.<sup>53</sup> The New Zealand employers had joined the actions of their Australian counterparts, trying to crush the seamen's and port workers unions.

The employers' efforts to break the power of the unions also spread to the railways. The railwaymen had joined the militant Maritime Council. The Railways Commissioner ordered men to do work that striking workers should have undertaken but these men went out and were dismissed. A Liberal government attempt to resolve the

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<sup>51</sup> Cole, Part II, 887-8.

<sup>52</sup> Cole, Part II, 889-90.

<sup>53</sup> Neill Atkinson, "Against the Tide: The Auckland Seamen's Union 1880-1914", in *Trade Unions, Work and Society: The Centenary of the Arbitration System*, ed. Pat Walsh, (Palmerston North New Zealand: The Dunmore Press Ltd, 1994), 77-8; Olssen and Richardson, 4.

problem met with refusal from the Railway Commissioners and employers representatives. They refused to meet with the trades unions, which were adamant the employer not engage non-union workers. The result was the employment of ‘scab’ labour (those who refuse to join a strike) and refusal to reinstate striking workers. This was a further attempt to crush the trade union movement in New Zealand.<sup>54</sup> Similar attempts to break the power of the unions were happening in Australia, but as we have seen it failed there when the workers decided to take political action and achieve representation in the parliament.

New Zealand unions did not take up political action as quickly as Australian unions because of their relationship with the Liberal government. The local Trades and Labour Councils were dominated by arbitration unions, and the Liberal government had aligned itself to them. In 1898 the Trades and Labour Councils resolved that a labour party be formed. In order for the governing Liberal Party to keep the allegiance of the trades unions a Liberal/Labour Federation was founded. Officials of the arbitration unions were generally strong supporters of the Liberal/Labour Federation. Therefore the success of the move to political action in Australia did not translate to New Zealand.

The New Zealand union movement in general, and the Federated Seamen’s Union (FSU), although battered by the employers, slowly recovered from the strike. The FSU maintained a close relationship with the Liberals. Some of its officials were active in the Liberal Party.<sup>55</sup> The failure to establish their own labour party and move quickly to political action was detrimental to the strengthening of the New Zealand labour movement. Quicker action would have been useful to combat the Reform Party when it formed government.

As noted above, New Zealand unions were not as quick as their Australian counterparts to resort to political action. The economic downturn and the resultant political action by the Australian unions changed the way the Australian unions operated. New Zealand unions had a dilemma; they were bound to the Liberal Party through the alliance, and did not pursue political action until later because they were fragmented.

In the wake of the success of labour in Australia, and the formation of the New Zealand Political Labour League in 1904, the Liberal/Labour alliance began to crumble. In the meantime the labour movement flirted with socialism. “New Zealand became known as the home of an empirical system of socialism, even before it had a Socialist

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<sup>54</sup> Entire passage; Cole, Part II, 890; see also Atkinson, 77.

<sup>55</sup> Atkinson, 78.

Party.”<sup>56</sup> As was the case in Australia, international influences endeavoured to bring political action from the labour movement. In contrast to Australia, where socialism was confined to the most militant unions, New Zealand unions embraced socialist ideals. A socialist party was formed in Wellington in 1900. It was not formed by trades unions, but, as in Australia, by immigrants from Great Britain, Australians and some New Zealanders who had returned home after working in the United States. Similar bodies soon were formed in Christchurch and other towns.<sup>57</sup> The IWW organisation helped people like Paddy Webb and Robert Semple<sup>58</sup> to form branches of the socialist party on New Zealand’s west coast.<sup>59</sup> Both Webb and Semple were involved in the mining industry (Semple was the miners’ agent and travelled from mine to mine), and no doubt were influential in the promotion of socialist ideals among miners. There was no great impact from these bodies in the political arena, but they pursued a strong propaganda campaign against imperialism.<sup>60</sup>

The path to arbitration in New Zealand was different in significant ways from Australia. The government had seen the problems labour had faced during the 1890s, the slashing of wages, and the employers’ actions to break the unions. The government realised, in order to assist their alliance partners, a compulsory Conciliation and Arbitration system should be implemented covering all registered unions throughout the country. This occurred in 1894, even before Australia had its various colonial systems. In order to use the Arbitration Act unions first had to register. Because of the many small local unions and the scattered nature of industry, officials spent most of their time on arbitration business.<sup>61</sup> This procedure made it necessary for union secretaries to become advocates for the union in arbitration cases.<sup>62</sup> A Conciliation Committee chosen by the trades unions and employers would first endeavour to reconcile differences between the workers and employers. If this failed the matter would be referred to a High Court Judge for arbitration. The conciliation plan ultimately failed, because employers refused to have representation on the committees.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Cole, Part II, 853, 883, 885; Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 173-4, 181-2

<sup>57</sup> Olssen and Richardson, 8; Sinclair, 183.

<sup>58</sup> Both Webb and Semple were Australians who went on to be Ministers in the New Zealand Government.

<sup>59</sup> Cole, Part II, 894-5; Sinclair 183.

<sup>60</sup> Cole, Part II, 894-5.

<sup>61</sup> Cole, Part II, 892.

<sup>62</sup> Atkinson, 79; Cole, Part II, 893-4; Olssen and Richardson, 6.

<sup>63</sup> Cole, Part II, 892.

Unions became disenchanted with the Arbitration Act. An amending act in 1901 took away the source of income they derived from the collection of fines for breaches of the act, and the Court was less inclined to incorporate “preference to unionists” in awards. The Trades and Labour Councils pressed the government to legislate for “preference to unionists”. A bill was introduced into the Assembly in 1903 by the Labour members but was defeated.<sup>64</sup> Despite these setbacks, unions had no real inclination to break away from the arbitration system. The leaders of the small unions realised their existence depended on it.<sup>65</sup> If they broke away the union movement would be fragmented; scab unions could be registered by employers and awards made detrimental to the unions.

The FSU made new demands of the shipowners in 1903. Lengthy delays occurred in securing conciliation boards, so the FSU went directly to the Arbitration Court where further delays meant the Court did not make a ruling until 1906. The FSU demands were unacceptable. Fragmentation of labour was evident when the Wellington seamen voted to cancel their registration.<sup>66</sup> Such action would allow a rebel Wellington union to be formed with an award binding on all Wellington seamen. In 1908 the unions secured a registered award giving the increases they sought and effectively restored them to the standards of 1890. But the seamen’s faith in arbitration failed. They preferred instead to rely on the prospect of legislative reform.<sup>67</sup>

Between 1894 and 1906 there were no strikes,<sup>68</sup> presumably because of the Liberal/Labour alliance, and the Compulsory Arbitration Act of 1894. However, the right and left factions of the labour movement disagreed over a series of labour laws which were designed to protect workers, and the Compulsory Arbitration Act. This led to a renewed revolt by the left in 1906. They were against arbitration, despite it being for the protection and benefit of the workers.<sup>69</sup>

Unions finally became disenchanted with the conciliation and arbitration system, like miners in Australia, and started to deregister at the urging of the New Zealand Federation of Miners, or ‘Red Feds’, as they were generally known. This, however, opened the way for the registration of scab unions which could apply for an award which would

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<sup>64</sup> Cole, Part II, 893-4; Olssen and Richardson, 6-7.

<sup>65</sup> Atkinson, 79; Cole, Part II, 893-4; Olssen and Richardson, 6.

<sup>66</sup> The Secretary of the Wellington Branch, W.T. Young was a more enthusiastic militant than the other branch leaders,

<sup>67</sup> Atkinson, 80-2

<sup>68</sup> Sinclair, 174.

<sup>69</sup> Cole, Part II, 888, 890, 892.

then become binding on all workers in the trade. The later actions of the Reform government in enforcing compulsory conciliation created much animosity within the trades' union movement.

In 1906, similar to Australia, the militant industrial union the IWW was introduced into New Zealand by Pat Hickey, a miner who had returned from working in the United States. It consisted mainly of miners who Hickey had organised to oppose the Arbitration Act. It was their contention the act, far from benefiting the workers, actually disadvantaged them by holding down wages and coupling them to unfavourable contracts. This contention was borne out in 1907, when slaughtermen at Petone went on strike in defiance of the Arbitration Act and gained an increase in wages of 15%.

In 1908, when the Blackball miners went on strike for the same reason they were fined by the Arbitration Court for their efforts.<sup>70</sup> The Blackball miners had the support of other miners; this prompted the formation of the New Zealand Federation of Miners. This federation had a central executive that tried to avoid wasting energy in local strikes, and preferred to conserve its energies and resources for more important issues.<sup>71</sup> Within a few years most of the miner's and waterside worker's unions had affiliated with the new federation. The Red Feds hoped trades unions would form the structure of a new society. But in contrast to the Australian labour movement it kept away from political action. The Red Feds were bitterly antagonistic toward arbitration, and would fight in the factories, striking, rather than adopting a political approach through conciliation.<sup>72</sup>

The Red Feds wanted all unions in New Zealand to join their federation. To encourage this, the New Zealand Federation of Miners changed its name to the New Zealand Federation of Labour (FOL). From 1908 unions started to cancel their registration under the Arbitration Act, hoping to achieve better pay by negotiating direct with employers, or by striking. By 1910 the FOL was up and running, appealing for all unions to join. Its declared principles were based on the IWW preamble and its fundamental objective was the socialisation of the means of production and distribution. It began to unite industrial unions into a powerful national organisation. It advocated the rejection of arbitration and relied on collective bargaining and direct action.

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<sup>70</sup> Cole, Part II, 896; Olssen and Richardson, 7.

<sup>71</sup> Cole, Part II, 895-6; Sinclair 183; Olssen & Richardson, 7.

<sup>72</sup> Sinclair, 183-4.

The Red Feds push for deregistration caused enormous problems. Unions having fifteen or more members could apply to the Arbitration Court for registration, bring claims before it, have awards made which were not only binding on the members of that union and their employers, but also all workers and employers in the trade and area concerned. This meant those unions that deregistered could still be bound by Court awards if a small number of dissatisfied members formed their own union and applied to the court for registration. Although not bound to accept such practices, the Court had full authority to do so. It used this power against the FOL in 1912.<sup>73</sup> The bigger employers simply registered scab unions and had awards granted binding all workers in a particular trade to that award.<sup>74</sup>

For reasons such as these the rejection of industrial arbitration by the Red Feds was not generally accepted, even within the FOL.<sup>75</sup> New Zealand labour was divided, moderate unions refused to affiliate with the Red Feds and continued to support the arbitration system. In 1910 the moderate unions and the Trades and Labour Council's Conference attempted to re-organise the unions by forming a loosely organised Federation of Labour (FL). This was mainly a co-ordinating body to act on issues between annual meetings, but its elected executive achieved little. Like their militant opponents, they declared for public ownership of the means of production, using the term 'public ownership' in preference to 'socialisation' allaying any anxiety of a revolutionary seizure of power.<sup>76</sup>

Although the seamen and firemen were not adverse to industrial militancy, the FSU stayed aloof from the FOL.<sup>77</sup> They preferred instead to affiliate with a similar body with aims similar to their own. In 1910/11, the FSU sought to strengthen its ties, not with New Zealand unions, but with their Australian counterpart. Wages and conditions in the two countries were similar. The national unions began discussions about possible amalgamation. These discussions failed, despite the New Zealand seamen voting overwhelmingly (785-26) for amalgamation.<sup>78</sup> If they wanted to strengthen their ties the best method would have been to join the FOL. This action would have given them the support of all other unions in the federation, and given them a stronger voice

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<sup>73</sup> Cole, Part II, 900; Sinclair, 189.

<sup>74</sup> Atkinson, 80-2; H. Roth, *Trade Unions in New Zealand; Past and Present*, (Wellington: Reed Education, 1974), 34.

<sup>75</sup> Olssen and Richardson, 7; Sinclair, 184

<sup>76</sup> Cole, Part II, 897-8.

<sup>77</sup> Atkinson, 82-3.

<sup>78</sup> Atkinson, 83.

in negotiations. Atkinson suggests this shows seamen considered occupational issues to be of more importance than class solidarity.<sup>79</sup> It certainly appears to have been the case.

In 1911, divisions appeared within the FSU when some branches became dissatisfied with the progress being made towards negotiating a new agreement. This new agreement was in line with the substantial wage increases and preference to unionists won by the Australian seamen. The shipping companies were prepared to match Australian wages, but refused to accede to preference for unionists. This caused the Wellington branch to call for a ballot to cancel the FSU's registration under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. However, a provisional agreement was reached. Despite the agreement the ballot went ahead. Wellington and Dunedin branches favoured deregistration while Auckland voted to retain registration. This was the first sign of the rift between the branches. A week after deregistration of the two branches the FSU and the eight largest shipping companies signed the agreement.<sup>80</sup>

New Zealand's trades unions association with the Liberal government fell apart when the success of the Australian labour movement became known. Attempts were made to establish a labour party but it took several years before it eventuated. Socialism was stronger in New Zealand trades unions than in Australia's, mainly within the mining industry while the member unions of the FL were more subdued in their approach to socialism. It was not until 1912 that a united party was formed to amalgamate all left wing organisations into a co-operative body.<sup>81</sup> However, this was too late to be of any real effect as the anti-labour Reform Party took office in the same year.

The fortunes of labour changed dramatically in 1912. Consolidation of the labour movement did not happen until too late. Consolidation had not occurred, as it had in Australia. The unions did not have the ability to influence an agenda; they lacked the power their Australian counterparts had. The Reform government had constitutional power over the unions that allowed it to enforce government legislation, and this is precisely what occurred, bringing about changes that affected all unions. The Reform Party was made up of wealthy farmers and employers who were determined to curtail the militant activities of the unions. The Reform government sided with the employers, and, backed by the New Zealand Farmers Union (Prime Minister Massey was a

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<sup>79</sup> Atkinson, 83.

<sup>80</sup> Atkinson, 83-4.

<sup>81</sup> Barry Gustafson, *Labour's Path to Political Independence; The Origins and Establishment of the New Zealand Labour Party 1900-19*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1980), 48.



farmer), the government ensured compulsory conciliation was practiced in labour disputes and allowed the registration of unions with fifteen members. Compulsory conciliation offered its benefits only to registered unions. This encouraged the multiplication of unions, and caused some of the bitterest conflicts between industrial labour and capital. The formation of scab unions which could seek an award would then bind all workers in a particular occupation to that award.<sup>82</sup> This could, and did, have a detrimental effect on the 'old trades unions', sparking a major strike in 1913 on the waterfront and in the mines. The government came down hard on the strikers, bringing in thousands of armed 'special police' to disperse the strikers, creating great animosity toward it from the unions.<sup>83</sup> The actions of the anti-labour Reform government caused the unions to adopt a more militant stance. Because of socialist leanings within the major unions, New Zealand became the stronghold of militant industrial unionism. It was led by men from the extreme left who later went on to become the leaders of the Labour Party.<sup>84</sup>

Employers sought to undermine the coherence of labour, and they got their opportunity in 1912 when the Waihi Miners Union cancelled its registration under the act. The employers organised a scab union of enginemen. This union was registered under the act, but the miners refused to work with the scabs. The employers broke a previous agreement with the miners, locked them out, and stated they would not deal with any unregistered union, organising another scab union comprised of miners. They imported blackleg labour *en masse*, (blacklegs are similar to scabs, refusing to strike) and secured police protection to assure the blacklegs' rights to work. When the strike and lockout ended there was great revulsion by the miners who had gone on strike against government sanctioned violence. Large numbers of police had been brought in to protect the 'toughs' whom the mine owners had brought in to break the strikers. The manner in which the Arbitration Act had been used to defeat the striking miners contributed to this revulsion.<sup>85</sup>

To consolidate all branches of the FSU into a strong organisation to face the problems the government imposed over conciliation, the executive decided by a narrow vote to transfer the head office from Dunedin to Wellington. In 1912 the Wellington branch

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<sup>82</sup> Cole, Part II, 885; Sinclair, 173-4, 181-2, 184-5.

<sup>83</sup> Olssen and Richardson, 12; Roth, 37-8; Sinclair, 190-1.

<sup>84</sup> Cole, Part II, 885; Sinclair, 173-4, 181-2, 184-5; For example Robert Semple, and H.H. Holland who became the leader of the party, in the National Parliament, but died just prior to Labour attaining Government; In 1893 there were only 37 unions but by 1906 there were 274.

<sup>85</sup> Cole, Part II, 902; Sinclair, 189-90.

of the FSU was the dominant force in the union. The secretary of the Wellington branch, W.T. (Tom) Young, became general secretary. The hierarchy of the union were not all on the same political plane. Young was a member of the first New Zealand Labour Party (which was formed in 1910), and convinced the executive to switch allegiance from the Liberals to the Labour Party (the previous general secretary, Bill Belcher and his lieutenant Jack Kneen were both members of the Liberal Party). With the militant Young now guiding the union it moved with some trepidation toward collective bargaining in place of arbitration, though the leaders of the union remained conscious of the fact they should retain some distance between themselves and the Red Feds.<sup>86</sup>

Faced with the challenges of deregistration and the actions of the new government, some unions sought new ways to cope. In 1912 there was a movement to amalgamate the Trades and Labour Councils' Federation of Labour and the Labour Party, by way of a unity conference, and despite the strong hostility of the FOL, the conference was well attended. It adopted a plan to amalgamate the two bodies into a United Labour Party (ULP) with both political and industrial functions. The Trades and Labour Councils would handle the political side whilst industrial departments would be set up to look after the industrial functions.<sup>87</sup>

In response to the Federation of Labour's (the body organised by the moderate unions and Trades and Labour Councils) unity conference, the FOL held a rival conference. They endorsed the Hardie/Vaillant resolution from the Copenhagen Socialist International Congress of 1910 for a general strike against war. The FOL resolved to keep out of politics, although it left its local bodies to do as they pleased. It re-organised itself into a number of IWW type industrial departments, called on its affiliated unions to cancel their registrations under the Arbitration Act, and rejected an appeal from the ULP to amalgamate.<sup>88</sup>

After its defeat in the Waihi miner's strike of 1912, the FOL summoned a unity conference in January 1913. It sent invitations to all unions, regardless of type. The FOL recognised that consolidation of the union movement was necessary to combat the power of the Reform government. The response of the FOL was not effective because

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<sup>86</sup> Atkinson, 84.

<sup>87</sup> Cole, Part II, 899.

<sup>88</sup> Cole, Part II, 900; Erik Olssen, 'Some reflections about the origins of the 'Red' Federation of Labour, 1909-13', in *Common Cause, Essays in Australian and New Zealand Labour History*, ed. Eric Fry, (North Sydney: Allen and Unwin Pty. Ltd., 1986), 35

there was not unanimous support from the labour movement. The ULP and Socialist Party participated, but some Trades and Labour Councils and Arbitration unions stood aloof. The IWW refused to attend because it opposed parliamentary action. Nevertheless the conference was an astonishing victory for the left. It agreed all factions and the FOL should form a United Federation of Labour (UFL), using the militant IWW preamble as its provisional basis.<sup>89</sup> It passed a resolution demanding amendment to the Arbitration Act to prevent the registration of ‘minor’ unions where the main union had deregistered. It decided there should be a political body and an industrial body.<sup>90</sup> Resentment of the Reform government’s behaviour had brought unity to the previously warring factions and made them realise that the very survival of the movement depended upon that unity.<sup>91</sup> But political action was too late in coming; New Zealand labour was vulnerable because of the Reform Party’s grip on government. It should have been taken before Reform formed a government. Had the unions taken political action when the Liberal government was in power it might have consolidated the union movement and given it some power, as in Australia. Each union was left to decide whether it should or should not register under the Arbitration Act. The centralised control of strike action was modified leaving each union more autonomous, providing they did not call upon the federation for help.

A further conference, in July 1913, endorsed the essential parts of the January plan, but the IWW preamble was struck out. The conference instead decided to commit itself to organise on the basis of an industrial union, to assist in the overthrow of the capitalist system, and to bring about a “Co-operative Commonwealth based on industrial democracy”. This was a remarkably militant viewpoint given the previous attitude of many of the represented bodies, and was probably due to the government’s determination to smash unions. A further recommendation was that all trades unions support the Social Democratic Party (SDP).<sup>92</sup> This must have been expected, with the domination of the Red Feds. Tom Young had been elected president of the new UFL and attempted to bring the FSU into the new organisation by way of a national ballot of its members. Auckland leaders and officials from Dunedin were wary that the UFL might be the ‘Red Feds’ under a different name and feared the consequences of joining, arguing the first allegiance New Zealand seamen had was to their Australian brothers.

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<sup>89</sup> Cole, Part II, 902-3; Olssen and Richardson, 11-2.

<sup>90</sup> Cole, Part II, 902-3; Olssen and Richardson, 11-2.

<sup>91</sup> Cole, Part II, 903; Olssen and Richardson, 12.

<sup>92</sup> Cole, Part II, 903-4; Sinclair 190; Olssen and Richardson, 12.

They, therefore, urged a vote against the proposition with a result as interesting as a previous ballot on deregistration. The rank and file showed they were as divided as their leaders, rejecting affiliation 845-615, but the Wellington branch voted for the proposition 412-220.<sup>93</sup>

There was still dissatisfaction amongst some factions. Many on the right wing disliked the Unity Conference decisions. The ULP refused to disband or amalgamate with the SDP, instead opting to continue in its own capacity. The Railway Servants' Union withdrew, but most of the trades unions accepted the new constitution which allowed unions to continue working under the Arbitration Act.<sup>94</sup>

The new UFL did not have to wait long before there was a serious industrial dispute in which it became involved and the Reform government demonstrated its hostility to labour by its forceful intervention in labour disputes. In the Great Strike of 1913, disunity, forceful government intervention and the refusal of some employers to negotiate with the unions caused disarray within the unions. The Wellington shipwrights went out against a new system of pay and the waterside workers held a stop-work meeting to consider supporting them. The shipowners cancelled their agreement with the waterside workers and locked out those who had attended the meeting, resulting in the remainder going on strike. The shipowners barricaded the port, and brought in blacklegs. This action threatened to bring the seamen into the dispute.<sup>95</sup> The blacklegs were driven out when the trade unionists stormed the barricade. The newly formed UFL was unable to contain the strike. When the president, Tom Young, tried to negotiate a settlement the shipowners demanded a security deposit from the Waterside Union against further breaches.<sup>96</sup>

The government acted against the unions by forcibly intervening on the employer's side because the Waterside Workers had rejected the employer's terms. The UFL was brought in to handle the dispute and it requested the government convene a meeting of all parties to resolve the situation. But the employers demanded guarantees against further strikes, and refused to have dealings with any unregistered union. In an effort to keep the seamen in work a conference was hastily convened by the FSU, but many of the Wellington seamen had already effectively joined the strike. In Auckland coastal shipping was idle due to a coal shortage prompting the seamen there to strike,

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<sup>93</sup> Atkinson, 85.

<sup>94</sup> Cole, Part II, 904; Sinclair 190; Olssen and Richardson, 12.

<sup>95</sup> Atkinson, 85-6.

<sup>96</sup> Cole, Part II, 904-5; Olssen and Richardson, 12; Roth, 37.

forcing the Wellington conference to declare the strike official.<sup>97</sup> The government decided to take further action to end the dispute. During the course of the meeting, they took violent steps against the strikers by mobilising forces to remove them. They brought in large contingents of special police (termed Massey's Cossacks) to protect the free labour that manned the docks, causing the dispute to spread to other ports and to the mining industry. The strike was in the process of collapsing even as seamen joined it.

To prevent scab unions from being formed, the Auckland branch sought to have the 1912 agreement registered as an award to ensure that their agreement was binding and to prevent a further award being registered by a scab union. Despite still being registered, they were thwarted by the Northern Shipping Company, which used new hands to establish the Auckland Seamen and Firemen's Union. Registration of this union was fast-tracked. At Auckland, the waterside workers, together with arbitrationist unions, called a general strike paralysing the city, with sympathetic general strikes being called by the federation in Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin.<sup>98</sup> Seamen at Dunedin were threatening a return to work, while at Lyttleton and many of the smaller ports seamen had already drifted back to work. The strike was effectively over; the shipping companies had won the day and the wharves were re-opened utilising police protected scab labour.<sup>99</sup>

Many new blackleg unions were registered. When men returned to work many employers refused to employ those who were not members of registered unions and many active trades unionists were blacklisted even after the strike had been called off. The Reform government, for its part, quickly enacted a law against picketing and a Labour Disputes Investigation Act which made it illegal to suddenly go on strike. The UFL was comprehensively defeated, but it continued to exist.<sup>100</sup> The actions of the Reform government were responsible for uniting key unions against the government.<sup>101</sup> (This becomes evident later when the issue of conscription arises.)

The Union Shipping Company and other Wellington Ship owners were conciliatory. They reached agreement with the FSU but when the Northern Company's representative arrived he refused to deal with the general secretary and president of the UFL

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<sup>97</sup> Atkinson, 85-6; Cole, Part II, 904-5; H. Roth, 37-8.

<sup>98</sup> Atkinson, 86; Cole, Part II, 904-6; Olssen and Richardson, 12.

<sup>99</sup> Atkinson, 85-7.

<sup>100</sup> Cole, Part II, 906.

<sup>101</sup> Olssen and Richardson, 12.

(Young). The mood changed dramatically but a settlement was eventually reached, with the Auckland Seamen and Firemen's Union retained. Wellington seamen voted against the settlement but when the Auckland and Dunedin members made it clear they would return to work Young put FSU unity before all else; called for a vote of Wellington workers to accept the settlement and return to work, which was declared carried. But the battle was not yet over. The Northern Company, in Auckland, reneged on the agreement and refused to re-employ FSU members. The situation was further exacerbated when the Arbitration Court, in December 1913, issued an award granting absolute preference to the Auckland Seamen and Firemen's Union. The FSU took the matter to Arbitration, arguing the award created a 'pre-entry closed shop' which was illegal. Equal preference was finally granted to both unions, in 1915.<sup>102</sup>

Unions had similar issues to deal with during the economic downturn; employers were able to dictate terms rather than the unions. Subsequently, both countries' trades unions decided to embrace political action to achieve their desires. This would strengthen their hand so their members would not have to suffer diminished wages and conditions in the future. Political bodies were formed in Australia which exerted power over elected members of parliament. Unions in New Zealand were slow to move to political action due to the formation of the Liberal/Labour alliance. They also failed to consolidate, which would prove costly later when the government changed. The move to political action and the consolidation of the union movement in Australia increased the power of the unions, enabling them to achieve the two most important things they desired: an arbitration system, and fair representation of the workers in the parliament. New Zealand's unions were granted a Compulsory Conciliation and Arbitration Act by the Liberal government, to assist them to achieve fair wages and conditions. Australian unions did not have an Arbitration Act until 1904. Arbitration turned out to be more problematic than helpful for New Zealand unions. They became disenchanted with arbitration, allowing militant unions to form a strong federation, the Red Feds. The Red Feds aim was to overcome the arbitration system. The moderate unions in New Zealand looked to the formation of a Labour Party, but this did not occur until 1910 and did not attain government until much later. New Zealand unions suffered a savage blow in 1912 when the Reform Party formed government and appeared to be determined to

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<sup>102</sup> Atkinson, 87-8

crush the unions. The unions in a state of disorganisation decided to consolidate but it was too late, they had no power over the government, unlike their Australian counterparts.

In 1914, Australian unions were well organised; they had power over their Labor government, due to the earlier consolidation of the union movement and the presence of unionists as elected members of parliament. They were able to dictate policy through the threat of funding cuts. They believed the government subscribed to the same ideological principles as them. New Zealand unions, on the other hand, had no effective Labour Party and were divided. They had failed to consolidate before the anti-labour Reform Party took power and the government exploited this situation and used its power to control unions causing them to be in a state of disarray.

Unions in New Zealand and Australia both believed in the same ideological principles. They opposed war; refused to fight fellow workers; and refused to manufacture war materials. These ideological principles, as mentioned earlier, were a result of some of them believing in the resolutions of the Second International Socialist Congress. The outbreak of war saw these ideological principles seemingly put aside; workers carried on in industry and men went to war either as volunteers or conscripts. Most unions opposed conscription when it was advocated by the governments, but others supported the governments. Even within the membership of those unions which opposed conscription there were some members who supported it, they were referred to as conscriptionists.

New Zealand's Reform government, being anti-labour, did not subscribe to the ideology of the unionists and could not be trusted to refrain from introducing conscription. In contrast, the Australian Labor government, comprising unionists as members, was trusted by the unions to adhere to their ideological principles. When the question of conscription arose, Australian unions believed the government would be against it. But the unions appear to have misread the intentions of the prime minister, who, torn between his allegiance to the union movement and his duty to the Empire, decided to hold two plebiscites to determine whether conscription would be introduced in Australia. In contrast the New Zealand government was able to use its power to overcome any union resistance to conscription and enacted the Military Service Act. Unions in both countries fought their governments; New Zealand unions for the repeal of the already legislated Military Service Act and Australian unions for the prevention of the introduction of conscription.

## CHAPTER 2.

### Compulsory Military Training Prior to the Outbreak of War.

In the first years of the twentieth century, a number of factors- fear of Japanese expansionism, new awareness of the power and reach of modern navies, and the concentration of British attention on the threat from Germany's naval build-up- contributed to a sense of precariousness and isolation in both Australia and New Zealand. The power and ideology of unions were put to the test in 1907 when both governments acted to defend their countries. Compulsory military training was implemented in both Australia and New Zealand under Defence Acts in 1909. An examination of compulsory military training will give an insight into union reaction to compulsory training and how they were to react when the issue of conscription was raised.

Long before the Great War, both Australia and New Zealand had confronted the vexing problems posed by military recruitment and training. Both countries were isolated from the 'Mother Country' and both governments and their populations, including unions, feared invasion from the north. There was universal fear and suspicion of Asians, predominantly Japan. Japan was no longer just a manufacturer of 'Satsuma' porcelain and decorative wooden crafts. It was now a mighty military and naval force; they had a 'Dreadnought class' battleship (Satsuma) and had just defeated Russia.<sup>103</sup> With its military might and a powerful modern navy it could invade isolated Australia and New Zealand. Australasians felt exposed, in a region so close to Asia, and an uncertain world.<sup>104</sup> New Zealanders were particularly suspicious of the Japanese.<sup>105</sup> The rapid rise of Japan's military might increased the fear, in both countries, of an invasion by the so called 'Yellow Peril'.

The Australian colonial governments had, in the late 1870s, invited migration from the Japanese, but Japan refused at that time.<sup>106</sup> The 1902 alliance between Britain and Japan might have induced some migration from the Japanese, however, Australians decided their country should develop as a 'white man's land'. This was to prevent the

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<sup>103</sup> *New York Times*, November 16, 1906, No page no.  
query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F20F10F83D5512738DDDAF0994D9415B868CF1. Taken off Internet October 13, 2008.

<sup>104</sup> John. Barrett, *Falling In: Australians and 'Boy Conscription' 1911-1915*, (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1979), 36.

<sup>105</sup> Paul J. Baker, *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War*. (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1988), 11.

<sup>106</sup> Leslie C. Jauncey, *The Story of Conscription in Australia*. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1935). 2-3.



problems that they believed had occurred in other countries where there were mixed races. Jauncey, in his *Story of Conscriptioin in Australia*, says by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Australian workers had wholeheartedly endorsed the principle of a “White Australia”, fearing an influx of Asians could take away the work and conditions they enjoyed.<sup>107</sup>

Australians feared the millions of Asians just to the north who might decide, because of its 12,000 miles of unprotected and exposed coastline, to settle the vast unpopulated tracts of Australia.<sup>108</sup> Australians believed their country was susceptible to invasion, particularly from Japan. Historian John Barrett, in his book *Falling In*, quotes George Mackay as saying “it is well known that the Japanese leaders are fully determined to have this country (Australia) yet.”<sup>109</sup> The Japanese had for many years been sounding and charting passages from Thursday Island south and through the Great Barrier Reef. It was reported that 42 Japanese schooners were in the vicinity of Cairns on one night, and could have landed a force without fear of retaliation.<sup>110</sup> This only served to heighten the perceived fear of invasion to the Australian people.

Adding to this fear was the visit of the American Great White Fleet. The visit, instigated by Prime Minister Deakin, awed many Australians by the sheer power of a modern navy. Australians were alarmed their country could be attacked by any enemy navy due to its exposure and isolation from Britain.<sup>111</sup> Where was the Royal Navy?

At the same time that racial fears and the fear of invasion were reaching a peak, the Royal Navy cut back on its commitment to defend Australia and New Zealand.<sup>112</sup> The governments of both Australia and New Zealand believed the Royal Navy was not ready to defend either country in the event of an invasion, due to other commitments. New Zealanders felt particularly aggrieved, in the shift in focus from Asia to Europe, having given Britain £1,000,000 for a Dreadnought, to defend them in the event of attack.<sup>113</sup> Australia had depended on Britain and its navy for security since settlement,

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<sup>107</sup> Jauncey, 3.

<sup>108</sup> Barrett, 8.

<sup>109</sup> Barrett, 15. George Mackay was a Mayor, member of the Queensland Legislative Assembly and Speaker in the Federal Parliament. He was a competent public speaker with a fondness for quoting figures. Source: *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 10, (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1986), 290-1.

<sup>110</sup> Barrett, 15.

<sup>111</sup> Barrett, 10.

<sup>112</sup> Barrett, 36; Baker, 11.

<sup>113</sup> Baker, 11; Barrett, 36.

because of its fear of an Asian invasion.<sup>114</sup> Australia's proposal to provide its own naval defence was dismissed by the Imperial Defence Committee because it was improper for Australia to propose such action; the Royal Navy would provide whatever became necessary. The British Admiralty considered any attack on Australia was a matter of secondary importance.<sup>115</sup> Britain felt it had its own problems. The Royal Navy was in danger of losing its superiority to the Germans. Germany was undertaking a massive Dreadnought building program to augment its existing navy. This prompted the British Admiralty to concentrate all available ships in the North Sea to counteract the German navy.<sup>116</sup> Col. Charles Repington, military correspondent for *The Times*, wrote:

The pressure of foreign naval competition has compelled us [Britain] to concentrate our armoured fleets at home. We no longer maintain quasi-permanently an armoured fleet in the Pacific, and it is uncertain whether we shall be able to do so again.<sup>117</sup>

Australia and New Zealand were left without the naval support they had come to rely on from the Royal Navy.

Because of their perceived vulnerability both Australia and New Zealand made some provision for defence. Prior to Federation, the Australian colonies had had their own volunteer defence forces. On Federation the responsibility for defence was vested in the Federal government. In 1858, New Zealand legislated for the formation of Compulsory Militia Units, but these had become inactive.<sup>118</sup>

After the South African war, New Zealand had a part time reserve force of volunteers. The number of volunteers had expanded to 8,000; by 1904 it had grown to 13,500.<sup>119</sup> Likewise, in Australia there was a reserve force of 17,000 in the militia and 5,000 volunteers; augmenting a permanent force of 1,500 men. There were also 56,000 members of rifle clubs and 1,000 unattached officers who could be called upon in the

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<sup>114</sup> David Black, "The Art of the Possible: Creating an independent Australian Foreign Policy 1901-1954, 2. [http://john.curtin.edu.au/artofthepossible/essay\(printversion\).html](http://john.curtin.edu.au/artofthepossible/essay(printversion).html)

<sup>115</sup> Barrett, 9.

<sup>116</sup> Barrett, 10-11.

<sup>117</sup> Barrett, 11.

<sup>118</sup> Barrett, 45; Jauncey, 16.

<sup>119</sup> Baker, 11.

event of enemy invasion.<sup>120</sup> Inadequate defence and the growing fear of a threat from the north suggested a re-appraisal of the defence forces of both countries was needed.

In Australia there was support for government action to combat this threat; various bodies formed to lobby the government to have some form of military training implemented. In September 1905, the Australian National Defence League (NSW Division) was formed with members from all political persuasions. It had a connection with the British National Service League.<sup>121</sup> The stated aim of the Australian National Defence League in NSW was to bring “universal compulsory training ... of the boyhood and manhood of Australia for purposes of national defence ...” and to secure “an adequate and effective system of national defence.”<sup>122</sup> A Victorian division was formed soon after the NSW division. It differed slightly from the NSW division. The compulsory element was deleted from its stated aims.<sup>123</sup> The purpose of both divisions was that all boys from 10 to 17 years received basic military training whilst those 18 to 25 years received thorough military training in camp. After age 25 years, annual musketry courses were to be taken up to the age of 31 years. In 25 years, this would give a reserve army of 250,000 men. The efforts of the Australian National Defence League sufficiently swayed the government to adopt a scheme of compulsory military training.

In New Zealand, the Japanese defeat of Russia encouraged the formation of a National Defence League in 1906. As was the case in Australia, the league advocated compulsory military training. It lobbied politicians for compulsory military training for all young men to the age of 21 years.<sup>124</sup>

In 1907, spurred by motivated fears and the apparent threat posed by modern navies, both governments created systems of compulsory military training for the defence of their countries. New Zealand also felt the necessity to create a reserve for Imperial service if called upon to supply trained men.<sup>125</sup> As the intention behind both schemes was to protect each country’s territory, it was envisioned that compulsory military training would mainly incorporate land based armies, although some naval training was available. Land based armies were able to be developed more quickly, and cheaply than a navy.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Barrett, 29.

<sup>121</sup> Barrett, 45.

<sup>122</sup> Jauncey, 13.

<sup>123</sup> Jauncey, 15-6.

<sup>124</sup> Baker, 11.

<sup>125</sup> Baker, 11-12.

<sup>126</sup> Barrett, 7.

Australian Prime Minister Alfred Deakin personally favoured voluntarism, but on December 13, 1907, he announced the Commonwealth Government had adopted, as the basis for the future defence of Australia, compulsory military training.<sup>127</sup> L.C. Jauncey, in his *Story of Conscription in Australia*, argues that most Australians felt the defence of Australia was a duty that everyone should bear.<sup>128</sup> Australian trades unions accepted the State had responsibility for defence. Australia's distance from Britain made it imperative that all the men of Australia be prepared to defend the country in the event of enemy invasion. This became more so after Japan's defeat of Russia. The Federal government used the threat of invasion by the 'Yellow Peril' to counter any possible opposition to compulsory military training from the trade unions. This alleged threat convinced most Australian labour leaders of the necessity for compulsory military training.<sup>129</sup> In Australia the principle of compulsory military training for all males to provide a Citizen Defence Force was debated at the 1908 Labor Party Conference. A motion approving the scheme was carried 24 votes to 7.<sup>130</sup> This was an overwhelmingly positive response from the Labor Party.

By 1909 the Australian Defence Act had been amended to include compulsory military training. The act of parliament compelled men and boys to undertake military training whether they wanted to or not. The unions accepted the measure because of the perceived threat from the 'Yellow Peril'. More significantly, the majority of the labour movement endorsed the idea of a citizen defence force, based on compulsory training, at its 1908 Commonwealth conference.<sup>131</sup> The only objection came from the Amalgamated Miners Association who objected to the compulsory component due to their anti-militarist stance.

Labour's majority acceptance of compulsory military training could be attributed to their belief in defence. They refused to leave the country to the mercy of any aggressive nation. This was later evidenced in an article in *The Australian Worker* in October 1914.<sup>132</sup> In New Zealand, on the other hand, the labour movement did not support compulsory military training.

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<sup>127</sup> Jauncey, 20.

<sup>128</sup> Jauncey, 3.

<sup>129</sup> Jauncey, 16.

<sup>130</sup> Jauncey, 20-1. Amongst those who supported the resolution were W.G. Spence and H. deLargie, while those against included F. Anstey and King O'Malley, all of whom were to be prominent in the fight against conscription.

<sup>131</sup> Jauncey, 20-22.

<sup>132</sup> *The Australian Worker*, October 1, 1914, 1.

It was not until the Defence Act of 1909 became law that compulsory military training of men and boys occurred during peacetime. The act was, as noted above, in response to the fear of a Japanese invasion and the belief the Royal Navy could not be depended upon to defend Australia in the event of any attack from the north. The act provided for compulsory drill for boys (cadets) between 12 and 18 years, and then they would move to the citizen force to age 26 years. Boys 12 -14 years (junior cadets) were required to undergo training for 120 hours per year, mainly physical education, marching drill, and two of four possibilities: miniature rifle shooting, first aid, swimming, and running exercises in organised games. Senior cadets aged between 14 and 18 years underwent 4 whole-day drills (4 hours), 12 half-day drills (2 hours), and 24 night drills (1 hour) per year. The citizen force aged from 18 to 26 years underwent each year 16 whole-day drills or their equivalent, of which not less than eight were in camps of continuous training.<sup>133</sup> There were penalties provided for evasion of service and for employers who refused leave for employees to attend training, both carried penalties of £100. Failure to attend training and breaches of discipline carried a fine of £5. If the person fined was unable or unwilling to pay the fine they could be incarcerated for up to 20 days.<sup>134</sup> But the act only provided for service within Australia, not overseas. It was only intended to provide a body of trained men to defend Australia in the event of invasion. Compulsory military training finally became a fact of life in Australia in 1911, after a decade of insistent calls from many sources.<sup>135</sup>

John Barrett, in his book *Falling In*, suggests that the above-mentioned regime of compulsory military training was generally well accepted.<sup>136</sup> This belief was based on the result of over 260 responses to questionnaires from participants in the scheme.<sup>137</sup> Most boys paraded without any serious disruption. The feeling of mateship among the trainees helped to make the training enjoyable.<sup>138</sup> According to official figures quoted

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<sup>133</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Defence Act 1903-10 Regulations 125,127, 134 and 135*, (Melbourne: J. Kemp Government printer for the State of Victoria), 27-28; Barrett, 69-72; Jauncey, 24-26.

<sup>134</sup> Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, No. 6 of 1913, (Melbourne, McCarron Bird & Co.) 1052 and 1057;

<sup>135</sup> Not only the National Defence Leagues as constituted bodies but also such individuals as J.C. Watson (Leader of the Federal Labour Party) W.M. Hughes (A.L.P.), W.A. Holman (Labor Premier N.S.W.), Senators Best (Protectionist), DeLargie (A.L.P.), Dobson (Free Trade), Higgs (A.L.P.), Pearce (A.L.P.), and Matheson (Free Trade): From the House of Representatives J. Hume Cook (Protectionist), Dr. Malony (A.L.P.), J. Page (A.L.P.), H.B. Higgins (Protectionist), W Knox (Anti-Socialist), S. Maughan, T. Skeene (Free Trade), Dr. Carty Salmon (Protectionist), W.H. Irvine (Anti-Socialist), and other prominent persons and clergy. Source Jauncey, 13, 16.

<sup>136</sup> Barrett, 6

<sup>137</sup> Barrett, 208-53.

<sup>138</sup> Barrett, 260.

in *Falling In*, for the year 1913 there were 10,153 prosecutions, or 7.8% of 131,000 in training. It was even lower than 7.8% when it is realised there were 221,000 registered in the training areas. Total prosecutions from July 1911 to July 1915 were 33,942, or 5.3% of the aggregate of each year's number of trainees (636,000).<sup>139</sup> Barrett suggests of the 33,942 prosecutions there were 7,000 detained, including parents, employers and persons required to register. The remainder were prosecuted for pranks, laziness, and bouts of temper and clashes of personality. This did not mean they were against the system; they were victims of the harsh disciplinary measures of the time.<sup>140</sup> So it is probably the case that the greater majority of the working classes were willing to put in an effort to train for the defence of Australia in the event of an invasion. But were they willing to accept conscription to fight a war away from home? We shall see in a later chapter that they were prepared to volunteer for overseas service but not prepared to accept conscription for the same purpose.

Motivated by the same fears as Australia, including invasion from the north: diminished Royal Navy support: and wishing to have a reserve force available for Imperial service, New Zealand moved to legislate a new Defence Act. The New Zealand government believed the state had a right to demand certain duties of the citizens. Most citizens perceived a need for self-defence because of their isolation from Britain. Paul Baker, in his book *King and Country Call*, contends there was, initially, almost unanimous support for compulsory military training. The militant unions, however, complained of the militarisation of the youth, the denial of liberty, and the possibility of the establishment of a standing army. They might have been prepared to forgo their ideology had the scheme been voluntary but it was not. A voluntary reserve had been increasing in number since the South African war.<sup>141</sup> The unions of New Zealand were more influenced by socialism than Australian unions. This was the result of the influence of overseas organisations, the IWW, the Knights of Labour, the Western Miners Federation, and the spread of propaganda from other socialist organisations.<sup>142</sup> This, together with an increasing voluntary reserve, may have convinced them that it was not necessary to implement compulsion.

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<sup>139</sup> Barrett, 212; table 1, 213 and table 2, 214.

<sup>140</sup> Barrett, 215.

<sup>141</sup> Baker, 11-12; Barrett, 36.

<sup>142</sup> Cole, Part II, 894-5.

New Zealand had a new Defence Act by the end of 1909, which enabled the government to institute compulsory military training.<sup>143</sup> This scheme was intended, not only for the defence of New Zealand, but also to bring discipline to the youth of the Dominion who it was perceived were becoming self-indulgent and undisciplined.<sup>144</sup> The New Zealand scheme differed slightly from Australia's. It enabled the compulsory training of all males between the ages of 12 and 21 years (amended later to 14-25 years). Men up to 55 years of age were required to undertake militia service. Junior cadets (12-14 years of age) underwent physical training in their schools but this was abolished in 1912. Senior cadets aged between 14 and 18 years undertook drill and rifle training for 64 hours per annum, which was similar to the Australian hours of training.<sup>145</sup> From age 18 to 21 they were transferred to the territorials (later extended to age 25 years) where they had 60 days training with 7 days in camp per annum. After age 25 they were posted to the reserve and took training when ordered.<sup>146</sup> In the event of an emergency there would be a trained force ready to fight. As in Australia, it was only for home defence. Liberal Prime Minister Joseph Ward, aware of the support for voluntarism, declared that the training scheme was not conscription because the country would never condone such a scheme.<sup>147</sup> Men and boys were still able to pursue their normal daily lifestyle, with training when required, as opposed to full-time military service. As was the case in Australia, men and boys were compelled by act of parliament to present themselves for training when ordered.

When British war hero Lord Kitchener visited New Zealand in 1910, he recommended the upper age for young men should be 25 years. This brought a response from the farmers union, which feared a disruption to agricultural labour. Raising the age but excluding those already over 21 years of age served to mollify the farmers.<sup>148</sup>

In 1912, the Liberal government was defeated in elections by Reform; the Liberals no longer had the support of labour unions which now had their own party. The Reform Party was comprised of wealthy farmers and employers who were determined to curtail the militant activities of the unions. When the Reform Party formed government in 1912, stricter measures were enforced to ensure compliance with the scheme. The

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<sup>143</sup> Baker, 11.

<sup>144</sup> Barrett, 45; Baker, 12.

<sup>145</sup> Ian McGibbon, Ed, *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Military History*, (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2000) 110.

<sup>146</sup> McGibbon, 528.

<sup>147</sup> Barrett, 45; Baker, 11-12.

<sup>148</sup> Barrett, 45-6.

prime minister was determined the scheme would succeed despite an increase in resistance to it. This reinforced the determination of all New Zealand unions in the fight against compulsory military training. In the first year of compulsory military training, 1912, some 3,187 youths absented themselves from parades,<sup>149</sup> 5.4% of the total in training.<sup>150</sup>

James Allen, minister of defence in the new government, tried to increase the efficiency of the compulsory military training scheme. The number of prosecutions increased, in 1912, to 7,030,<sup>151</sup> or 9.8% of the total in training.<sup>152</sup> Deduction of fines from wages increased the animosity of the unions toward the government. Some miners went on strike because of this.<sup>153</sup>

With the advent of the Reform government farmers now called all the shots politically while society, both urban and rural, was dominated by the Protestant middle class. The divide between working class and country widened. The government was determined to bring the unions to heel. Farmers were the backbone of New Zealand's economy, and country people considered the townspeople, mainly workers, to play a secondary role.<sup>154</sup> It could have been because of this divide, animosity toward the government, and the farmer's objection to the scheme that worker's opinions changed from favouring compulsion to favouring the voluntary system. Those supporters of the compulsory system were adamant that compulsion was the only way. William Massey, the new prime minister, stated his government would stand or fall by the provisions of the Defence Act.<sup>155</sup> This could have been a genuine commitment to the Defence Act, but in view of the above it may have been another way of proving the government had power over the unions, unlike Australia where the reverse was the case. The New Zealand unions did not have the strength to defeat the government. The above facts suggest the change from favouring the scheme to favouring a voluntary scheme occurred in 1912 when the Reform government came to power and resulted from that government's actions. The declaration of war ended the conflict over compulsory military training,<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Baker, 12.

<sup>150</sup> Total in training was 59,083 source *The Official New Zealand Year Book 1912*, (Wellington: Government Printer), 249.

<sup>151</sup> Baker, 12.

<sup>152</sup> Total in training 71,929 source *The Official Year Book of New Zealand 1913*, (Wellington: Government Printer), 251.

<sup>153</sup> Baker, 12.

<sup>154</sup> Baker, 10; Cole, Part II, 907.

<sup>155</sup> Baker, 13-14.

<sup>156</sup> Baker, 13-14.



but by this time New Zealand had some 26,000 territorials and around the same number of cadets in training. It was, therefore, able to muster a reasonably trained force in a short time.<sup>157</sup>

There was some objection to compulsory military training in both countries. In Australia the Amalgamated Miners Association, while not objecting to the training scheme, did object to the compulsory component.<sup>158</sup> This reveals the influence overseas organisations had on the miners who adopted a socialistic stance against what they saw as militarism of the young men of the country.

Pacifist and anti-militarist groups soon formed in New Zealand in response to compulsory military training. These groups were made up of radical religious groups, predominantly Quakers, and militant labour. New Zealand's militant unionists did not favour compulsion. They protested the curtailment of liberty, militarisation of the youth and the possibility that a standing army could be established.<sup>159</sup> They preferred to maintain their liberty, and were not amenable to the compulsory element, preferring instead to continue with voluntary training. They were more socialist than Australian unions and most opposed military training because workers could be pitted against workers in combat. This went against their principle that workers should not engage in combat against one another.

The later union conflict over conscription necessitates a clarification of the differences between compulsory military training and conscription. Compulsory military training is different from conscription. William Morris Hughes M.P. and future prime minister of Australia asserted that compulsory military training was not conscription. When he addressed the National Service League in London, during April 1907, Hughes explained:

Conscription produces militarism; universal training [Compulsory military training] destroys it. Conscription produces a caste; universal training deals with the nation and places all men on the same level ... For a long while the

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<sup>157</sup> J.L. Sleeman, 'The Supply of Reinforcements during the War.', ed, H.T.B. Drew, *The War Effort of New Zealand*, (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, 1923), 1-2.

<sup>158</sup> Jauncey, 20.

<sup>159</sup> Baker, 12

Government was in the hands of a class. The Government is now in the hands not of the whole people, but nearly so.<sup>160</sup>

Although, as its description implies, compulsory military training compelled men and youths to attend training for military duties, it was not a full-time commitment; it provided sufficient trained personnel to defend the nation. Trainees still went about their daily routine and reported for training when required. Conscription, on the other hand, produced militarism by boosting military strength to make the government more powerful; it compels men and youths to serve in the full-time military, for a set term, to the preclusion of all other occupations. They could also be sent to fight with the regular army anywhere the government decreed. It was the distinction Hughes cited that the governments of both countries relied upon.

The rapid rise of Japan's military might and pressure from lobby groups caused the governments of both countries to rethink their position in regard to their country's defence. The perceived threat of the 'Yellow Peril' and the belief by both the New Zealand and Australian governments that the Royal Navy was not ready to defend either country changed the Australian labour movement's thinking with respect to compulsory military training.<sup>161</sup> Unions in Australia adapted more readily to the domestic and international situation than did New Zealand's. Self preservation seems to have taken a hold in the majority of unions with only one (Amalgamated Miners Association) objecting to the compulsory element. In contrast to the New Zealand labour movement's position, Australian labour, with the one exception (Amalgamated Miners Association), supported compulsory military training in the years leading up to the war because it was for the defence of the homeland in case of an invasion. Only the militant unions of New Zealand objected initially, but when the government of New Zealand changed to the anti-labour Reform Party, this prompted a change in attitude from the unions. They were totally opposed to the curtailment of their liberty, and therefore opposed compulsory military training; they preferred the voluntary system. The actions of the Reform government only served to strengthen their resolve to fight the system.

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<sup>160</sup> Jauncey, 18.

<sup>161</sup> Jauncey, 16; Baker, 11.

The two governments' decision to implement compulsory military training was supplemented by the actions and agitation of people outside of government. The National Defence Leagues actively lobbied for compulsory military training when it was realised that both Australia and New Zealand were susceptible to attack from a foreign invader and no longer had the Royal Navy to defend them. Labour in Australia supported the scheme because it was for home defence, but like New Zealand labour, they opposed the government's later attempts to inflict conscription on the nation. Apart from their ideological principles they had other reasons to refuse the government's attempts.

Despite the opposition to compulsory military training in New Zealand, when war was declared, both countries had a stock of reasonably trained men as a result of compulsory military training. These men were able and willing to volunteer for service.

Compulsory military training was implemented for the defence of Australia and New Zealand. It was not the intention of the Australian government to send men out of the country to engage in war, unlike New Zealand's government which also intended to have a reserve force for service if the imperial government required it. Despite the Australian unions' compliance with compulsory military training, unions in both countries remained true to their ideological principles when the matter of conscription was raised during the Great War. They fought their government's desire for conscription. But, while being the greatest concern for the unions, conscription was not the only factor which influenced them to fight against it. We shall see in the following chapters what other factors were influential in their fight.

### **CHAPTER 3.**

#### **Trade Unions position between declaration of war and conscription.**

When war was declared in August 1914 the Australian and New Zealand governments and trades unions were forced to consider the problems of manpower. Both governments responded by offering the services of men. This created divisions within the trades' union movements of both countries. An internationalist, socialist ideology influenced large sections of the labour movement. This ideology resulted from the Australian and New Zealand unions subscribing to the resolutions of the Second International Socialist Congress. Trades unions were ideologically opposed to wars which they believed were fought by the working classes for the benefit of the capitalists. They also believed the working classes should defend each other and do all in their power to prevent the manufacture of war materials. But in this instance ideology was not paramount: prevention of a German victory and the survival of the British Empire and its Dominions was; most unionists, with the exception of the most militant, were prepared to support their governments in the quest to support Britain by voluntary enlistment. But they required something in return, the maintenance of the economic situation they had enjoyed before the outbreak of war. But they were to be disappointed. Wages were frozen; the cost of living escalated; provision for the dependants of enlisted men was not made, and men were made redundant in an effort to make them enlist. Despite this, working class men on both sides of the Tasman continued to volunteer in great numbers, sacrificing their family's financial security.

Who were the capitalists the unionists spoke of? The unions perceived them as being the employers, merchants, large landholders and the wealthy. That is, they included those who were able to maintain their income and lifestyle, and who were able to profit from the war, while the workers suffered stagnant incomes and ever increasing prices of basic commodities. Unions believed most capitalists were unwilling to sacrifice their wealth in return for the sacrifice of workers lives at the front

When it became clear in May 1915 that recruiting in Australia had fallen off, and the New Zealand government felt its country's contribution was insufficient, it led both governments to consider other ways of obtaining recruits. Australia's government instigated a war census to determine the number of men who were physically fit and able to perform any kind of work considered necessary. Men were approached directly by recruiting officers at rallies, public meetings and in their homes if necessary, to complete

war census cards which provided details of their income, assets and the purpose for which they were used and whether they had had any military training or possessed any firearms and ammunition. When recruit numbers failed to increase, to the level the government required, it implemented a federal recruiting scheme. Men now had to declare if they were prepared to enlist, or explain why not. New Zealand's government implemented postal enlistment to make it easier for country based men to enlist, but this did not have the desired effect, men still went to the city recruiting centres and returned home dejected by the delay in waiting for call-up. A national register, where men would indicate their preparedness to volunteer, also failed to bring forth the number of recruits the government required. A scheme based on Britain's Derby Scheme was then put into effect. Men were approached directly and asked to enlist. But, again, insufficient numbers were obtained to satisfy the government. The governments of both countries believed conscription to be the answer. This was to cause a rethink of the unions' position; they now had to confront the issue of conscription.

On both sides of the Tasman, conscription, while being the most contentious issue, was fundamentally shaped by other factors. Unions again had to reconsider their position, they felt there would be socio-economic consequences for them, and the union movement would be threatened with destruction if conscription was introduced. Unions explicitly connected the issue of conscription to issues of class. They believed the wealthy capitalists were not doing their share to help the war effort; they were not enlisting in great numbers, nor contributing in a financial way to the war effort. Some members of the working class, who did not enlist, faced 'economic conscription'. They were retrenched or put on reduced hours, causing increased hardship on their families; thus they were forced to enlist. There was inequality of sacrifice; therefore the unions decided to fight the introduction of conscription.

The conscription debate is complex and full of contradictions. While conscription has been identified by others to be the main cause of antagonism within the trades unions during the war, other factors referred to above influenced this antagonism and these will be discussed in this and the following chapter.

As discussed in chapter 1, unions in Australia and New Zealand were in different states of organisation by August 1914. Australian unions were relatively stable and well organised. Having formed the Labor Party the unions had power over the Labor government and were able to dictate policy through the Labor Caucus. Their cross-Tasman counterparts were in disarray. New Zealand unions were disadvantaged by the non-

labour Reform government which had power over them and seemed determined to break them.

Australian Labor Prime Minister Andrew Fisher said the day after war was declared: “We are behind the Empire to the last man and the last shilling.” But he was speaking from a government perspective which did not necessarily convey the belief of the unions. The ideological principles of unions, as indicated earlier, were opposition to war and the belief wars were fought by the working classes for the benefit of the capitalists. The working classes should defend each other and do all in their power to prevent the manufacture of war material. But these principles appear to have been balanced against other concerns. Maurice Blackburn, in his publication *The Conscription Referendum of 1916*, suggests this was because the war was against imperialism, and to liberate the subject nationalities and working classes of the German and Austrian Empires.<sup>1</sup> Blackburn is only partially correct. Certainly it is the case that to achieve the liberation of the subjected working class, unionists had to ignore ideology and volunteer for service, but they were also volunteering to prevent Germany being victorious.

As shown in chapter 2, Australian trade unionists accepted that the state had responsibility for defence. Therefore the unions did not discourage men from enlisting voluntarily. The government did not begin a recruiting campaign until nearly twelve months after the declaration of war because of the satisfactory response to voluntarily enlist.<sup>2</sup>

Patriotism and loyalty to Britain were also driving forces which caused some unionists to volunteer. *The Australian Worker* declared: “Organised Labor has been trained in loyalty; its ideals are rooted and grounded in patriotism.”<sup>3</sup> The New South Wales Labour Council (LCN) president, E.J. Kavanagh, said on January 21, 1915:

Notwithstanding the fact that the trade union movement as a whole is opposed to war, when it became known that England was at war with Germany a general desire to assist the Empire in its time of trouble was manifested by every recognised labour organisation in England and her colonies. I venture to assert

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<sup>1</sup> Maurice Blackburn, *The Conscription Referendum of 1916*, (Melbourne: The Anti-conscription Celebration League, 1936), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia 1900-1921*, (Canberra: The Australian National University, 1965), 71.

<sup>3</sup> *The Australian Worker*, August 6, 1914, 13.

that England never entered into war with such a solid backing by her own people as she has at the present time.<sup>4</sup>

The more militant Australian Workers Union (AWU) held its national convention in Sydney from January 28, 1915. At the convention, Jack Cullinan<sup>5</sup> moved the following:

That this Convention emphatically condemns Warfare, which is against the Workers interests, and at its termination we hope it will mean the overthrow of Capitalism and Militarism and the triumph of the working class Movements throughout the World and that this Convention express its deepest sympathy with those who have lost their breadwinners and other relations in this deplorable War.<sup>6</sup>

*The Australian Worker* reported the motion was carried unanimously.

There were, however, limits to the union's militancy. While the above motion condemned warfare, the union was prepared not to object to unionists enlisting voluntarily, suggesting it was prepared to forsake principles in the interest of gaining a German defeat.<sup>7</sup> From a total enlistment of over 60,500 the Government statistician stated 23,300 unionists had enlisted by January 31, 1915. Later W.M. Hughes, prime minister, was to state some 25,200 unionists from just three unions had volunteered by January 13, 1916.<sup>8</sup> But it would appear not all unions were prepared to weigh their principles against the scenario of a German victory. The more militant unions (miners, seamen and waterside workers), while not objecting to their members enlisting voluntarily,

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<sup>4</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 22, 1915, 10.

<sup>5</sup> Jack Cullinan was a delegate from the Western Branch of the AWU. It is unclear what his position was in 1915 but he was Secretary of the Western Branch in 1918 as stated by E.H. Lane, *Dawn to Dusk: Reminiscences of a Rebel*, (Queensland: William Brooks & Co.(Q0 Pty., 1939), 249.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Workers Union (Hereinafter referred to as AWU) National Convention Minutes of February 8, 1915, 100, Box N117 Record 7; See also M44 Reel 6. Noel Butlin Archives (Hereinafter referred to as NBA). *The Australian Worker*, March 4, 1915, 1. (*The Australian Worker* claims motion was carried unanimously, but minutes just say "carried".)

<sup>7</sup> The AWU was at this time the largest union in Australia and apart from being able to influence the smaller unions it also held considerable sway over the elected Labor members of the Federal Parliament.

<sup>8</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 24, 1915, 14 ; Turner, citing *Labour Bulletin*, No.8, 294-5; Billy Hughes, *"The Day" and after : War speeches of the Rt. Hon. W.M. Hughes Prime Minister of Australia*, Arranged Keith A Murdoch, (London: Cassell, 1916), 169; Ernest, Scott. *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18*, Volume XI, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson Ltd. 1936), 226, 286.

maintained their adhesion to the principles of the Second International Socialist Congress, suggesting there were divisions within the Australian labour movement.

The Australian Government offered men to fight for Britain, but some Australian unions were divided over the war. However, that did not stop a great number of unionists volunteering to assist Britain in its war against Germany. The more militant unions condemned the war, but it appears no union was prepared to stop its members enlisting voluntarily.

New Zealand Prime Minister Massey stated a few days before its official declaration of war: "I am sure that if New Zealanders are asked to assist the Empire they will go and that they will not ask any questions."<sup>9</sup> But as in Australia, Massey was not representing the views of the unions. Like their Australian counterparts, most unions in New Zealand were not averse to voluntary enlistment. The *Lyttleton Times* suggested that the initial rush of volunteers possibly comprised mostly workers, while W.H. Oliver in his book *The Story of New Zealand*, states volunteering was brisk and continued until the end of the war. He also contends that nearly half of the eligible male population saw service.<sup>10</sup> Paul Baker in *King and Country Call* says by mid 1915 there had been a boom in recruiting but after May 1915 it neither remained buoyant nor collapsed.<sup>11</sup> This appears to be supported by Defence Minister Allen. He wrote to General Godley, Commanding Officer of the Expeditionary Force, that the efforts of the new recruiting board may produce all the men required each month but, in his own opinion, compulsion should be introduced if Britain decided to introduce it.<sup>12</sup>

As was the case with their counterparts in Australia, the militant miners, seamen, and waterside workers maintained their adherence to the resolutions of the Second International Socialist Congress. They were opposed to war and believed the working classes should defend each other and do all in their power to prevent the manufacture of war material. But even within their ranks there were many who volunteered.

The greater majority of New Zealanders still considered themselves 'British' and were absolutely fierce in their patriotism; they were determined to prove their loyalty to

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<sup>9</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, August 5, 1914, 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Lyttleton Times*, August 12, 1914, 9; W.H. Oliver, 168.

<sup>11</sup> Paul J. Baker, *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1988), 32.

<sup>12</sup> Allen to Godley, January 4, 1916, Letter nod. 2337; February 12, 1916, Letter nod. 3396. M1/15 Part 2, Letter no. 3396; Allen Papers, Archives New Zealand (Hereinafter referred to as ANZ).



Britain.<sup>13</sup> Trade unionists were just as ‘British’ and patriotic as the other members of the population. Patriotism and loyalty aside, New Zealand, like Australia, was bound to support the Empire. *The Maoriland Worker* was critical of the labour leadership when it noted that:

For all practical purposes we have abandoned for the time being our war with capitalism. Many of our comrades, and in many instances trusted leaders from the ranks of Labour, have lost their balance and deserted the principles of peace which are the ‘fundamentals’ of the world’s working-class movement.<sup>14</sup>

This suggests that New Zealand labour, like Australia’s, was divided. Or was patriotism to Britain being put before ideology? The evidence suggests New Zealand labour at this point was divided, but it was also fiercely patriotic. Britain had been forced into a war which was to New Zealanders “righteous and unavoidable”<sup>15</sup> and Britain had to be supported.

Unions in both countries were divided, with the militant unions adhering to their ideology while the more moderate unions balanced other factors against ideology resulting in them helping support Britain in its war with Germany. But regardless of divisions both countries were bound to support Britain and therefore so were the unionists. Despite their opposition to war, unionists, in Australia and New Zealand, volunteered in large numbers until around May 1915 when numbers decreased in Australia and the New Zealand government felt its country’s contribution was insufficient.

In Australia, by July 1915, voluntary recruiting numbers had decreased from earlier enlistment numbers. Blackburn suggests the tragedy of Gallipoli shocked the nation and the bulk of the parliamentarians united in a recruiting campaign in an attempt to overcome the shortfall of men enlisting.<sup>16</sup> The government decided a war census would ascertain the number of eligible men available for enlistment. Unions felt this decision should have been discussed in the Labor Caucus. Because of the power they had over the government they would have had some input into the decision through their representatives. Senator Barnes confirmed at the AWU convention, in January 1916, the

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<sup>13</sup> Baker, 11, 15.

<sup>14</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, January 13, 1915, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Baker, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Blackburn, 9.

matter of the war census was not referred to caucus.<sup>17</sup> Hughes (at this time Attorney General) said it was not the intent of the bill to introduce conscription into the country.<sup>18</sup>

Following the census, Hughes, now prime minister, instituted a Federal recruiting scheme, and again the unions were not consulted. All males between the ages of 18 and 45 years were required to complete a questionnaire stating if they were prepared to enlist immediately. If they were prepared to enlist later they had to specify the date, and if not prepared to enlist state the reasons why.<sup>19</sup>

Some unions supported the Federal government's measures. The Committee of Management of the Waterside Workers Federation of Australia (WWF) was one. The fact that the federation's affiliated unions were among the more militant unions made this a strange decision. At its meeting on December 21, 1915, the seven members of the Committee of Management passed a motion condemning the Trades Hall Council for advising unionists not to fill out registration cards under the new recruiting scheme. Those seven members expressed confidence, on behalf of 17,000 members, in the Federal Labor Government.<sup>20</sup> It is significant that the prime minister was the general president of the federation and presided at this meeting, but he left as soon as the vote was completed, indicating he was vitally interested in achieving the outcome he wanted; the condemnation of the Trades Hall Council for its actions. The decision might have been intended to garner support from other unions for the completion of the registration cards. Ian Turner, in *Industrial Labour and Politics*, submits that the Waterside Workers and other unions influenced by Hughes brought pressure to bear on the Trades Hall Council which rescinded its earlier advice to unions.<sup>21</sup> The government (Hughes) was now trying to dominate the unions, but this did not stop union hostility to the scheme.

Some unions opposed the government's measures because they believed there was inequality between the working class and capitalists when it came to volunteering. Blackburn says labour perceived the recruiting system spared the 'silvertails' and netted only the workers.<sup>22</sup> The unions failed, or chose not to recognise that all men of military

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<sup>17</sup> AWU National Convention Report, January 27, 1916, 11. Box E154/17. NBA.

<sup>18</sup> Turner, 98; Australian Parliamentary Debates, Vol. LXXVII, 4834.

<sup>19</sup> L.F. Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger 1914-1952: William Morris Hughes a Political Biography*, Volume II, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson Publishers, 1979) 311-3.

<sup>20</sup> Waterside Workers Federation of Australia (Hereinafter referred to as WWF) Minutes of December 21, 1915, 208. Microfilm M26. NBA.

<sup>21</sup> Turner, 100.

<sup>22</sup> Blackburn, 10.

age would be subjected to conscription, thus diminishing their argument of inequality. But it was their perception inequality would continue, with conscription, which caused the unions to use it as one of the issues in their fight against conscription. When Hughes was asked by a member of a Brisbane Industrial Council deputation if there was any official law, compelling people to fill out the cards, he evaded the question by declaring he was not in the witness box. He said;

I have been a unionist, and I am Prime Minister. There is the law. If people break the law there is punishment for it. I expect every man to whom a circular is sent, to fill in the card.<sup>23</sup>

He did not say specifically there was a law compelling the completion of the card. F.B. Smith in his book *The Conscription Plebiscites in Australia 1916-17* claims Hughes showed a readiness to subjugate the normal course of parliamentary and legal procedure to the winning of the war.<sup>24</sup> It would appear that regardless of parliament, Labor Caucus, the union movement, or the law, Hughes would push through whatever measure he felt necessary to achieve victory in the war.

The government's insistence that every man fill in a card sparked a furious response from the AWU.<sup>25</sup> The 1916 convention of the AWU considered the completion of registration cards for the war census was the precursor to conscription because that is what had occurred in Britain. Hughes had, on four previous occasions, attempted to bring compulsory military training into law. What was there to stop him introducing conscription given his determination to achieve victory in the war? The AWU felt it was "un-Australian" to make threats to enforce the completion of the cards. (Australians do not force their mates to do anything.) There was voluntary enlistment; to compel men to state why they would not enlist was, in the eyes of the union, tantamount to conscription. The convention felt that the Labor government was showing a distinct inclination to follow the dictates of the imperial government.<sup>26</sup>

To maintain the voluntary system of recruiting, and prevent the introduction of conscription, some unions were prepared to assist the government by offering solutions

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<sup>23</sup> Leslie C. Jauncey, *The Story of Conscription in Australia*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1935), 123.

<sup>24</sup> F.B. Smith, *The Conscription Plebiscites in Australia 1916-17*, Second Edition Revised, (Melbourne: Victorian Historical Association, 1966), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Jauncey, 126.

<sup>26</sup> AWU National Convention Report, January 27, 1916, 10-11, Box E154/17. NBA.

to the recruiting problem. They believed if the government gave support to dependants of soldiers and increase soldiers' pay more volunteers would be forthcoming. The Melbourne Trades Hall Council (MTHC) believed more men might have enlisted voluntarily if there had been greater support for their families. It suggested a widows and children's pension fund be set up. This would have made the government's new measures unnecessary.<sup>27</sup> More men would volunteer if they felt their dependants were adequately provided for. A later conference of trade councils and affiliated bodies decided voluntary recruiting would have been assisted if income tax had been increased. This would have allowed a boost in soldiers pay, provided support for their dependants and provided avenues for employment on demobilisation.<sup>28</sup>

Similar to Australia, New Zealand did not experience a lack of volunteers. By mid 1915 there had been a boom in recruiting, but after May recruiting reached a plateau.<sup>29</sup> As previously noted Oliver maintains volunteering for overseas service was brisk and remained so for the duration of the war.<sup>30</sup> But the government felt New Zealand was not contributing its share of fighting men. It implemented a system of postal enlistment whereby it was not necessary to leave home to enlist and then wait, possibly months, for the call-up, as was the case with the standard procedure for enlistment. Enlistments were not increased by this system. Rural recruits still left their jobs to go to the nearest town to enlist and then gave up in disgust at having to wait so long for the call-up.<sup>31</sup>

In an effort to stimulate recruiting and prevent the introduction of conscription, the Otago Labour Council decided to co-operate with the provincial recruiting committee. In a letter to H. Hunter, secretary of United Federation of Labour (UFL), J.T. Paul, Labour M.P. and president of the council, asserted that this co-operation met with the approval of the "overwhelming majority" of workers in Otago.<sup>32</sup>

There was a majority of military aged men in favour of prosecuting the war; thousands of men were ready and willing to go. They should not be paid less than the best rate paid to an artisan under trade union rates. A conference of New Zealand Labour

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<sup>27</sup> Melbourne Trades Hall Council (Hereinafter referred to as MTHC) Minutes, May 13, 1915, 117.

<sup>28</sup> MTHC Minutes, August 31, 1916, 223.

<sup>29</sup> Baker, 32.

<sup>30</sup> William H. Oliver, *The Story of New Zealand*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), 169.

<sup>31</sup> Baker, 25-6 & 33-4.

<sup>32</sup> J.T. Paul to H. Hunter, November 1, 1915. J.T. Paul papers, MS-0982/006, Hocken Collections Archives and Manuscripts (Hereinafter referred to as HCA)

Organisations, held in January 1916, noted that in view of this, the voluntary system could not possibly fail. But the government would not adequately provide for their dependants while they were away or in the event they were killed or disabled.<sup>33</sup> It appears, similar to their Australian counterparts, they did not volunteer because of the government's lack of adequate provision. (Soldiers were paid £89.9.0 per annum compared to the lowest award rate of £132.2.0 and middle class incomes of £300.0.0. If a soldier was disabled he would receive a pension of £62.10.0 per annum, increased to £83.5.0 if he needed assistance, and £11.0.0 per child, with a total maximum pension of £156.0.0 per annum).<sup>34</sup> By June 1916, the Wellington Carpenters and Joiners felt the voluntary system had not failed and would have received a substantial boost if the government had recognised that 4/- per day was a 'beggarly pittance', and increased the pay.<sup>35</sup>

Attempts were made by both governments to boost recruiting. Australian unions felt, because of Hughes' determination to win the war, the government's measures were the precursor to conscription, so they opposed them. Some unions in both countries offered suggestions on how recruiting could be boosted, but the governments failed to accept these. Had the governments of both countries recognised and adopted the unions' suggestions, unions might have been more co-operative later toward the governments' war efforts. These factors were just part of several factors that influenced the unions in their antagonism towards conscription.

In view of the belief of both governments that the voluntary system of enlistment had failed the threat of conscription was now real. The unions were determined to fight their governments on this issue. The issue of equality of sacrifice was now paramount. Having put aside their ideology in order to assist the Empire in its war and the looming spectre of conscription, unionists on both sides of the Tasman demanded their governments conscript the wealth of the nation. They wanted the capitalists to contribute financially to the cost of prosecuting the war, and the governments should legislate to enforce this. The working classes on both sides of the Tasman were volunteering in

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<sup>33</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, February 2, 1916, 4-5. Citing Manifesto from Conference of New Zealand Labour Organisations.

<sup>34</sup> Baker, 37.

<sup>35</sup> Wellington Carpenters and Joiners (Hereinafter referred to as Wellington Carpenters), Minutes, June 1, 1916, no page number. MS-Group-0414 89-317-10/05. Alexander Turnbull Library (Hereinafter referred to as ATL).

large numbers to fight the war but the unions believed capitalists were not doing their share. To conscript wealth would have provided, in the eyes of the unionists, equality of sacrifice. Unionists had sacrificed their lives at the front to save the wealth of the capitalists. By conscripting the wealth of the nation provision could have been made for the soldiers and their dependants. This inequality of sacrifice remained in the minds of the unionists and was one of the factors that prompted them to fight the introduction of conscription.

Ian Turner, in his book *Industrial Labour and Politics* shares this view with respect to Australian unions, with the qualification that they only held out for equality until conscription became an issue in July 1916.<sup>36</sup> But this is not the case, even after conscription became the issue unions still demanded equality of sacrifice and it was one of the factors which influenced their fight against it.

Those unionists who volunteered were prepared to fight for their country in the war against the imperial regimes of Germany and Austria. They were the ones being maimed or killed, and while they did not necessarily want the capitalists to enlist, they did want them to sacrifice their wealth to assist the government in the prosecution of the war. Capitalists were having their savings defended by the worker.<sup>37</sup> This prompted a series of resolutions throughout the country calling for conscription of wealth. The unions demanded this as a fair way of equalising the sacrifices made by the working classes. The president of the LCN, E.J. Kavanagh, said on January 21, 1915:

Notwithstanding the hardships many of the workers are at present suffering, there is no complaint against the Empire for being at war, but ... we, as workers, are called upon to bear more than our fair share of the Empire's burdens. The employer, as soon as business slackens, reduces his hands, or, where it is possible, their wages, evidently being of the opinion that profit is something too sacred to be touched.<sup>38</sup>

Unions believed one way of overcoming the capitalists' failure to sacrifice their wealth was to impose a tax on it, by way of an income tax. There was no income tax levied at this time; income tax would impose a sacrifice on the capitalists, but an in-

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<sup>36</sup> Turner, 99.

<sup>37</sup> J.M. Main, ed, *Conscription: The Australian Debate, 1901-1970*, (North Melbourne: Cassell Australia, 1970), 32.

<sup>38</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 22, 1915, 10.

come tax bill was not assented to until October 1915.<sup>39</sup> At the January 1915 convention of the AWU it was agreed that the Federal government should finance the war out of revenue by raising an income tax<sup>40</sup> on the wealthy classes. The rich had been telling the workers to go to the front so it would be fair that they forfeited a fair amount of their incomes to pay for the war.<sup>41</sup> The war had been brought about by capitalism; the worker expended his life, therefore the capitalist should relinquish some of his profits to finance the war.<sup>42</sup> This would, in the view of the AWU, overcome the inequality of sacrifice.

To ease the burden for the dependants of fallen soldiers the MTHC sought the establishment of a widows and children's pension fund. This was a major issue for the unions, and one that created hostility toward the government for its failure to adequately provide for dependants. It was also to increase the unions' resolve to fight conscription. The MTHC resolved, on May 13, 1915, a deputation wait upon the prime minister requesting early consideration of the establishment of such a fund.<sup>43</sup> Scott in *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918* writes that the minister of defence suggested such a fund probably would be established by way of patriotic funds.<sup>44</sup> This would effectively absolve the government of any responsibility. A subsequent meeting on February 3, 1916, called for a deputation to wait upon the acting prime minister to urge the ministry to place before parliament the question of a tax on war profits. Unions believed a War Profits Tax would enable the government to increase the soldiers pay from 6/- to 10/- per day and make adequate provision in the event of their permanent disablement.<sup>45</sup> But the government did nothing, at this time, in response to the union demands. (It was not until December 1916 that Hughes said provision was being made for a wealth tax to pay the costs of repatriation. It was not until

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<sup>39</sup> *Australian Parliamentary Debates*, Volume LXXIX, 6th. Parliament, First Session, September 9, 1915 to September 14, 1916, 6941, 6945

<sup>40</sup> The Government considered Income Tax on 18<sup>th</sup>. August 1915 and the Bill was assented to October 27, 1915. *Australian Parliamentary Debates*, Volumes LXXVIII, July 1915 to September 1915, 5845, and LXXIX, September 9, 1915 to September 14, 1916, 6941, 6945.

<sup>41</sup> AWU National Convention Report, January 1915, 41-2, Box 154/17; see also Box 117 Record 7 Minute Book of Convention February 12, 1915, 140; also M44 Reel 6, Minute Book of Convention, February 12, 1915, 140. NBA.

<sup>42</sup> Entire Section AWU National Convention Report, January 1915, 41-2, Box 154/17; See also Box 117 Record 7 Minute Book of Convention, February 12, 1915, 140; also M44 Reel 6 Minute Book of Convention February 12, 1915, 140. NBA.

<sup>43</sup> MTHC, Minutes, May 13, 1915, 117.

<sup>44</sup> Scott, 206.

<sup>45</sup> Scott, 206: MTHC, Minutes, February 3, 1916, 183.

August 1917 the Federal government was charged with the responsibility for repatriation).<sup>46</sup>

When the government sought to raise a loan to prosecute the war the MTHC objected. They believed that of all the men who had enlisted, 90% were workers, and prepared to make the supreme sacrifice while the capitalists were not prepared to sacrifice their wealth in order to support the war effort unless they received interest on the monies advanced to the government.<sup>47</sup> The Tasmanian Trades and Labour Council agreed with the MTHC. Its secretary wrote to other trade councils on December 6, 1915, stating: “we want equality of sacrifice as the worker is giving his life the least the rich should do is give their money free of interest. We ask your co-operation and support by bringing this matter before the War Council of your State.”<sup>48</sup> Again, equality of sacrifice was demanded; the rich should give financial support without reward. Equality of sacrifice remained a central part of the unions’ antagonism towards the government for failing to achieve it. This inequality of sacrifice, as the unions saw it, was at the heart of their fight against conscription.

In response to the Tasmanian call, the W.A. Labour Federation in its half yearly report declared the workers of Australia should insist there be no conscription of human life until money has first been made conscript.<sup>49</sup> The Western Branch of the AWU agreed. On January 3, 1916, it decided the government should conscript all wealth in view of the serious financial situation which Australia found itself in due to the war.<sup>50</sup> (The budget deficit had blown out by £4.76 million and Australia borrowed £18 million from Britain to finance the war)<sup>51</sup> The unions were again attempting to exert power over the government, because they believed the government was not doing enough to make the wealthy contribute towards the financing of the war effort; the unions continued to believe the workers were fighting to preserve the wealth of the capitalists, but the government refused to buckle.

In April 1916, the Western Branch of the AWU made a similar decision to the one they made in January but included “utter opposition” to conscription. They also

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<sup>46</sup> Scott, 831-3.

<sup>47</sup> MTHC, Minutes, July 22, 1915, 137.

<sup>48</sup> United Trades and Labour Council S.A. (Hereinafter referred to as UTLC), Minutes, December 17, 1915, 164; New South Wales Labour Council (Hereinafter referred to as LCN), Minutes, December 23, 1915, 185.

<sup>49</sup> *The Australian Worker*, December 9, 1915, 5.

<sup>50</sup> AWU Western Branch, Minute Book, January 3, 1916, 128, Box N117 Record 1482. NBA.

<sup>51</sup> Scott, 480-1. Citing Australian Parliamentary Debates LXXV, 1340.



decided the matter should be discussed by the Executive Council as soon as possible.<sup>52</sup> This attitude was in response to the government's refusal to recognise the various socio/economic factors which the unions had raised.

The United Trades and Labour Council of South Australia (UTLC) debated the matter over a three month period. Eventually, with qualified opposition, they decided conscription of military aged males should not occur until it was clearly shown by the authorities that it was absolutely necessary, and in such case, conscription of wealth first be applied. A referendum of trades' unionists should also be taken to confirm their consent.<sup>53</sup> They subsequently changed their position from qualified opposition to objecting to all forms of conscription of men when the matter was discussed at the Trades and Labour Councils' conference in Hobart.<sup>54</sup> They did, however, remain steadfast in their conviction that wealth should be conscripted.

At a conference sponsored by the MTHC, on May 10, 1916, an anti-conscription executive was appointed. This executive subsequently reported to the MTHC that its position was straight out opposition to the conscription of human life, no compromise on the question of conscription of wealth, an increase of taxation on incomes as a means to fund the war and provide for the dependants of those who serve, and all States to call their respective councils and affiliated bodies and re-affirm their previous resolutions and campaign against conscription at the plebiscite.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the unions' committed stance that wealth should be sacrificed in return for the workers sacrifices at the front, not all members of unions were adamant that equality of sacrifice should be practiced. The NSW Labor Premier, W.A. Holman, had remarked on who should fight and who should stay at home, bringing a reaction from the LCN. At its meeting on August 26, 1915, the council was asked to repudiate the statements made by Mr. Holman that the working classes should go to the firing line and the intellectual section should remain at home. But Holman's views were apparently in accord with those of most of the members of the council because a motion to censure him was lost on the voices.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> AWU Western Branch, Minute Book, April 1-4, 1916, 159, Box N117 Record 1482. NBA.

<sup>53</sup> UTLC, Minutes, February 25, 1916, 188; March 10, 1916, 194; April 7, 1916, 199-200.

<sup>54</sup> UTLC, Minutes, May 6, 1916, 212.

<sup>55</sup> MTHC, Minutes, August 31, 1916, 223.

<sup>56</sup> LCN, Minutes, August 26, 1915, 143.

Australian unions' calls for equality of sacrifice seem to have been ignored by the government. In retaliation the unions sought to obstruct the government's efforts to raise a loan to finance the war unless the wealth of the nation was conscripted, but they failed in this endeavour.

In New Zealand calls for equality of sacrifice were also made. As in Australia, the working classes were volunteering while unionists believed the capitalists were content to sit back and let someone else protect their interests. At the same time, unionists believed these capitalists increased their wealth by increasing prices of everyday commodities. New Zealand unionists, like their Australian counterparts, seized upon this inequality and used it in their fight against conscription. In the national parliament, J.T. Paul, M.P. and president of the Otago Labour Council said:

What right, moral or legal, have you to say to a man, 'You shall give your body to the State' – and I do not care how many pieces of silver you put in the scales weighed against a man's life, the amount will never be enough to make the balance even unless you say to the rich man, 'Your riches are as necessary to the successful prosecution of this war as a man's body'? In the one case we shall force the man to place his life at the disposal of the State, and in the other case we will pay the wealthy man so-much interest for any money we may require from him. ... It would be done under the conscription system, unless you nationalized both men and money.<sup>57</sup>

Paul was reinforcing the majority of the labour movement's contention that the sacrifice of money is as important as the sacrifice of human life.

Later the Otago Trades and Labour Council declared if the government demanded compulsory service and sacrifice of life it should also demand compulsory sacrifice of wealth. Those fighting were fighting to protect wealth; therefore soldiers should be given adequate pay, and ample provision made for the wounded and dependants of the fallen.<sup>58</sup> A conference of New Zealand's labour organisations, in January 1916, decided conscription of a man's wealth was a less serious invasion of personal liberties than the conscription of a man's person. In a struggle for freedom, conscription of wealth must

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<sup>57</sup> New Zealand Parliamentary Debates, September 28, 1915, Vol.174, September 20 – October 12, 1915, 254. ATL.

<sup>58</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, December 15, 1915, 4.

precede the conscription of flesh and blood. These organisations considered this should be fully tried before the conscription of flesh and blood was seriously considered.<sup>59</sup> In other words they wanted equality of sacrifice. Conscription of wealth would enable the government to make better provision for soldiers' pay and benefits for dependants. Following this conference the Wellington Printers and Allied Trades held their annual conference where they discussed the issue of conscription and resolved in similar terms to the Otago Trades and Labour Council.<sup>60</sup>

The general secretary of the Federated Seamen's Union of New Zealand (FSU), W.T. Young, wrote to his counterpart in Australia during May 1916 about conscription:

Massey's political circus opened business on Tuesday, and it's apparent that the leading 'dummy' will be a chap they call 'conscription', not of wealth; oh no, but of humanity, and so the ANZAC'S and HACAN'S under the good old Southern Cross make history while fat stretches himself and soothes his soul (if he ever had one) watching and thinking of 'our' dear boys at the front.<sup>61</sup>

He believed conscription would take the workers to the front while the capitalists stayed at home and continued to increase their wealth.

Equality of sacrifice would only be achieved by the imposition of a 50% tax on war profits, said the Wellington Carpenters. This had been done in England and there was no reason why the same could not occur in New Zealand. (A 45% war profits tax was introduced in New Zealand in 1916, but was discontinued in 1917).<sup>62</sup> The value of exports was greater than in any other country, therefore there was no reason why men should not receive sufficient pay to induce them to volunteer. The imposition of a war tax would enable this to occur.<sup>63</sup>

Different interests viewed the introduction of taxation in different ways. Unions saw it as a means to make the capitalists contribute to the war effort; the capitalists saw it as a means to tax everyone, thus increasing the sacrifice being made by the workers. The New Zealand Farmers Union Dominion Executive, on February 24, 1915, carried

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<sup>59</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, February 2, 1916, 4-5. Citing manifesto from conference of New Zealand labour organisations.

<sup>60</sup> Wellington Printers and Allied Trades, Conference Report, February 21, 1916, 3, MS-Papers-1131 1131-2, ATL.

<sup>61</sup> Letter Young to Cooper, May 1916 (day not shown), 2, MS-Papers-0650 0650-005, ATL.

<sup>62</sup> Baker, 67.

<sup>63</sup> Wellington Carpenters, Minutes, June 1, 1916, no page number, MS-Group-0414 89-317-10/05, ATL.

unanimously the motion of Sir James Wilson and Mr. Birch that a war tax be imposed. It was not intended to be a class tax but was to be levied upon everyone in the Dominion.<sup>64</sup> The annual conference of the New Zealand Farmers Union held on July 28, 1915, confirmed this tax should be levied but in their own interests they strongly objected to any form of export tax.<sup>65</sup> The New Zealand Farmers Union was comprised of wealthy farmers (capitalists) and rather than supporting equality of sacrifice their remedy would only widen the inequality.

In comparison, *The Maoriland Worker* in its issue June 9, 1915, also advocated a war tax, but their proposal was to tax the wealthy and those profiting from the war, as opposed to the New Zealand Farmers Union proposal to tax everyone. Its purpose was to pay an adequate wage to the soldiers and their dependants, and pensions for those incapacitated. To raise sufficient money for the war bill it was proposed a graduated tax would cut into the incomes of the idle wealthy.<sup>66</sup> New Zealand Timber Workers' Federation president, Mr. E. Phelan told the *New Zealand Herald* workers were concerned that better pay for soldiers and war expenditure could not be met unless there was a heavy tax on incomes and war profits.<sup>67</sup> It would appear though, that the heavy tax on incomes only referred to the wealthy because of the proposal for graduated taxation.

Unionists in both countries were adamant that there should have been equality of sacrifice. Why should those who could afford to contribute financially to the war effort have done nothing when the working class sacrificed their lives? A wealth tax or war profits tax would have solved this inequity, and it was to be one of the most contentious factors in the whole conscription debate.

The economic impact of the war on the working classes on both sides of the Tasman greatly disadvantaged them. Wages were frozen and the cost of living escalated during the war. The capitalists were not so disadvantaged; they were able to maintain a greater standard of living than the unionists. The unions' also perceived they engaged in profiteering due to the war. Unionists believed everyone should be disadvantaged

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<sup>64</sup> New Zealand Farmers Union, Dominion Executive Minutes, February 24, 1915, 68-9, MS-Papers-1159 MSY-0237, ATL.

<sup>65</sup> New Zealand Farmers Union, Annual Conference Minutes, July 28, 1915, 97, MS-Papers-1159, MSY-0237, ATL.

<sup>66</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, June 9, 1915, 4; February 2, 1916, 4-5. Citing Manifesto from Conference of New Zealand Labour Organisations.

<sup>67</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, May 5, 1916, 7.

equally, and again this inequality contributed to the unions' resolve in their fight against conscription.

In Australia, unionists and the working class were dealt a blow when wages were frozen at existing levels from November 30, 1914. Justice Heydon of the Arbitration Court declared that "wages boards for the time being were not to consider applications for increased wages, unless in special cases."<sup>68</sup> This was re-iterated by Justice Edmunds in March 1915. As discussed in chapter 1, the unions had fought hard to gain a satisfactory wage structure through the arbitration system, and now their wages would be eroded by the freeze. Blackburn says the worker's cherished standard of living was reduced.<sup>69</sup>

Dependants of those men serving were disadvantaged by the reduction in income coming into the household. They were further deprived if the breadwinner was killed or maimed. Adding to these disadvantages was the continually increasing cost of living, and the government's refusal to act to ease the burden for the workers. To the unionists this was another case of inequality of sacrifice. The employers and the wealthy did not have to rely on the wages boards and were able to maintain their lifestyle.

In December 1914, the Chief Commissioner for Railways (NSW) applied to the Arbitration Court to stop the regular wage increments provided for in awards for railway workers. Five unions with members working in the rail and tramway system objected.<sup>70</sup> The matter was remitted to the Wages Board for decision. In the meantime the Court suspended all increments until the final decision of the Wages Board was known.<sup>71</sup> In response to the Court's decision the president of the Railway Workers' and General Labourers' Association of New South Wales, at their annual conference, denounced the Arbitration Court's decision to suspend wage increases. Despite the suspension of wage increases, the union believed, employers, merchants, and middlemen who dealt in the necessary commodities had raised the price of practically all commodities. This was despite the existence of the Necessary Commodities Control Committee. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on January 5, 1915, that the wages of labour during the previous five months had effectively been reduced by at least 25% due to the

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<sup>68</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 26, 1915, 4; March 27, 1915, 18.

<sup>69</sup> Blackburn, 9.

<sup>70</sup> Amalgamated Railway and Tramway Association, The Locomotive Engine-drivers, Firemen, and Cleaners Association, Tramway Employees Union, The Railway and Tramway Officers Association, The Railway and General Labourers Association, *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 9, 1914, 8.

<sup>71</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 12, 1914, 10.

spiralling cost of living.<sup>72</sup> The value of the workers' wage had shrunk and continued to do so.<sup>73</sup>

At the LCN meeting on January 21, 1915, the view of the president, Mr. E.J. Kavanagh M.L.C., was that the future prospects for the worker were not bright, due to the war and the restrictions it imposed. Thousands of workers and their families suffered severely through the loss of wages and the high cost of the necessities of life.<sup>74</sup> Conversely, employers believed employees must not get wage increases because the country was at war.<sup>75</sup> Unions were not allowed to submit claims for increases to the Arbitration Court, as wages had to remain stationary until the war was over, but prices could be increased thereby reducing purchasing power.<sup>76</sup>

In January 1915, due to political pressure from the unions, some relaxation of the declarations of Justices Heydon and Edmunds was made. Effective February 1, 1915, all applications were to be dealt with on their merits. The state of things and the effect of the war on industry and community, as they currently existed, were to be considered. Existing awards suspended under the declaration continued in suspension until an appeal could be heard. Government employees did not benefit from the relaxation because of an earlier judgement, but they could submit special circumstances for a claim to be heard.<sup>77</sup> As a result of this relaxation wages did increase, but only by 12% for males and 8% for females, during the total period of the war.<sup>78</sup> The reduced value of the workers' earnings, the high cost of living and government inaction were additional factors that later caused the unions to fight the government on conscription.

The trades unions wanted the Federal government to control prices, but a request to Prime Minister Fisher was rejected on the grounds the Commonwealth did not have the power to do so. The Commonwealth government preferred that individual state governments regulate prices.<sup>79</sup> In the absence of any government action to alleviate the hardships suffered by the workers, the LCN decided a deputation wait upon the government to request the Arbitration Act be amended to provide that the cost of living applied to all awards.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 5, 1915, 10.

<sup>73</sup> Blackburn, 11.

<sup>74</sup> LCN, Minutes, January 21, 1915, 51; *Sydney Morning Herald* January 21, 1915, 10.

<sup>75</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 22, 1915, 10.

<sup>76</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 22, 1915, 10.

<sup>77</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 26, 1915, 4.

<sup>78</sup> Scott, 665.

<sup>79</sup> Turner, 76.

<sup>80</sup> LCN, Minutes, March 9, 1916, 210.

The problem was not confined to the eastern seaboard. It was felt across Australia. In early March 1915, Western Australia's Labour Federation Council effectively broke the industrial truce when it recommended all unions apply immediately for pay increases due to the pronounced increase in the cost of living.<sup>81</sup> In Broken Hill, members of the Hotel, Club, and Restaurant Employees' Union sought a conference with the Hotelkeepers' Association regarding their wages which was before the Wages Board. If the Hotelkeepers' Association refused to recognise the old log of claims, and failed to withdraw their proposal for a new log, they would call out all employees in those premises which did not consent, in writing, that the old log be maintained and made the ruling rate by the Wages Board for the district.<sup>82</sup>

Australian unionists were not satisfied with the decision to freeze the wages they had fought for in the arbitration system, and although no strike action resulted they did register their displeasure. Failure by the government to act in this regard only served to antagonise the unionists. By exerting political pressure the unions were able to have the wages freeze discontinued in 1916.<sup>83</sup> But this only brought a small increase, nowhere near enough to cover the spiralling cost of living.

In tandem with fixed wages, and later, minimal increases, the cost of living continued to increase during the war.<sup>84</sup> Basic commodities increased in price almost on a weekly basis. Unionists believed the increased cost of living was due to profiteering by the capitalists. Citing W. Wallis in *Labor Call*, Turner contends the unionists clung to the belief it was the "hogs of society, the exploiting rascals of the peoples' everyday food trading on misfortune and making the poor pay the bill."<sup>85</sup> Turner intimates this was backed by the labour propagandists saying the food producers had a desire to corner supplies of some essential commodities to profiteer in the rising world market.<sup>86</sup> Scott on the other hand suggests the major cause was the drought creating a scarcity of

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<sup>81</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 13, 1915, 17.

<sup>82</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 20, 1915, 18.

<sup>83</sup> Turner, 83.

<sup>84</sup> Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia 1901-1917, Number 11 of 1918*, (Melbourne: McCarron Bird & Co., 1918), 1151,1154,1157; Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, *Labour and Industrial Branch Report No.8*, (Melbourne: McCarron Bird & Co., 1918), 26-7; See also Blackburn, 11.

<sup>85</sup> Turner, 76. Citing W. Wallis, *Labor Call*, July 13, 1915.

<sup>86</sup> Turner, 76-7.

foodstuff.<sup>87</sup> Scott may be correct; however, the only union body to include the drought as a cause of the spiralling prices was the Western Australian Labour Federation. Regardless of Scott's assertions, unions had already decided the capitalists were exploiting them.

Within a year of the outbreak of war some commodities had doubled in price.<sup>88</sup> Scott contends there was no large scale profiteering, and that different causes contributed to increased prices of different commodities.<sup>89</sup> However unions at the time were not convinced that profiteering was not taking place. The longer the war dragged on and wages failed to keep abreast of price increases and the government seemingly failed to address the problem, the more antagonistic the unions became towards the government and any plans to implement conscription.

The price of bread had increased by 50% in some places in less than twelve months, and continued to rise.<sup>90</sup> In January 1915, the price of meat in some cases was dearer than that exported to London. In the Necessary Commodities Commission in NSW, Mr. C.F. Tindall, grazier and meatworks proprietor, said: "The war is the primary cause of high prices, and the scarcity of meat in England and America."<sup>91</sup> There was apparently no shortage of meat in Australia; in evidence of which it was being shipped to Britain, but the suppliers were selling at prices which suggested to the unions there was profiteering. The LCN decided a deputation protesting the increased price of meat would wait upon the government,<sup>92</sup> but the government failed to take any action after the deputation presented its case. However, at a subsequent meeting Premier Holman and several ministers addressed the council and briefly outlined what the government intended to do with regard to food prices, but as prices continued to rise it appears there was little action taken.<sup>93</sup>

Butter producers found by exporting to Melbourne they received higher prices. This led to shortages in NSW, with many shopkeepers unable to supply their customers.<sup>94</sup> The unions believed profiteering was occurring. The high prices demanded in Melbourne were due to exporting butter to the Western States; "A large number of or-

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<sup>87</sup> Scott, 633.

<sup>88</sup> Scott, 633.

<sup>89</sup> Scott, 654.

<sup>90</sup> Scott, 633.

<sup>91</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 28, 1915, 5; February 9, 1915, 10.

<sup>92</sup> LCN, Minutes, January 21, 1915, 51; *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 22, 1915, 10.

<sup>93</sup> LCN, Minutes, March 4, 1915, 69-70.

<sup>94</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 10, 1915, 14.



ders have been telegraphed from the Western States to Melbourne lately for supplies of butter to be shipped at once, irrespective of price.”<sup>95</sup> This not only affected Melbourne prices but also those in Queensland, NSW and the Western States. This again, to the unions, suggested profiteering. The LCN requested the state government fix the price of butter on parity with London prices and immediately stop speculative holding-up of butter beyond this price. A deputation waited upon the government to convey this message,<sup>96</sup> but the deputation appears to have failed to convince the government. The price of butter increased again within days,<sup>97</sup> causing the government to finally intervene, and fix the price.<sup>98</sup>

In Perth, the Labour Federation called a meeting of all affiliated unions to discuss a campaign for higher wages to offset the increased cost of living. The commercial community put up the price of goods on the slightest pretext, often without justification. Each increase in the cost of commodities had been passed on to consumers. The workers found not only did it cost more to live, but due to the war and drought, their means of livelihood had become more precarious.<sup>99</sup>

Justifications for the unions’ claims are substantiated by the following figures from the Commonwealth statistician, G.H. Knibbs, and published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In Australia, since 1911, the cost of living had increased by 14% to the end of 1914. Groceries were 6.2% higher, dairy produce 10.8%, meat 32.3% and house rents 13.5%.<sup>100</sup> A further increase of 6¼ % in the cost of living had occurred to the end of February 1915,<sup>101</sup> and continued to rise.

The LCN, by June 1915, had had enough. They decided to circularise all Labor Ministers of Federal Parliament alerting them to the difficulties experienced by the workers in those times of dear food. They requested them to insist duties on foodstuffs be removed where their removal would not affect employment.<sup>102</sup> High prices still persisted by August 1915. A deputation from the LCN waited on the government,<sup>103</sup> but the government failed to take any action on behalf of the unions. As a result the LCN

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<sup>95</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 12, 1915, 8; April 14, 1915, 12.

<sup>96</sup> LCN, Minutes, March 11, 1915, 73; March 25, 1915, 79-80; *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 19, 1915, 7.

<sup>97</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 25, 1915, 7.

<sup>98</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 5, 1915, 6.

<sup>99</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 1, 1915, 5.

<sup>100</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 8, 1915, 10. Citing Commonwealth Statistician G.H. Knibbs.

<sup>101</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, April 1, 1915, 12. Citing Commonwealth Statistician G.H. Knibbs.

<sup>102</sup> LCN, Minutes, June 24, 1915, 114-5.

<sup>103</sup> LCN, Minutes, August 5, 1915, 132-3.

decided, in March 1916, the matter should be referred to the Necessary Commodities Commission. The government should also be asked to extend the powers of that commission enabling it to fix the cost of living. The Arbitration Act should be amended to provide the cost of living, when ascertained, be applied to all awards.<sup>104</sup>

Hughes at last in 1916 made some attempt to reduce the cost of living. Under the War Precautions Act the prices of sugar and flour were regulated.<sup>105</sup> But by now it was too late; the government was too slow responding to the calls of the labour movement and it had lost the goodwill of the working class. In a climate where the connection between conscription and the government's action in other domains was under scrutiny, this did not help its argument for conscription.

On March 29, 1917, the MTHC decided it should investigate the causes of the ever increasing cost of living. The increases nullified to a great extent the wage increases won by the workers. It also decided to appoint a committee to enquire and investigate the matter.<sup>106</sup> The Wharf Labourers Union in Victoria attempted to bring down the price of food. The MTHC supported them. As a result they instructed the executive to at once call a conference of the unions concerned to discuss the necessary steps to bring down the prices of food supplies.<sup>107</sup>

The high cost of living remained a concern for the trades unions to the end of the war. J.R.D. Douglas, in his thesis on the effects of the war on New Zealand's working class draws a comparison of the cost of living, and states the cost of living in Australia had risen by 30% between 1914 and 1918,<sup>108</sup> although Scott, the official historian, says the increase was more than 71%.<sup>109</sup> Regardless of the disputed figures the increase in wages during the same period, 12% for male workers and 8% for females,<sup>110</sup> was not enough to offset the cost of living increase. The evidence shows the rising prices and the government's inaction to stabilise the cost of living was a major factor that caused Australian unions to be more determined to fight any attempt by the Australian government to implement any form of conscription. Unions felt the government had failed

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<sup>104</sup> LCN, Minutes, March 9, 1916, 209-11.

<sup>105</sup> Turner, 81.

<sup>106</sup> MTHC, Minutes, March 29, 1917, 265.

<sup>107</sup> MTHC, Minutes, August 2, 1917, 289.

<sup>108</sup> J.R.D. Douglas, "World War One and its Effects on the Working Class in New Zealand, 1914-1919." (Dip. Arts Thesis, University of Otago, 1990), 36. (Citing J.B. Condliffe, 'N.Z. during the war', *Economic Journal*, 29, 1919, 170-1).

<sup>109</sup> Scott, 634. Citing Labour Bulletin, 1919, No number, No page number.

<sup>110</sup> Scott, 665.

to support them, therefore why should they support the government in its quest to implement conscription.

New Zealand unions, unlike their Australian counterparts, agreed to leave wages at the levels existing at the outbreak of war. They decided not to bring any cases for higher wages before the Arbitration Court for the duration of the war. They wished to do their share in the fight against the Germans.<sup>111</sup> Unions promised not to strike and labour leaders assured the government of their loyalty.<sup>112</sup> But they were unaware the cost of living would escalate at a rate that outstripped wages. To offset the wages freeze and the high cost of living a 10% War Bonus was introduced.

The Wellington Carpenters believed the government was tacitly a consenting party to the high cost of living.<sup>113</sup> This is not surprising given that the bulk of the government were capitalists supporting, or involved in, the farming industry. (Prime Minister Massey was a farmer.) Baker, citing *The Dominion*, says Massey claimed economic laws could not be interfered with, and the producers were just taking advantage of these laws.<sup>114</sup> Oliver contends the farmer received marked advantages from the war. Britain brought all they could produce and the market was guaranteed.<sup>115</sup> Massey condoned this by saying the farmers had the right to take advantage of the market.<sup>116</sup> *The Maoriland Worker* stated “food pirates pursue their robbery of the people.”<sup>117</sup> Baker contends that imperial requisitioning and profiteering were responsible for the disparity between workers and others, a point on which Oliver agrees.<sup>118</sup> Given Massey’s comments it is not difficult to conclude there was a certain amount of profiteering, which the government did nothing to stop, thus the working class was disadvantaged. The unions had agreed not to pursue any wage increases but the government was blatantly condoning profiteering by the capitalists.

In January 1915, the price of bread was raised and there were no guarantees the price would not increase further. The government had approved an increase in the price of flour in excess of 30%. *The Maoriland Worker* claimed as there was no shortage of flour in New Zealand the price was increased as a piece of “economic bushranging”.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, April 7, 1915, 1. See also Baker, 68.

<sup>112</sup> Baker, 19.

<sup>113</sup> Wellington Carpenters, Minutes, June 1, 1916, no page number, MS-Group-0414 89-317-10/05, ATL.

<sup>114</sup> Baker, 67. Citing *The Dominion*, June 23, 1916.

<sup>115</sup> Baker, 67; Oliver, 168, 171.

<sup>116</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, December 8, 1915, 2.

<sup>117</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, June 9, 1915, 4.

<sup>118</sup> Baker, 67.

<sup>119</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, December 23, 1914, 4.

Massey's laws of economics were in operation. But the unions wanted the government to stabilise prices. Failure to do so meant inequality for the workers, and this contributed to the workers fight against any government attempt to introduce conscription.

The country knew little of shortages of necessities,<sup>120</sup> but day by day the cost of living increased, making it harder for the average working-class family to live on ordinary wages. The prices of various commodities were steadily raised. Oatmeal, wheat and other staples were increase by almost 100%. Butter, of which there was ample supply, had an abnormally high price. The government failed to act in regard to these price increases.<sup>121</sup> Dairy produce and meat had been commandeered by the government on behalf of Britain. Shortages of this produce in Britain enabled the New Zealand government to obtain higher prices than normal, resulting in producers passing high prices on to the domestic market.<sup>122</sup> The government should have controlled prices for the domestic market, while still obtaining the best price overseas, in order to appease the workers and circumvent any adverse reaction from the unions in the event conscription was introduced.

On September 23, 1915, in the national parliament, Mr. P.C. Webb M.P. and unionist, expressed concern at the high cost of living. He claimed that the capitalist members of parliament thought the war was sufficient justification for them to grow richer at the expense of the ordinary people; they should show their patriotism to New Zealand by reducing the cost of living.<sup>123</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, on December 15, 1915, published part of an Otago Trades and Labour Council manifesto which stated:

THE CONTINUED INCREASES IN THE NECESSARIES OF LIFE ARE  
LOWERING WAGES. ...EVERY INCREASE OF PRICES MEANS A  
REDUCED STANDARD OF LIVING FOR THE MASSES.<sup>124</sup>

The cost of living in New Zealand during the period 1914 to 1918 rose by 38%.<sup>125</sup> The government did not act to address this. The working class were suffering

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<sup>120</sup> Oliver, 161.

<sup>121</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, June 9, 1915, 4.

<sup>122</sup> Oliver, 171.

<sup>123</sup> New Zealand Parliamentary Debates, Vol 174, September 20 – October 12, 1915, 146. ATL.

<sup>124</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, December 15, 1915, 4. "The workers sovereign is ever diminishing in the amount of goods it will purchase ... the people of New Zealand are suffering from high prices as they have never suffered before. And the Government, which is called a National Government, is doing nothing."

more from the high cost of living than the capitalists; the government's inaction to rectify the situation increased union animosity toward the government, and, it is considered this contributed to their refusal to accept conscription. The cost of living far outweighed the 10% war bonus and like their Australian counterparts New Zealand unionists increased their antagonism against any move by the government to introduce conscription.

The governments of Australia and New Zealand, through their inaction to address the unions' concerns over wages and the cost of living, added to the hostility of the labour movements. The perceived support for the capitalists, to make greater profits through the war, contributed to the unionists' belief the governments would not address the equality of sacrifice demanded by the unionists. As a consequence, antagonism toward their governments increased and any attempt to introduce conscription would be fought.

In Australia and New Zealand, governments and some employers dismissed men from their occupation during the war. In order to support themselves and their families, these men enlisted. This practice was known to the unions as economic conscription, and was a further instance of the perceived inequality, which heightened the unionists' resolve to fight conscription. Australian coal miners in the western area of NSW were dismissed from the mines. The government had seized the whole of the wheat production and stored it at railway stations, effectively reducing the amount of coal required by the railways. Dismissed miners volunteered for military service in order to maintain income for themselves and their families.<sup>126</sup> Turner confirms this, stating NSW Premier Holman advocated the use of economic factors to encourage recruiting.<sup>127</sup> F.B. Smith is more specific, saying Holman requested eligible's be discharged from employment and forced to enlist.<sup>128</sup> This gave workers another reason to think that conscription was tied to socio-economic issues. By March 1916 the NSW State government had dispensed with the services of 5405 workers. A further 40,968 were relegated to part time work.<sup>129</sup> Similar conditions appear to have occurred in Western Australia. In that State the Premier stated the Civil Service had to be reduced or the hours of work reduced.

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<sup>125</sup> Government of New Zealand, *The New Zealand Official Year Book* 1919, (Wellington: Marcus. M. Marks, 1919), 786; Douglas, 36. Both Douglas and Condliffe quote 34% increase in the cost of living.

<sup>126</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 16, 1915, 16

<sup>127</sup> Turner, 164.

<sup>128</sup> F.B. Smith, 21.

<sup>129</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 26, 1915, 5.

The council of the Civil Servants Association accepted the reduction of hours.<sup>130</sup> But was this the end? Apparently not, for at the 1916 national convention of the AWU Jack Cullinan opposed conscription. He believed men were being dismissed from Federal works for the sole purpose of forcing them to enlist.<sup>131</sup>

In New Zealand economic pressure was also being brought to bear to force workers to enlist. The Trade Unions' Congress, held on July 8, 1915, raised the question of the refusal to admit legitimate workers of good character to the 'Arbitration Unions'. It appeared to the congress that this action was supported by the government. It was considered that hundreds of honest workers were being denied the right to live. Was this a move to force men to enlist in order to survive? The congress apparently thought this to be the case. It believed, rather, that the matter of enlistment was an individual responsibility. No unionist should be dictated to as to whether he should enlist. *The Maoriland Worker* claimed employers were willing to sacrifice workers in the war, but they were not prepared to go themselves.<sup>132</sup>

There were divisions within the unions on the issue of conscription. There were big issues at stake, and as with all large bodies of people there is always an element that disagrees with the bulk of the membership. The trades' union movement, in Australia and New Zealand, during the period of the war was no different. Not only were there differences between unions, there were also differences within unions over the question of conscription.

In Australia, the MTHC meeting on July 8, 1915, discussed the prospect of urging the organised workers to oppose compulsory military and naval service outside the territory of Australia as existed in 1901. They further urged that the Federal government acquire 10% of the wealth of every inhabitant to establish heavy artillery and submarine works.<sup>133</sup> The council failed to adopt the measures. Did this mean they no longer supported opposition to conscription? Did they mean to tax all inhabitants? Their resolution of July 22, 1915, which was adopted, says it was just and reasonable to expect that those who were able to finance the country (capitalists) should do so.<sup>134</sup> But what about conscription? It appears through the defeat of the earlier motion they might have sup-

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<sup>130</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 22, 1915, 8.

<sup>131</sup> AWU, Convention Report January 27, 1916, 10, Box E154/17 1916, NBA; see also *The Australian Worker*, February 10, 1916, 1.

<sup>132</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, July 17, 1915, 6.

<sup>133</sup> MTHC, Minutes, July 8, 1915, 132.

<sup>134</sup> MTHC, Minutes, July 22, 1915, 137.

ported conscription but changed sides later. Scott believes some unions disguised their opposition to conscription by professing to support it subject to a vague condition.<sup>135</sup> But we find later the MTHC was strong in its opposition to conscription.

The LCN considered compulsory military service on January 6, 1916, together with bringing wealth under conscription. The meeting was adjourned before a vote could be taken, but it was again raised at the meeting of January 13, 1916, where a resolution against conscription, unless there was corresponding conscription of wealth, was defeated 65 votes to 36. The following week a request was made for the matter to be raised again, but was refused by 71 votes to 40.<sup>136</sup> Not only did the council differ from the bulk of unions; there was certainly no unanimous acceptance of the decision, but it vindicates the claim by H. Vivash that the rank and file did not object to conscription.

Writing to the editor of *The Australian Worker*, the former secretary of the Victorian Branch of the Railway Workers Union, H. Vivash, pointed to the inconsistencies in the union movement's argument regarding conscription. Compulsion was practiced by the unions in gaining the membership of non-unionists. Conscription as advocated was not along Continental lines. This was a scare tactic being employed by *The Australian Worker*. Compulsory service was only for the duration of the war. He believed the majority of the rank and file did not subscribe to the objection to conscription of men. They also did not, in his opinion, subscribe to conscription of wealth.<sup>137</sup> Scott states; if a vote were taken of the rank and file of the entire movement (Labor Party) there would be an undoubted demand for conscription. Men who contacted labour organisations appear to have believed the same but with the proviso there also was conscription of wealth.<sup>138</sup>

The NSW Branch of the Australian Journalists Association was evenly split on the issue of conscription. Meeting on June 29, 1916, it was moved the association pledge themselves to follow the government in whatever course it took in the conduct of the war. The chairman ruled the motion out of order but the matter was discussed, and was defeated by the narrowest of margins.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Scott, 336.

<sup>136</sup> LCN, Minutes, January 6, 1916, 188; January 13, 1916, 190-1; January 20, 1916, 194.

<sup>137</sup> *The Australian Worker*, May 11, 1916, 18.

<sup>138</sup> Scott, 335-6.

<sup>139</sup> Australian Journalists Association New South Wales Branch, Minutes of Special Meeting June 29, 1916, No page number, Box N59 Record 42, NBA.

The Sydney Wharf Labourers Union appears to have been divided on the issue of conscription. When the Anti-conscription League canvassed them, on August 9, 1916, for a donation for the fight against conscription it was moved an amount of five pounds be donated. The chairman (McCristal) refused to accept the resolution. It would appear that the earlier WWF decision (December 21, 1915) to support the government in its endeavours toward the war was adopted by the chairman. There was dissent from the chairman's ruling and a resolution to that effect was carried 28 votes to 20 votes. After much discussion, over two meetings and an amendment, it was again moved that five pounds be donated. Messrs Hughes [P.M.], Kerr, and McCristal stated they were not in favour, but the motion was adopted with the amount to be paid 6 months hence; the chairman, however, refused to accept it.<sup>140</sup> It appears the majority of members of the union, at this point, remained steadfast in their opposition to conscription. However, when the union met again on August 16, 1916, it was moved to rescind the motion regarding the donation. After discussion the motion for the adoption (from the previous meeting) was carried 46 votes to 23 votes. A division was called resulting in 50 votes for, 35 against.<sup>141</sup> There were divisions in the union on the question of conscription. At the same meeting correspondence from the Anti-conscription League was tabled, asking the union what action it was prepared to adopt to oppose the introduction of conscription. The correspondence was consigned to the waste paper bin.<sup>142</sup>

New Zealand unions were not free from division either. Whilst the majority of unions were against conscription there were some in favour and some who would favour it if the voluntary system failed to produce enough enlistments. The Eden Branch of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners placed on record their support for conscription. It was, according to them, the only way to make each man shoulder his responsibilities.<sup>143</sup> The Engine-drivers, Firemen, and Cleaners Association, however, were in favour of voluntary enlistment, but if the time came when there were not sufficient volunteers, a form of compulsion could not be objected to. They felt if the country had to adopt conscription to break the Prussian military spirit it was the right and proper thing to do.<sup>144</sup> The New Zealand Timber Workers Federation president, Mr. E. Phelan, told the *New Zealand Herald* his federation affirmed the principle of con-

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<sup>140</sup> Sydney Wharf Labourers Union Minutes, August 9, 1916, 214-6, Entire section, Microfilm M70 Reel 2, NBA.

<sup>141</sup> Sydney Wharf Labourers Union Minutes, August 16, 1916, 219, Microfilm M70 Reel 2, NBA.

<sup>142</sup> Sydney Wharf Labourers Union Minutes, August 16, 1916, 220, Microfilm M70 Reel 2, NBA.

<sup>143</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, December 7, 1915, 9.

<sup>144</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, February 10, 1916, 8.



scription. National necessity demanded a bill compelling all eligible men to enlist and should be put on the Statute Book without delay.<sup>145</sup> These three unions all demonstrate they were willing to accept conscription despite the majority stand against it.

On both sides of the Tasman, not all unions were in agreement with the majority. In Australia there was confusion within unions as to where their allegiances lay, while some New Zealand unions advocated conscription.

Unions in Australia and New Zealand took political action against their governments when support on socio-economic issues was not forthcoming. They decided to fight the imposition of conscription. As noted earlier, on both sides of the Tasman, conscription was the most contentious issue, but it was fundamentally shaped by other factors. Some of them have already been dealt with in this chapter. Others will arise in the following chapter. These issues served to intensify the mood of unionists against what they perceived to be government inaction to support them in their claims on economic issues. Hence, they were not prepared to accede to their government on the issue of conscription.

Australian unions believed they had the support of the Labor government. They supported the government, so, to them it seemed fundamental government support would be forthcoming when the issue of conscription was raised. But Hughes had changed his position toward conscription. When conscription emerged as the government's final option to boost recruiting the unions were determined to fight until conscription was laid to rest.

The question of conscription was first raised in Australian union circles before the War Census Act and the recruiting scheme that followed. *The Australian Worker* started its campaign against conscription on May 9, 1915, printing an old quote by Sir Ian Hamilton (Commander in Chief at Gallipoli), who was against conscription. He felt it might be possible to implement conscription in peacetime, but during a time of war only a dictator could implement it.<sup>146</sup> The following week the same publication, under the banner "Shall Australians be forced to fight?" had a further quote from Sir Ian. He would not have conscription at any price.<sup>147</sup> On the same page of this issue, Attorney General Hughes, when introducing the War Census Bill,<sup>148</sup> said:

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<sup>145</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, May 5, 1916, 7.

<sup>146</sup> *The Australian Worker*, May 9, 1915, 5.

<sup>147</sup> *The Australian Worker*, May 16, 1915, 1.

<sup>148</sup> The War Census Act was proclaimed in July 1915.

The Bill is not for the purpose of conscription for service either in Australia or abroad. In no circumstances would I agree to send men out of the country to fight against their will.<sup>149</sup>

This was a similar sentiment to that expressed by Prime Minister Andrew Fisher. But despite these assurances, Hughes, later as prime minister, advocated conscription in both Canada and Britain when he visited them in early 1916. *The Australian Worker* reminded its readers of Hughes' support for conscription by publishing the following:

On four different occasions Mr. Hughes has submitted motions in Parliament for adult conscription in Australia (see 1907 Hansard page 1282 and for further particulars see leaflet 'Facts about Conscription'). It must not be forgotten that there is still an undealt-with motion advocating conscription awaiting the Senates attention.<sup>150</sup>

The Universal Service League called for compulsory military service in September 1915. Many prominent union leaders spoke against the proposition.<sup>151</sup> Voluntary recruits were coming forward in such numbers that the government was unable to equip them. There was no need for absolute conscription at that time according to T.W. Furse, general secretary of the Australasian Meat Employees Union, and an office bearer of the Universal Service League.<sup>152</sup>

In responding to the call for conscription, Prime Minister Andrew Fisher said:

As to conscription, I am irrevocably opposed to it ...before anything in the nature of a change is proposed, the people to whom the members of the Ministry

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<sup>149</sup> *The Australian Worker*, May 16, 1915, 1. See also Hansard July 22, 1915, 5066.

<sup>150</sup> *The Australian Worker*, April 20, 1916, 4. (Quoting Thomas J Miller of the Australian Freedom League)

<sup>151</sup> E. Grayndler (AWU), W. O'Neill (Labor Council NSW), E.J. Kavanagh (Labor Council NSW), S.J. Stanbridge (Typographical Assoc.), W. Rosser (Railway Workers and General Labourers), J. Hampton (Boilermakers), H.A. Mitchell (Fed. Engine-drivers and Firemen), J.W. Doyle (Eight Hours Cmttee), A.E. Johns (Timber workers), J. Pemberton (Storemen and Packers), P.J. Loughman (Shop Assistants Union), and W. O'Connor (Coal Lumpers). Source *The Australian Worker*, September 16, 1915, 5.

<sup>152</sup> *The Australian Worker*, September 23, 1915, 5.

owe their positions, will be given the opportunity of expressing their opinions on the subject.<sup>153</sup>

This was an indication a plebiscite of the electors would be held before any commitment was made. Hughes made a similar statement to the Brisbane Industrial Council deputation who waited on him in December 1915,<sup>154</sup> and in keeping with his statement the issue was put to the electorate in 1916 and again in 1917.

The LCN decided at its meeting on September 23, 1915, to discuss the question of conscription at its next meeting. After much discussion it was moved: "That this Council is opposed to any form of compulsory service of life, health and limb that does not first of all bring wealth under conscription."<sup>155</sup> It was carried on the voices. This was in direct contrast to what Scott says: that unions purport to support conscription subject to a vague condition such as conscription of wealth.<sup>156</sup> This certainly was a strong rebuff of conscription, and strong support for conscription of wealth.

When the Military Service Act was introduced in Britain *The Australian Worker* in its issue of January 6, 1916, printed a warning to the union movement:

The ruling class have seized upon the pretext of the war to rivet the chains of conscription upon the British workers and rob them of a precious heritage of freedom. Capitalism has struck no viler blow at our race than this. Emboldened by the success of the enemies of the people in England, we may expect that further efforts will be made by the corresponding gang in Australia to turn this country into a nation of servile soldiers. The organised workers of Australia must be on their guard. Capitalism is unscrupulous enough to take advantage of their patriotic fervour, and forge it into a weapon with which to strike them down.<sup>157</sup>

*The Australian Worker* was running a powerful anti-conscription campaign, alongside the union movement, to encourage the workers to resist any attempt to introduce conscription in Australia.

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<sup>153</sup> *The Australian Worker*, September 30, 1915, 15. Did this statement stick in Hughes' sub-conscious mind bringing him to the decision to call a plebiscite on conscription?

<sup>154</sup> Jauncey, 121.

<sup>155</sup> LCN, Minutes, September 23, 1915, 152-3; September 30, 1915, 155-7.

<sup>156</sup> Scott, 336.

<sup>157</sup> *The Australian Worker*, January 6, 1916, 1.

The 1916 AWU convention absolutely opposed the principle of conscription as being opposed to the spirit of Australia's 'time and race'. Australia had contributed more men under the voluntary system, in proportion to its population, than any other portion of the British Empire.<sup>158</sup> The AWU believed Australia's contribution to be sufficiently met under the voluntary system. Some New Zealand unions made the same claim; they believed their contribution to be greater, in proportion to its population, than any other Dominion's.<sup>159</sup>

To achieve solidarity within the union movement the MTHC decided that the Federal Grand Council should call a congress to discuss conscription. All affiliated unions throughout Australia were invited to attend. The congress was to determine the official attitude of the industrial movement toward conscription and the possibility of a general strike if conscription was implemented, however the council decided against the threat of a general strike. The congress was to be held no later than May 2, 1916, and if the Grand Council did not immediately call the congress the MTHC would.<sup>160</sup>

Prior to the conference, the MTHC advised all labour bodies that conscription involved more than compulsory military service. Military rule would dominate industrial matters, civil liberties would be surrendered, and all democratic institutions would be suspended. The adoption of conscription would threaten the existence of the industrial movement. Maurice Blackburn MHR supported this contention in his publication *The Conscription Referendum of 1916*.<sup>161</sup> The MTHC was now displaying a strong contradiction to its July 1915 resolution wherein it appeared to support conscription. A motion to take strike action against conscription was apparently put to the conference with the delegate of the Melbourne Branch of the Federated Seamen's Union of Australia (SUA) being the sole dissident.<sup>162</sup> Turner, citing *Labor Call*, says the conference pledged itself to oppose conscription by all lawful means.<sup>163</sup> While this was the case the

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<sup>158</sup> *The Australian Worker*, February 10, 1916, 1; see also AWU Convention Report January 27, 1916, 10, Box E154/17, NBA.

<sup>159</sup> Wellington Amalgamated Watersiders Industrial Union of Workers (Hereinafter referred to as WWU), Minutes, June 20, 1916, 35, MS-Group-0612 77-165-1, ATL.

<sup>160</sup> MTHC, Minutes, March 2, 1916, 188; May 4, 1916, 201; LCN, Minutes May 4, 1915, 232-3; UTLC, Minutes, May 5, 1916, 204-5; *The Australian Worker*, March 22, 1916, 12.

<sup>161</sup> *The Australian Worker*, April 27, 1916, 5; Blackburn, 11-2. (Blackburn was the member for Bourke, during the Great War he was the member for Essendon in the Victorian Legislative Assembly).

<sup>162</sup> Federated Seamen's Union of Australia (Hereinafter referred to as SUA) Victorian Branch, Minutes May 15, 1916, no page number, Carton Z263 Box 1, NBA.

<sup>163</sup> Turner, 101, Citing *Labor Call*, May 4, 1916.

publication he cites was for May 4, 1916 but the conference was not held until May 10, 1916.<sup>164</sup>

Former British Cabinet Minister Sir John Simon wrongly claimed conscription in Britain was not necessary from a military standpoint. *The Australian Worker* picked up on this and said there was an unscrupulous gang in Australia that was pursuing similar tactics to those employed in Britain, and they were backed by the press.<sup>165</sup>

Addressing the 1916 Eight Hour Celebrations in Melbourne, the Minister for Defence was of the opinion the time might come when every part of the British Empire might have to adopt conscription. But he did not think conscription would produce many more men than the number volunteering.<sup>166</sup> If that were the case, why was conscription still being spoken of? The minister himself provided the answer, albeit not a convincing one. He believed discrimination could be used, with some men ordered to the front while excuses could be found to exempt others.<sup>167</sup> Who stays behind? Not the working class! This was just another form of the inequality of sacrifice the unions had been fighting to overcome. To further confuse the masses, and in particular the unionists, he declared the government's policy was not, and never had been, conscription. Voluntarism was its policy. But rather than have German rule in Australia, he would go for conscription. He believed the trade unionists of Australia recognised that position as the bulk of the men who had gone to the war had been trade unionists. The AWU had sent forward sufficient men to form a complete division, out of a total Australian force of five divisions.<sup>168</sup> This simply means trade unionists believed in voluntarism and the defeat of Germany was essential. It did not mean they supported conscription.

At a meeting of the Melbourne branch of the SUA, on July 3, 1916, notice of motion was given for a special meeting to be called for July 17, 1916, to deal with the question of conscription.<sup>169</sup> At the special meeting it was decided unanimously that the branch protest against conscription as it had always been used against the working class. They would offer their strongest protest against any action of the Federal government to implement conscription including any surreptitious attempt by calling up all

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<sup>164</sup> MTHC, Minutes, May 4, 1916, 201.

<sup>165</sup> *The Australian Worker*, April 27, 1916, 5.

<sup>166</sup> *The Australian Worker*, April 20, 1916, 1.

<sup>167</sup> *The Australian Worker*, April 20, 1916, 1.

<sup>168</sup> *The Australian Worker*, April 20, 1916, 16.

<sup>169</sup> SUA Victorian Branch, Minutes, July 3, 1916, no page number, Carton Z263 Box 1, NBA.

males militarily fit for national defence.<sup>170</sup> But they would not strike over the issue because they believed it would be unlawful to do so.

The Sydney Wharf Labourers Union meeting on July 4, 1916, carried a motion (131 to 19) that two delegates be appointed to the Anti-conscription League to protest against the principle of conscription.<sup>171</sup> This was a big change in direction for the union; it had confined previous correspondence from the league, seeking how they would oppose conscription, to the waste paper bin. At their meeting on August 30, 1916, two resolutions forwarded by the Anti-conscription League were endorsed. These resolutions were against the press agitating for conscription, and calling for the rescission of the prohibition of free discussion on the question of voluntary or compulsory service. A further decision to call a general strike, in the event conscription was introduced, was carried over to the next fortnightly meeting. At the same meeting the delegates to attend a conference in Hobart were instructed to oppose conscription and the plebiscite.<sup>172</sup> The outcome of the subsequent meeting was to “emphatically protest against the introduction of conscription of life as intended by W.M. Hughes.”<sup>173</sup> By now Hughes had advised the labour bodies of his intention to call a plebiscite.

From May 1915 conscription was hotly debated in union circles. This resulted from an aggressive campaign by *The Australian Worker* which continually referred to the inequality of sacrifice, Hughes’ and Fisher’s statements regarding no conscription, and the confusion of the Defence Minister which served to heighten unions’ suspicions that conscription could be invoked. On September 22, 1916, Hughes finally announced that a plebiscite, to be held on October 28, 1916, would decide whether conscription would be introduced in Australia. This prompted further union resistance which will be dealt with in the following chapter.

New Zealand unions were under no illusions that they would gain support from the Reform-dominated National government. As noted earlier the Reform Party seemed intent on destroying the unions so it is not surprising the unions fought conscription. As was the case in Australia, conscription was discussed in New Zealand union circles before the government introduced it. Meetings were called by the unions to discuss what action they would take to circumvent the introduction of conscription

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<sup>170</sup> SUA Victorian Branch, Minutes, July 17, 1916, no page number, Carton Z263 Box 1, NBA.

<sup>171</sup> The Sydney Wharf Labourers Union, Minutes, July 4, 1916, 192, Microfilm M70 Reel 2, NBA.

<sup>172</sup> The Sydney Wharf Labourers Union, Minutes, August 30, 1916, 230-2, Micro-film M70 Reel 2, NBA.

<sup>173</sup> Sydney Wharf Labourers Union, Minutes of Special Cease Work Meeting, September 14, 1916, [2]38, Microfilm M70 Reel 2, NBA.

*The Maoriland Worker*, in an editorial on August 25, 1915, referred to the impending introduction of conscription. It said:

One thing is certain. If the capitalistic interests persist in their decision to foist the fuller conscription of Prussia, France, and other European countries on the workers of New Zealand, they will create such a turmoil of internal resistance that they will have little time to think about anything else.<sup>174</sup>

*The Maoriland Worker* believed that conscription was about class struggle. In a subsequent edition, citing the *Evening Post*, it brought to the attention of the workers: “an admission that the Fusion Government will introduce conscription when the time arrives.”<sup>175</sup> Defence Minister James Allen had informed General Godley that conscription would be introduced in New Zealand, but not before Britain had introduced it.<sup>176</sup>

The secretary of the UFL received a letter from Labour M.P. J.T. Paul indicating his opinion that if men were not coming forward under the voluntary system, the only way to get them was by compulsion. Paul was surprised and disappointed at the large number of workers advocating conscription.<sup>177</sup> This was the only way to achieve equality; the only way to get ‘shirkers’ to enlist. The U.F.L. decided to convene a conference to discuss the question of conscription and labour’s attitude to it. Every labour organisation was encouraged to send delegates. They were informed, “the life of Trades Unionism is at stake.”<sup>178</sup> All bodies were urged to pass resolutions condemning conscription and send copies of the resolutions to the prime minister and newspapers.

The Wharf Labourers Industrial Union (WIU) Executive, meeting on November 10, 1915, discussed conscription. They objected to the efforts that were being made to enforce conscription in New Zealand especially when war profits and capital remain untouched. They believed wherever conscription was in force its influence was used against trade unionism. Therefore they took a stand in line with the decision carried by the British Trades Union Congress to resist conscription. Conscription was detrimental to the best interests of unionism, personal liberty, and progress. A motion to this effect was put to a general meeting of members which unanimously adopted the executive’s

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<sup>174</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, August 25, 1915, 4.

<sup>175</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, September 15, 1915, 4.

<sup>176</sup> Letters Allen to Godley, No.2337, January 4, 1916, 6; No.3396, February 15, 1916, 2-3; No.4772, February 19, 1916, 2; No.4772, April 13, 1916, 4-5. Allen Papers, M1/15 Part 2, ANZ.

<sup>177</sup> Letter J.T. Paul to H. Hunter, November 1, 1915, 1-2. J.T. Paul Papers, MS-0982/006, HCA; Baker, 71.

<sup>178</sup> Circular Hunter to all labour bodies, November 11, 1915, J.T. Paul Papers, MS-0982/006, HCA.

recommendation on December 12, 1915.<sup>179</sup> Equality of sacrifice was still an unanswered issue.

The New Zealand Coal Miners Federation (CMF) called a conference to discuss conscription. The Puponga Coal Miners Industrial Union of Workers, when nominating delegates to attend the conference, also decided the union would protest to the government about the threatened introduction of conscription.<sup>180</sup> This protest was in line with the request from the UFL. The Federated Seamen's Union of New Zealand (FSU) Executive Council reported to local branches the action it had taken with regard to conscription. It strongly protested against the conscription of human beings being introduced into the country. For the proper protection of members it suggested the local branches appoint representatives to attend the proposed UFL conference to finally decide the view of labour regarding conscription.<sup>181</sup> The Palmerston Branch of The Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners instructed its secretary to write to James Allen. They had decided to protest against the attempt to foist conscription on the people of New Zealand. They believed in the principle of voluntary enlistment for war purposes.<sup>182</sup>

The conference of the New Zealand Labour Organisations, held in January 1916 to discuss conscription regretted that a section of the community should attempt to introduce conscription. Conscription had been consistently opposed by the working classes throughout the Empire as "there was no fair method of selection because all men stood equal."<sup>183</sup> The conference declared its opposition to conscription, and vowed to resist its introduction to the utmost.

Sir Joseph Ward, Prime Minister Massey's deputy in the Nationalist government, had described conscription as: "the worst form of Prussian Militarism", a point not missed by *The Maoriland Worker* in its editorial on May 10, 1916. *The Maoriland Worker* also pointed out that the Conscription Bill would go before the parliament in

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<sup>179</sup> Wharf Labourers Industrial Union (Hereinafter referred to as WIU), Minutes of Executive meeting, November 10, 1915, 250; Minutes of General meeting, December 16, 1915, 260-1, MS-Group-0612 77-165-7, ATL.

<sup>180</sup> Puponga Coal Miners Industrial Union of Workers (Hereinafter referred to as Puponga Miners), Minutes, November 28, 1915, no page number, MS-Papers-3782 3782-2, ATL.

<sup>181</sup> Federated Seamen's Union of New Zealand, (Hereinafter referred to as FSU) Executive Council Report No. 3, December 15, 1915, MS-Papers-0650 0650-065, ATL.

<sup>182</sup> Letter Nod. 8418, J. Hodgens to Minister of Defence, January 3, 1916. Allen Papers, AD1/10/329 Item 780, ANZ.

<sup>183</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, February 2, 1916, 4-5. Citing Conference Manifesto; *New Zealand Herald*, January 28, 1916, 6.



the current session.<sup>184</sup> Both Massey and Ward had declared numerous times that “practically all the people ... are in favour of prosecuting the war.”<sup>185</sup> If that were the case there would have been no problem in recruiting men had their dependants been properly provided for. There would be no need for conscription. As mentioned earlier the number of volunteers was sufficient for New Zealand, but the government was seeking to impress the Imperial authorities of its patriotism. However, Oliver contends that numbers were sufficient throughout the war.<sup>186</sup>

*The Maoriland Worker* said workers would demand the bill not become law until it had been passed by the Bill Committee, and the unions given a chance to lodge objections. If the government proceeded without these safeguards it would be the signal that it was not prepared to consult the people. Prussianism would win the day. Organised labour should then determine its attitude and instigate an effective campaign to achieve the repeal of the bill.<sup>187</sup> The Wellington Shipwrights’ Union condemned conscription at their meeting on May 31, 1916. They considered the Military Service Bill to be the grossest infringement of the rights and liberties of the working class of New Zealand. They pledged themselves to support organised labour in its attempt to prevent the act from being put into action.<sup>188</sup>

Responding to *The Maoriland Worker* article of May 10, 1916, the UFL wrote to unions with recommendations from the committee set up to monitor organised labour’s interests in the event a bill for conscription was introduced in parliament. The Inangahua Mine and Dredge Employees Industrial Union responded immediately to those recommendations by sending a telegram to the prime minister. They asked that the proposed Compulsory Military Service Bill be handed over to a committee enabling labour unions to tender evidence regarding the bill.<sup>189</sup>

The Auckland General Labourers Union and the Wellington Boot Operatives’ Union both resolved to oppose the bill. The Wellington Boot Operatives’ considered it unnecessary, due to the response under the voluntary system. They considered conscription to be a blight on the manhood of the country.<sup>190</sup> The Manawatu Employees

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<sup>184</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, May 10, 1916, 4; See also Letter 4772 Allen to Godley, April 13, 1916, 4-5. Allen Papers, Item M1/15 Part 2, ANZ.

<sup>185</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, May 10, 1916, 4;

<sup>186</sup> Oliver, 169.

<sup>187</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, May 10, 1916, 4.

<sup>188</sup> Wellington Shipwrights Union, Minutes, May 31, 1916, 45, MS Group-0612 77-165-2, ATL.

<sup>189</sup> Inangahua Gold and Coal Miners Industrial Union of Workers (Hereinafter referred to as Inangahua Miners), Minutes, June 3, 1916, 189-90, MS-Group-0219 MSY-3471, ATL.

<sup>190</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, June 7, 1916, 2.

Industrial Union of Workers held a mass meeting of flax workers on June 12, 1916, at which they resolved unanimously that conscription was not a military necessity. It did not result in equality of sacrifice, and its only purpose was the raising of a cheap army to protect the 'enormous war profits of the wealthy shirkers' (capitalists). Following the war it would be used to shackle the wage workers and used to abolish trade union protection, making the workers subservient to the military authorities. They believed industrial conscription could be introduced which would continue after the war ended. They also protested at the 'Star Chamber' methods which would favour the rich and discriminate against the workers in the secret Exemption Tribunals. Pledging to use all and any method to obstruct the bill the members also pledged to go on strike the moment the conscription act was enforced to compel any man to serve against his wish or conscience.<sup>191</sup> This action subsequently resulted in the union secretary being charged for sedition.

On June 16, 1916, W Young, the general secretary of the FSU, wrote to the Minister of Defence James Allen seeking exemption for all mercantile mariners, of not less than twelve months service, from the ballot in the event Compulsory Military Service became a reality. A similar situation had been resolved in Australia.<sup>192</sup> This action was successful; seamen were declared essential workers as we shall see in the following chapter. By seeking exemption for just the members of one union and not others illustrates how divided the labour movement in New Zealand was; giving the government power which it otherwise would not have had if the unions were amalgamated into one strong body.

The WWU held a meeting on June 20, 1916, attended by 600 members. Having previously objected to the prospect of conscription, they met to consider the Military Service Act which they considered was not necessary. They believed New Zealand had equipped and sent away more men to the front, taking into consideration its population, than any overseas country under the British flag. The meeting considered the bill was for no other purpose than securing cheap soldiers, abolishing trades unionism and forcing the people of New Zealand under military and police domination. The executive was instructed to immediately communicate with all affiliated unions, drawing their attention to the drastic measures contained in the bill, and to call meetings to consider the most effective means of preventing it being put into operation. They were also in-

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<sup>191</sup> Letter No. 6198, Robinson to Allen, June 12, 1916. Allen Papers, AD1/10/329 Item 780, ANZ.

<sup>192</sup> Letter, Young to Allen, June 16, 1916, MS-Papers-0650 0650-005, ATL.

structed to approach the Miners Federation, the UFL, the Railwaymen's Union, and other labour organisations to arrange joint action to oppose the Military Service Bill.<sup>193</sup> James Roberts, secretary of the Waterside Workers Federation of New Zealand, stated those who thought the act did not concern them did not appreciate what had happened in England (Roberts believed 10,000 men had been jailed) for opposing conscription. W. Robinson strongly advocated immediate action: "we should not wait any longer, we were up against the trickiest crowd possible to meet, we should do something at once."<sup>194</sup> One member (Allington) was of the opinion that it was industrial conscription. Industrial conscription was feared by the workers because they believed the government would carry it through after the war to control the unions. There was considerable discussion before a resolution along the above lines was passed unanimously. The president, Coutice, advised the meeting some men had told him they favoured the act and a further meeting was called for June 25, 1916, to enable all members to express their opinion.<sup>195</sup> In the meantime the executive of the union met on June 23, 1916, and decided if the members of the union were opposed to conscription they would pledge themselves to resist it to the best of their ability even meeting the full penalty provided in the bill. They also instructed officials to convene a conference, immediately, of all unions for the purpose of defining their position.<sup>196</sup> The special meeting held on June 25, 1916, only attracted 250 members. It was a hostile meeting; members were angry about the recommendations of the executive. There was much discussion about the framers of the recommendations being in cahoots with the Attorney General (Herdman), and the recommendations being "a fool resolution." The meeting was against conscription and threatened to reduce productivity by 50% if any members were taken in the ballot. This action was to continue until the act was rescinded, and, if the act was not rescinded, work would cease. The probability of industrial conscription was again raised. Eventually all recommendations of the executive were agreed to.<sup>197</sup>

*The Maoriland Worker* stated the second reading of the bill "PROVED THAT COMPULSION WAS NOT NECESSARY."<sup>198</sup> Oliver contends conscription was in-

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<sup>193</sup> WWU, Minutes, June 20, 1916, 35, MS-Group-0612 77-165-1, ATL.

<sup>194</sup> WWU, Minutes, June 20, 1916, 35-6, MS-Group-0612 77-165-1, ATL.

<sup>195</sup> WWU, Minutes, June 20, 1916. 36, MS-Group-0612 77-165-1, ATL.

<sup>196</sup> WWU, Minutes of Executive Committee, June 23, 1916, 37, MS-Group-0612 77-165-1, ATL.

<sup>197</sup> WWU, Minutes, June 25, 1916, 38-9, MS-Group-0612 77-165-1, ATL.

<sup>198</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, June 7, 1916, 2.

roduced despite there being no difficulty in keeping up reinforcements.<sup>199</sup> Defence Minister Allen stated 68,000 men had already enlisted. He said it would have been wiser if conscription had been enacted earlier, not from a military standpoint but for industrial reasons.<sup>200</sup> This confirmed the unionist fears of industrial conscription. *The Maoriland Worker* contended:

It would require a Parliament of knaves and traitors to vote it into law [Military Service Act]; and it would need a nation of cravens and degenerates to submit to its wickedness if it became law.<sup>201</sup>

The thought that the government was not going to consult the people before introducing conscription and the previously documented failures of the government to respond to the unions in those matters which vitally concerned them increased their hostility toward conscription. Despite a campaign by the unions and *The Maoriland Worker* the government was not persuaded to forgo conscription and the Military Service Act became law on August 1, 1916. Had the unions consolidated earlier, as had Australian unions, they might have been in a position to exert some power over the Reform government. But they were relatively weak. The government had power over the unions, which was in contrast to Australia where the unions had considerable power over the Labor government.

In both Australia and New Zealand, the unions did not object to unionists volunteering for service in the war against the Imperial regime of Germany. To boost recruiting numbers the Australian government implemented a war census and a recruiting campaign while the New Zealand government introduced a postal enlistment scheme and a scheme fashioned Britain's Derby Scheme. The Australian schemes produced further divisions within Australian labour with some unions supportive while others were not. When both governments decided voluntary recruiting had failed to produce enough men for service most unions opposed conscription. It appeared to the Australian unions that Hughes was determined to push through whatever measures he felt necessary to raise enlistment numbers. New Zealand unions were convinced the voluntary system had not failed and could have been improved if the government had made

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<sup>199</sup> Oliver, 169.

<sup>200</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, June 7, 1916, 2.

<sup>201</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, May 31, 1916, 2.

proper provision for the dependants of those men serving in the military. Some Australian union bodies offered what might have been solutions to the recruiting problem by suggesting ways the government could give support to dependants of soldiers and increase soldiers pay. This inequity could have been addressed by both governments by acceding to the unions' requests for equality of sacrifice. Unionists in Australia believed they contributed to the war effort in greater numbers than the capitalists and considered this unfair. They wanted the capitalists to sacrifice their wealth in return for the human sacrifice the working class made. In some cases the unions perceived the capitalists were profiteering from the war while failing to contribute financially. Equality of sacrifice was a major thorn in the side of unionists and served to increase animosity toward the governments. Unionists were against their governments' intention to introduce conscription because the governments had failed to accede to the union's demands for equality of sacrifice. The high cost of living and freezing of wages were other major factors in the union's fight against conscription. Why should the unions succumb to the government's desires when the government did very little to alleviate the economic hardship suffered throughout the war? A degree of economic conscription was practiced in both countries by governments and employers alike. Unionists forced out of work through this practice were forced to enlist to provide for themselves and dependants. The economic pressure that was brought to bear gave the unions yet another reason to fight their governments over conscription. We shall see later that this practice continued in Australia after the defeat of the first plebiscite. The combination of all these factors made the unions strong in their resolve to fight the introduction of conscription.

## CHAPTER 4.

### **Military Conscription introduced in New Zealand and proposed in Australia.**

“The man who is forced to fight is by that very fact stripped of his manhood.”<sup>1</sup>

When the Australian and New Zealand governments perceived that the voluntary system of recruiting had failed to produce sufficient numbers of men they both responded by calling for conscription. These decisions emanated from the continual demands of the imperial government for more fighting men. The ever growing number of casualties and the fact Britain had decided to introduce conscription brought pressure to bear on both countries to follow suit. The New Zealand government decided to implement conscription without consulting the people. (Which it was perfectly entitled to do.) In Australia, in comparison, the Labor Prime Minister W.M. Hughes decided to hold a plebiscite of electors which he expected would bring a positive response for the implementation of conscription. The Australian unions were advised of the prime minister's intentions on August 30, 1916; legislation for the plebiscite was enacted late September 1916. These decisions were to bring to the fore further union animosity towards their governments which had previously failed to support them in their socio-economic difficulties. Unions believed that the government action was to bring them to subjection and perceived it as class war. In addition to the burdens they already bore due to the war, conscription could be used against them in industry both during and after the war. Their civil liberties, which had already been curtailed, would be further infringed. To consolidate their efforts, to prevent conscription, unions organised committees, raising funds and conducting media campaigns to fight conscription. New Zealand miners decided to conduct a ‘go slow’ campaign and went out on strike.

The New Zealand government felt it was not contributing enough men to the war effort; the bulk of the population supported Britain in its fight, but volunteers were not coming forward in sufficient numbers. Defence Minister James Allen corresponded regularly with General Godley, Commander of New Zealand's Expeditionary Force, regarding recruiting. He told Godley of the recruiting problem and the government's belief that the bulk of the people favoured conscription. But he feared a labour back-

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<sup>1</sup> *The Australian Worker*, April 27, 1916, 1.

lash. However, if conscription were to be introduced in Britain he had no doubt in his own mind it would be introduced in New Zealand. Conscription, he believed, was the fairest way to increase recruiting.<sup>2</sup> The New Zealand government missed an opportunity to follow the British lead. In January 1916 the British government introduced the Military Service Act, which called up all unmarried men without dependants and between the ages of 18 and 41 years to enlist immediately. But Allen did not follow suit because he wanted to give the voluntary system further opportunity to succeed. Up until April 1916, Allen was still insisting the voluntary system remained the basis of recruitment. However, he believed that, inevitably, the introduction of conscription was the only way to boost recruitment. In April 1916, Allen again wrote to Godley saying the government was continuing with voluntary recruiting, but he was satisfied the better option was conscription and a bill would be introduced into parliament giving the government the power to invoke conscription if necessary. He anticipated opposition to conscription and trouble from the more militant unions.<sup>3</sup>

New Zealand adopted conscription despite the anticipated trouble from the labour movement. The Military Service Act was passed by a majority of the New Zealand parliament on May 24, 1916. Of the six Labour MPs, four voted against the bill. The exceptions were W. Veitch and one other who had been paired.<sup>4</sup> The act came into force on August 1, 1916. All men in the Dominion between the ages of 20 and 46 years were required to enrol to go into the ballot. Certificates of enrolment were issued. If a man failed to enrol he could be sent straight to camp. As a result of the earlier National Registration in 1915, all men aged 20 to 46 years were designated as reservists. Some reservists, because of their occupation, were exempted. Others employed in essential industries were able to apply for exemption if they were drawn in the ballot. Employers could also apply to have a worker exempted.

In the meantime, on the other side of the Tasman, recruitment of volunteers in Australia produced far fewer volunteers than the number demanded by the imperial government. Despite the results of the war census and the government's renewed recruiting system, it appeared to Prime Minister Hughes that the voluntary system had

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<sup>2</sup> Letter Nod. 2337, Allen to Godfrey (Commander New Zealand Expeditionary Force) January 4, 1916, 5-6. Allen Papers, M1/15 Part 2, Archives New Zealand. (Hereinafter referred to as ANZ)

<sup>3</sup> Letter Nod. 4772, Allen to Godley, April 13, 1916, 4-5; Letter Nod. 10404, Allen to Godley, June 12, 1916, 2-3. Allen Papers, M1/15 Part 2; also M1/15 Part 3, ANZ.

<sup>4</sup> Paul J. Baker, *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1988), 89.

failed. Hughes could have introduced conscription under the War Precautions Act. This act gave the government control over the national effort; gave the Governor-General in Council extensive powers, and enabled the executive to rule by proclamation in matters relating to the war effort.<sup>5</sup> Like the New Zealand defence minister, Hughes knew there would be strong opposition from within the trades unions if conscription was introduced. There would also be opposition within his own party because of Labor's traditional stance against war. In an attempt to overcome any resistance from the unions, he decided to put the issue to the electorate by way of a plebiscite. Hughes warned the unions of his decision to call a plebiscite on conscription; trades and labour councils received an urgent telegram dated August 30, 1916, advising them of grave facts in relation to the war, the fact the government had adopted a policy which would be laid before parliament the next day, and requesting they reserve their judgement until after the facts were made known to them.<sup>6</sup> This was a warning he was laying the matter of conscription and a plebiscite before parliament on August 31, 1916,<sup>7</sup> but the legislation was not passed until late September 1916. At least Hughes had advised the labour movement of his intentions, unlike the New Zealand government which legislated without referral to anybody, least of all the unions. The receipt of Hughes' telegram motivated the Australian unions and *The Australian Worker* to mobilise against conscription. *The Australian Worker* in its issue of September 14, 1916, stated: "There is no power in the Constitution Act to take a referendum on any other question than an amendment of the Constitution."<sup>8</sup>

The news that their governments were adopting conscription as the tool to increase recruiting did not sit well with the union movements of New Zealand and Australia. They were firm in their resolve to fight the imposition and attempted imposition of conscription. The fact that the New Zealand defence minister was considering conscription evoked a response from within that country's union movement. In January

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<sup>5</sup> F.B. Smith, *The Conscription Plebiscites 1916-17*, Second Edition Revised (Melbourne: Victorian Historical Association, 1966), 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> United Trades and Labour Council of South Australia (Hereinafter referred to as UTLC), Minutes, September 22, 1916, 251, and Telegram, Hughes to UTLC, received August 30, 1916.

<sup>7</sup> Australian Parliamentary Debates, Volume LXXIX, 6<sup>th</sup>. Parliament, 1<sup>st</sup>. Session, 9 September 1915 – 14 September 1916, 8402-3.

<sup>8</sup> *The Australian Worker*, September 14, 1916, 1.



1916, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners wrote to Allen protesting the attempt “to foist conscription on the people.”<sup>9</sup>

Like their cross Tasman comrades, New Zealand unionists were happy to allow the voluntary system to continue, but the government legislated for conscription causing the unions to become locked in battle with it over the question. Unlike their Australian comrades they were not in a position to fight the introduction of conscription; they were instead fighting for the repeal of the Military Service Act. Trades unionists believed the number of men enlisting made conscription unnecessary. A meeting in Wellington condemned the conscription bill in view of the fact the voluntary system had not failed.<sup>10</sup> The Agriculture and Pastoral Workers Union believed there were sufficient volunteers to make conscription unnecessary. They condemned its introduction in New Zealand. The majority of workers on the South Island would not, they said, under any circumstance, tolerate conscription.<sup>11</sup> In Christchurch “a largely-attended meeting of trades’ unionists carried a series of resolutions against the Military Service Bill.”<sup>12</sup> In June 1916, flax workers held a mass meeting to discuss the implications of the Military Service Bill. They resolved to pledge themselves to a united resistance of its operation, go on strike the moment the act is enforced to compel men to join the expeditionary force, and take whatever other action that was considered necessary to obstruct the bill.<sup>13</sup> The Wellington Shipwrights Union also passed a resolution condemning the Military Service Bill.<sup>14</sup>

While New Zealand unions were condemning the military service bill, Australian unions still wanted to believe conscription would not be introduced in Australia. On Hughes’ return in July 1916, *The Australian Worker* welcomed him home to the cause of anti-conscription and printed his “In no circumstance would I agree to send men out of the country to fight against their will ....” statement.<sup>15</sup> Unionists still wanted to believe he was against conscription. But his visit to Britain and the battlefields of France had influenced him to believe conscription was necessary to keep up the supply of men.

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<sup>9</sup> Letter Nod. 8418, J. Hodgens, Secretary Palmerston Branch Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners to Allen, January 3, 1916. Allen Papers, AD1/10/329 Item 780, ANZ.

<sup>10</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, May 31, 1916, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Agricultural and Pastoral Workers Union, Report of Conference, August 8, 1916, 24, MSGroup-1310 Record MSX-3773, Alexander Turnbull Library. (Hereinafter referred to as ATL)

<sup>12</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, June 3, 1916, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Letter Nod. 6198, Robinson (Secretary Manawatu Employees Industrial Union of Workers) to Allen, June 12, 1916. Allen Papers, AD1/10/329 Item 780, ANZ.

<sup>14</sup> Wellington Shipwrights Union, Minutes, June 14, 1916, 46, MS-Group-0612 Record 77-165-2, ATL.

<sup>15</sup> *The Australian Worker*, August 3, 1916, 5.

The Governor-General, Munro-Ferguson, advised him that the people would accept it. Now was the time to introduce conscription. But the Governor General was later proven wrong.

Unionists believed conscription and the war were not in the interests of the worker. Unions perceived there was inequality between them and the capitalists. The capitalists were not contributing to the war effort while the workers were volunteering. The unionists believed conscription would be used to suppress and destroy unions. Benjamin Kidd, the celebrated philosophic writer said;

There are many of the advocates of conscription who press for it for purely military reasons, but there are others – some of the chief of them have frankly admitted as much to me – who desire it as the only weapon against the growing power of the trade unions. And it is in that direction that conscription must in any case inevitably tend.<sup>16</sup>

The New Zealand Agriculture and Pastoral Workers Union believed “Conscription was not for war winning; it was a capitalistic method to deal with the workers.”<sup>17</sup> Given the government’s determination to crush the unions, this was one method to bring them to subjection. New Zealand unions were adamant the capitalists were not volunteering nor were they contributing financially to the war effort. The government, aware of these concerns, thought conscription would eliminate any belief the capitalists were being favoured.

Had the New Zealand unions been united in a strong consolidated body they might have been able to exert pressure on the government, but the government, instead, was able to exercise its power over the unions. The government exercised its power when it prosecuted officials of the Federated Miners Union at Auckland. The Agriculture and Pastoral Workers Union demanded a searching enquiry into the court proceedings because the Crown Prosecutor allegedly made statements that had no foundation to them. His speech was promulgated by the Employers Federation while the case was still before the Court. The defence had not been given the opportunity to answer inaccurately.

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<sup>16</sup> *The Australian Worker*, September 21, 1916, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Agriculture and Pastoral Workers Union, Report of Conference, August 8, 1916, 25, MS-Group-1310 Record MSX-3773, ATL.

racies.<sup>18</sup> It would appear that the intent was to prosecute unionists at all cost. This was a similar action to that of the prosecution of Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) members in Australia where Hughes was given, by the Attorney General, a letter written to one defendant by a member of parliament and used it, in association with others, for political purposes.

Member of Parliament P.C. Webb, a former miner and founder of Socialist Party branches, was balloted (called up) for service. He went into camp but refused to obey orders, whereupon he was court martialled and imprisoned. Miners unions were invited to a meeting to protest his conscription and subsequent imprisonment.<sup>19</sup> The New Zealand Coal Miners Federation (CMF) sought the co-operation of other miners to attempt a re-hearing of Webb's exemption appeal to which miners readily agreed to cooperate.<sup>20</sup> A demonstration was called by the Grey Branch of the New Zealand Labour Party to protest against the government preventing Webb representing his constituents in parliament although some miners unions refused to send a representative.<sup>21</sup> The Federated Seamen's Union of New Zealand (FSU) requested the government to release him without further delay,<sup>22</sup> while two coal mining unions threatened "immediate industrial revolt" if he was not exempted and permitted to represent his constituents.<sup>23</sup> Webb, however, telegraphed labour unions on the West Coast asking them not to take industrial action on his behalf.<sup>24</sup> Webb's action in requesting no industrial action could have been in recognition of the government's power to withdraw exemptions for the seamen and miners.

There was widespread resistance within Australian unions to conscription. Meetings were called to vent their hostility to the conscription plebiscite. The Amalgamated Miners Association N.S.W. Branch Executive called a special meeting to be held on September 1, 1916. That meeting resolved "to express its hostility to the introduction of

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<sup>18</sup> Agriculture and Pastoral Workers Union, Conference Report, May 1, 1917, 37-8, MS-Group1310 Record MSX-3773, ATL.

<sup>19</sup> Inangahua Gold and Coal Miners Industrial Union of Workers, (Hereinafter referred to as Inangahua Miners), Minutes, October 27, 1917, 275-6., MS-Group-0219 Record MSY-3471, ATL; see also Letter Nod. 8698, Allen to Godley, April 26, 1918, 2. Allen Papers, M1/15 Part 5, ANZ.

<sup>20</sup> Inangahua Miners, Minutes, February 2, 1918, 290; North Cape Coal Miners Industrial Union of Workers, Minutes, February 6, 1918, no page no, MS-Group-0219 Record MSY-3471; also MS-Papers-3788 Record no number, ATL.

<sup>21</sup> Inangahua Miners, Minutes, April 6, 1918, 306, MS-Group-0219 Record MSY-3471, ATL.

<sup>22</sup> Federated Seamen's Union of New Zealand (Hereinafter referred to as FSU), Minutes, April 8, 1918, 89, MS-Papers-0650 Record MSY-0153, ATL.

<sup>23</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, February 20, 1918, 4.

<sup>24</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, March 15, 1918, 4.

conscription of human life into the Commonwealth.”<sup>25</sup> Opposition to conscription was also expressed by the Federated Union of Seamen Australia (SUA), Victorian Branch.<sup>26</sup>

Hughes’ advocacy of conscription even created hostility within his own union. In stark contrast to the 1915 resolution of the Federal Executive of the Waterside Workers Federation of Australia (WWF) which expressed “entire confidence in the Federal Labor government”,<sup>27</sup> a special cease-work meeting of the Sydney Wharf Labourers Union voted to “emphatically protest against the introduction of conscription of life as intended by W.M. Hughes”, on September 14, 1916.<sup>28</sup> Hughes was invited to attend the cease-work meeting but saw fit not to.<sup>29</sup> Given the fact the introduction of the bill for the plebiscite was introduced in parliament on that day he was busy outlining his plan for conscription.

Australian unions did not believe Hughes would introduce conscription. They believed he was against conscription. He had demonstrated this when he belittled the member for Swan, Sir John Forrest, for supporting conscription in July 1915.<sup>30</sup> Because they believed he was against conscription it would not be introduced in Australia. But was he really against conscription as the unions believed him to be? On his sojourn overseas, in 1916, he had promoted conscription in Canada and Britain. Unions were not pleased when they heard of him promoting conscription and fraternising with capitalists. This went against labour’s ideological principles; workers were not to be compelled to fight other workers. This was despite the fact unionists in Australia were volunteering for military service. Nevertheless ill feeling towards Hughes emerged within the union movement because of his actions. Such was this ill feeling, members of his own union refused an invitation to a dinner in his honour, despatching the invitation to the waste paper bin.<sup>31</sup>

Labour’s confidence in Hughes being against conscription was undermined; they also began to doubt his allegiance to Labor. Under the heading “Should Australians be

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<sup>25</sup> Amalgamated Miners Association N.S.W. Branch Executive, Minutes of Meeting, September 1, 1916, 90, Box N117 Record 1468, Noel Butlin Archive. (Hereinafter referred to as NBA).

<sup>26</sup> Federated Union of Seamen Australia (Hereinafter referred to as SUA) Victorian Branch, Minutes, September 18, 1916, No page No, Carton Z263 Box 1, NBA.

<sup>27</sup> Waterside Workers Federation of Australia (Hereinafter referred to as WWF), Minutes of Committee of Management, December 21, 1915, 208, Microfilm M26, NBA.

<sup>28</sup> Sydney Wharf Labourers Union, Minutes of Special Cease Work Meeting, September 14, 1916, [2]38, Microfilm M70 Reel 2, NBA.

<sup>29</sup> Sydney Wharf Labourers Union, Minutes, August 30, 1916, 232, Microfilm M70 Reel 2, NBA.

<sup>30</sup> *Australian Parliamentary Debates*, Vol. LXXVII, 6<sup>th</sup>. Parliament 1<sup>st</sup>. Session, May 26-July 21, 1915, 5066.

<sup>31</sup> Sydney Wharf Labourers Union, Minutes of Meeting, August 16, 1916, 220, Microfilm M70 Reel 2, NBA.

Conscripts?" *The Australian Worker* hoped Hughes would remain true to the pledge he had made, "That in no circumstances would he send a man out of the country to fight against his will." *The Australian Worker* believed despite his pledge Hughes was now going to fight for conscription as if his life depended upon it.<sup>32</sup> As a consequence, *The Australian Worker* stepped up its campaign against conscription.

But Hughes did manage to secure some support among some elements of labour. While most unions were objecting to conscription some were prepared to look at the broader picture and help the government make the voluntary system of recruiting work. The Barrier Branch of the Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association went further. It resolved at a special meeting held September 3, 1916, that:

This Sub-Branch enters an emphatic protest against the conscripting of the workers of Australasia for military service, and that we do all in our power to assist the Federal government to make the voluntary system a success.<sup>33</sup>

Other unions were prepared to accept the government's proposal for the implementation of conscription. Unions in Western Australia initially were an example of this. The Western Australian labour movement was different from the other States. Its political and industrial wings were united into one organisation. It had decided to declare its trust in the Hughes government, expressing its willingness to support conscription if the federal authorities deemed it necessary.<sup>34</sup> Therefore it is not surprising that in contrast to their eastern seaboard comrades, the Fremantle Branch of the Waterside Workers Union expressed "the utmost confidence in the Executive of the Waterside Workers Federation in reference to the question of conscription."<sup>35</sup> This meant they approved the government's action in seeking to impose conscription.

Most unions in both countries were against their government imposing conscription and began to organise campaigns to fight it. But they were starting from different positions. In New Zealand the government had legislated for conscription and they were fighting for the repeal of the Military Service Act; in Australia the government

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<sup>32</sup> *The Australian Worker*, September 7, 1916, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association, Minutes Federal Executive, September 25, 1916, 212, Box N81 Record 3, NBA.

<sup>34</sup> A.R. Pearson, 'W.A. and the Conscription Plebiscites of 1916-1917', *RMC Historical Journal*, 3, (1974), 21-7.

<sup>35</sup> Waterside Workers Union Fremantle Branch, Minutes of Meeting, September 18, 1916, 722, Box N28 Record 5, NBA.

decided to hold a plebiscite to determine the wishes of the people so the unions campaigned vigorously to defeat the plebiscite,

The New Zealand campaign got off to a shaky start but soon righted itself. A lack of solidarity in the union movement became apparent when a conference was arranged for all unions in New Zealand to discuss the action they would take against conscription. The date for the conference was July 11, 1916.<sup>36</sup> In response to New Zealand's Federation of Labour's (FOL) request if they would strike in protest to the Military Service Act, the Waterside Workers Union at Greymouth responded with an emphatic negative. They also stated any further correspondence from the federation would find the waste paper bin.<sup>37</sup> This was similar to the response of the Australian WWF Executive when they supported the government for the war census. Only a few unions responded to the call.<sup>38</sup> The FSU had already attended a Labour representative's conference in January and saw this as duplication and of no benefit.<sup>39</sup> Most unions had attended or were represented at the January conference but the resolution made there had no effect on the government and its intention to implement conscription. Had the unions been more united they might have had power, similar to Australia's unions, to bring pressure to bear on the government at that time.

To fund a publicity campaign against conscription the New Zealand Anti-conscription League requested assistance from the unions. This request was discussed at several meetings of the Wellington Watersiders Union (WWU). They made no decision due to animosity between the union and league.<sup>40</sup> However, at its meeting on October 19, 1916, financial assistance was finally granted.<sup>41</sup>

The validity of the Military Service Act was questioned by the WWU. Legal opinion was sought from Mr. P. O'Regan, solicitor, who advised under the Constitution Act it was illegal. However, a later Military Act made it legal.<sup>42</sup>

A circular explaining the Military Service Act was sent to all branches of the Locomotive Engineers Union. All members were urged to vote. (It is not clear what they

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<sup>36</sup> Wellington Waterside Workers Union (Hereinafter referred to as WWU), Minutes, June 28, 1916, 40, MS-Group-0612 Record 77-165-1, ATL.

<sup>37</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, July 18, 1916, no page no. (Cutting), Box 80-307 Record 80-307-05/15, ATL.

<sup>38</sup> WWU, Minutes of Special Meeting, September 13, 1916, 62, MS-Group-0612 Record 77-165-1, ATL.

<sup>39</sup> FSU, Correspondence to Secretary Waterside Workers Union, July 8, 1916, 1, MS-Papers-0650 Record 0650-005, ATL.

<sup>40</sup> WWU, Minutes, October 4, 1916, October 12, 1916, 71&75, MS-Group-0612 Record 77-165-1, ATL.

<sup>41</sup> WWU, Minutes, October 19, 1916, 76, MS-Group-0612 Record 77-165-1, ATL.

<sup>42</sup> WWU, Minutes, February 20, 1917, 100, MS-Group-0612 Record 77-165-1, ATL.

were to vote for, presumably against conscription. But a further resolution suggests economic conscription. At the same time the men offered to work overtime to assist the government).<sup>43</sup>

In Australia, trades union bodies throughout the country, disappointed at the government's about-face, began to organise to defeat the plebiscite Hughes had announced. (Western Australian unions officially joined the fight against conscription in the first weeks of October, 1916).<sup>44</sup> This was the signal for the unions to stand to the power of their convictions; they were now engaged in a bitter struggle to defeat the plebiscite. The labour case against conscription was put before a crowd of 100,000 at the Domain in Sydney. All the speakers were from the trades' union movement in NSW. That meeting passed a resolution expressing "hostility to the introduction of conscription of human life into the Australian Commonwealth."<sup>45</sup>

The NSW Labour Council (LCN) believed that the best interests of the labour movement and the Commonwealth would be served if every citizen were free to place his views on conscription before the electors. They endorsed the attitude of the Parliamentary Labor League with regard to organised opposition to the conscription of human life. It was suggested by the LCN that a committee should be formed, to coordinate the anti-conscription fight, consisting of five delegates from Trades Union Anti-conscription Congress, Labor Council, Anti-conscription League and the Industrial section.<sup>46</sup> The LCN adopted the suggestion and appointed five members to represent the Council.<sup>47</sup> To secure a 'No' vote at the plebiscite in South Australia, the United Trades and Labour Council of S.A. (UTLC) resolved to form a management committee to run an anti-conscription campaign. All unions and labour organisations were called upon to assist in the distribution of publicity material, and subscribe to a fighting fund.<sup>48</sup>

The unions were embarking on a costly campaign to ensure the defeat of the plebiscite; they were willing to expend a scarce resource in their commitment to the struggle. To fund the labour movement's fight, the No Conscription Congress (Trades

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<sup>43</sup> New Zealand Locomotive Engineers Association, Minutes, February 18, 1917, 182-3, Box 92-179 Record 92-179-01, ATL.

<sup>44</sup> *The Westralian Worker*, October 13, 1916, 2. Citing minutes from the State Executive of the Australian Labor Federation, October, 1916.

<sup>45</sup> *The Australian Worker*, August 17, 1916, 15.

<sup>46</sup> New South Wales Labour Council (Hereinafter referred to as LCN), Minutes, September 7, 1916, 276-7

<sup>47</sup> LCN, Minutes, September 14, 1916, 279.

<sup>48</sup> UTLC, Minutes, September 22, 1916, 252-3.

Union Anti-conscription Congress) requested the LCN to circularise all unions requesting subscriptions to the fighting fund.<sup>49</sup> The Executive of the Australian Workers Union (AWU), through the general secretary, Grayndler, requested each branch to guarantee £250 to *The Australian Worker* to offset the cost of a massive campaign. The Executive of the Central Branch of the AWU decided a special edition would be printed “stating the case against the Conscription Slavery Referendum.” Further, the Central Branch of the union would contribute £40 to the No Conscription Campaign committee.<sup>50</sup>

To ensure the fight against conscription was victorious some labour councils decided to answer the call of the No-Conscription Congress to release officials to work exclusively on the anti-conscription campaign. Some did, others did not. To enable delegates to devote the whole of their time to the fight against conscription the LCN decided to adjourn until the first Thursday after the day of the conscription referendum.<sup>51</sup> Victorian unions were called upon to release officials to fight for the Anti-Conscription Campaign, and to provide funding for the fight.<sup>52</sup> The Melbourne Trades Hall Council (MTHC), in contrast to the LCN, decided not to release all its officers to assist procuring a ‘No’ vote.<sup>53</sup> Was this a chink in the armour of the labour movement? It does not seem so given their attitude to conscription.

To ensure its seagoing members were apprised of the situation, the Victorian Branch of the SUA resolved that each branch appoint a man to visit members on board ships advising them to vote against conscription.<sup>54</sup> This action was delayed because the general secretary, a supporter of conscription, delayed forwarding correspondence to the branches requesting the advisors. As a result the *Seamen’s Journal* did not publish the request. The general president of the union, Guthrie, was also believed to support conscription and was required to resign, but he refused to.<sup>55</sup>

In New Zealand where, as indicated earlier, there was a lack of solidarity in the union movement, individual unions attempted to gain exemption for their members

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<sup>49</sup> LCN, Minutes, September 14, 1916, 279.

<sup>50</sup> Australian Workers Union (Hereinafter referred to as AWU), Minutes of Central Branch Executive, October 12, 1916, 156 & 159, Box N117 Record 1485, NBA.

<sup>51</sup> LCN, Minutes, October 12, 1916, 290.

<sup>52</sup> Melbourne Trades Hall Council (Hereinafter referred to as MTHC), Minutes, September 21, 1916, 225.

<sup>53</sup> MTHC, Minutes, October 5, 1916, 227.

<sup>54</sup> SUA, Minutes, October 9, 1916, No page No, Carton Z263 Box 1, NBA.

<sup>55</sup> SUA Victorian Branch, Minutes, November 6, 1916, No page No, also November 20, 1916, No page No, Carton Z263 Box 1, NBA.



from the Military Service Act. One such union was the FSU. They individually sought exemption from the ballot for seamen of twelve months sea service. Following a resolution to this effect they requested Allen to exempt these men.<sup>56</sup> The defence minister replied they could not be exempted; those desiring exemption would first have to apply to enlist and then apply for an exemption. As the Imperial and Commonwealth governments had decided seamen of the Mercantile Marine should not be enlisted the minister's decision was severely criticised. A resolution of protest was passed.<sup>57</sup> The minister for defence finally agreed to exempt seamen; they were considered to be essential workers and vital to the war effort. Explanation of the exemption procedure for seamen, who had been balloted, was contained in a circular which was posted at each local branch office. If he produced his discharge papers, showing he was a seaman, to the Military Service Board he would be exempted from service.<sup>58</sup> Members who had received exemption were required, by the union, to report to the union office no later than the second week of each month, to ensure, under the terms of exemption, men were continuing in the occupation under which their exemption was granted.<sup>59</sup>

Further evidence of the lack of solidarity amongst the New Zealand unions is demonstrated by individual miners' unions. *The Maoriland Worker* reported some coalmining unions had resolved to resist the Military Service Act, stating their determination and preparedness to resist conscription by industrial revolt.<sup>60</sup> New Zealand coal miners considered they too were essential workers and should be granted exemption. Being the most militant unionists they believed by threatening to revolt they could achieve their aims. In contrast, Australian miners did not make any threat to revolt because there was no direct threat of enforced conscription. The Australian government had sought the consent of the people unlike New Zealand's government. New Zealand Prime Minister Massey countered the miners' threat; "That if the last sentence of your resolution is intended to threaten the government, it will not have the slightest effect."<sup>61</sup> This was another example of the power the government held over unions, albeit not a very strong one considering the next action of the government. Despite the prime min-

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<sup>56</sup> FSU, Letter, June 16, 1916, 1-2, MS-Papers-0650 Record 0650-005, ATL.

<sup>57</sup> FSU Executive Council, Minutes, July 3-19, 1916, 1, MS-Papers-0650 Record -650-01, ATL.

<sup>58</sup> FSU Wellington Branch, Minutes, November 11, 1916, no page no; FSU Executive Council Circular, November 16, 1916, MS-Papers-0650 Record MSY-0153, and MS-Papers-0650 Record 0650-094A-1, ATL.

<sup>59</sup> FSU, Minutes, January 28, 1918, 80-1, MS-Papers-0650 Record MSY-0153, ATL.

<sup>60</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, September 13, 1916, 4.

<sup>61</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, September 13, 1916, 4.

ister's comment, a letter from the minister for defence to the Member for Grey stated the coalminers were doing important work getting coal in New Zealand and the miners were assured the defence department and government would do what was possible to indicate to the Military Service Boards that the best interests of the country would be served by exempting the miners.<sup>62</sup> But this came with conditions.

A meeting of Wellington workers held on November 5, 1916, was informed of the defeat of the Australian plebiscite on conscription. It was felt this result would "exercise a material influence on the destinies of New Zealand."<sup>63</sup> The meeting resolved New Zealand should not bow to military conscription, demanded the government repeal the act for which it had no mandate from the people and which was enacted in defiance of a universal protest from the labour movement.<sup>64</sup> The resolution was conveyed to Allen, who was acting prime minister at the time. It was also publicised, in *The Maoriland Worker*, to all industrial and political labour organisations with a recommendation "that a national agitation be organised for the repeal of Conscription in New Zealand."<sup>65</sup>

The secretary of the United Federation of Labour (UFL), Hiram Hunter, wrote to Allen on November 8, 1916. The federation contended the government had no mandate from the people to invoke conscription. A ballot of electors should have been held before the Military Service Act went before parliament, as the government had declared against conscription at the last general election. Trades unions were required by the government to conduct a ballot of members before creating an industrial dispute.<sup>66</sup> Why was the government loath to conduct a ballot of the people with regard to conscription? The government believed 80-90% of the people were in favour of conscription,<sup>67</sup> therefore Allen's reply to Hunter indicated the majority of the people supported conscription, and a ballot was unnecessary.<sup>68</sup> However, at best Allen's figures were only a guess and not the result of any official survey. After all, the government had power over the unions and the UFL, unlike Australia where the unions had considerable power over the government.

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<sup>62</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, September 13, 1916, 4.

<sup>63</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, November 8, 1916, 41.

<sup>64</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, November 8, 1916, 41.

<sup>65</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, November 8, 1916, 41.

<sup>66</sup> Letter Nod. 9459, Hunter (Secretary UFL) to Allen, November 8, 1916, Allen Papers, AD1/10/329, Item 780, ANZ.

<sup>67</sup> Letter Nod. 4772, Allen to Godley, April 13, 1916, 4-5. Allen Papers, M1/15 Part 2, ANZ.

<sup>68</sup> Letter Nod. 9459, Allen to Hunter, November 14, 1916. Allen Papers, AD1/10/329 Item 780, ANZ.

In the mistaken belief that the union bodies in coalition had sufficient strength to force the government to repeal the Military Service Act, a conference was held on December 20, 1916. Convened by the UFL, the Watersiders' Federation of New Zealand (WWFN), the Miners' Federation, and the New Zealand Labour Party, representatives of 45 unions and political bodies, covering a membership of 50,000, attended. The conference recommended parliament be convened immediately for the purpose of repealing conscription. Failure to comply with the wishes of the people, the Military Service Act should be at once submitted to a vote of the electors. (By early 1917, Baker contends, war weariness and the call for a further division by the British War Council caused enthusiasm for conscription to wane.)<sup>69</sup> While the matter was before the people, there should be unrestricted right of free speech.<sup>70</sup> This latter part would overcome any threat of sedition charges being laid.

The Waterside Workers Executive pledged itself that, whatever industrial trouble might occur through the Conscription Act being enforced, they would stand together as an executive.<sup>71</sup> Uncompromising hostility against conscription was registered by branches of the Inangahua miners. They would resist regardless of the consequences.<sup>72</sup> Miners were amongst the most militant of unionists. They had been influenced by the IWW's particular form of socialist ideals when it helped Webb and Semple organise Socialist Party branches on the West Coast.<sup>73</sup> While Australian miners were also influenced by socialist ideals they did not go as far as outright resistance to the government. The Inangahua miners were advised that refusal to attest by unwilling conscripts probably would end in arrest. In reply to their earlier protests, the prime minister and minister of defence hoped after further consideration the men would alter their opinion and attitude to the Military Service Act.<sup>74</sup> The government had, after all, the ability to withdraw the miners' exemptions if they continued to defy the authorities. An anti-conscription demonstration was held at Greymouth. The Blackball Band and unionists from the Blackball mine attended.<sup>75</sup> To ascertain what other mines workers actions for

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<sup>69</sup> Baker, 131-3.

<sup>70</sup> *The Maoriland Worker*, January 3, 1917, 8.

<sup>71</sup> WWU Executive, Minutes, December 31, 1916, 89, MS-Group-0612 Record 77-165-1, ATL.

<sup>72</sup> Inangahua Miners Management Committee, Minutes, November 26, 1916, 217, MS-Group-0219 Record MSY-3471, ATL; See also *The Maoriland Worker*, December 1, 1916, 1.

<sup>73</sup> G.D.H. Cole, *History of Socialist Thought: The Second International 1889-1914*, Part II (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1956), 894-5; Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 183.

<sup>74</sup> Inangahua Miners, Minutes, December 23, 1916, 222, MS-Group-0219 Record MSY-3471, ATL.

<sup>75</sup> Inangahua Miners, Minutes, December 23, 1916, 225, MS-Group-0219 Record MSY-3471, ATL.

the repeal of the Military Service Act were, the secretary of the Inangahua miners was sent to the State and Blackball mines.<sup>76</sup>

Miners at the Blackball mine struck in opposition to conscription. Contrary to the government's exemption for miners and a declaration by the prime minister one of the miners had been called up. The mine manager had been informed by the men a strike would take place; they wanted a referendum taken for the repeal of the Military Service Act. The CMF did not want a strike; they would order a general strike for all miners unions when the time was right. The Blackball men were instructed to refrain.<sup>77</sup> The strike, however, was not totally about conscription. As mentioned earlier several other issues influenced unionists to fight conscription; the economic situation was one such factor. The Blackball miners wanted a 17½% increase in wages to offset the high cost of living.<sup>78</sup> Papanoa miners joined the strike a few days later. This was partly in sympathy with the Blackball men and partly due to working conditions.<sup>79</sup> Two other mines' unionists joined the strike, Puponga and North Cape. Their grievances were the same as the Blackball miners.<sup>80</sup> The striking miners returned to work eleven days after the Blackball strike commenced, with no change to their wages and conditions.<sup>81</sup>

In an effort to stop strikes the government caused an order in council to be gazetted. This order added to the existing War Regulations the illegality of seditious strikes and lock-outs. The miners were its target.<sup>82</sup> Despite the government action the Puponga coal miners resolved no union members were to work at that time, although exception was made for Engine Drivers and Firemen.<sup>83</sup> Miners from the Inangahua union also resolved to stop work. They sent a copy of their resolution to Acting Prime Minister Allen, who replied he was disappointed the union "could not view the Military Service Act in a more sensible light."<sup>84</sup>

Allen decided to take a forceful approach to combat the 'go slow' tactics of the miners. When exemption appeals were heard the mine manager was to swear on oath

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<sup>76</sup> Inangahua Miners, Minutes, March 11, 1917, 237, MS-Group-0219 Record MSY-3471, ATL.

<sup>77</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, December 1, 1916, 5-6; December 5, 1916, 9; Letter Blackball Coal Company Limited to Tate, December 6, 1916, Allen Papers, AD1/10/483 Box 788, ANZ.

<sup>78</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, December 1, 1916, 5-6,

<sup>79</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, December 4, 1916, 4; see also Notes of Coalminers Deputation to Allen, May 10, 1917, 1, Allen Papers, AD82/28/1 Box 7, ANZ.

<sup>80</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, December 5, 1916, 9.

<sup>81</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, December 12, 1916, 9.

<sup>82</sup> *The New Zealand Gazette (Extraordinary)* February 16, 1917, 699-700, Order in Council, February 16, 1917, ATL.

<sup>83</sup> Puponga Miners, Minutes of Special Executive Meeting, March 1, 1917, no page no, MS-Papers-3782 Record 3782-2, ATL.

<sup>84</sup> Inangahua Miners, Minutes, May 5, 1917, 246, MS-Group-0219 Record MSY-3471, ATL.

whether the appellant miners were “maintaining a fair average output of coal.”<sup>85</sup> Despite the government’s determination to crush the unions it was loath to take the men from the mines and put them into uniform. Prosecution by the police and salutary punishment by a Magistrate were tried to compel the men to give an honest work effort; failure would see them sent to military camp.<sup>86</sup>

A subsequent strike at the Paparoa Coal mine meant the men there who had been balloted had their appeals dismissed. The trustees of the company wrote to Allen saying coal production at the mine would decrease by 25% if the men were sent to camp. Leave was requested to keep the men working at the mine. They had to comply with the requirements of the military authorities and “work continuously and industriously” at the mine after the leave was granted.<sup>87</sup>

As a result of the ‘go slow’ policy, police raided the offices of the coal miners’ unions. Office bearers of the unions were arrested and charged with having “encouraged the continuance of a seditious strike.”<sup>88</sup> This action appears to have prompted miners in several locations to strike, however they stated the strike had nothing to do with the arrests; the repeal of the Military Service Act was their demand. The minister for defence and minister of mines travelled to the affected areas to appeal to the miners to return to work.<sup>89</sup> A special meeting of the striking Puponga miners resolved to return to work on the same conditions prevailing when they went out on strike.<sup>90</sup> Work was resumed at all mines by April 27, 1917. The miners ‘go slow’ failed to have the Military Service Act repealed; they abandoned the ‘go slow’ policy,<sup>91</sup> and charged miners subsequently had their sentences remitted.<sup>92</sup>

Other miners’ unions opted to apply for exemption for their members before taking strike action. Representations for exemption were made on behalf of miners in the Reefton district to the minister of defence. The minister had decided those miners balloted would not have to present for medical examination until after their appeal was

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<sup>85</sup> Letter Allen to Evans, March 16, 1917. Allen Papers, AD82/28/1 Box 7, ANZ.

<sup>86</sup> Letter Allen to Evans, March 16, 1917. Allen Papers, AD82/28/1 Box 7, ANZ; See also *New Zealand Herald*, February 16, 1917, page no. unknown; March 14, 1917, 6.

<sup>87</sup> Letter Trustees Paparoa Coal Mining Company Ltd. To Allen, May 12, 1917. Allen Papers, AD82/28/1 Box 7, ANZ.

<sup>88</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, April 4, 1917, 6; *Auckland Star*, April 4, 1917, 4.

<sup>89</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, April 7, 1917, 6; April 10, 1917, 4; April 17, 1917, 4; April 18, 1917, 4 & 6; April 19, 1917, 4; April 20, 1917, 4; April 21, 1917, 6; *Auckland Star*, April 10, 1917, 4.

<sup>90</sup> Puponga Miners, Minutes of Special and Executive Meetings, April 24, 25, & 29, 1917, no page nos, MS-Papers-3782 Record 3782-2, ATL.

<sup>91</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, April 24, 1917, 4; April 25, 1917, 6; April 26, 1917, 4; *Auckland Star*, April 26, 1917, 4.

<sup>92</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, May 2, 1917, 6.

determined. Employers were to advise the military authorities the names of those on whose behalf they intended to appeal.<sup>93</sup> This was the case with all miners. However if they left the employ of the mine to follow a different occupation they would be called to camp.<sup>94</sup> If, however, they were going to another mine to carry on their occupation exemption would continue.<sup>95</sup>

When a further strike occurred at Paparoa the Military Service Board decided to dismiss all appeals for those miners who went on strike.<sup>96</sup> As a result a deputation from the coal miners waited on Allen on May 10, 1917. They discussed a previous agreement reached between the CMF and government, although the recent strike at Paparoa was the main topic. Allen agreed that although exemption appeals had been dismissed for the Paparoa miners he would submit relevant facts regarding the strike to cabinet. Cabinet would then decide what action was to be taken. In return the CMF was to guarantee no further strikes for the duration of the war.<sup>97</sup> The decision of cabinet was conveyed by Allen to the Military Service Boards and the Coalminers Executive. Miners' appeals should not be dismissed on account of the strike. The exceptions were those who had previously had their appeals dismissed; they were to be retained in the mines as soldier-miners. The Coalminers Executive was to attend the Military Service Board and give a public assurance as to the miner's conduct for the duration of the war.<sup>98</sup> The strikes and 'go-slow' in the mines caused some labour leaders (Semple, Thorn, and Cook) to be arrested and imprisoned. The FSU registered an emphatic protest against the government's action in detaining these men.<sup>99</sup>

Exemption under the Military Service Act for waterside workers had not been obtained. The WWU considered a recommendation from the Federal Executive that they should try to get exemption from the Military Service Act and resolved to follow

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<sup>93</sup> Inangahua Miners, Minutes, March 31, 1917, 239 MS-Group-0219 Record MSY-3471, ATL.

<sup>94</sup> Minute Sheet Note from Gray to Tate, March 14, 1917, Allen Papers, AD1/10/483 Box 788, ANZ.

<sup>95</sup> Extract from notes from deputation Coalminers Federation (Hereinafter referred to as CMF) to Sir James Allen, July 3, 1918; Letter Gray to Solicitor General, July 9, 1918; Letter Solicitor General to Gray, July 25, 1918. Allen Papers, AD/82/1/11/2, ANZ.

<sup>96</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, May 3, 1917, 5.

<sup>97</sup> Deputation notes, CMF waiting upon Allen, May 10, 1917, 1-9. Allen Papers, AD82/28/1 Box 7, ANZ.

<sup>98</sup> Letter Allen to Arbuckle, July 4, 1917; Letter Gray to Evans, July 4, 1917; Letter Gray to Tate, July 6, 1917. Allen Papers, AD82/28/1 Box 7, ANZ.

<sup>99</sup> FSU Wellington Branch, Minutes, May 7, 1917, 35, MS-Papers-0650 Record MSY-0153, ATL.

the recommendation.<sup>100</sup> A meeting, to discuss appeals, was held between the union and the Military Service Board. Some appeals had been successful and it was difficult to see the reasoning behind how some were exempted while others were not. Workers who were liable to be drawn in the ballot were advised of this situation.<sup>101</sup> Qualified shipwrights were in short supply; qualified men had been lost to the ballot. The Wellington shipwrights union resolved to ask the minister of marine, T.M. Wilford, whether the trade could be considered an essential industry. The minister agreed shipwrights were essential and employers were to claim exemption for those balloted.<sup>102</sup>

New Zealand unions were not happy that the government had implemented the Military Service Act; they believed the voluntary system had not failed, and fought for its repeal. Their representations fell on deaf ears within the government; however some unions were successful in gaining exemptions from service for their members. The Waterside Workers Union at Greymouth decided to break with their fellow unionists by not striking against the Military Service Act if called upon to do so. Strike action and go-slow tactics were implemented by the miners unions, and while they disrupted an essential industry they did not succeed in having the Military Service Act repealed.

In Australia the power the unions had over the government again came to the fore when the Prime Minister (Hughes) and other conscriptionists were expelled from their union and the Labor Party. During the lead up to Australia's first plebiscite, trades unions began to doubt Hughes' loyalty to the labour movement. As noted earlier he had previously been an advocate of Compulsory Military Service and had campaigned for conscription in Canada and Britain. Now he was willing to inflict conscription on his comrades. Other Labor politicians and union officials were also openly supporting conscription. This did not sit well with the majority of the union movement.

The Sydney Wharf Labourers Union resolved to call a special meeting to discuss the advisability of expelling Hughes from the union.<sup>103</sup> He was expelled at a subsequent meeting. The vote was 160 for to 42 against.<sup>104</sup> The Western Branch of the AWU placed on record their "appreciation and endorsement of the action of expelling W.M.

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<sup>100</sup> WWU, Minutes of Special Stop-work Meeting, January 3, 1918, 186; also April 3, 1918, 67, MS-Group-0612 Record 77-165-1, Minute Book and MS-Group-0612 Record 77-165-2, ATL.

<sup>101</sup> WWU, Minutes, July 29 & September 13, 1918, 235, 245-6, MS-Group-0612 Record 77-165-1, ATL.

<sup>102</sup> WSU, Minutes, January 9, 1918, 65-6, MS-Group-0612 Record 77-165-2, ATL.

<sup>103</sup> Sydney Wharf Labourers Union, Minutes, September 20, 1916, 241, Microfilm M70 Reel 2, NBA.

<sup>104</sup> Sydney Wharf Labourers Union, Minutes, September 27, 1916, 243-4, Microfilm M70 Reel 2, NBA.

Hughes and others and withdrawing endorsement from those advocating conscription.”<sup>105</sup>

Senator Guthrie, general president of the SUA, was called upon to resign. He was believed to be a conscriptionist, and was in the eyes of the Victorian Branch no longer a fit person to hold the position. This decision was communicated to all other branches. As Guthrie continued to refuse to resign, a plebiscite was called to determine whether he should be removed from the executive. But it would appear the plebiscite was not successful as Guthrie was again elected to the Federal Executive of the union.<sup>106</sup> The general secretary of the union, Cooper, was requested to state, in writing, his position with regard to conscription.<sup>107</sup> He was a conscriptionist and had been responsible for the failure to promulgate the decision to appoint advisors to seamen to assist them in how to vote at the plebiscite. But it is unclear whether he was removed from his position.

The LCN called for a one day stop work meeting of all workers to discuss conscription; the date was eventually fixed as October 4, 1916.<sup>108</sup> In the meantime, the Sydney Wharf Labourers resolved to cease work for 24 hours on any date decided by the Trades Union Congress. They would also fall into line with any action taken by that body. These resolutions were carried unanimously.<sup>109</sup> This was Hughes’ own union acting contrary to the national federation’s adopted position (confidence on behalf of 17,000 members in the Federal Labor government) which would have given an added boost to that section of the labour movement who were resisting conscription.

The AWU continued its opposition to conscription. It resolved there should be no conscription of life for service outside the Commonwealth, and considered it should be a plank in the federal platform.<sup>110</sup> As the largest union, and having considerable power over the Labor Party, they were in a position to have this instigated; however, they were unsuccessful in having it adopted as a plank in the federal platform. The Western Branch of the AWU resolved to promote the anti-conscription message to those outside

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<sup>105</sup> AWU Western Branch, Minutes, September 30, 1916, 194; also October 12, 1916, 204-5; October 14, 1916, 166. Others removed included W.G. Spence (previous President of A.W.U.),

A. Lamond (Editor of *Worker*), J.C. Watson (former Prime Minister), Box N117 Record 1482, NBA.

<sup>106</sup> SUA Victorian Branch, Minutes, October 2, 1916, no page No., also December 11, 1916, No page No., December 18, 1916, No page No., December 19, 1916, No page No., January 2, 1917, No page No, Carton Z263 Box 1, NBA.

<sup>107</sup> SUA, Minutes, October 9, 1916, No page No, Carton Z263 Box 1, NBA.

<sup>108</sup> LCN, Minutes, September 21, 1916, 282-3; September 28, 1916, 285-6.

<sup>109</sup> Sydney Wharf Labourers Union, Minutes, September 28, 1916, 249, Microfilm M70 Reel 2, NBA.

<sup>110</sup> AWU, Minutes, September 30, 1916, 193, Box N117 Record 1482, NBA.



the AWU. It provided speakers for meetings and literature to further labour's anti-conscription cause. They believed Senators Gardiner and MacDougal's loyalty to the cause was in question, so they were invited to address anti-conscription meetings.<sup>111</sup> This would show whether they were loyal to the Labor cause.

It was important that both sides of the conscription debate were known and in the interests of equality the LCN sought to use the press to further its campaign. They asked the Typographical union to request the proprietors of the daily newspapers to grant equal space between October 23 and 29 to the 'Yes' and 'No' statements on the plebiscite.<sup>112</sup> The MTHC on the other hand, declared 'black'<sup>113</sup> (boycotting and refusing to purchase goods) all print matter supporting conscription. This applied, in particular, to *The Age* and *Argus*, but when put to the vote the motion was lost.<sup>114</sup> Had Victorian unionists decided to support conscription or support liberty of expression? Was this yet another indication of the Victorian result? In a similar vein the South Australian Labor paper, *The Daily Herald*, was requested not to publish the 'Yes' column for the conscriptionists under the heading Labor's Attitude.<sup>115</sup> The unions did not want their members to feel they were even remotely advocating conscription.

The plebiscite conducted on October 28, 1916 was a disaster for Hughes. It was defeated. The concerted campaign by the labour movement and the publicity in *The Australian Worker* and elsewhere prompted the AWU general secretary to state it was a victory for labour and a matter for congratulations.<sup>116</sup> After the defeat of the plebiscite some believed the danger of conscription had passed, but ever vigilant, *The Australian Worker* warned of danger in the future.<sup>117</sup> There were still people agitating for conscription. Hughes had said he would accept the umpire's decision. Could he be trusted? He had proved untrustworthy before. Unions were sceptical and looked towards preventing a repeat of what they had recently experienced. This was not the end of the issue. Nor was it the end of union hostilities.

After the defeat of the plebiscite a motion of no confidence in caucus led to Hughes removing himself from the leadership of the party. With fourteen members from the House of Representatives, eleven Senators and the support of the Liberal

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<sup>111</sup> AWU Western Branch, Minutes, September 30, 1916, 197-8, Box N117 Record 1482, NBA.

<sup>112</sup> LCN, Minutes, October 19, 1916, 293-4.

<sup>113</sup> The practice of unionists boycotting and refusing to purchase the publication or goods.

<sup>114</sup> MTHC, October 19, 1916, 230.

<sup>115</sup> UTLC, Minutes, October 20, 1916, 255.

<sup>116</sup> AWU, Report to Annual Convention, January 23, 1917, 3. Box E 154/17, NBA.

<sup>117</sup> *The Australian Worker*, January 25, 1917, 22.

Party, Hughes was commissioned by the Governor General to form a new government.<sup>118</sup>

With the defeat of the conscription plebiscite the threat of conscription was not now thought to be as great in the eyes of sections of the labour movement. Peace was now at the forefront of some unions' thinking. The MTHC believed that workers' interests were best served during times of peace; workers everywhere were suffering as a result of the European war, it was time to consider peace terms and the Federal government should express this view to the British government. The Prime Minister, Leader of the Federal Labor Party and every trade's council were advised of this view.<sup>119</sup> A peace campaign was discussed at a subsequent meeting, and it was resolved that public meetings be held to show people how their interests would be better served by a negotiated settlement to end the war. The Executive of the P.L.C. were invited to co-operate. A demonstration was held on the Yarra Bank on March 25, 1917. This was followed by weekly meetings in all suburbs and a fortnightly meeting on the Yarra Bank.<sup>120</sup> It would appear, after a few months, those demonstrations were no longer popular resulting in the Trades Hall Council Executive recommending all unions again be circularised with the peace proposals, and asked for their opinions before any demonstration took place.<sup>121</sup>

Hughes, still prime minister but no longer trusted by the unions, would do anything to bring the war to a victorious end. Unknown, but probably suspected, (given Hughes' determination to ensure the war was won at all costs) a second plebiscite was to be called. (It was called for December 20, 1917.) The *Telegraph's* Melbourne correspondent believed he knew the intentions of the cabinet and wrote "Conscription will not be introduced unless something unforeseen occurs. The Ministry has agreed to respect the former vote of the Australian people upon the question."<sup>122</sup> Despite all the union resistance, and the result of the October 1916 plebiscite, he believed conscription

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<sup>118</sup> Leslie C. Jauncey, *The Story of Conscription in Australia* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1935), 246; L.F. Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger 1914-1952: William Morris Hughes a Political Biography*, Volume II, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1979) 226-8.

<sup>119</sup> MTHC, Minutes, December 21, 1916, 247.

<sup>120</sup> MTHC, Minutes, January 18, 1917, p248; March 1, 1917, 259.

<sup>121</sup> MTHC, Minutes, July 26, 1917, 286.

<sup>122</sup> *The Australian Worker*, March 1, 1917, 1, citing *The Telegraph's* Melbourne Correspondent.

was still firmly fixed in the minds of the cabinet. It was, to them, the only viable way to meet the demands of the imperial government for men.

Distrust of Hughes and his coalition Liberal partners was increased. But Hughes was in a difficult position; on the one hand he had to appease the labour movement and the public at large and on the other hand he was expected to meet the expressed requirements of the imperial government. During the May 1917 election campaign, Hughes said "If national safety demands it, the question of conscription will again be referred to the people." The minister of defence said, "We shall see", whether a further plebiscite would be called, or an election held, while Hughes said, "The electors of Australia can reverse their former decision."<sup>123</sup>

Because unions felt they could no longer trust Hughes they continued planning to prevent conscription being implemented in Australia. The MTHC felt it necessary to call for a congress to consider the best way of preventing conscription. In accordance with the desire of the national executive it consisted of representatives from all bona fide industrial organisations in Victoria (affiliated or otherwise). The congress was to be held on November 11, 1916, to consider the best means of preventing the application of conscription in Australia. The various unions were advised the issue was vital and that all unions should be represented.<sup>124</sup> The National Congress held on November 11, 1916, decided that recognition of the peoples' verdict logically involved the immediate release of all men who had been sent to military camp for 'home defence'. Unless this was accepted by the Federal government, the trades unions of Australia would take industrial action to have their demands obeyed. The executive was to wait on the prime minister at once to present their demands. In the event that the demands were refused, the national executive would put into operation all the machinery at their disposal to bring about a stoppage of work throughout Australia until the demands were complied with. The national executive of the Inter-State Trades Union Congresses expressed the view of the industrialist forces of the Commonwealth that nothing short of the removal of W.M. Hughes from the Leadership of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party and the endorsement of his expulsion from the labour movement would meet with the approval of organised trades' unionism. The executive called upon bona fide Labor Representatives to honour the expulsions made by the various State Political Labor Executives. All branches and members of the federation were instructed that in the event of any

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<sup>123</sup> *The Australian Worker*, March 1, 1917, 1; April 5, 1917, 7; April 26, 1917, 15.

<sup>124</sup> MTHC, Minutes, November 2, 1916, 233.

State Political Executive or Trades and Labor Council endorsing the inclusion in the Labor Party of men who have advocated conscription or who have not publicly declared their attitude on the question, that those branches immediately cancel the conscriptionists' affiliation with such Political Labor Executive or Trades and Labour Council.<sup>125</sup>

To strengthen the union movements' resolve against conscription, the MTHC called for the release of the men in camp for 'home defence'. This was additional to the decision taken at the National Congress. If the prime minister failed to accede to their request the Trades Hall Council would circularise all unions to take a vote of all members within 21 days regarding the advisability of a general stoppage of work. If the majority favoured a stop work a date would be fixed when the stoppage would occur, and if effected would continue until their demands had been conceded.<sup>126</sup>

Some delegates on the LCN were conscriptionists. They, and any who may have been so inclined, were removed from the council.<sup>127</sup> The AWU would no longer support political candidates who advocated conscription because they argued that conscription was against the labour movement's ideology.<sup>128</sup> Being the largest union with considerable financial backing it was able to impose its will during pre-selection of political candidates.

The trades' union movement rightly concluded conscription was again on the agenda. In the event Hughes might again press for conscription the demand for equality of sacrifice was again raised. The Tasmanian Worker's Political League was one body which continued to fight for equality of sacrifice. It was sceptical that Hughes would accept the plebiscite result and not proceed further with his conscription plans. At its special conference, in January 1917, it was resolved that conscription should not be enforced under any circumstance unless all incomes exceeding £300 be conscripted; and the consent of both houses of parliament be required before calling men to the colours.<sup>129</sup>

Should there be a second attempt to institute conscription, the Central Executive of the Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association decided the members be allowed to make up their own minds as to which way they would vote. The executive

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<sup>125</sup> LCN, Report from National Congress in Minutes, November 14, 1916, 66-8.

<sup>126</sup> MTHC, Minutes, November 16, 1916, 237; UTLC. considered the matters and referred them to a State Congress to be held November 25, 1916, Minutes, November 17, 1916, 259-60.

<sup>127</sup> LCN, Minutes, November 16, 1916, 300-1.

<sup>128</sup> AWU, Convention Report, January 23, 1917, 62-3, Box E154/17, NBA.

<sup>129</sup> *The Australian Worker*, January 18, 1917, 23.

felt they should not dictate their personal views to the members; the only way to ascertain the member's views would be by a ballot and this was considered to be a waste of time as it would only reflect each member's vote at the plebiscite.<sup>130</sup>

Once again divisions within the union movement became apparent. At the annual conference of the Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association a motion was unanimously carried to assist any Australian government to successfully prosecute the war. This motion highlights the fact there were fundamental differences between unions when it came to the question of continuing the war or negotiating a peace settlement. The association admonished the trades' union movement for its continual attacks on the loyalty of the country. To uphold liberty and democracy, in Europe, they believed the war should be brought to a successful conclusion.<sup>131</sup> But liberty and democracy, for Australian unionists, were to be casualties eight months later when Hughes called the second plebiscite after previously stating he would accept the people's verdict.

The fact conscription appeared to be again on Hughes' agenda brought a new solidarity to the New South Wales union movement. The LCN discussed conscription at a special meeting at which all unions were represented, whether affiliated or not. It recommended that the National Congress be empowered by the unions present at the meeting to call upon any section of the workers to act in any way deemed necessary to prevent the enforcement of conscription. All Unions were to agree to abide by the decisions of congress, and they were to place the proposals before their members, and take a vote.<sup>132</sup> This would effectively overcome any divisions in the labour movement and present the unions as one unified body. Immediately a proclamation was issued or an attempt was made to enforce conscription the committee would call a cessation of work, and be given full power to deal with all matters connected with the question of conscription.<sup>133</sup> The previous divisions within the New South Wales union movement were now repaired and a united union movement would fight any attempt to implement conscription.

To present a unified union movement to prevent any further attempt to introduce conscription there was a broadening of the coalition against it when other state union bodies became involved with the LCN plan. Delegates were appointed by the MTHC to

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<sup>130</sup> Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association, President's Report, January 25, 1917, 251, Box N81 Record 3, NBA.

<sup>131</sup> Federated Engine Drivers and Firemen's Association, Minutes of Annual Conference, April 7, 1917, 71, Carton Z175 Box 85, NBA.

<sup>132</sup> LCN, Minutes of special Meeting, June 14, 1917, 355-7.

<sup>133</sup> LCN, Minutes of Special Meeting, June 14, 1917, 356-7

meet with delegates of the Political Labor League on the question of conscription. The secretary of MTHC requested the UTLC to take similar action. The request was acceded to and delegates were appointed.<sup>134</sup> The UTLC adopted a Manifesto similar in terms to the N.S.W. recommendations. There would be a central Federal Anti-Conscription Executive with the Federal Executive controlling all actions to defeat conscription.<sup>135</sup> The addition of the MTHC and the UTLC gave added strength to the forces against conscription. The Western Branch of the AWU heeded the earlier warnings of *The Australian Worker*, and resolved to affiliate with the Anti-Conscription congress in Sydney.<sup>136</sup>

The unions' preparation to fight a second plebiscite was not in vain. Distrust of Hughes was re-affirmed when he announced on November 7, 1917, a second plebiscite would be held on December 20, 1917, a Thursday. The day chosen was to disadvantage anti-conscriptionists who were strongly supported by the workers and farmers.<sup>137</sup> Farmers would be harvesting and the workers would have to rely on their employers to grant them time off to vote. The plebiscite was to be held under the provisions of the War Precautions Act<sup>138</sup> unlike the first.

The announcement of the plebiscite caused the MTHC to appoint a committee to carry on an Anti-Conscription Campaign. This committee was formed from the executive of the MTHC, and the P.L.C. All Inter State Councils were advised of this. The assistant secretary was released from his ordinary duties to be placed at the disposal of the Anti-Conscription Committee until after the plebiscite.<sup>139</sup> This was a different approach from the first plebiscite when the council refused a request to release its workers to engage in the anti-conscription campaign. The UTLC believed "The struggle to defeat Conscription must go on until every possibility of its imposition on the Australian people has disappeared."<sup>140</sup> To fund the fight against conscription unions were requested to contribute money to the campaign. Different bodies in different states sought these funds and while some unions were able to contribute there were others who could not.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> UTLC, Minutes, June 15, 1917, 307-8.

<sup>135</sup> UTLC, Minutes, August 10, 1917, 326-8.

<sup>136</sup> AWU Western Branch, Minutes, June 24, 1917, 245, Box N117 Record 1482, NBA.

<sup>137</sup> Jauncey, 272.

<sup>138</sup> Jauncey, 266.

<sup>139</sup> MTHC, Minutes, November 8, 1917, 295, November 15, 1917, 297.

<sup>140</sup> UTLC, Minutes, August 10, 1917, 328.

<sup>141</sup> The Trolleyemen, Draymen, and Carters Union of Sydney and Suburbs, Minutes, November 19, 1917, 42, Carton Z277 Box 74, NBA; The Sydney Wharf Labourers Union, Minutes, November 28, 1917, 129,

To enable its members to vote in the plebiscite, the Port Adelaide Waterside Workers moved to stop work on the day, but the chairman refused to accept the motion. They then decided to interview each company to make arrangements for the men to register their vote. One member suggested the men would vote even if they lost work over it.<sup>142</sup>

The plebiscite held on December 20, 1917, was defeated. Hughes finally got the message that conscription was not wanted by Australians.

Australian unions were happy to allow the voluntary system of recruiting to continue despite the falling numbers. Hughes on the other hand returned from Britain and advocated conscription. This caused the unions to distrust him and when he declared a plebiscite would be held union anger increased. Unions throughout the country fought a vigorous campaign, alongside labour newspapers, to ensure the plebiscite of October 1916 was defeated. When the plebiscite was defeated, Hughes, who had said he would accept the people's decision, was not yet finished; he called a second plebiscite, increasing unionists' distrust of him. The unions again fought a strong campaign for the defeat of the plebiscite, which was the eventual outcome.

Unions in Australia and New Zealand believed they had lost their civil liberties when their respective governments passed the War Precautions Acts. To an extent this was true, but the War Precautions Acts were to protect the interests of the country and the Crown. However, unions did not agree with this repressive action; they had a different view of what needed to be defended.

In Australia, *The Australian Worker* said the Australian people believed they lived under free institutions; government was carried on democratic principles, and men may speak their minds and papers print their views with the utmost freedom of expression. The people did not live under free institutions.<sup>143</sup> The Australian government's reaction to the union movement's agitation towards conscription was swift. The War Precautions Acts of 1914 and 1915, and censorship, were used to block any comment which was prejudicial to the war effort and victory of the plebiscites. Similar to New Zealand, men were imprisoned for voicing or printing a negative comment about con-

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Microfilm M70 Reel 2, NBA;. WWF Port Adelaide Branch, Minutes, November 19, 1917, 150, Box E81/1 Record 1, NBA.

<sup>142</sup> WWF Port Adelaide Branch, Minutes, December 17, 1917, 184, Box E81/1 Record 1, NBA.

<sup>143</sup> *The Australian Worker*, September 14, 1916, 1.

scription. Others in the employment of the government were relieved of their position. A leading hand, employed by a government organisation, had been 'relieved' of his position for his anti-conscription views. He was a member of the Progressive Carpenters' Union and had been speaking on behalf of his union.<sup>144</sup>

An Unlawful Associations Bill was proposed by Hughes. The intent of the bill was to break-up the IWW. Trades unions were also threatened by the bill. Any organisation which did not agree with the government could be disbanded by legislation. The government was no longer a Labor government and held no allegiance to any industrial organisation. Members of the IWW were imprisoned for their activities against conscription. It was argued their cases had been prejudiced by the press, and statements from Hughes, Holman, and Critchley Parker, all made before their trial had commenced. The LCN decided the Trades and Labor Council should send a deputation to the state parliamentary Labor Party requesting its members to use every means in their power to secure the appointment of a Royal Commission. The commission was to enquire into the whole conduct of the IWW cases by the Crown law department and the attorney general (Mr. Hall), and was to report all irregularities in the Crown's conduct of the cases. In particular it should report how a letter from Mr. Anstey M.H.R. to Mr. Barker (one of the defendants), which was taken by the police for court purposes, came to be in the possession of Mr. Hughes, to be used for political purposes. The commission was also to express an opinion as to whether it was in the interests of justice for prominent conscriptionists, such as Mr. Hughes, Mr. Holman, and Critchly Parker, to be allowed to create an impression, in the public mind, that the IWW men were guilty even before they were tried.<sup>145</sup> The subsequent imprisonment of these men was considered by the unions to be against British justice. The Labour Councils felt the sentences were too severe and pledges were made to assist the Workers Defence League to secure their release. A letter was sent to Hughes reminding him of his pledge for free speech during the plebiscite campaign.<sup>146</sup> The LCN resolved to take action to defeat the object of the Unlawful Associations Bill. It referred the matter to the Anti-Conscription Executive and Frank Tudor, Leader of the Federal Labor Party.<sup>147</sup> Under the provisions of

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<sup>144</sup> *The Australian Worker*, October 19, 1916, 9.

<sup>145</sup> LCN, Minutes, December 14, 1916, 308.

<sup>146</sup> MTHC, Minutes, December 14, 1916, 246; January 18, 1917, 248; UTLC, Minutes, February 9, 1917, 282; February 17, 1917, 288; February 23, 1917, No page no, June 29, 1917, 314; LCN, Minutes, November 14, 1916, 303.

<sup>147</sup> LCN, Minutes, July 19, 1917, 367; See also UTLC, Minutes, July 27, 1917, 322-3.



this bill police raided a meeting of the IWW, prompting a protest from the LCN against the action of the police.<sup>148</sup>

As in Australia, war regulations were instigated by the New Zealand government early in July 1915. Unionists considered these regulations caused a loss of civil liberties. The regulations were added to; regulating what could be spoken and written. In other words there was censorship. If a person said the wrong thing charges of sedition or treason were levelled against them, unionists (and other sections of the community) seeming to be the main target. The secretary of the Manawatu Flax Workers Union, P.T. Robinson, was charged with sedition for passing a letter outlining the resolutions of a meeting of flax workers, to resist and obstruct the Military Service Act, to an unknown person,<sup>149</sup> He had been warned by Allen to “contemplate seriously the consequences” of the actions outlined in his letter to Allen.<sup>150</sup> Obviously those consequences included charges of sedition for passing a letter to another person.

J.A. McCullough, a union advocate in the Arbitration Court, noted in his diary, “These [War] regulations are so drastic in character that no person is safe to preach Peace, or do anything else than shout for War and a crushing defeat of Germany.”<sup>151</sup> As evidence of this, miners’ agent Robert Semple was arrested for using seditious language at a public meeting. He was subsequently imprisoned for twelve months<sup>152</sup> as was *The Maoriland Worker* correspondent and labour agitator, James Thorn, for using seditious language in an address.<sup>153</sup>

New Zealand unions believed Constitutional rights were under threat. They believed parliament had no right to legislate for conscription without a mandate from the people. But as we have seen earlier, the government believed it had this mandate. Allen stated 80-90% of the people were for conscription, but without a vote this figure could only be a guess. In any case a previous act of parliament made conscription legal.<sup>154</sup> Therefore constitutional rights were not under threat as they had been changed by the previous act.

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<sup>148</sup> LCN, Minutes, August 2, 1917, 371.

<sup>149</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, July 18, 1916, no page no, (Cutting), Box 80-307 Record 80-307-05/15, ATL.

<sup>150</sup> Letter Nod. 6198, Allen to Robinson, June 15, 1916, Allen Papers, AD1/10/329 Item 780, ANZ.

<sup>151</sup> Diary entry, J.A. McCullough, December 23, 1916, 98. J.A. McCullough Papers, ARC 1991. 26, Canterbury Museum Christchurch.

<sup>152</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, December 11, 1916, 6; December 16, 1916, 6.

<sup>153</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, December 23, 1916, 11.

<sup>154</sup> WWU, Minutes, February 20, 1917, 100, MS-Group-0612 Record 77-165-1, ATL.

The railways department had been in the habit of selecting workers for military service. The Locomotive Engineers Association believed this practice did infringe civil liberties and should be abolished. They believed men should be taken in the order of the military ballot.<sup>155</sup> Some employers in the mining industry used threats against their employees. If a miner wished to leave the mine, at which he was employed, to work at another, the mine managers threatened to hand him over to the military authorities. The managers and Military Service Boards believed exemptions tied the miner to the mine. This was not so. A deputation had waited upon Allen who undertook to seek the opinion of the solicitor general who advised that “Nothing in the Act prevents a miner moving.”<sup>156</sup>

Free speech and liberty of the press were demanded in Australia after the loss of the first plebiscite. Unions thought they still had power over the government and believed they were in a position to dictate terms. In contrast, New Zealand unions had no power over the government which was determined to curtail any power the unions might have. Australian labour bodies responded to the restriction on free speech. The LCN resolved that the right of free speech was vitally necessary to prevent corrupt or tyrannical governments interfering with the liberty of the people. They requested all sections of the labour movement throughout Australia demand the repeal of clauses in the War Precautions Act which prevented free speech.<sup>157</sup> The Australian trades’ union movement as a whole was not under any threat of extinction, if Hughes could be believed, but was concerned that the ordinary civil liberties they had enjoyed prior to the Great War could be diminished. As a result, to protect civil liberties, and prevent industrial conscription, the LCN resolved to take immediate action to secure solidarity in the union movement to resist any further attempt to encroach upon the workers’ liberty. They also resolved to call a conference to consider the matter.<sup>158</sup> Freedom of speech was not the only casualty. The very existence of the union movement was under threat.

Censorship of union mail occurred prior to the second plebiscite. The AWU was targeted. A member of the Executive Council, Edward Holloway, wrote to the general

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<sup>155</sup> New Zealand Locomotive Engineers Association, Minutes, June 10, 1917, 194-5, Box 92-179 Record 92-179-01, ATL.

<sup>156</sup> Extract of notes from deputation CMF to Sir. James Allen, July 3, 1918; Letter Gray to Solicitor General, July 9, 1918; Letter Solicitor General to Gray, July 25, 1918. Allen Papers, AD82/1/11/2, ANZ.

<sup>157</sup> LCN, Minutes, January 11, 1917, 316

<sup>158</sup> LCN, Minutes, May 10, 1917, 346-7.

secretary, Edward Grayndler, notifying him of this.<sup>159</sup> Censorship was objected to by the Australian Journalists Association, N.S.W. Branch. They decided the matter be dealt with at their next meeting,<sup>160</sup> but by that time the conscription debate was over.

Unions were not just against conscription or the other impediments the war had imposed on them. Industrial conscription could be implemented; this would allow the government to take workers and place them in whatever occupation they saw fit, and pay them whatever they wanted. Australian unions felt if conscription was successfully implemented the government would then implement industrial conscription. New Zealand unions, already subject to the Military Service Act, also believed industrial conscription would be imposed on them. Fear of industrial conscription was confirmed in New Zealand when the government formed the National Efficiency Board. Its purpose was “to provide for the possibility of national industrial service in some form or other.”<sup>161</sup> The Board recommended that the government take power to place any person in any occupation it deemed essential to the public good. In addition some industries considered essential would be placed under national control and the labour would be provided to maintain these industries. Trades unions’ main principles should be maintained, but when the war finished and normal conditions were restored all awards, agreements and trades union rules which had been suspended should be fully restored.<sup>162</sup>

Industrial conscription was to be considered at a conference of the New Zealand Trades and Labour Council. The government was passing orders in council to introduce a National Efficiency Board;<sup>163</sup> the Trades and Labour Council decided no representative of labour should be appointed to the board. When the council was able to look at the orders in council it was to decide whether the conference was necessary.<sup>164</sup> To the unions, the orders in council constituted a threat of industrial conscription. The government using these orders could take unionists from their ordinary place of work and

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<sup>159</sup> Letter Holloway to Grayndler, November 12, 1917, Microfilm M44 Reel 16a, NBA.

<sup>160</sup> Australian Journalists Association N.S.W. Branch, Minutes, November 26, 1917, 284, Box N59 Record 4, NBA.

<sup>161</sup> Letter Ferguson to Allen, July 9, 1917. Allen Papers, Box 11, ANZ.

<sup>162</sup> Letter Allen to Massey, September 18, 1917, 3. Allen Papers, Box 11, ANZ.

<sup>163</sup> Wellington Carpenters and Joiners (Hereinafter referred to as Wellington Carpenters), Minutes, October 25, 1917, no page no, MS-Group-0414 Record 89-317-08/8, ATL.

<sup>164</sup> Wellington Carpenters, Minutes, November 20, 1917, no page no, MS-Group-0414 Record 89-317-08/8, ATL.

make them work at whatever occupation the government and the National Efficiency Board decided was in the national interest.

The Trades Hall Council wrote to unions asking them to send a representative to consider the threat of industrial conscription. The WWU voted to send the president and the members pledged themselves to take no action in respect of the bill until recommendations were received from their executive.<sup>165</sup> A subsequent meeting decided to send five delegates who were instructed “to urge the conference the necessity of calling a Dominion conference of labour for the purpose of dealing with this Bill”.<sup>166</sup> The FSU decided to send two delegates.<sup>167</sup> At the meeting of trade union delegates on May 13, 1918, it was decided to oppose the bill. A national conference of union representatives was to be held in Wellington<sup>168</sup> but the government had circumvented union action by obtaining the orders in council. The orders had the full effect of any legislation: the Governor General, as the Crown’s representative had assented to the orders.

To prepare for the National Efficiency Board, the government intended to issue conscription of labour cards. The Wellington Carpenters were warned to exercise care when answering the questions there-on, recalling that military conscription had been introduced as a result of previous questions.<sup>169</sup> The UFL convened a congress on July 5, 1918 to discuss industrial conscription. This congress was separate to the Trades Hall’s. Unions attending were strongly against industrial conscription and voted to oppose the government’s move. The Wellington Carpenters wanted equal representation of labour on the National Efficiency Board.<sup>170</sup> Industrial Conscription was unanimously opposed at the conference and a committee of eight was appointed to draft recommendations for the consideration of the conference. The resulting recommendations advanced reasons, from the labour standpoint, why industrial conscription was

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<sup>165</sup> WWU, Minutes of Executive Meeting, April 21, 1918, 213, MS-Group-0612 Record 77-165-1, ATL.

<sup>166</sup> WWU, Minutes of Special Meeting, May 1, 1918, 218-20, MS-Group-0612 Record 77-165-1, ATL.

<sup>167</sup> FSU, Minutes, April 22, 1918, 92, MS-Papers-0650 Record MSY-0153, ATL.

<sup>168</sup> FSU, Minutes, May 20, 1918, 96, MS-Papers-0650 Record MSY-0153, ATL.

<sup>169</sup> Wellington Carpenters, Minutes, May 6, 1918, no page no, MS-Group-0414 Record 89-317-08/8, ATL.

<sup>170</sup> Wellington Carpenters, Minutes, May 20, 1918, no page no, MS-Group-0414 Record 89-317-08/8; APU, Annual Conference Report, May 20, 1918, 18 & 22, MS-Group-1310 Record 88-203-1/08, also MS-Group-1310 Record MSX-3773; WWU, Minutes, June 27, 1918, 226-8, MS-Group-0612 Record 77-165-1; Inangahua Miners, Minutes, June 8, 1918, 315-6, MS-Group-0219 Record MSY-3471; FSU, Minutes, June 10, 1918, 100, MS-Papers-0650 Record MSY-0153; FSU Dunedin Branch, Minutes, June 20 & July 11, 1918 105-6, MS-Group-0431 Record 87-148-53/1; FSU Executive Council Report, September 8, 1918, 41, MS-Papers-0650 Record 0650-065; Wellington Carpenters, Minutes, July 2, 1918, no page no, MS-Group-0414 Record 89-317-08/8. All at ATL.

unnecessary. When the final proposals of the government were brought down another conference would be convened.<sup>171</sup>

In Australia, Hughes said the government had the power to compel workers to work at any occupation they chose for them, for any wages they chose to pay them. But they had not used it, nor did they propose to use it.<sup>172</sup> But could Hughes be trusted? Not in the union's opinion. The AWU, at its convention in January 1917, considered industrial service by persons mobilised. It decided the Defence Act should be amended to prevent mobilised personnel being employed for industrial service, or used in industrial trouble. A copy of its decision was sent to the Australian Labor Party in the Federal parliament.<sup>173</sup>

The Australian government was not out to destroy the unions, unlike New Zealand's which was intent on crushing trades unions. But even in New Zealand the government did not go that far. While it did institute industrial conscription it actually exempted some of the more militant unions because they already were working in essential industries.

In New Zealand the cost of living and autocratic style of government continued to be of concern to the unions. Labour Day 1917 was resolved to be a mass gathering of workers. They were to protest the unwarranted high prices of commodities and the autocratic treatment of the citizens by the government. It was arranged for speakers to address the gathering and any resolutions made would be presented to the government by the procession which marched on Parliament House. Immediate redress, of both problems, was required from the prime minister.<sup>174</sup> The Trades and Labour Council convened a meeting to discuss the proposal.<sup>175</sup> But the government, it seems, did nothing to change the situation.

Economic conscription (the dismissal of men from employment to force enlistment) was one avenue the Australian government used to boost enlistment. Used as a tool to boost enlistment, by a government whose leader had vowed not to send a man

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<sup>171</sup> FSU, Report of Conference, July 6, 1918, MS-Papers-0650 Record 0650-065; IMD, Minutes, August 3, 1918, 327, MS-Group-0219 Record MSY-3471. All at ATL.

<sup>172</sup> *The Australian Worker*, September 21, 1916, 15.

<sup>173</sup> AWU, Convention Report, January 23, 1917, 62, Box E154/17, NBA.

<sup>174</sup> FSU, Minutes, August 13, 1917, 49, MS-Papers-0650 Record MSY-0153, ATL.

<sup>175</sup> FSU, Minutes, September 3, 1917, 54, MS-Papers-0650 Record MSY-0153, ATL.

out of the country against his will, was a direct slap in the face of the unions. It was yet another reason to distrust Hughes who by this time was no longer a unionist, nor a member of the Labor Party. Economic conscription continued throughout the lead up to the plebiscites. 'Go slow' tactics were adopted by both State and Federal governments; public works were reduced or stopped. The national convention of the AWU condemned this tactic. It was designed, they said, to ruin industry and deplete the manhood of the country. Economic pressure being brought to bear on the men would force them to enlist.<sup>176</sup> Union members were discharged from their employment after the defeat of the first plebiscite. This was particularly so in government entities. The AWU convention heard from Mr. Hogan that in N.S.W. some 3-4,000 men were thrown out of work from railway construction. Mr. Stewart advised Premier Holman had waived the right to get loan money from the federal government, money which could have been used to retain the men in railway construction.<sup>177</sup> The economic pressure which was being brought to bear on the men was really conscription in disguise. It was a deliberate scheme hatched by capitalistic forces and backed by Premier Holman to gain his own political ends. Mr. Hogan said there was no doubt the whole object of this dismissal move was to force men to go to the front.<sup>178</sup> The MTHC decided to recommend to the unions that in the event of economic conscription being enforced, mass meetings of protest and organised demonstrations against the wholesale application of the most cowardly form of recruiting be held. The executive was requested to organise a mass demonstration to propagate the peace resolutions carried by the P.L.C. Conference and call upon all Labor members of parliament to refuse to assist in recruiting.<sup>179</sup> A copy of these decisions was sent to other State Councils.

In South Australia there was a proposal to dismiss all single eligible men from the government service. J.K. Nieass secretary of the Australian Government Workers Union advised that notices had been posted in all government instrumentalities that men had to show on their time sheet whether they were single or married. Those who subsequently married had to inform their employer in writing. Should this proposal be effected the executive of the UTLC would be empowered to call a special meeting of the council. The council also decided to wait upon the government to discuss the matter,<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> AWU, Minutes of National Convention, February 6, 1917, 318-20, Box N117 Record 8, NBA.

<sup>177</sup> AWU, Convention Report, January 23, 1917, 34-5, Box E154/17, NBA.

<sup>178</sup> AWU, Convention Report, January 23, 1917, 34-5, Box E154/17, NBA.

<sup>179</sup> MTHC, Minutes, July 19, 1917, 285.

<sup>180</sup> UTLC, Minutes, September 21, 1917, 339, November 2, 1917, 350.

but it appears there was no further action by the government up to the time the second plebiscite was defeated.

While there were common fears about the outcome of conscription, only Australia was successful in stopping its introduction. With a few exceptions trades unions and their associated Trades and Labour Councils in Australia fought Hughes' attempts to impose conscription on the manhood of the nation. Backed by a very vigorous campaign instituted by *The Australian Worker*, unionists and their Trades and Labour Councils were exhorted to oppose the two plebiscites conducted to secure the defeat of the attempts to foist conscription on Australians. By contrast, New Zealand's Reform government pushed through legislation believing it had the majority of the people in agreement. This might have been the case, although evidence to support this is difficult to find. In Australia both the prime minister and governor general misread the mood of the populace and Hughes moved toward the implementation of conscription even though he knew he would have problems with his own party and the unions. He called a plebiscite to determine if the people were favourably disposed to conscription. This was a more democratic way to handle the situation than that adopted in New Zealand. Both governments knew they would have trouble with the unions, but proceeded anyway. Both countries' unions, Trades and Labour Councils and union papers carried on vigorous campaigns; to defeat the introduction of conscription in Australia, and for the repeal of the Military Service Act in New Zealand. Australia was successful in preventing conscription but New Zealand was unable to have the Military Service Act repealed.

Civil liberties were casualties in both countries. Unionists were arrested and imprisoned for sedition or treasonable offences. Censorship was invoked. In Australia an Unlawful Associations Act was designed to eradicate the IWW but it could also have been used against all unions. In New Zealand the government had outlawed the IWW, bringing about its demise in 1915. Some New Zealand employers used threats of report to the military authorities if exempt workers left their employ to work elsewhere where their exemption still applied.

Unions believed industrial conscription could be imposed and continued after the war ended to break the unions. New Zealand was the only country to introduce industrial conscription via the National Efficiency Board. Australia was saved from this measure.

The economic conscription invoked in Australia continued through government instrumentalities through to the end of the conscription debate, but does not appear to have been the case in New Zealand.

There were no strikes because of conscription in Australia; there was no conscription either despite threats of both. Australian unions used the power they had to defeat the government's plebiscites and because of this success there was no reason to strike. New Zealand had a different outcome; the government implemented conscription; unions were not unified in their attempts to have the Military Service Act repealed; militant miners held the country to ransom striking and adopting 'go slow' tactics in an attempt to have the government repeal the Military Service Act and grant exemptions to miners.

The government of New Zealand stood firm on conscription because the unions lacked solidarity and, therefore, were unable to convince the government to repeal the Military Service Act. No minister or Member of Parliament was removed, or resigned because of conscription, although Webb, the member for Grey, was balloted and subsequently courts martialled, effectively removing him from parliament for the duration of the war. In Australia, however, Hughes had decided to hold a democratic plebiscite of electors on the question of conscription saying he would abide by their wishes. However, the first plebiscite was defeated and Hughes still considered conscription, the unions exercised their power by having the prime minister expelled from his union. Caucus then moved for him and his staunchest followers to be expelled from the Labor Party. Hughes had taken decisions without consulting the unions, which as prime minister he was perfectly entitled to do, but as a member of the Labor Party he should have consulted caucus and abided by their wishes. He ignored the wishes of the unions and electorate after the first plebiscite was defeated by calling a second just 14 months later, which was also defeated.



## **CHAPTER 5.**

### **Conclusion.**

A comparative study of the relationship between labour and conscription in Australia and New Zealand helps us to understand why two of the smallest Dominions had different outcomes from the conscription debate during the Great War. New Zealand got conscription, Australia did not. While conscription has been seen to be the main issue, it is my contention that other factors, which were important to the unions, were influential in their determination to fight their government's actions. Some of these factors were a result of pre-war actions by both unions and governments.

The early history of trades unions in Australia and New Zealand demonstrates a tendency toward socialism because of exposure from international influences, and as a result they adopted some socialist principles. This was particularly so in New Zealand while Australian unions, by and large, adopted a more democratic approach. As a result of this exposure some unions affiliated with the Second International Socialist Congress adopted its resolutions to oppose war by refusing to manufacture war materials and not fight fellow working classes.

Most Australian unions generally did not embark upon a strong militant socialist path; they looked toward political power in parliament and consolidation of the union movement to boost this power. These moves resulted from the economic downturn of the 1890's. Even with this political power and consolidation the wharf labourers, seamen, and shearers maintained a militant attitude. New Zealand's unions failed to consolidate but did look toward political action, but later than Australia, due to an alliance between the then Liberal government and the labour movement. Because of this alliance, the labour movement was granted a Conciliation and Arbitration Act, something the Australian unions had to wait for until 1904.

Despite the benefits of the New Zealand Conciliation and Arbitration Act, unions became disenchanted with the system; militant unions joined the New Zealand Federation of Labour, or 'Red Feds' as it was known, and were encouraged to desert the Conciliation and Arbitration system. This was an error in judgement which proved costly when the government changed in 1912 to the Reform Party. Moderate unions, however, looked toward the formation of a Labour Party, but it was not until 1910 that such a party came into existence.

The Australian union movement was stable when war broke out. It had achieved political power with the formation of a Labor Party with representation from unionists, giving them considerable influence over the government. This power enabled them, if the need arose, to fight any government measures they objected to. New Zealand unions, on the other hand, were in disarray at the outbreak of war. They had suffered savage blows since the Reform Party came to power in 1912. The government seemed determined to break the power of the unions; the unions belatedly decided to consolidate, but it was too late to gain any power over the government. By exercising its power the government was able to ignore the demands of the unions.

In the early 1900's the perceived threat of invasion by Japan caused the governments of both countries to implement some form of compulsory military training. Unionists in both countries, despite their ideology, accepted the training because it was for the defence of the homeland; initially only New Zealand's militant unionists rejected it, while the Amalgamated Miners Association in Australia objected to the compulsory element. When the New Zealand government changed to Reform, all New Zealand unions' attitudes changed because of the way they were treated by the Reform government; they were against compulsory training and protested about the curtailment of civil liberties.

The Australian union movement trusted their government during the first few months of the Great War. It was a Labor government comprised of members of unions who the unions believed had the same beliefs as them. As it turned out this trust was misplaced; Hughes broke with labour tradition, pursuing almost every avenue he could to see the war brought to a victorious conclusion, but in the end the power of labour saw him expelled from the labour movement and the Labor Party, but not from office. New Zealand unions on the other hand had reason to distrust the Reform government from the outset. This government was out to break the unions and treated them violently, especially after waterfront and miners strikes in 1913. New Zealand unions continued this distrust throughout the Great War.

By mid 1915, the governments of New Zealand and Australia believed the voluntary system of enlistment was failing to produce sufficient men for the war effort. Australian unions felt the measures the government was taking to rectify this situation were the precursor to conscription. Some unions, agreeing that recruitment was important, suggested proper provision for the dependants of men serving in the military would have assisted recruiting. New Zealand unions also felt the voluntary system had not

failed and like some Australian unions proffered solutions to boost recruitment, by providing for dependants of enlisted men. But neither government acted to rectify this situation. The New Zealand government instead preferred to implement conscription while the Australian government held two plebiscites to determine the people's attitude to conscription.

Union beliefs held firm until war broke out. War caused conflicting positions amongst unions on both sides of the Tasman. Both countries' unionists weighed ideology against other considerations and did not object to men volunteering for overseas service or producing war materials; the protection of the Empire and its Dominions was required. But even though unions considered it important not to pursue ideology at that time, when the issue of conscription arose they reverted to their ideological principles to fight its introduction. In Australia, there was confusion within some unions as to where their allegiances lay, while some New Zealand unions advocated conscription.

But ideology is only a partial explanation for the animosity toward conscription; several other factors influenced the unions to fight the governments on conscription. As noted earlier, conscription has been perceived as the main issue, but the evidence suggests that the failure of the two governments to acknowledge and act upon several other issues which concerned the unions contributed greatly to the animosity toward them, and therefore increased union hostility towards conscription.

In both countries one of the most contentious issues in the whole debate was equality of sacrifice, regardless of whether it pertained to the voluntary system or conscription. It was demanded by unions in both countries. The New Zealand government believed the introduction of conscription would overcome this problem, but in the eyes of the unions, there was still inequality. The Australian Defence Minister stated that conscription would allow the government to practice discrimination; selecting who should go to the front and who should stay at home, thereby perpetuating inequality in Australia.

The unions believed the governments were not providing sufficiently for serving men and their dependants. While Australian soldiers appear to have been better paid than the New Zealanders, they did not gain any benefits from the government for themselves or dependants in the event they were injured or killed. New Zealand soldiers were provided for in the event of injury, but this was not equal to the rate of pay a worker could expect.

The wage freeze, which was voluntarily introduced in New Zealand, was also instituted in Australia, but was by no means voluntary. The Justices of the Arbitration Court decreed wages be frozen. Frozen wages placed hardship on the workers in both countries due to the ever increasing cost of living. In New Zealand a war bonus was introduced to lessen the hardship, but in Australia, there was no war bonus. The cost of living in both countries continued to rise with neither government acting to rectify the problem. In fact, the New Zealand prime minister seemed supportive of the capitalists making greater profits through the war period. These failures by the governments contributed to unionists' antagonism.

The failure of both governments to deal with the inequality of sacrifice, the lack of benefits for serving men and their dependants, and the ever increasing cost of living showed, in the unionists' eyes, a lack of support for the workers. As a result, the workers were not prepared to support their government in its endeavours; in the case of Australia to implement conscription, and in New Zealand to support conscription. In both countries the governments, and in some cases employers, also employed some form of economic conscription, giving the unions yet another reason for antagonism toward the governments.

When the spectre of conscription was raised, with a few exceptions on both sides of the Tasman, unions were adamant it should not be implemented. Unionists feared their civil liberties would be eroded and this proved to be so. Censorship was rigidly enforced in both countries. Men were imprisoned for airing their views on the war generally and conscription in particular. The New Zealand Reform/Liberal government appears to have been more ready to inflict penalties on dissidents than Australia's.

Unions in both countries also feared conscription would bring about industrial conscription which could be continued after the war to bring unions to subjection. While the Australian government did not introduce industrial conscription the New Zealand government did through the National Efficiency Board, adding yet another objection for the New Zealand unions.

The combination of the socio-economic factors discussed in this thesis and enumerated above, together with the ideological principles of the unions, in both countries, caused them to adopt an attitude to fight the imposition of conscription. Government attempts to introduce conscription in Australia were defeated by two plebiscites when the unions exerted their power over government by conducting strong campaigns within the union movement and the union press. New Zealand unions, on the other hand, un-

able to exert any power over their government, were faced with a *fait accompli* when the government introduced conscription without referring it to the people. New Zealand unions were determined to fight for the repeal of the Military Service Act, a fight they were never going to win.

In the final analysis, was the fight against conscription worthwhile? This thesis demonstrates that solidarity is a more powerful force than fragmentation. Australian unions adopted solidarity in their quest to prevent conscription; they consolidated and campaigned against the plebiscites on conscription as a unified body. New Zealand unions, on the other hand, failed to consolidate and act as a unified body. Some unions separately sought exemption from the act for their members. Self interest rather than solidarity was the downfall of New Zealand unions: they failed to have the Military Service Act repealed. As individual units they were unable to exert sufficient power over the government to achieve their aim. The power the government had over New Zealand unions continued well after the end of the war. By contrast, Australian unions used the power they had achieved through their earlier struggles, not only to defeat the plebiscites, but to expel the prime minister from the union movement and vote him down as leader of the Labor Party. The power the Australian unions had over the Labor government and the Australian Labor Party during the conscription debate continued into the future.

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