

GREAT DEBATES: ARGUMENTS FOR CONSCRIPTION

CHARACTER PROFILE

1

Prime Minister William Morris (Billy) **Hughes**



Great Debates: Conscription

© Commonwealth of Australia 2015

This work is copyright.

Permission is given by the Commonwealth for this publication to be copied royalty free within Australia solely for educational purposes. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced for commercial purposes.

To the best of DVA's knowledge, copyright permission has been obtained for any non-Commonwealth material used in this book and for the use of such material for education purposes. The Commonwealth shall not be responsible for any actions resulting from any errors or omissions contained in this book. If you believe there has been an error or omission in any of the material, please contact DVA at education@dva.gov.au.

For enquiries about reproduction or other uses of this publication, contact:

Department of Veterans' Affairs
Commemorations Branch
GPO Box 9998
CANBERRA ACT 2601
Tel: (02) 6289 1111

Website: www.anzacportal.dva.gov.au

Email: education@dva.gov.au

P03075

Published by the Department of Veterans' Affairs
Designed by Fivefold Creative
January 2016



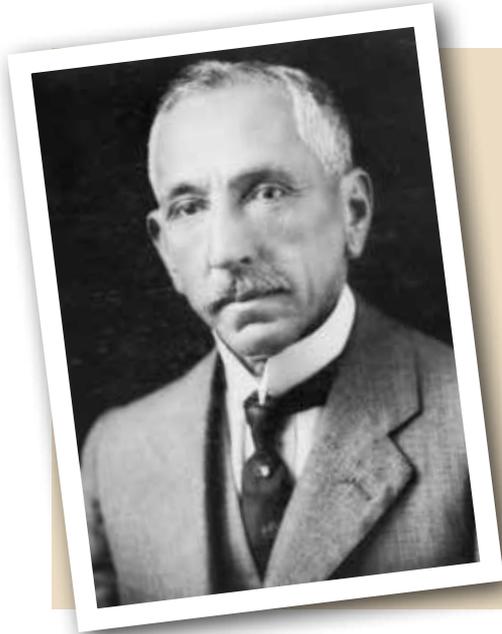
Australian Government
Department of Veterans' Affairs

Source Analysis Worksheet

Source	What is the source? Who created it?	What information does the source provide?	What argument does this provide your character?	What questions are you left asking?

Biography

William Morris (Billy) Hughes



“Don’t leave the boys in the trenches. Don’t see them butchered. Don’t leave them below their strength or you will cover Australia with shame.”

AWM H16071

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/H16071/>

It is November 1917. Billy Hughes was re-elected Prime Minister of Australia in May. During the election campaign, Hughes promised not to revisit the **conscription** issue unless Germany looked like prevailing in the war. However, after requests from Britain for another Australian division, falling enlistments and Hughes’ belief in the possibility of a German victory, he has announced another **referendum** on conscription. .

Hughes has announced the referendum for 20 December. Australians are to vote on whether or not conscripts should be sent to a war outside of the Commonwealth.

This is not the first time Hughes has called for a referendum on the issue. A previous vote was held on 28 October 1916. The referendum was defeated: 49% voted for the proposal, 51% were against. Most disappointingly for Hughes, only a small majority of soldiers serving in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) voted in favour of compulsory overseas service.

In the aftermath of the first referendum, Hughes was expelled from the Labor Party – the issue had split the party. However, Hughes had many colleagues who still supported both him and the need for compulsion. These men left the party with Hughes and formed a new cabinet. Later, they merged with the Opposition, into the Nationalist Party of Australia. Hughes called an election for 5 May 1917; the Nationalists won the majority of seats in both Houses of Government.

Hughes had long been sympathetic towards Australian soldiers. In June 1916, he visited Australian troops on the **Western Front**. After meeting the men, he became particularly concerned about their welfare. Not only were they suffering severe casualties and enduring terrible living conditions, but they were also understrength. The military leadership also informed Hughes of coming offensives in which the Australians were likely to suffer even more casualties.

Source 1.1



AWM ARTV00139

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/ARTV00139/>

Unlike most other armies of the First World War, the AIF was manned entirely by volunteers. While Australia did have a form of conscription, these conscripts could not be sent overseas to serve.

Source 1.2

'Don't leave the boys in the trenches. Don't see them butchered. Don't leave them below their strength or you will cover Australia with shame.'

William Morris Hughes, Prime Minister of Australia, to the Australian Labor Party Caucus, c. 1916, *Conscription during the First World War*, Museum of Australian Democracy, <http://billyhughes.moadoph.gov.au/conscription>

Source 1.3

'The people of Australia have decided that they will not resort to compulsion to fill the ranks of the Australian divisions at the front. The Government accepts the verdict of the people as given on October 28 last. It will not enforce nor attempt to enforce conscription, either by regulation or statute, during the life of the forthcoming Parliament. If, however, national safety demands it, the question will again be referred to the people. That is the policy of the Government on the great question. It is clear and definite.

The Government accepts the verdict of the electors on October 28, and appeals to the patriotism of the people to uphold the honour of Australia by maintaining the Australian divisions at their full fighting strength by voluntary enlistment.

It appeals to the manhood of Australia to strike a blow for this their country. It appeals to every lover of liberty who is fit to take his place in the ranks to go and stand by the side of those heroic men whose glorious deeds gain them fresh laurels every passing day. It appeals to every loyal Australian not to let the supreme sacrifice made by the thousands of young Australian lads who have offered up their lives on the altar of their country be in vain.'

William Morris Hughes, Prime Minister of Australia, speech as part of the election campaign delivered in Bendigo, Victoria, 27 March 1917, in *Australian Federal Election Speeches*, Museum of Australian Democracy <http://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/1917-billy-hughes>

Source 1.4



PROCLAMATION

REINFORCEMENTS. REFERENDUM.

QUESTION.

ARE YOU IN FAVOUR OF THE PROPOSAL OF THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT FOR REINFORCING THE AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE OVERSEA ?

Until America has marshalled her great resources the chief burden of the War must rest upon the British Empire. Every part must do its share. Australia must maintain her five Divisions in Europe and her forces in Palestine and elsewhere at their full strength. To do this 7,000 men per month are necessary.

Voluntary recruiting, though given every opportunity, has proved herself quite inadequate to raise this number.

National safety imperatively demands that Australia should do her duty.

The Government therefore asks the Electors to give it power to raise 7,000 men per month in the terms of the following proposal:-

1. Voluntary enlistment is to continue.
2. The number of reinforcements required is 7,000 per month.
3. Compulsory reinforcements will be called up by ballot in the extent to which voluntary enlistment fails to supply this number.
4. The ballot will be taken among single men only between the ages of 20 and 44 years, including widowers and divorcees without children dependent upon them.
5. The following will be exempt:
 - (a) Married men.
 - (b) Persons who are physically unfit for service.
 - (c) Judges of Federal and State Courts and justices, special and stipendiary Magistrates.
 - (d) Ministers of religion.
 - (e) Persons whose employment in any particular industry is declared by the provincial authority to be necessary for the supply of food and material essential for the War.
 - (f) Persons whose religious belief does not allow them to bear arms, and this objection will exempt them from conscription service.
 - (g) Persons, the calling up of whom for military service would, because of their domestic circumstances, cause undue hardship to those dependent upon them.
6. The Government will prescribe the industries essential to the prosecution of the War and the national welfare of Australia, and a special ballot will determine the amount of labour necessary for their effective operation.
7. Where a family in or has been represented in the Australian Imperial Force by the father or a son or by a brother, one eligible son or brother, as the case may be, shall be exempt.
8. Eligible males of families which have one or have been represented at the front shall not be included for until after eligible males of families not so represented have been called up.
9. All ballots shall be so conducted that families will constitute an entity as possible for vote, and that in no case shall the vote remaining eligible member of a family which is or has been so represented be called up for service. Males under the age of 20 will be exempt in addition to the one eligible male over that age.
10. In determining the one man contribution regard shall be had to all members of the family who have joined the Australian Imperial Force irrespective of age.
11. Ballots will be taken by States on the basis of the proportional number of eligible persons in each State.
12. The tribunals for deciding exemptions will be constituted by magistrates specially appointed, and an appeal will be to a Supreme Court Judge.

This is the proposal of the Government upon which the Electors are asked to vote. The power asked for is definite and limited. It applies to single men only, and widowers and divorcees without dependants between 20 and 44 years of age.

The GOVERNMENT GIVES the ELECTORS A DEFINITE PLEDGE :

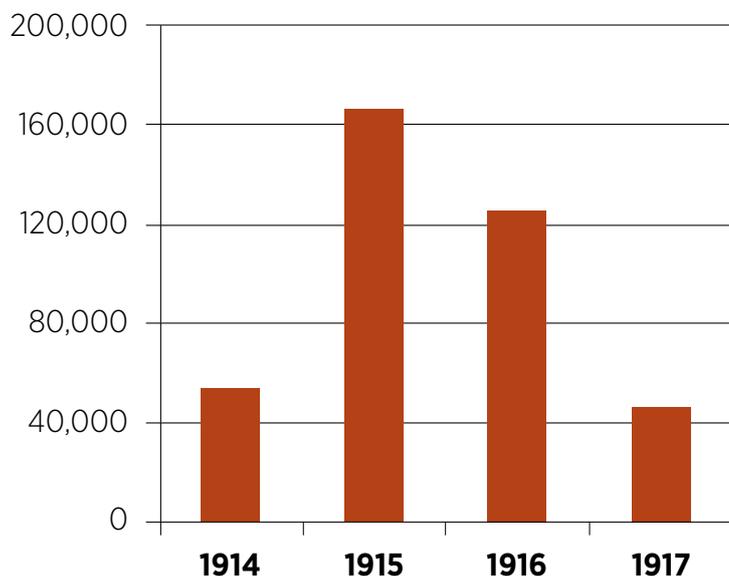
1. The power here asked for will be limited to the period of the War.
2. That the limits of the power will not be exceeded.
3. That the total reinforcements, including Volunteers, will not exceed 7,000 per month.
4. That the number of Divisions will not be increased.
5. That if through any cause fewer men than 7,000 are needed for reinforcements in any month only the number actually required will be called up or enlisted.
6. That married men will be exempt.
7. That other classes or persons exempted under the proposal will not be called up.
8. That sufficient labour to carry on the necessary industries of the country, including the rural industries, will be exempted.

(Signed) W. M. HUGHES,
PRIME MINISTER.

AWM ARTV08888
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/ARTV08888/>

Source 1.5

Enlistments by year*



In 1917 Britain sought a sixth division for active service. In order to meet this request, Australia needed 7,000 volunteers per month. However, the number of volunteers in 1917 was failing to meet this target.

Based on *Enlistment statistics, First World War*, Australian War Memorial, accessed 3 September 2015

* Approximate only

<https://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/enlistment/ww1/#year>.

Source 1.6

“Early this year the Prime Minister promised Australia that the question of compulsory service overseas would not be reopened unless the tide of battle, which was then flowing strongly for the Allies, turned against them. To obtain release from their pledge to the electors the Government are bound to show that this set-back has occurred, and whether or not the Prime Minister at Bendigo took rather too gloomy a view of the Russian situation and the Italian reverses, or failed to make sufficient allowance for the compensation afforded by the adhesion of America to the cause of the Allies, it is certain that the change in war situation is so grave as to warrant another appeal to the patriotism of the Commonwealth.”

The Chronicle. SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 1917. (1917, November 17). Chronicle (Adelaide, SA: 1895 - 1954), p. 30. Retrieved June 10, 2015, from <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article87410856>

Glossary of terms

conscription

A policy that compels citizens of a nation into military service.

referendum

A public vote called by the government to approve a change to the Australian Constitution. The 1916 and 1917 referenda were in fact plebiscites. A plebiscite, also known as an advisory referendum, is used to decide a national question that does not affect the Constitution. It can be used to test whether the government has sufficient support from the people to go ahead with a proposed action.

Western Front

A series of trenches running from the Belgian coast to the Swiss border, separating the Allied and Central Powers in the First World War.