GREAT DEBATES: ARGUMENTS FOR CONSCRIPTION

CHARACTER PROFILE

Mrs Kitty Brill
## Source Analysis Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Source</th>
<th>What is the source? Who created it?</th>
<th>What information does the source provide?</th>
<th>What argument does this provide your character?</th>
<th>What questions are you left asking?</th>
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It is December 1917. Mrs Kitty Brill has just received an anonymously sent copy of the anti-conscription leaflet, ‘The Blood Vote’, from someone in a nearby town. A message, ‘from your dead soldier son’, is handwritten on the back. Mrs Brill has been targeted because she is thought to be in favour of conscription.

Earlier this year, Prime Minister Billy Hughes decided it necessary to introduce a referendum on conscription to address the shortfall of new recruits for the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). He announced the referendum for 20 December. Australians will vote on whether conscripts can be sent to fight overseas.

This is not the first time Hughes has called for a referendum on conscription. A previous vote was held on 28 October 1916. It was defeated: 49% voted for the proposal, 51% were against. Only a narrow majority of soldiers serving in the AIF voted in favour of compulsory overseas service.

On 14 March 1917, one of Mrs Brill’s sons, Jim, was killed by a shell on the Western Front. In November, she received his personal belongings, some of which were damaged by shrapnel. Her other son, Les, is still serving on the Western Front, having previously participated in Gallipoli campaign. He was awarded the Military Medal for bravery.

Mrs Brill recently asked a local newspaper to print a letter called ‘A Little Mother’. It was originally published in a British newspaper and is critical of those who are not willing to serve in the war. The local paper published it on 14 December and, in so doing, publicly aligned Mrs Brill with pro-conscriptionists, less than a week before the second referendum.
Source 1.1

AWM RC00337
Source 1.2

_A Little Mother_

Tommy Atkins to the front,
He has gone to bear the brunt.
Shall “stay-at-homes” do naught but
snivel and but sigh?
No, while your eyes are filling
We are up and doing, willing
To face the music with you – or to die!


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_
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.

* Approximate only

GREAT DEBATES: ARGUMENTS FOR CONSCRIPTION

Source 1.6

AWM RC00318

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.