

GREAT DEBATES: ARGUMENTS FOR CONSCRIPTION

CHARACTER PROFILE

4

Mrs Kitty **Brill**



Great Debates: Conscription

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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

Mrs Kitty **Brill**



***“Shall “stay-at-homes” do naught but snivel and but sigh?”
- A Little Mother***

Jim Brill's Rising Sun hat badge, damaged by shrapnel.

RELAWM14076.003

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/RELAWM14076.003/>

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**.

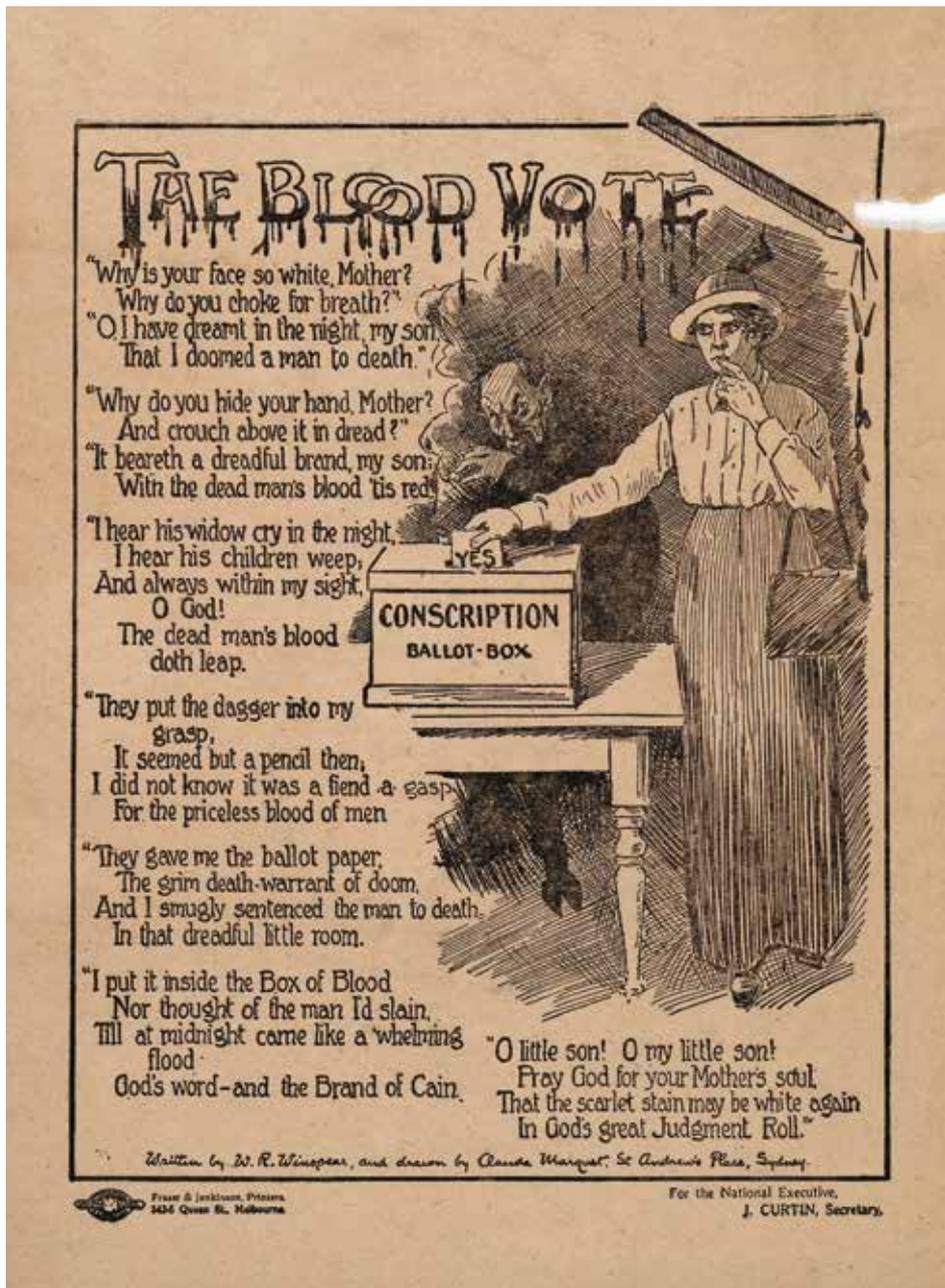
Earlier this year, Prime Minister Billy Hughes decided it necessary to introduce a referendum on conscription to address the shortfall of new recruits for the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). He announced the **referendum** for 20 December. Australians will vote on whether conscripts can be sent to fight 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
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/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!

“From your dead soldier son”: the conscription referenda 1916–17, Australian War Memorial, accessed 4 September 2015, <https://www.awm.gov.au/blog/2013/11/25/from-your-dead-soldier-son/>

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>

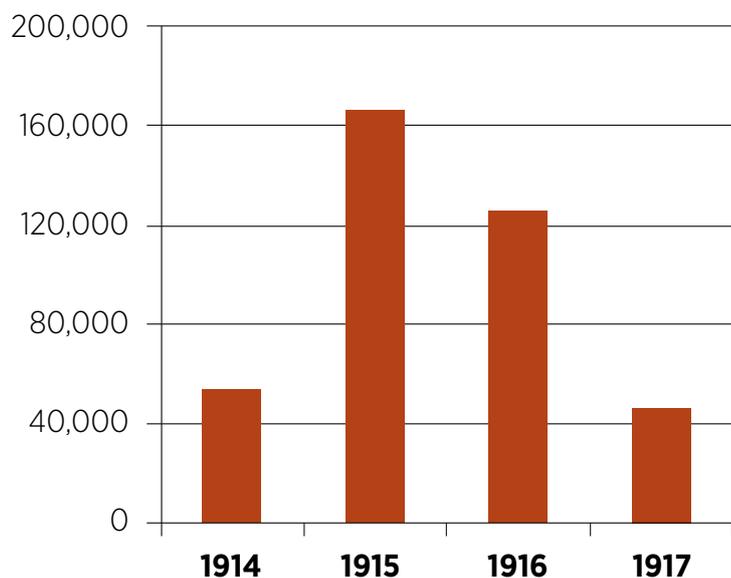
Source 1.4



AWM ARTV10140
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/ARTV10140/>

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



A MOTHER'S LAMENT.

I dreamed I saw a mother,
And her head was bowed in shame;
Her heart was wrung with anguish,
And her eyes had lost their flame.
Long brooded she in silence,
In her bitter, abject woe,
Then shrieked she in her hopeless grief:
"My God! I voted 'No.'"

I said, "Come, tell me, mother,
Of the burden on thy soul;
What is it that hath bowed thee
In this grief beyond control?"
Said she: "My eyes were blinded,
That the truth I did not know,
These hands of mine with blood are red—
My God! I voted 'No.'"

"Men called for reinforcement,
And I let them call in vain;
The word I should have spoken,
I can never speak again.
Fools whispered 'Life is sacred,'
And although I held it so,
I thought of only those at home—
My God! I voted 'No.'"

"I thought not of the mothers
Of three hundred thousand men,
Who bore the brunt of battle
For the curs I sheltered when
I strode up to the ballot
For the few my love to show,
And sacrificed these mothers' sons.
My God! I voted 'No.'"

"Should this fair land be blighted,
Should Australia meet her doom—
Befouled, outraged, like Belgium—
In the shadow, in the gloom?
Through all the years before me,
As in solemn file they go,
Burnt in my brain will be the stain:
My God! I voted 'No.'"

—FRED. P. MORRIS.

No. 28.

Authorized by the Referendums Referendum Council, Charles McKean, Publicity Secretary, 38 Collins Street, Melbourne.
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AWM RC00318

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