Peacemongers, Australian Resistance to War and Military Conscription, 1885 to 1945

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Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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This book first published 2024

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-0364-1207-4
ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-1208-1

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAMC – Australian Army Medical Corps
AANS – Australian Army Nursing Service
ABC – Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACT – Australian Capital Territory
ACTU – Australian Council of Trade Unions
AIF – Australian Imperial Force (volunteer citizen soldiers)
ALP – Australian Labor Party
AMF – Australian Military Forces (militia, volunteers and conscripts)
ANU – Australian National University, Canberra.
ANZAC– Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
AO – Area Officer
APPU – Australian Peace Pledge Union
ASCM – Australian Student Christian Movement
AWL – Anti-War League
AWM – Australian War Memorial
AWU – Australian Workers' Union
BHP – Broken Hill Proprietary Limited
CCC – Civil Construction Corps
CIB – Commonwealth Investigation Bureau
CMF – Citizens' Military Forces
CPA – Communist Party of Australia
CPD – Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates
CO – Conscientious Objector
CPM – Christian Pacifist Movement
CSIR – Council of Scientific and Industrial Research
CSIRO – Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DRM – Draft Resistance Movement
FPC – Federal Pacifist Council
FPLP – Federal Parliamentary Labor Party
IPC – International Peace Council
IWW – Industrial Workers of the World (also known as 'Wobblies')
LAI – League Against Imperialism
LNU – League of Nations Union
LPD – League for Peace and Democracy
MAWF – Movement Against War and Fascism

MLA – Member of the Legislative Assembly (State Lower House)
MLC – Member of the Legislative Council (State Upper House
MP – Member of the House of Representatives (Federal Lower House)
NAA – National Archives of Australia
NBA – Noel Butlin Archives of Business and Labour, ANU.
NSW – New South Wales
PPP – Peace Pledge Union (same as Australian Peace Pledge Union – various state branches)
PRO – Public Records Office
Quakers – Religious Society of Friends
RAN – Royal Australian Navy
RSL – Returned Sailors', Soldiers', and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia (originally Returned Services League)
SDA – Seventh Day Adventist
SLNSW – State Library of New South Wales
SLWA – State Library of Western Australia
UAP – United Australia Party
VAD – Voluntary Aid Detachment
VCAWF – Victorian Council Against War and Fascism
WAPD – Western Australian Parliamentary Debates
WEA – Workers' Educational Association
WILPF – Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WPA – War Precautions Act (World War I)

INTRODUCTION

Historians have often portrayed Australians as a nation eager to go to war, especially on behalf of "a powerful ally" such as Britain or the United States of America.[1] This perception was gained partly from the thousands who willingly enlisted in both world wars, and the public scorn directed at those who stayed home. Such men not only received white feathers and other tokens of cowardice during the course of the conflict, but also were marked in later years as those who "didn't go", whereas those who had served gained a special status in their community as "returned men".[2] Despite this perception being challenged by Australia's involvement in an increasingly unpopular war in Vietnam, conscientious objectors still suffered social stigma, loss of employment and economic hardship as well as long periods in prison, and—for some—post traumatic stress. Today, the veneration of ANZAC[3]—which has come to mean all Australian active service personnel—seems overwhelming. Anyone who offers critical comment or analysis of Australian military activities past or present in a public forum risks being subjected to severe chastisement, including personal abuse, and a questioning of the individual's right to express his or her opinion, even when it is based upon years of research.[4]

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[1] For example, Lloyd Robson, Australia and the Great War, 1914–1918 (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1974 edition), 21, wrote: "Australians had made their minds up and were terrifyingly willing to go to war…"; Bill Gammage, The Broken Years: Australian soldiers in the Great War (Canberra, ANU Press, 1974), 7, wrote that: "great wars were rare, and short, and many seized a fleeting opportunity".

[2] The author recalls, as a child, hearing these attitudes frequently expressed in the rural Queensland of the 1950s, for example.

[3] ANZAC, an acronym for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, which served in World War I, was adopted in World War II as a generic term for Australian active service personnel, especially soldiers.

[4] See Marilyn Lake, "What have you done for your country". In What's wrong with ANZAC? The militarisation of Australian History, edited by Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds with Mark McKenna and Joy Damousi (hereafter Lake et. al. What's wrong with ANZAC*?*), (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2010). Peter Stanley, "The Myth of Japanese Invasion", Australia-Asia-Pacific-Institute Seminar, Curtin University, 14 June 2012. Some of the comments aimed at Lake included: "What have you done for your country? Please, no lecturing. You haven't earned the

Yet, concurrent with the much-publicised history of Australia's military exploits in overseas wars, there has always existed a lesser-known history of resistance, either to conscription or to involvement in war *per se.* Parts of this history have been researched and published, mostly in the 1960s and 1970s, during or just after the Vietnam conflict when a more questioning spirit pervaded the research of Australia's military past.[5] Mostly, these studies have concerned the world wars and the conflicts in Vietnam and South Africa, with little attention given to the National Service scheme in the 1950s.

This book, which is a revised and expanded version of Peacemongers (originally published in 1997), has extended the period under research from the ill-fated Sudan expedition by a contingent from New South Wales (NSW) in 1885 to the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War in 1973—a period of almost 90 years. The treatment of the post-World War II period, however, is brief as I have written in depth about it elsewhere.

Conscientious objectors to compulsory military training and service between 1885 and 1945 were not a large minority; yet by being courageous and vocal dissidents, they made an impact on Australia's social, political, and legal history which was proportionately greater than their numbers.

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right"; "This fool of a woman should be charged with treason. Be quiet and be grateful", and "How disgusting to call ANZAC a myth". Stanley's questioning of the idea that there was "a battle for Australia" provoked the comments: "I find it quite offensive, as would the majority of older Australians", and "Many would consider it good grace for a retraction to be printed. However, I personally think that you're not man enough for that".

[5] Examples include: Robert Forward and Bob Reece, eds, Conscription in Australia, (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1968); J.M. Main, Conscription: the Australian debate, 1901–1970, (North Melbourne: Cassell Australia, 1970); Bobbie Oliver, Peacemongers, Conscientious objectors to military service in Australia, 1911 to 1945, (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1997); Malcolm Saunders and Ralph Sumy, The Australian Peace Movement, a short history, (Canberra: Peace Research Centre, ANU, 1986); Glen Withers, Conscription, Necessity and Justice. The case for an all-volunteer army, (St, Leonards': Allen & Unwin, 1972); Ann Mari Jordens, "Conscription and Dissent: The Genesis of the Anti-War Protest". In Vietnam Remembered, edited by G. Pemberton, (Sydney: Weldon Publishing, 1991 edition), 60-81; G. Langley, A Decade of Dissent. Vietnam and the conflict on the Australian home front, (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1992); Hugh Smith, "Conscience, Law and the State: Australia's Approach to Conscientious Objection since 1901", Australian Journal of Politics and History, Vol. 35, No. 1 (1989), 13-28, and "Conscientious Objection to Particular Wars: Australia's Experience during the Vietnam War, 1965-72", War & Society, Vol. 8, No. 1 (1990), 118-134. A more recent addition to the literature is Bobbie Oliver, Hell No! We won't go: resistance to conscription in post war Australia (Melbourne: Interventions Publications, 2022).

This changed in the mass campaigns against the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s, when thousands took to the streets, braving police violence, fines and prison sentences that were up to four times as long as those imposed in World War II. A more detailed examination of this latter period is in my book Hell No! We won't go! resistance to conscription in post war Australia (Melbourne: Interventions, 2022).

The original research for Peacemongers was completed in 1993 and 1994, when I was a Visiting Fellow in the Peace Research Centre, at the Australian National University, Canberra. I was assisted financially by grants-in-aid from the Peace Research Centre, the Australian War Memorial, and the Australian Army History Unit. The Returned Services League of Australia, the Supreme Court of Western Australia and the Maritime Museum of Australia permitted me access to their records. I thank the staff of all these institutions, together with those of the National Library of Australia, the National Archives (Canberra and Melbourne), the N G Butlin Archives of Business and Labour, Canberra, the Western Australian State Archives, the University of Melbourne Archives, the Public Records Office of Victoria, and the Queen Victoria Museum, Launceston. Dr Paul Wilson allowed me to quote from his doctoral thesis, "A Question of Conscience: Pacifism in Victoria, 1938–1945". Mr Keith Howard permitted the use of material from his Master's thesis, "Political Benefit, Defence Burden: The Australian National Service Training Scheme of 1950–1960".

I am especially grateful to the men and women who shared their experiences, personal papers, and photographs with me: Vivienne Abraham, Ken Rivett, John Fallding, Jim Somerville, Ted Hartley, Nancy Deans, Lex Turnbull, Don Badger, William Coaldrake and Mr D Scott. Vivienne Abraham permitted me to produce images from The Peacemaker, as well as making available a considerable amount of material in her private archives, which is now lodged in the National Library of Australia. Dr Peter Stanley of the Australian War Memorial and Dr Kenneth Rivett read early drafts of the original manuscript.

I thank Fremantle Press, the original publishers, for permitting me to revise, expand and republish the manuscript, Cambridge Scholars for publishing this second edition of Peacemongers, the Noel Butlin Archives for permitting the re-publishing of images from the J Normington- Rawling collection, and Jan Gothard for the use of her photographs of the Archibald Baxter Memorial in Dunedin, New Zealand.

CHAPTER 1

EARLY ANTI-WAR RESISTANCE: THE SUDAN CAMPAIGN OF 1885 AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN (BOER) WAR OF 1899–1902

During the 19th century, fear of attack by a hostile power was a recurrent theme in colonial Australian newspapers. According to historian and one-time diplomat, R. Hyslop, during the 1800s there were almost 200 "war scares". France, Germany, Russia, the United States of America, China, Holland, Japan, and Spain were all regarded as possible invaders. In the last decade of the century, Japan was perhaps the most feared of the supposedly hostile nations.[1]

Acutely aware of their isolation from Britain, Australian colonial governments promoted several possible deterrents to foreign invasion. Some raised part-time, volunteer regiments. Colonial parliaments discussed whether they should acquire their own warships, rather than relying on British naval power. But most significantly for Australia's future history—and the most hotly debated—were the attempts to extend Australian influence in the Empire by sending a contingent of troops to an overseas conflict.[2]

A tradition of opposing Australian involvement in other nations' wars had begun with the Reverend John Dunmore Lang who argued, in a series of public lectures in Sydney in 1850, that the Royal Navy and the British Empire did not protect Australia. Indeed, they were a danger, because Australia's allegiance to Britain made Imperial enemies Australia's

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[1] R Hyslop, "War Scares in Australia in the 19th century", The Victorian Historical Journal, Vol 47, No 1 (1976), 23.

[2] J L Mordike, An Army for a Nation. A history of Australian military developments 1880–1914, (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 1; Neville Meaney, The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–1914, (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1976), 18-22.

enemies, too.[3] Dunmore Lang objected to the colony of New South Wales (NSW) supporting Britain's involvement in the Crimean War that began in 1854. A small minority adopted and developed Dunmore Lang's arguments or took a pacifist stance. One was Daniel Deniehy, a more radical thinker than Lang, who strongly supported him in his opposition to the war.[4] Too often, opponents of war have been regarded as voices crying in the wilderness, struggling against an overwhelming tide of patriotic feeling as firstly the colonies and then the Commonwealth committed armed troops to overseas wars. Nevertheless, the debate began and continues more than 150 years later as to the rightness of sending Australians to fight in wars begun by "great and powerful friends" such as Britain and the United States of America.

The Sudan contingent was the first officially organised expeditionary force to depart Australian shores. It was sent by the NSW colonial government in February 1885 to help British forces avenge the death of General Gordon at Khartoum in the Sudan. The Sudan campaign's savagery made it unpopular both in Britain and Australia. Sir Henry Parkes, a former Premier of NSW, was one of the few who protested strongly against sending troops. He declared that there was no national crisis. A colonial contribution, he argued, would result in the national ethos being damaged by the creation of a "spurious spirit of military ardour". Protest meetings in Sydney throughout March 1885 drew large crowds. Later commentators came to regard this opposition as a "forerunner" of the Anti-War League that was formed during the South African (or Boer) War.[5] The Sudan Campaign is significant for another reason: it set a precedent for sending colonial—and later, Australian—troops to fight in overseas wars.

When, on 12 October 1899, Britain declared war on the Transvaal over the electoral franchise for British subjects in that state, the Australian colonies were initially reluctant to become involved. Yet, soon, all the Australian colonial governments yielded to pressure from the British Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, ultimately sending more than 16,000 soldiers to South Africa to fight the Boer settlers.

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[3] D W A Baker, "Republican: John Dunmore Lang". In Rebels and Radicals, edited by Eric Fry, (Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1983), 83-103, quoted from 100.
[4] Gerald Walsh, "Democrat: Dan Deniehy". In Rebels and Radicals, edited by Eric Fry, (North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 59-82, quoted from 66-67.
[5] W.A. Wood, "The Sudan Contingent of 1885 and the anti-war movement", Labour History, No 3 (November 1962), 52-69.

The basis of anti-war arguments

Even before war had been declared, there was some opposition, either to the war itself or to colonial involvement. On 5 October, the Western Australian (WA) parliament discussed the matter of sending a contingent if Britain declared war on the Transvaal. The premier, John Forrest, and most of those who spoke supported cooperating with the other Australian colonies in offering a military force to fight in the Transvaal. But the Member for North-East Coolgardie, Frederick Vosper, objected. Vosper argued that, before making a commitment, parliament should acquaint itself with the facts because, "we know nothing about the justice or injustice of the [pending] war". Forrest told Vosper that to argue in this way was "the same thing as saying that Western Australia did not belong to the Empire". Vosper replied that, while he was in full sympathy with the expression of loyalty in the resolution, he was not in sympathy with the "idea of Western Australia, or any portion of Australia, joining in a war-like operation against a small people, concerning whose grievances we know nothing". Charles Moran, the Member for East Coolgardie, expressed similar reservations about Britain going to war with "so unworthy a foe".[6]

At least four distinct anti-war arguments emerged over the following months and years of the war. First, there was the view that Britain was fighting to secure control of the Rand gold mines and to acquire territories that would provide a land link between the British colonies in Central and Southern Africa, whereas the Boers were fighting to preserve their independence. While many holding this view did not object to wars in general, they regarded this war as unjust and unchristian. Consequently, they believed that the British could not regard their cause as just because it was driven by greed. George Arnold Wood, Professor of History at Sydney University, was one the few to express opposition early in the war. His opposition will be discussed shortly.

A second group of dissidents argued that Australia should refrain from taking part on pragmatic grounds. They believed that Australia would be left unprotected while the few trained military and naval forces were

[6] Western Australia Parliamentary Debates (WAPD), Vol XV, 3 October to 16 December 1899, 1557-1559. Vosper and Moran represented gold mining electorates, which, at that stage in WA's history, contained large populations of people from the eastern colonies (especially Victoria) and from overseas. Mining communities were the first in WA to elect Labor members of Parliament and were noted for more radical thought than the pastoral and city electorates at the turn of the century. (Note: American spelling is used because the Australian Labor Party adopted that spelling early in its history. In all other instances the Australian spelling "labour" is used.)

fighting overseas. This argument was strengthened when Australian forces also went to fight in the so-called "Boxer Rebellion" in China in 1900, thus stretching military resources even more thinly. Apart from the security risk, some opponents argued that participation in the war would deplete the nation of urgently needed manpower and retard economic growth. For the first time since European settlement, emigration exceeded immigration. Some soldiers took their discharge in South Africa and did not return to Australia after their 12 months' service.[7] A.B. Piddington, who later became a prominent jurist, was a major proponent of the economic view. Piddington wrote to the Daily Telegraph in Sydney, that "siding with England in a quarrel that was none of Australia's making" was indefensible, and that if Australian blood was to be spilt, it should be spilt "like that of the Boers, in defence of freedom and fireside".[8]

A third group voiced its dissent later in the war after reading stories of human rights abuses. In 1902, the Australian public began to learn of the "methods of barbarism" used by irregular units, such as the Bushveldt Carbineers, including farm burning and imprisoning the defeated population in concentration camps where the death toll from disease and neglect was enormous.[9] Added to this was public indignation over the court-martial and execution of Lieutenants Harry Morant and Peter Handcock for shooting Boer prisoners.[10] The major opposition in this period came from the Australian Anti-War League, a body formed in Sydney in December 1901, with Professor Wood as President. Individuals such as feminist reformer Rose Scott, also deplored the establishment of concentration camps, which they saw as "a strategy to secure the surrender of the Boer army".[11]

The fourth and final body of opposition identified here came from the Australian labour movement, and was based in a deep suspicion of capitalists, increased by the defeats of the union movement in the 1890s strikes and the economic depression. Griffiths in the NSW Parliament and

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[7] See Barbara Penny, "The Australian Debate on the Boer War", Historical Studies, Vol 14, No 56 (April 1971), 537; L.M. Field, The Forgotten War. Australian involvement in the South African Conflict 1899 – 1902, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1979), 33; R.M. Crawford, "The Antipodean Pilgrimage of Arnold Wood: A Manchester Liberal and the Boer War", Royal Australian History Society Journal and Proceedings, Vol 48, No 6 (March 1963), 418.

[8] A.B. Piddington, cited in Field, The Forgotten War, 33.

[9] Field, The Forgotten War, 2.

[10] B.R. Penny, "Australia's reactions to the Boer War", Journal of British Studies, Vol VII, No. I (1967), 122.

[11] J.A. Allen, Rose Scott. Vision and Revision in Feminism, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), 149.

Higgins in Victoria both argued that the mining companies' indignation over the Boer treatment of African labourers was hardly philanthropic. Was it not just a means to force white diggers off the fields and enable the companies to employ cheaper African labour? In this argument, the main villains were not the British but Jewish entrepreneurs who were supposedly the power behind the British mining companies such as De Beers and British South African Chartered Companies.[12]

The Dissenters

In the early stages of the war, dissent was confined to a few, middle class individuals, writing letters to the newspapers. Chief among these was Professor Wood. George Arnold Wood came from an English Liberal tradition, and was educated at Oxford, prior to taking up the first Chair of Modern History at Sydney University in 1891, when he was only 26 years old. In 1899, he married and spent most of the year touring England on sabbatical with his new wife. They returned to Australia just as the matter of sending troops to the Transvaal was being debated in the NSW parliament. Wood wrote to the Daily Telegraph, claiming that there was widespread opposition to the war in England. His recent travels had placed him in a good position to judge public opinion in Britain. He argued that the Australian public were victims of biased reporting because virtually all news came from one source—the Times. Wood was unprepared for the response. He found that Mungo McCallum, his colleague at Sydney University, was "a bitter, unrelenting and clever opponent". After a short, sharp exchange of letters with McCallum, via the Daily Telegraph, Wood fell silent and remained so for most of the rest of the war.[13]

The Reverend Doctor Charles Strong, founder of the Australian Church in Melbourne, held a similar position to Wood's. Like Wood, Strong regarded the British Empire as "a force for good, as a means of holding and spreading such values as liberty, justice and humanity". But he felt that Australia, as a new country, should avoid getting involved in European wars. He also had particularly forceful views on the involvement of Christians in war. Strong believed that war was incompatible with Christianity.

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[12] Allen, Rose Scott, 110-111.

[13] For details of Wood's life, see R.M. Crawford, "A bit of a rebel". The life and work of George Arnold Wood, (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1975). The details of his campaign against the Boer War are in Chapters X, XI. XII and XIII. Wood's letters appeared in the Daily Telegraph on 11 and 22 November 1899 and 10 and 11 December 1901; McCallum's letters appeared on 15 and 24 November 1899, 18 December 1901, and 2 January 1902.

He quoted the words of the Hebrew prophet, Isaiah, "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks", as well as Christ's statement, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God". Every real Christian, he believed, must deplore war, and be prepared to work actively against it. Strong was appalled that members of the Christian clergy not only sanctioned war but actively promoted it. He accused some clergy of acting as "recruiting sergeants" and of "prostituting themselves". He pointed out that the clergy had "enormous power to effect a change in people's thinking", and therefore, the church should be "one gigantic peace movement".[14]

Henry Bournes Higgins was another middle-class intellectual who opposed the war. Higgins was the Irish-born son of a Methodist minister, who had received a Liberal education at Scotch College in Melbourne and at Sydney University before entering the Victorian parliament in 1894. Late in 1899, when the parliament voted to send a contingent to the South African war, Higgins was shocked that people could "go into war with a light heart, and without inquiring closely into the justice of it". Like Vosper in WA, he "objected that Imperial sentiment was being exploited to excuse the colony from making its own assessment". Campaigning in his seat of Geelong in 1900, Higgins was asked why he had opposed Australian involvement in the war. He replied, "Because I regarded the war as unnecessary and unjust". Members of the audience began waving Union Jacks and the meeting broke up in disorder. Higgins lost his seat in the Victorian parliament but was elected to the Federal seat of North Melbourne by a predominantly working-class constituency after Australia's federation in 1901.[15]

Within the labour movement, there was only limited opposition to the war. The Australian Labor Party (ALP), which had formed in 1891 in eastern Australia, was divided over whether to support Australian involvement in the conflict. Anderson Dawson, leader of Australia's first Labor government—which governed in Queensland for five days at the beginning of December 1899—objected to "sending a mob of swash bucklers to South Africa to show off their uniforms".[16] E.A. Roberts, the

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[14] Malcolm Saunders, "The 'Pacifism' of the Reverend Doctor Charles Strong: 1844-1942", Interdisciplinary Peace Research, (May-June 1993), 8-9.

[15] John Rickard, "Higgins, Henry Bournes (1851–1929)", Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, Accessed 21 August 2023. https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/higgins-henry-bournes-6662/text11483. This article was published in hardcopy in Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 9, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press), 1983.

[16] Dawson, cited in Ross McMullin, The Light on the Hill. The Australian Labor Party 1891–1991, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1991), 28.

member for the South Australian seat of Gladstone, initially sneered at "'feather bed' soldiers who would involve themselves in such an unworthy enterprise" but later changed his opinion. He enlisted and performed two tours of duty in South Africa.[17] The Boer War is not mentioned in Jim Moss's history of South Australian labour movement, suggesting that it was not a major issue in the state.[18] This is rather surprising, given the strong opposition to military conscription in that state only a decade later, as discussed in the next chapter.

W.A Holman was the most prominent ALP member to oppose the war. Holman's position was like that of Higgins. In January 1900, he was asked to lecture in Hobart (Tasmania) on "The Labour Movement and militarism". Holman contended that militarism was "always used by its capitalistic controllers to check the rising tide of socialism and democracy". When he illustrated his argument with references to the situation in the Transvaal, some sailors who were present began to hiss and boo. Joined by some "larrikins" looking for a fight, the sailors rushed the platform and threw Holman to the floor. The police prevented him being thrown off the platform, but Holman was attacked again and struck from behind as he returned to his hotel. No arrests were made.[19]

Despite threats to his physical safety, Holman continued to speak out against the war. His biographer, Herbert Vere Evatt, painted a graphic portrait of Holman talking to the miners at Grenfell one night in April 1900:

> All the men on the field, nearly 400, attended; and the chairman and Holman both spoke in almost complete darkness while a strong, cold wind kept the rushlights smoking …. [According to an observer], 'There was only one interjection. In answer to some grave reference to English policy, "You couldn't say that at Hobart" was projected from the edge of the crowd like a missile … to which Holman—who was generally not good at repartee—responded: "Thank God. I *can* say it here." It looks little enough on paper, but in the darkness in those wild surroundings, and before that audience, it was most telling. Interruptions ceased then, and Holman pursued his theme

[17] McMullin, The Light on the Hill, 33.

[18] Jim Moss, Sound of Trumpets: History of the Labour Movement in South Australia, (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1985).

[19] H.V. Evatt, Australian Labor Leader. The Story of W.A. Holman and the Labour Movement, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1954 edition), 91-92. Ironically, Holman supported conscription for overseas service in World War I and left the ALP as a result. Evatt was a barrister, a High Court judge, and a state and then a federal politician, Attorney General and Minister for External Affairs in John Curtin's wartime Labor government and later leader of the ALP (1951–1960). As well as his biography of Holman, he wrote several other works on history and law.

> pitilessly to the end. I have never seen an Australian meeting devoted wholly to foreign policy before.[20]

But Holman did not win everyone over. The following month, some of his opponents celebrated the relief of Mafeking by burning Holman's effigy, labelled "Traitor". Holman expressed his disgust in the local newspaper, the Grenfell Vedette, which he owned:

> The skunks, to whose bright genius Grenfell owes the insulting exhibition, considerately went, and hid themselves and are even now unknown to fame. If the gentlemen (?) who prepared the effigy thought they could thereby harm the member for the district, the overwhelming disapprobation which their action has evoked must have quickly undeceived them.[21]

Perhaps the action was more popular that Holman admitted for, in the so-called "khaki election" in 1901, his opponents used his anti-war stance against him, and, in a two-candidate contest, he scraped home by a mere 86 votes.[22]

No Federal Labor politician adopted an anti-war stance like Holman's. The Federal Parliamentary Labor Party (FPLP) seemed more concerned with preventing the employment of "native" labour in the gold mines of the Rand than in criticising the war.[23]

While Labor parliamentarians generally supported the war, the Left of the labour movement was strongly opposed to Australia's involvement. The Victorian radical Labour journal Tocsin had criticised Britain's stance on Transvaal even before the war began, on the basis that the "Mother Country" appeared to be "departing from her traditional policy towards weaker and dependent peoples". Tocsin accused the British government of acting at the behest of the "Stock Exchange people in England and Africa, of greedy diamond speculators, gold bosses, and a Chartered Company which, by its own admissions of piracy, has placed itself outside the pale of civilisation".

Tocsin reminded its readers that the Labour Party in Johannesburg supported Kruger and "dreaded" Rhodes, and that:

> This is not a war of Britain against Boer, but of capitalists against Kruger's anti-capitalistic government; and that the defeat of Kruger means the

[20] Evatt, Australian Labor Leader, 93.
[21] Holman, cited in Evatt, Australian Labor Leader, 94.
[22] Evatt, Australian Labor Leader, 99.
[23] See comments in Federal Parliamentary Labor Party (FPLP) Caucus meetings. In Caucus Minutes 1901–1917, edited by P. Weller (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1975), 56, 87, 91-92.

> irruption [sic] of Rhodes and all his works and all his pomp, of free competition and all its horrors, of the sweater and all its paradoxes of monopoly and ring and trust and combine into the hitherto comparatively un-infested Transvaal.
> You hear talk of avenging Majuba Hill, by which the Boers got their present Constitution. Before acceding to that argument, do not forget that Victorians, too, have had a Majuba Hill which they call Eureka Stockade. What if Jingoes talked of wiping out the memory of that Eureka by which you got your Constitution? Would you be impressed by the sanity of their reasoning?[24]

As with the ALP, the response to the war varied among the trade unions. Through the pages of the Sydney-based newspaper Australian Worker, the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) was mildly critical of Australia's involvement. William Lane, however, believed that the war would assist in levelling class differences—as did the poet Henry Lawson.[25] The Westralian Worker, the WA labour movement's newspaper, which was not controlled by the AWU until after World War I, was generally silent on the war, except for a few comments about its cost and the numbers of soldiers and civilians killed. The editor revealed that he personally was opposed to the war, but that was not the official opinion of the paper. In April 1902, the Westralian Worker commented on the executions of Morant and Handcock, referring to them as "murderers and ruffians" and stating that Lord Kitchener had "no choice but to dispatch them".[26]

The other main source of anti-war comment was the Bulletin, often via the satirical pens of such artists as Norman Lindsay, Livingstone Hopkins ("Hop") and Alf Vincent. The Bulletin's editor, A.G. Stephens, was sufficiently opposed to the war to join the Anti-War League.

Anti-War Organisations

The middle-class Liberals and members of the labour movement found common ground in Melbourne and Sydney in the only anti-war leagues formed during the South African War. The lesser known of these two organisations, the Peace and Humanity Society (PHS, was formed in Melbourne by a group of academics and clergy in May 1900. It was Australia's first peace society, and it was (unusually for the time)

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[24] Tocsin, 5 October 1899.
[25] M. Hearn and H. Knowles, One Big Union. A history of the Australian Workers' Union, 1886–1994, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 89-90.
[26] Westralian Worker, 11 April 1902.

ecumenical with a membership that included Presbyterians, Roman Catholics, Australian Church, and other denominations, which quickly grew to 150 strong. Prominent members included the Reverend Dr Charles Strong and Professor John Laurence Rentoul of Ormond College at Melbourne University.[27]

The Anti-War League (AWL) formed in NSW in December 1901, was a reaction to particularly disturbing accounts of starvation and deaths among Boer prisoners, including women and children, in concentration camps. Professor Wood was President and Ada Holman (W.A. Holman's wife) was Secretary. Members included W.A. Holman and Bulletin editor A.G. Stephens. About one third of the membership were women—unusual for Australian organisations at that time. The AWL drafted and circulated a petition to the British House of Commons, seeking peace terms with the Boers, including "a complete amnesty", compensation, and a guarantee of immediate self-government to the former Boer states. The petition stirred up a storm of rage and indignation. As AWL President, Wood became the main target. Yielding to public pressure calling for the University to dismiss Wood from his chair, the University Senate passed a resolution, on 10 February 1902, censuring him for his public opposition to the war. On the same day, Wood despatched an article to the Manchester Guardian on Australian opinion about the war. It was a balanced discussion, but Wood made the mistake of signing it as "Professor of History", rather than as President of the Anti-War League. When confused accounts of the article's contents reached Sydney University, Wood's opponents called for his dismissal. Fortunately, the Barton government was dependent upon Labor members to get its legislation passed in the House of Representatives. Wood's Labor friends intervened, making it clear that they would vote against the University estimates if Wood was dismissed. Wood's dismissal was postponed and finally removed from the Senate's agenda.[28]

The Cost of Opposition

Ironically, the terms of peace agreed in South Africa shortly afterwards were not far removed from those advocated by the AWL. But this was little comfort to Wood. His position at Sydney University was saved, but he

[27] Marion Maddox, "Middle-Class Radicalism in 'this fine new country': The Australian Church Network's social activism". In Charles Strong's Australian Church. Christian Social Activism 1885–1917, edited by Marion Maddox, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2021), 43; Saunders and Sumy, The Australian Peace Movement, 13.

[28] For details, see Crawford, "A Bit of a Rebel", Chapter XII.

resigned from the AWL. His spirit was broken. Throughout the dark days of World War I, he avoided controversy about the justice or otherwise of going to war. According to his biographer, R.M. Crawford, Wood was "spared" being "obliged to stand for conscience's sake a target of hostility and vituperation". Generally, in his public talks and lectures, he supported the war and the actions of British and Australian servicemen.[29] While this may be seen as a compromise position, Holman changed his opinion completely, adopting the belief that military conscription for service overseas was necessary to win the war. Subsequently, he was expelled from the ALP.[30]

The official inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia took place in Sydney on 1 January 1901, more than a year before the South African war ended. Section 69 of the Australian Constitution granted the Commonwealth control of the former colonial military forces. A Defence Act, establishing a national military force, was an urgent necessity. Australians knew they did not have sufficient manpower or resources to defend their large, lightly populated country if they were attacked by a hostile power. But they were divided over the best means of achieving security—whether to offer troops to assist the Empire in its wars in the hope of receiving reciprocal aid, or to adopt a more self-sufficient but isolationist stance to avoid the notice of aggressive powers. The solution that the Federal government decided upon was a curious one, that would be branded by its most eloquent opponent, the Quaker John Hills, as "child conscription—our country's shame".

From the hesitant beginnings of the Peace and Humanity Society and the Anti-War League developed much stronger anti-war and anti-conscription organisations, such as the Australian Freedom League founded in South Australia in 1912 to oppose the compulsory military training of boys, the campaigns to prevent conscription for overseas service in World War I, the inter-war peace societies, opposition to conscription during World War II, and ultimately the mass demonstrations of the Vietnam War era. Some of their stories will be told in the following chapters.

[29] Crawford, "A Bit of a Rebel", 286 ff.
[30] McMullin, The Light on the Hill, 105.

CHAPTER 2

"'CHILD CONSCRIPTION'— OUR COUNTRY'S SHAME': COMPULSORY MILITARY TRAINING OF BOYS AND YOUNG MEN, 1911–1915

The first Australian Commonwealth Defence Act became law in 1903, after considerable and lengthy debate in the newly formed Federal Parliament. The demanding task of drawing up legislation fell to the first Minister for Defence, John Forrest, former Premier of Western Australia. Forrest, who had little military knowledge, appointed a committee comprising the six State military commandants to advise him on the formation and structure of a national military force. Consisting of either British Imperial officers on loan to the Australian government or Australian officers who had trained and served with the Imperial Army, this committee was naturally inclined to suggest that any Australian military force should be used for Imperial, as well as Australian, defence requirements. The committee's President, Major-General French, an Imperial officer, advocated raising a force of 10,000 men, mostly mounted, "ready to fight for the Empire".[1]

Forrest rejected his committee's advice on most matters relating to the first Defence Bill, which he introduced in the House of Representatives for its second reading on 9 July 1901. Yet the Bill embodied two aspects of Imperial influence: the principle of conscription of all males between 18 and 60 years of age for a period of compulsory military training, and the option for small numbers of permanently enlisted, volunteer soldiers to be ordered to perform military service overseas, for example, in India. Half a century after the so-called Indian Mutiny of 1857, it was evident that British authorities still saw that part of the Empire as a potential flashpoint. Most of the 28 Members of Parliament who spoke against the Bill opposed the "excesses of militarism" which they thought it would introduce into

[1] Mordike, An Army for a Nation., 70.

Australian society—in particular, conscription and the maintenance of a large standing army. A few objected to the potential expense.[2]

The Bill was so controversial that it was debated and redrafted several times over the next two years. Critics included H.B. Higgins, who sought provisions for conscientious objectors to military service. He also wanted to ensure that the call-up would not occur in the event of a so-called "national emergency" apart from a war (such as a general strike), and that conscripts would not be sent to fight outside of Australia. Pro-conscriptionist William Morris ("Billy") Hughes, the Labor member for West Sydney (later Prime Minister), failed in his attempt to have compulsory military training included in the Bill. Clause 60 of the Commonwealth Defence Act required all males between the ages of 18 and 60 years to serve in defence of Australia during wartime, but there was no compulsory military training scheme and no provision for conscripts to serve overseas. The Act was a setback for militarists, but they were not defeated.[3]

In 1905, a group of NSW politicians formed the Australian National Defence League, aimed at persuading the federal government to adopt a system of compulsory military training. The League published a journal, Call, to popularise the idea of conscription. International events assisted their cause. In 1905 Japan defeated the Imperial Russian fleet, providing a powerful weapon for proponents of the alarmist "yellow peril" rhetoric, such as Hughes.

The pro-conscriptionists soon had their way. In 1907, the Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, speaking in the House of Representatives, proposed:

> …a system of universal training, in order to form a National Guard of Defence, in which every young man in the Commonwealth shall be required to serve during his nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first years … Each young man will be called upon to spend an average of sixteen days per year, not in drill rooms or parade grounds, but in local camps, devoted wholly and solely to continuous practical instruction. By this means it is believed that within three years we shall have in the Commonwealth a body of men sufficiently officered and capable of performing the services which Australia will require from her defenders.[4]

The Defence Act was amended in 1909, but it did not exactly reflect the requirements that Deakin had outlined. Instead, the Act incorporated a scheme whereby not 19- to 21-year-olds but 14- to 18-year-old boys were

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[2] The arguments for and against the Bill are detailed in Mordike, An Army for a Nation, 78-84 and 107 ff.

[3] Main, ed., Conscription: The Australian debate, 7-30.

[4] Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (*CPD*), 1907, Vol 42, 7528.

to attend compulsory regular drills as military cadets, where they would learn to fire a rifle. After this, 18- to 21-year-olds would undergo 16 days of military training annually for three years. The only concession for conscientious objectors was to offer men with religious scruples the option of non-combatant training, with duties to be determined by the military. Significantly, in the light of later opposition to the scheme, Defence Minister Joseph Cook envisaged trainees continuing in the reserve until aged 26, and then remaining as members of military rifle clubs.[5]

As soon as the Defence Act was made law, Hughes attacked its “inadequacy”, citing comments made by Lord Kitchener, who visited Australia in 1909 to advise on defence. Kitchener had concluded that the existing defence force was inadequate in every aspect—numbers, training, organisation, and weapons—“to defend Australia from the dangers that *are due to present conditions that prevail in the country as well as to its isolated position”.*[6] Clearly, Kitchener not only conceded the possibility of using the nation’s military force to curb domestic unrest, such as industrial strikes; he assumed that such duties would naturally be part of the rationale for training a militia. Hughes, it seems, agreed with him, despite representing a strongly Labor electorate. The military’s role in enforcing domestic law and order was subsequently legalised in Clause 51 of the Defence Act, which declared that, where the Governor-General had proclaimed that a situation of “domestic violence” existed in a State of the Commonwealth, the permanent armed forces might be called out to quell riots or other forms of internal unrest. If their numbers were insufficient, members of the militia and volunteer forces could be used to protect the State against “domestic violence”.[7]

Kitchener’s recommendation of extending the period of military training was accepted and legalised by a Labor government in a 1911 amendment to Clauses 125 and 128 of the Defence Act. The Defence Minister, Senator George Pearce, introduced the amended Act in the Senate. Pearce’s fellow Labor Senators, Arthur Rae, Albert Gardiner, R.K. Ready and James Long, opposed extending the scheme. Rae, a life member of the AWU, who had been imprisoned in 1890 for bringing shearers in the Riverina district out on strike, tried to have the Act amended to state that the Citizen Defence Force (or militia) was raised solely to defend Australia against external aggression, and that its members would in no circumstances bear arms

[5] CPD, 1909, Vol 51, 3622-3623,

[6] Kitchener, cited by W.M. Hughes, CPD, 1910, Vol. 59, 6118 (emphasis added).

[7] Australia. Acts of Parliament, Defence Act 1903–1911, Part III, Division 3. “Domestic violence” in this context referred specifically to internal unrest such as industrial strikes, street demonstrations and riots.

against any Australian citizen. Pearce opposed Rae's motion, stating that the defence scheme was intended to protect Australia from internal as well as external aggression. The defence force, therefore, had a role in defending "the laws which have been framed in Parliament". When the vote was taken, only Rae, Gardiner, Ready and Long opposed it.[8]

Pearce's interpretation of "external aggression" was much wider than many of his colleagues and opponents realised. He fully agreed with British aims to use Australian troops for the defence of the Empire, whereas the legislation stated they would train only for Australia's defence. At a secret meeting during the Imperial Conference in London in 1911, prior to the November amendment of the Defence Act, Pearce had committed Australian military forces to an expeditionary as well as a defensive role.[9]

The new legislation compelled all "British" males aged 12 to 26 years, who had lived in Australia for at least the previous six months, to undergo military training in the junior or senior cadets (12 to 18 years) and the citizen forces (18 to 26 years). Junior cadets were required to perform 120 hours of training each year (approximately two and a half hours a week) and senior cadets had to undergo four whole-day drills, 12 half-day drills and 24 night drills. Members of the citizen forces were to complete the equivalent of 16 whole-day drills, including eight days of continuous training in camps. The only exemptions were for medical unfitness; schoolteachers who had taught at a naval or military college; theological students, and members of the permanent military or naval forces. Former criminals and men who were regarded as being "of bad character" were barred from serving. Non-Europeans were not wholly exempt; they were required to train for non-combatant duties.[10]

There was no provision for conscientious objectors, although the Governor-General had the power to exempt individuals, or to limit or withdraw exemptions from areas specified in the proclamation. He could also grant temporary exemptions of up to a year in individual cases. The wording of the legislation implied that being allowed to undertake such training was a privilege. Thus, the legislation indicates a quite remarkable disregard for rights of pacifists, especially religious minorities such as the

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[8] CPD, 1911, Vol. LXI, 2 November, 2147. For details of Arthur Rae's life, see Frank Farrell, "Rae, Arthur Edward (1860–1943)", Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University. Accessed online 15 August 2023 https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/rae-arthur-edward-8148/text14237, (originally published in Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol 11, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1988).

[9] Mordike, An Army for a Nation, 238-243.

[10] Defence Act, 1903–1911, Part XIII, Clauses 138, 141