

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

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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.