

Conscription for war and profit: classes, nation-market-states and empires

Humphrey McQueen

Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Canberra Branch,
Seminar, Saturday, 29 October 2017: 'The defeat of conscription: a centennial retrospective'.

'Here and today, a new epoch in the history of the world has begun.' So said Johann Wolfgang Goethe to the Prussian commanders on the night after their defeat at Valmy on 20 September 1792. French volunteers had charged the invaders' guns shouting '*Vive la Nation!*' and singing '*Ca ira*' - 'It goes well, It goes well, It goes well.' 'A new epoch' indeed, for, on the following day, the Convention abolished the monarchy.¹ Within two years, the lyrics of '*Ca ira*' had been rewritten to include '*Les aristocrates a la lanterne!*'²

Fernand Braudel reports that 'the modern notion of *patrie* ... took on its first explosive form with the Revolution,' while 'the word nationalism first appears only from the pen of Balzac.'³ In *The Lily of the Valley* (1835), the half-crazed Count Mortsauf faints as he returns from exile crying: 'La France! La France!',⁴ whereas, in *Cesar Birotteau* (1837), Balzac mocks liberal merchants for claiming 'a monopoly of love of their country. The royalists were at liberty to love the king, but to love the country was the privilege of the *Left*; the people belonged to it!'⁵ The sense in which working people 'belonged' to the merchants and their ilk underpins this study.

Famous victories

To join in celebrating the defeat of the first conscription plebiscite, one hundred years ago yesterday, is an honour. My thanks to the Labour History Society for an opportunity to reflect once more on how industrial and military conscription operates in the multi-layered and conflicted connections between social classes and nation-market-states.

The 'No' majorities in 1916 and 1917 were more expressive of the popular will than had been the votes for or against Federation in the 1890s, when only men could vote – other than in South Australia - and when far fewer of them turned out. The two defeats of

¹ William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, O.U.P., Oxford, 1989, pp. 192-3.

² Paul Harvey and J.E. Heseltine, *The Oxford Companion to French Literature*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1959, p. 98.

³ Fernand Braudel, *The Identity of France*, Volume one, Fontana, London, 1989, p. 18.

⁴ The cry '*La France!*' was not confined to its natives but had been taken up by the lower and middle ranks of Neapolitans when Charles VIII invaded in 1495, Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination, City-States in Renaissance Italy*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1983, pp. 404 and 417.

⁵ Honore de Balzac, *Lily of the Valley*, Heron Books, London, no date, p. 69, and *Cesar Birrotteau*, Collins, London, no date, p. 312.

conscription for overseas service, alongside the defeat of the anti-Red Bill in 1951, are the three most significant events in the history of European Australia during the twentieth-century. It is no surprise that our victories over conscription are not celebrated by the capitalist-warfare state. In a socialist Australia, they will displace ANZAC Day, the Queen's birthday and Christmas Day as public holidays.

Australia would have been tempered differently had any of those attempts to tighten the covert dictatorship of the bourgeoisie succeeded. Parliamentary democracy would not have been replaced by an overt dictatorship, despite Billy Hughes's demonstrating his opposition to Prussianism by establishing a police force in alarm at a terrorist egg striking his hat in Warwick.⁶ Nonetheless, each prosecution and repression took place under the 1915 War Precautions Act for which, as the Solicitor-General, Sir Robert Garran, recalled,

The regulations were mostly expressed widely to make sure that nothing necessary was omitted, and the result soon was that John Citizen was hardly able to lift a finger without coming under the penumbra of some technical offence⁷

Under the War Precautions Repeal Act of 1920, the moderate secretary of the Melbourne Trades Hall E. J. Holloway was convicted during the 1929 timber workers dispute for encouraging 'something in the nature of a strike.'⁸

Fears that the returning troops might follow the lead of German and Russian forces in turning their weapons against the authorities⁹ led to a conference in Melbourne on 18 January 1919 attended by the Chief of the General Staff, the Inspector of Police in New South Wales and the acting Chief Commissioner in Victoria who agreed:

That arrangements should be made quietly for the rapid increase in Police Forces by enrolment of additional and special constables, and by preparation of lists of suitable citizens in every police district ...

The Chief of the General Staff warned that, in the initial stages of any outbreak of Bolshevism, the Army could not be relied upon for more than

- (a) military material;
- (b) small groups of picked men with machine guns, and
- (c) a few aeroplanes with improvised bombs.

Three days later, Federal cabinet approved these plans.¹⁰

⁶ L.F. Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger 1914-1952, A Political Biography of William Morris Hughes*, volume II, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1979; Hughes sent rifles and machine-guns north 'to prepare for eventualities.' pp. 294-6. Compare Hughes's reaction to that of George Reid who remarked 'That egg was as rotten as the bastard who threw it.'

⁷ R.R. Garran *Prosper the Commonwealth*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1958, p. 222; Section 51 (vi) of the Constitution allowed for a centralisation of authority.

⁸ D. Carboch, 'The Fall of the Bruce-page Government', *Studies in Australian Politics*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1958, p. 130.

⁹ see my 'New Guard', *From Gallipoli to Petrov, Arguing with Australian History*, George Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1984, pp. 210-214.

¹⁰ A.A., CP, 447/2, SC 294; see my 'Shoot the Bolshevik!' 'Hang the Profiteer!' 'Reconstructing Australian Capitalism, 1918-21', E.L. Wheelwright and Ken Buckley (eds), *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*, Volume two, ANZ Books, Sydney, 1978, pp. 185-206.

Having to depend on this interlock of regular and volunteers meant that even the intelligence operative and Attorney General, John Grieg Latham, was never game to apply the full weight of his 1925 Crimes Act, or its 1932 rewrite, because of the weak spots in the repressive apparatuses of the state, as he spelt out in his April 1929 cabinet submission:

.. it is not possible, particularly with the limited executive agencies, (police, etc.) available to a federal government, to compel obedience on a continental scale by merely legal means to an award to which the unions of Australia as a whole are opposed. The problem is smaller and simpler when the issue is fought on a State arena – and the States have the police forces which the Commonwealth lacks.¹¹

Here we have the matrix for the White Army to deal with the 1923 Police strike in Melbourne¹², Eric Campbell's New Guard to deport the leaders of the Seamen's Union, Tom Walsh and Jacob Johnson, in 1925,¹³ and multiple manifestations as documented by Andrew Moore.¹⁴

The No majorities boosted the fighting strength of organised labour around the jobs and even in parliament. Had the 'Yes' side won, would the militants of the Labor Volunteer Defence Army¹⁵ have turned to physical force to prevent being conscripted? The willingness to have a go lasted into 1930 with the collapse of the miners' strike, to revive in 1934 at Wonthaggi and around the Movement Against War and Fascism. During the later 1930s, the Communist Party began infiltrating the military to prevent its being used against working people or to invade the Soviet Union again.¹⁶ Even during the Party's 'defeatist' period in the Phoney War, it had hopes of building a peoples' army to resist the Japanese with guerilla tactics as their Chinese comrades had been doing for a decade.¹⁷ The Imperial Japanese Army had decided to go north.¹⁸

Who? Whom?

Although the 'No' vote was a reverse for the imperial ruling class, the result was not a disaster like the one inflicted a year later on the Czarist regime at the hands of its own conscripts. No war: no revolution. That is the message of Lenin's popular outline of

¹¹ Latham Papers, NLA MS 1009, Series 28-4.

¹² Jacqueline Templeton, 'The Melbourne Police Strike of 1923', *Strikes*, Angus & Robertson, Cremorne, 1973, pp. 103-27; Gavin Brown and Robert Haldane, *Days of Violence, The 1923 police strike in Melbourne*, Hybrid Publishers, Melbourne, 1998.

¹³ Eric Campbell, *The Rallying Point*, M.U.P., Carlton, 1965, p. 16.

¹⁴ Andrew Moore, *The Secret Army and the Premier, Conservative Paramilitary Organisations in New South Wales 1930-32*, N.S.W. University Press, Kensington, 1989, and *The right road?: a history of right-wing politics in Australia*, O.U.P., South Melbourne, 1995; Michael Cathcart, *Defending the National Tuckshop*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1989.

¹⁵ John Paul Adams, *The Best Hated Man in Australia, The Life and Death of Percy Brookfield 1875-1921*, Puncher & Wattmann, Sydney, 2010, pp. 54-73.

¹⁶ Stuart Macintyre, *Reds, the Communist Party of Australia from origins to illegality*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1998, pp. 394-5.

¹⁷ See Bernice Morris, *Between the Lines*, Sybylla, Collingwood, 1988, pp. 31, 34 and 120-1; cf. M. Barnard Eldershaw, *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, Virago, London, 1983, pp. 374ff.

¹⁸ See my *Japan to the Rescue*, Heinemann, Port Melbourne, 1992, chapters 16 and 17; and Peter Stanley, *Invading Australia: Japan and the Battle for Australia, 1942*, Viking, Camberwell, 2008.

monopolising capitals, to which he gave the title *Imperialism*.¹⁹ The Romanoffs were no longer able to rule in the old way because they had lost their monopoly of violence.²⁰ After the anti-fascist war, the same fate befell the old ruling classes in Yugoslavia, China, half of Korea, Vietnam and, less directly, the British in India.

Outcomes are forever contingent. Would a victorious Czarist army have turned its guns against its masters? The improbability of that victory flows from the failure of its allies to seize the Dardanelles and maintain a warm water port. The long-term opposition to the Romanoffs was inseparable from their failure to keep up supplies to their forces in the field. But raising the prospect of a Czarist victory on the Eastern Front underlines that the outcome of universal conscription on the balance of class forces is never predictable.

Nonetheless, from the perspective of world revolution, military training could be a good thing. Whether it is - or is not - will depend on the answer to the Lenin-Trotsky-Stalin question: who-whom? Who will use conscripts to knock whom flat? Contrast Venezuela in 2002 with Chile in 1973, and ask why Chavez survived a CIA-backed coup and Allende did not. A history of Latin America could be written from that perspective,²¹ indeed, a history of the world.²² So, in celebrating a famous victory on 28 October 1916, socialists need to examine war-making from the standpoint of the class struggle.²³ In particular, we need to ask how, despite arming the masses, the state is still able to maintain the rule of capital.

The state is not your friend

By the late seventeenth century, the spread of firearms among the propertied classes had tipped power so far in their favour that France's rural poor could not prevent the plague of taxes.²⁴ Every ruling class raises violence to an obligatory norm, aka the 'law', which, as Adam Smith knew, operates 'in every case as a combination of the rich to oppress the poor, and preserve to themselves the inequality of goods.'²⁵ Smith's somewhat later judgement has lost none of its aptness: 'The masters ... never cease to call aloud for the assistance of

¹⁹ Georg Lukacs, *Lenin*, N.L.B., London, 1970, chapter 4, 'Imperialism: World War and Civil War'.

²⁰ Labourers returning from the French Wars used their experiences to turn their militia units against the authorities, J.L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, *The Skilled Labourer 1760-1832*, Longmans, Green, London, 1919, pp. 172 and 175.

²¹ As but one incident from the early 1950s see Robert J. Alexander, *The Bolivian national revolution*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, NJ., 1958, chapter 8; the tin miners maintained militia detachments.

²² S.E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback, The Role of the Military in Politics*, Pall Mall, London, 1962; Sandra Halperin, *War and Social Change in Modern Europe, the Great Transformation Reconsidered*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004.

²³ Engels justified his fox-hunting on the grounds that, without a cavalry, the proletarian infantry would be at the mercy of the landed classes on horseback, Tristan Hunt, *The Frock-coated Communist, The Revolutionary Life of Friederich Engels*, Allen Lane, London, 2009, pp. 208-10; S.F. Kissin, *War and the Marxists, Socialist Theory and Practice in Capitalist Wars, Volume 1, 1848-1918*, Andre Deutsch, London, 1988.

²⁴ John S. Pettengill, 'The Impact of Military Technology on European Income Distribution', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 10 (2), August 1979, pp. 201-225; Ronald W. Batchelder and Herman Freudenberg, 'On the Rational Origins of the Modern Centralised State', *Explorations in Economic History*, 20 (1), January 1983, pp. 1-13. Needless to say, the bourgeois liberal Thomas Piketty has nothing to say about state or corporate violence on levels of inequality.

²⁵ Adam Smith, *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1978, p. 208.

the civil magistrate, and the rigorous execution of those laws which have been enacted with so much severity against the combinations of servants, labourers, and journeymen.²⁶

Elaborating on this fact of social production, Max Weber recognises that

[t]he industrialist takes into account the fact that people exist who are hungry, and that those other people in the spiked helmets will prevent them using physical force simply to take the means where they find them which could serve to allay their hunger ...²⁷

To give but one illustration from an inexhaustible supply, the Quaker Josiah Wedgwood summoned the military to suppress riotous workmen in 1783, saw to it that one of their leaders was hanged, while bemoaning that he could not thrash the rest.²⁸

Squaring up to state power as class rule became crucial for socialists in designing the strategies and tactics needed to protect workers against laws as violence raised to an obligatory norm, while striving to vanquish the capitalist state entirely. In practice, both the short- and long-term objectives mean weighing up the likely outcomes from different methods of enlistment.

A peoples' army

Promoters of conscription as a buttress of freedom held Switzerland up as a model of a militarised democracy, as did Wilhelm Liebknecht.²⁹ Marx and Engels viewed the Swiss somewhat differently:

This 'birthplace of freedom' is nothing else but the center of barbarism, of brutality, bigotry, hypocritical 'purity' ... Internal affairs are exhausted in making cheese, chastity, and yodeling ... abroad, the only claim of the Swiss is that of being hired mercenaries.³⁰

Closer to home are English fears of a standing army. The Bill of Rights in 1689 endorsed the virtue of a well-regulated militia with the right to keep arms – if you were a Protestant. After Prime Minister Robert Walpole sought to ease the tax burden on landlords in 1733 by imposing excise taxes, the merchants raised a hue and cry against excise men invading the

²⁶ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, volume 1, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1976, pp. 82-3; Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1974, pp. 169-70.

²⁷ Max Weber, *Critique of Stammler*, Free Press, New York, 1977, p. 102; cf. Alf Ludtke, 'The role of state violence in the period of transition industrial capitalism: the example of Prussia from 1815 to 1848', *Social History*, 4 (2), May 1979, pp. 175-221.

²⁸ Neil McKendrick, 'Josiah Wedgwood and Factory Discipline', *Historical Journal*, 4 (1), 1961, p. 52.

²⁹ Wilhelm Liebknecht, 'On Militarism', *The Clarion*, 21 April 1900, pp. 121-2, on Marxists.org

³⁰ 'Switzerland is the center of attraction for hysterical virgins over thirty, for the pale buds of the finishing school who are keen on the chaste by so effective love-making of the fleet hunters of the Chamois. In the original agricultural cantons the people live like animals, and are as bovine as their oxen. It is necessary, very necessary, that this last refuge of brutal primitive Germanism, of barbarians of bigotry, of patriarchal naiveté and purity of morals, of agricultural stability and of loyalty to death – available to the highest bidder – should at last be destroyed.' Cf. F. Engels, c.20 January 1848, *Marx-Engels Collected Works (MECW)* volume 6, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1976, pp. 523-5.

Karl Liebknecht documented how the Swiss bourgeoisie used the militia against the workers, *Militarism and anti-Militarism* (1907), Socialist Labour Press, Glasgow, 1917, pp. 71-73.

yeoman's castle. As Lord Scarborough informed the Queen: 'I will answer for my regiment against the Pretender, but not against the opposers of the Excise.'³¹ Inevitably, the rebellious American colonists adopted the Second Amendment for an armed citizenry as one more guarantor for their freedom of speech, the Press, religion, and against the billeting of troops.³²

At that moment in France, the class component in military service proved pivotal in the vanquishing of the *ancien regime* where *Le Noblesse d'epee* (the nobility of the sword) had been expected to fight, an obligation known as the blood tax, which exempted them from the monetary imposts, which fell on everyone else. However, the *noblesse de robe*, who bought offices of state, had got themselves exempted too, whether they fought or not. These, and related inequities throughout the tax regime, bankrupted the state and powered peasant support for the reforms by the Estates-General.³³ Victory at Valmy had been won by a combination of volunteers and professional artillery officers, an arrangement which gave way to *levee en masse* as one more instance of the bourgeois notion of equality as the erasure of legal privilege, while the individual's ability to buy his way out lingered.³⁴

One hundred years later, debates among socialists about how military training might promote the overthrow of capitalism were sidetracked into disputes over whether the working class should opt for a regular army of volunteers or for universal conscription in a militia.³⁵ Wilhelm Liebknecht botched the class aspect in 1900 by praising volunteers as if they were a good thing just because they were not an elite force at the disposal of the ruling class:

There are two military systems – and only these two – consistent with civil liberty: either the system of voluntary service as, in the main, it has existed until now in England and the United States of America, or the militia system as it exists in Switzerland, ...

A country in which every citizen, whether rich or poor, is a warrior, such a country is a free country and never lose its liberty, because there is no power to oppress the people. All citizens are equal – everyone has arms, and Government has no means to enforce its will upon the people.³⁶

This utopia overlooks how the state organises its armed populace, including psychologically, especially where military service is extended over a lifetime. The Prussian

³¹ Quoted Raymond Turner, 'The Excise Scheme of 1733', *The English Historical Review*, 42 (185), January 1927, p. 44; J.H. Plumb, *England in the Eighteenth Century*, 1963, Pelican, Harmondsworth, pp. 65-7.

³² Saul Cornell, *'A well-Regulated militia': the founding fathers and the Origins of Gun Control in America*, O.U.P., New York, 2008.

³³ Georges Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1967, Parts I and IV.

³⁴ Doyle, 1989, pp. 204, 207, 250, 270 and 371.

³⁵ Cf. G. I. Neimanis, 'Militia vs. the Standing Army in the History of Economic Thought from Adam Smith to Friedrich Engels', *Military Affairs*, 44 (1), February 1980, pp. 28-32; for Engels's scorn of militia, see Martin Kitchen, 'Friedrich Engels' Theory of War', *Military Affairs*, 41 (3), October 1977, p 121.

³⁶ Wilhelm Liebknecht, 1900.

version was part of Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* against the socialists.³⁷ The Meiji followed suit in 1873, 'more to establish unchallengeable control over the country' than to meet external threats or adventures.³⁸

Australian experiences show why volunteers are no better for workers than are regular troops. On the invaders' side of the Australian frontier, the wars were waged by mixes of police, regular troops and volunteers, including the Native Police. Regulars suppressed the rebels at Vinegar Hill in 1804 and at Eureka fifty years later. During the winter of 1861, parties of police, special constables and volunteers moved against the construction teams along the railway from Kyneton to Castlemaine,³⁹ and in September 1888 against the Hunter Valley miners.⁴⁰

Despite the legend of 'Fire-low' Price in Melbourne during the 1890 Maritime dispute, the turn-out in Sydney is more instructive as to whether a regular or a volunteer force is a graver menace to organised workers. The cadre of Permanent Mounted Infantry had been disbanded as a cost-cutting measure on 3 July 1890 so that the Parkes government had to swear in ninety-five volunteer troopers from the Picton and Campbelltown companies as special constables to patrol the city and suburbs for five weeks until 30 October.⁴¹ Rebadging military volunteers to uphold the civil power sufficed on many an occasion.

Although official reports about the N.S.W. Artillery into the mid-1890s depict 'a laughing stock',⁴² its incompetence would have been a liability only against an invader. To

³⁷ No one was then more alert to this barrier to socialist revolution than Karl Liebknecht, 1917, pp. 2-5, 19-22 and 87-88; cf. Wilhelm Reich, 'Ideology as a Material Force', *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1975, chapter 1. ANZAC-ery is a late echo.

³⁸ Edwin Reischauer and Albert M. Craig, *Japan: Tradition and Transformation*, Tuttle Books, Tokyo, 1978, p. 139; Jon Livingston, Joe Moore and Felicia Oldfather (eds), *The Japan Reader 1 Imperial Japan: 1800-1945*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976, pp. 105-6, 125, 171-5 and 229.

The life-long anti-militarist Saburo Ienaga noted: 'The new military forces ... were completely different from the popular conscript army formed in France at the time of the French Revolution the common soldiers [were] an exploited labour force from the most impoverished level of the farming population.' *Japan's Last War: World War II and the Japanese 1931-1945*, A.N.U. Press, Canberra, 1979, p. 47. During the 1930s, some 'economic conscripts' were cannon fodder for coups against the *zaibatsu*.

³⁹ *Mt Alexander Mail*, 7 August 1861, [p. 3c]. The volunteers followed the British troops to the Otago goldfields to shoot 'down the New Zealanders as savages because they won't sell their land to the Government for an old song.' *Herald* (Melb.), 7 August 1861, p. 4d.

⁴⁰ Edgar Ross, *A History of the Miners' Federation of Australia*, Australasian Coal and Shale Employees' Federation, Sydney, 1970, pp. 62-3 and 70-71.

⁴¹ *A Short History of the New South Wales Mounted Rifles*, pp. 17-18, from *Dispatch*, NSW Wales Military History Society, Sydney, 1982.

⁴² 'The term "Field Artillery" seems scarcely appropriate to apply to an aggregation of obsolete guns and cart-horses, even though the latter may be attached to the former by the usually recognised Field Artillery means. If force of circumstances compels Artillerymen to use such horses, they at least should feel that if, by dint of spur, and whip, and strong language, they have got a gun into a suitable position, the labour ought to be repaid by seeing effective fire opened. This is scarcely possible with the present old muzzle-loaders, ...' *New South Wales Legislative Council Journal*, volume 56, Part 1, 1897, p. 638.

The annual Easter camps at Menangle featured 'luxurious living' with batmen, non-military visitors entertained to dinners every evening, a piano, camp beds and floor boards, not straw, *N.S.W. L.C. Journal*,

quell a class disturbance,⁴³ the mounted infantry were what the capitalist state needed – backed by Nordenfelt and Gatling to bring us to our knees at Barcaldine in 1891⁴⁴ and three years later across New England and the western plains.

A servile class

These deployments of regulars and volunteers against even non-violent workers might have turned the labour movement towards a policy of abolishing every kind of army. Instead, the repressions more often led to support for universal conscription, a preference backed by assessments of external threats to democracy, whether from Czardom, Prussianism, or, in our case, Asiatic hordes.

Nowhere were the tensions between transforming bourgeois democracy and combating militarism sharper than in the life and death of the French socialist Jean Jaures, who despite the Dreyfus Affair, loved the France of the revolution. He knew that his Socialist Party was at a disadvantage for as long as it lacked a convincing defence program because the working-class electorate feared Prussianism, and looked forward to reversing the loss of Alsace and Lorraine in 1871. With advice from some junior officers, and in reaction against Poincare's imposing a third year onto compulsory service, Jaures in 1913, produced *La nouvelle armee: l'organisation socialiste de la France* in which he called for *la nation armee* of citizen-soldiers; not a battlefield manual or merely a strategic plan to expel an invader but a manifesto to mobilise the people against their class enemies at home, instead of churning out the dullards produced by two or more years drill.⁴⁵

Although all Marxists acknowledged the role of force in history,⁴⁶ there is nothing like *Le nouvelle armee* in all of socialist literature. Marx and Engels had contributed at least more than 100 entries on military matters for the *New American Encyclopedia* in 1857, while Engels - 'The General' – acquired a reputation as an armchair strategist regarding contemporary conflicts.⁴⁷ Tukhachevsky,⁴⁸ Mao and Giap drew on their experiences in the field.

1892-93, v. 50, pp. 254 and 819. Whether the percentage of drunks with venereal infections was higher than in the colony's population cannot now be determined, *N.S.W. L.C. Journal*, v. 43, Pt II, 1887-88, p. 644; and v. 45, Pt II, 1889-90, p. 1009.

⁴³ One exception was in 1879 when 471 Hobart volunteers put a stop to sectarian brawls by parading 'their 32pdr guns and the two 12pdr howitzers, with three rounds of canister for each gun ...'. Bob Nicholls, *The Colonial Volunteers, The defence forces of the Australian colonies 1836-1901*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1988, p. 85.

⁴⁴ D.H. Johnson, *Volunteers at Heart, The Queensland Defence Forces 1860-1901*, U.Q.P., St Lucia, 1975, Chapter 14.

⁴⁵ Harvey Goldberg, 'The Last Crusade for Peace, 1911-1914', *Life of Jean Jaures*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1962, pp. 417-57; for *la nouvelle armee*, pp. 385-88. The work was at once translated into German.

⁴⁶ F. Engels, 'The Role of Force in History', *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Selected Works*, Volume Three, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970, pp. 377-428.

⁴⁷ W.O. Henderson and W.H. Chaloner (eds), *Engels as Military Critic, articles reprinted from the Volunteer journal and the Manchester Guardian of the 1860s*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1959.

⁴⁸ Mikail Tukhachevsky, 'Revolution from without', *New Left Review*, 55, May-June 1969, pp. 91-97; Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Military Writings*, Peoples Publishing House, Peking, 1963; Vo Nguyen Giap, *Dien Bien Phu The most difficult decision*, The Gioi, Hanoi, 1992.

Jaures also opposed France's entanglements with Russia and was campaigning for a Europe-wide general strike to stop mobilisation until his murder by a revanchist on 30 July 1914, an assassination as fateful as that five weeks earlier at Sarejevo.

Fear of Prussianism as a specific threat both to the British Empire or as a domestic system imposed by that Empire played a smaller part in the support that the Australian labour movement gave to universal conscription as a guarantee of liberty. Yet, the locals shared the European Left's conviction that a democratic temper had to be earned out of centuries of struggle. The crux was that centuries of oppression meant that serfs and coolies could not be minted into democrats.

In consequence of these concerns, the Labour movement here voiced very little in-principle opposition to universal (male) conscription for home defence. The fighting platforms of the early Labor parties advocated compulsory military service to advance Australia fair along with initiative, referendum and recall⁴⁹ as measures to install a participatory democracy in line with.⁵⁰

Keeping out Asians involved more than the protection of wages and conditions or preventing sexual perversion. The Restrictive Immigration Act (1902) was but a precondition for White Australia as the national ideal of welfare reforms built on positive eugenics. A Queensland country doctor in 1915 discerned the evolution of National Ideals: (1) equality of the sexes; (2) compulsory military service; and (3) the white Australia policy.⁵¹ Conservatives and liberals supplemented their commitment to the White Australia Ideal by seeing 'the Empire' as the center of moral gravity in the world.

Japan

The dangers from the servile mentalities of Indians and Chinamen were contained by a dictation test which offered no protection against the naval and military might of our ally, Japan. The dilemma on both sides of the conscription tussles in 1916 and 1917 was whether the surest defence was to keep the troops at home in order to repel the Japanese when they swept south, or to send as many soldiers as possible overseas to uphold the Empire, which alone could drive them back. Whitehall's dependence on Japan to the East of Suez energized both sides in the conscription battle.⁵² In his fear of the Japanese, J.H. Catts did not miss a beat in shifting from chair of the New South Wales voluntary recruitment effort to heading up the State's anti-conscription committee.⁵³

⁴⁹ D.J. Murphy (ed.), *Labor in Politics, the state labor parties in Australia, 1880-1920*, U.Q.P., St Lucia, 1975, pp. 88, 177, 194, 204-5, 212-4 and 307.

⁵⁰ Thomas W. Tanner, *Compulsory Citizen Soldiers*, APCOL, Waterloo, 1980, chapter 4.

⁵¹ Jas. F. Merrillees, *Medical Journal of Australia*, 29 May 1915, p. 524; Vance Palmer, 'White Australia', *Fellowship*, September 1921, pp. 28-9; F.W. Eggleston, 'The "White Australia" Policy and its Critics', *The English Review*, August 1924, p. 159-174.

⁵² Fitzhardinge, 1979, pp. 166-70; see my *A New Britannia*, U.Q.P., St Lucia, 2004, pp. 66-69. If *The Conscription Conflict and the Great War* is any guide, the wartime censorship of the pivotal place which the Japanese menace held throughout the conscription battles has hardly lifted, Robin Archer, Joy Damousi, Murray Goot and Sean Scalmer (eds), Monash University Publishing, Clayton, 2016, pp. 86-7 and 183.

⁵³ Dorothy M. Catts, *James Howard Catts, M.H.R.*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1953, pp. 74-82.

Japan proved the sharpest point of censorship⁵⁴ for fear of driving our nominal ally into the arms of Germany, upon which the Meiji oligarchs had modeled their education system and army, but not their navy. For example, in October 1916 the government suppressed the *BLF News* after its 'Anti-Slavery Number' had devoted all its pages to the menace to White Australia from compulsory service overseas. Pros and Antis clashed over how to represent a continent for a nation.

What was 'National'?

If Balzac gave 'nationalist' to the French, the English form appears in 1715 to abuse Jacobite rebels.⁵⁵ Two hundred years later in Australia, capital-N 'National' was used to rise above politics driven by sect or by class - other than, of course, Protestant Imperialists. To be **national**, with or without a capital-N, is not necessarily to be **nationalist**, still less to be **nationalistic**. A good deal of muddle on the Left arises from the failure to explore a distinction crucial to analysing far more than conscription for overseas service during the Great War.

On 14 November 1916, Prime Minister Hughes formed a minority government calling itself National Labor.⁵⁶ Once the Liberals agreed to merge with National Labour, the second fusionists needed a new name. One indicator of how they saw themselves is the Index to the Melbourne *Argus*. The entries covering January to June 1917 give no lead heading for 'National', but, under the main heading LIBERAL ORGANISATIONS we find 'National Federation' and 'National Government'. From July to December 1917, the lead entry, LIBERAL ORGANISATIONS, again opens with 'National Federation'. Not until the second half of 1923 will the *Argus* index provide a main heading for NATIONAL FEDERATION. In New South Wales, premier Holman led National Labor to the 24 March 1917 elections, reforming in July as the National Association. The Queensland Tories became a branch of the National Federation before amalgamating with the Liberal Association on 28 June as the National Party.

So, when do we get *Nationalists*? A short answer is that 'National' applied to organisations, as it still did in official Victorian publications during 1930, while their representatives had become known as capital-N Nationalists in time for the May 1917 poll.⁵⁷ National Union was reserved for the controllers of the purse strings who continued under that name after the National Party, like the Vicar of Bray, had changed its name to United Australia and then back to Liberal.⁵⁸ Whether attached to an Association, a Club, a

⁵⁴ Kevin Fewster, 'The Operation of State Apparatuses in Times of Crisis: Censorship and Conscription, 1916', *War & Society*, 3 (1), May 1985, 37-54.

⁵⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, volume X, pp. 231-5; Raymond Williams, *Keywords, A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Fontana, Glasgow, 1976, pp. 178-80.

⁵⁶ In the spring of 1917, Hughes put 'loyalist' strike-breakers onto the Fremantle docks, calling them 'National Workers', see B.K. de Garis, 'An Incident at Fremantle', *Labour History*, 10, May 1966, p. 32.

⁵⁷ John R. Williams, 'The Organisation of the Australian National Party', *The Australian Quarterly*, 41 (2), June 1969, pp. 41-51. Williams applies 'Nationalist' to bodies which, in his references, refer to themselves as 'National', for example, n. 18.

⁵⁸ B.D. Graham, 'The Place of Finance Committee in Non-Labour Politics, 1910-30', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 6 (1), May 1960, pp. 41-52; Lex Watson, 'The United Australia Party and its Sponsors', Cameron

Council, a Federation, a League, a Party or a Union, the conscriptionists never thought of themselves as nationalists in the sense that Sinn Fein did about Eire. The 'win-the-war' champions asserted their patriotism by cleaving to White Australia as an expression of their loyalty to King and Empire.

One reason why the centrality of class on this point is not recognised is because scholars have blended the terms 'Nationals' into 'Nationalist'.⁵⁹ A photograph from the May 1917 Federal elections, reproduced in *War at home*, helps to explain the confusion. 'Vote National' is clear on one poster but the party's name on the other sign is too fuzzy to be sure whether it says 'Nationalist'.⁶⁰ To penetrate the substantive 'who-whom?' question of which class and which nation benefitted from universal conscription depends on attending to the names adopted by the parties of urban capital.

A scattering of late nineteenth-century conservatives had considered the very notion of a Labor party to be unconstitutional on the grounds that the British constitution abhors classes.⁶¹ Class antagonisms do not exist but were contrived by paid agitators. The Deakinites accepted representation of, by and for working people but attacked the pledge, caucus rule and machine politics as violations of parliamentary democracy.⁶² By 1916, however, even liberals were beginning to suspect the Labor Party as subversive through guilt by association with the I.W.W. and the Pat-Riotism of Sinn Fein.

A long letter to the *Brisbane Courier* headed 'Nationalism vs "One Class Only"' underlines the significance of 'National' as defending the home front against class-conscious parties.⁶³ Also telling is a preference for 'Association', 'Council' or 'Federation' to distinguish the non-labour forces from 'Party' which was seen as a mark of partisanship. In 1931, 'United Australia Party' and the 'All for Australia League' offered new ways to mask the biases of class rule by chattering about 'Non-Party government'.

For profit

In what way does conscription for war differ from the imposition of 'freed labour' in the reproduction of capital? Each serves its expansion but in distinct ways.⁶⁴ Above all, military service cannot add value. Instead, it seizes more of the wealth of nature to which we wage-slaves, as bearers of freed labour, add value. War also opens a way to more of the sales that

Hazelhurst, (ed.), *Australian Conservatism, Essays in Twentieth Century Political History*, A.N.U. Press, Canberra, 1979, pp. 71-74.

⁵⁹ Exceptions are B.D. Graham, *The Formation of the Australian Country Party*, A.N.U. Press, Canberra, 1966, because he understands that [t]he National Party, as its name suggests, was meant to embody solidarity, patriotism and a desire to "Win-the-War".' p. 115; and Don Aitkin, *The Country Party in New South Wales*, A.N.U. Press, Canberra, 1972; the index to Katherine West, *Power in the liberal Party*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1965, gives 'National(ist) Party'.

⁶⁰ John Connor, Peter Stanley, and Peter Yule, *War at home*, O.U.P., South Melbourne, 2015, p. 120.

⁶¹ The National Union had been formed in 1910 as the Constitutional Union, Ian Hancock, *National and Permanent? The Federal Organisation of the Liberal Party of Australia 1944-1965*, M.U.P., Carlton, 2000, p. 11.

⁶² J.A. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin, A Biography*, volume II, M.U.P., Carlton, 1965, p. 374.

⁶³ *Brisbane Courier*, 4 April 1917, p. 8.

⁶⁴ One of the few attempts to confront these issues is Rosa Luxemburg, 'Militarism as a Province of Accumulation', *The Accumulation of Capital*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1951, pp. 454-67.

capital must have to realise the profit from that exploitation. These are the features of war that Archbishop Mannix is alleged to have called 'sordid'.⁶⁵

A further difference is that military conscription applies a form of compulsion unlike that imposed on 'freed labour' under the rule of capital, and more like that for chattel-slaves and serfs. As the embodiments of 'freed labour' we are compelled either to sell our capacity to add value - or to steal, starve and beg. The front-line compulsion on us to sell our labour-power is economic.⁶⁶ By contrast, military conscription requires the application of extra-economic force by the long and short arms of the state. Those arms back up the economic imperative through the Master and Servant Acts, compulsory arbitration and the Building and Construction Commission.

Although the disciplines in the workplace and on the parade ground differ in their outcomes, many of those control techniques have been transferred from one to the other. As Marx observes, overseers are the N.C.O.s of capital.⁶⁷

Finally, the accumulation of capital and war-making both need conglomerations of human labour. In growing to survive, capital creates its own gravediggers by bringing workers together, thereby allowing more challenges to its rule within the workplace. The potential of a working class to win through as gravediggers for the system as a whole is many times greater when brought together *en masse* for military training since that experience supplies the weapons and the discipline to assault the capitalist state, as Jaures had hoped.

One instance appeared in the late 1960s when Black servicemen returned from Indo-China with weapons training and took up the slogan 'bring the war home'. Black Panthers toted the *Little Red Book*, shouting 'Political Power Grows out of the Barrel of a Gun'. Nixon responded to this internal threat by Asianising the war while stepping up the on-going de-labourisation of the battlefield with B-52s bombing night and day; forty years on, the march away from the risks of arming our class again is as bad as complete with Obama's drone strikes and robots on the ground.

That ruling-class reaction takes us back to our initial question: how might conscription affect the balance of class forces? In 2017, the monopoly of violence is more complete than it was under the convict system, though not as overt as in places of secondary punishment. What need has capital today for volunteer storm-troopers or a conscript army when its state has the S.A.S., riot and terrorist squads? On top of that brute force there is a surveillance regime erected on the mass marketing of cell phones that have turned citizens into NSA informants, another definition of 'selfie'. The counter-revolution is being tweeted.

1966: lottery of death

This year is also the fiftieth anniversary of the last hurrah by Arthur Augustus Calwell in his campaign against the 'dirty little Asian war' and to 'bring the troops home now', which

⁶⁵ *Argus*, 29 January 1917, p. 9.

⁶⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital*, I, Penguin, London, 1976, pp. 411 and 424-5.

⁶⁷ Marx, 1976, p. 450.

white-tie-and-tails Whitlam sabotaged at every turn. May 5 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Errol Noack, the first Australian conscript sacrificed in U.S. imperialism's war against the peoples of Indo-China.

From an anti-conscription platform in the lead-up to the 1966 elections, a very militant union secretary told anti-war demonstrators that we should be in favour of conscription. 'Yes', he declaimed, 'first we nationalise the oil companies, and then we conscript all the Young Libs to fight off the Marines when they land.' Much as we welcomed both legs of this policy, many of us knew that those Young Liberals would have be followed into battle by politically reliable officers with sub-machine guns to make sure that the Tory conscripts did not follow their principles by defecting to the invaders. Today, it might well prove necessary to treat Young Labor conscripts the same way since they are the standard-bearers of so-called 'Free Trade' sell-outs to the global corporates and their warfare state.

Blood vote

In honouring those who defeated the blood vote, we can begin to tell the truth only by seeing that a system, which came into world 'dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt',⁶⁸ has never ceased, vampire like, to bleed its victims. Conscription was not a topic for a university seminar in 1916. Norman Lindsay, responding to some 'patriotically callous comments, exploded:

'Do you know what you're talking about? The war isn't something over there, in Europe. It's here in this room. There is blood everywhere, all round us, on everything, on us. Can't you smell it?'⁶⁹

That sensibility is the precondition for objectivity. The intervening hundred years have not washed the blood away. Quite the reverse. Blood continues to gush from the 1916 Sykes-Picot-Suzanov Agreement for unmaking the Middle East to divvy up the oil, followed by the Balfour Declaration to Lord Rothschild in support of a Zionist enclave in the Palestinian homelands.⁷⁰ As we engage in a civilised discussion throughout this afternoon, smell the blood on this floor too - lest we forget that our subject is barbarism.

⁶⁸ Marx, 1976, p. 926.

⁶⁹ Quoted in J. Lindsay, *The Roaring Twenties*, Bodley Head, London, 1960, p. 66.

⁷⁰ Jeremy Salt, *The Unmaking of the Middle-East*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2008; David Fromkin, *A peace to end all peace, Creating the Modern Middle East, 1914-1922*, Penguin, London, 1991; Maxime Rodinson, *Israel A Colonial-Settler State?*, Monad Press, New York, 1973.