**Essays on Mount Crosby - Conscription Debate 1916**

For Mount Crosby and most other parts of the country, 1916 brought bad news from the battlefields of the First World War and a very public and rancorous debate about whether the government should resort to compulsory war service for young men (known as "conscription"). The Federal Government under Prime Minister Billy Hughes called for a referendum on the matter to be held on Saturday 28 October 1916, in light of which vociferous and influential members of the public began to debate the topic and press their ideas upon the community.

The referendum question, which seemed keen to provide its own answer, went like this:

*Are you in favour of the Government having, in this grave emergency, the same compulsory powers over citizens in regard to requiring their military service, for the term of this War, outside the Commonwealth, as it now has in regard to military service within the Commonwealth?*

At Mount Crosby the debate was as vigorous and partisan as anywhere else. Chief Engineer at the works, Joseph Stewart, made his position clear and chaired a pro-conscriptionist meeting at our hall in which prominent citizens from Ipswich, including Alderman Shillito and Mr J.C. Cribb (of the famous department store) extolled various arguments for a unanimous "yes vote" in the upcoming referendum. At the meeting, Mr Stewart proposed a vote of thanks to the visitors and said he thought they had clearly explained the nature of the question.

Conversely, local unionists voiced their opinion through the Worker magazine, stating that young men should follow the example set by their bosses and the editors of newspapers and become "stay at home patriots".

The Australian people narrowly rejected the notion of conscription in 1916, and more assertively when asked again in 1917. Although he technically had the power to insist on conscription, and he was seriously undermined by the unexpected result, Prime Minister Hughes had the good grace to accept the nation's decision and the Government never forced any man to fight in the Great War.

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