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## South Australians at war – transcript

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### ***Compulsory military training : the South Australian debate, 1901-1914***

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Transcription of selected text

Transcribed by Susie van der Sluys, July 2002

Extract from pages 208-209.

#### APPENDIX 6.

##### The Size brothers and Arthur Henzell.

On only rare occasions did individuals, cadets or parents, do more than offer excuses when appearing in court charged with offences against the Defence Act. Two notable exceptions were the Size brothers, William and John of Oakbank, a village in the hills east of Adelaide. The two originally appeared in their local court in September 1912, charged with failing to render personal service. When questioned, William stated that he and his brother had to remain home "to keep the little ones"; they were a large family and there was no mother. They persisted in staying away from parades and were brought before the court again the following year, when they were each sentenced to 20 days detention in Fort Largs. While in the fort they consistently refused to submit to military discipline. The reason for such obstinacy does not appear to have been idealistic commitment; they made no appeal to principles, Christian or secular, at any time; neither were they pacifists, because, two years later, they enlisted in the AIF. The only explanation seems to be, simply, that they resented compulsion; their casual demeanour in court, for which the magistrate reprimanded them, suggests, too, that they held the exercise of arbitrary authority in contempt.

Apart from William Ingle, the Quaker, the only other adult South Australian to make a stand in court was Arthur Henzell. A founder member of the Freedom League, he soon left the organization because of a quarrel over appointment to the post of secretary. In court his manner contrasted strongly with that of his fellow-defendant, Ingle. Where Ingle was quietly spoken and reasonable in his arguments, Henzell was noisily verbose and erratic. He began by declaring his belief that "no Christian can bear arms", and continued by



inveighing against the various Christian denominations for deserting the cause of peace. All churches had appointed military chaplains which was tantamount to condoning warfare. Henzell had decided to conduct his own defence and carried a written statement of some length. After reading from this for four minutes, the magistrate stopped him on the grounds that "conscientious scruples do not constitute a defence." Henzell put his case in strongly emotional terms: "I cannot allow an infant child of mine to become a conscript slave... I conscientiously object to his training to become a man-slayer..." The exaggerated nature of his speech, the quarrel at the League meeting and the fact that he had given his son an extraordinary collection of Christian names, all mark Henzell as an eccentric who did not fit into any of the regular categories of protesters. Perhaps he was an embarrassment to more sober opponents of compulsion; if so, this may explain his difficulty with the Freedom League.

Extract from pages 210-212.

#### APPENDIX 7.

#### The Public Meeting held at Adelaide Town Hall.

21 October, 1912.

The meeting was called by the Mayor of Adelaide, Mr. Lavington Bonython, in response to a petition signed by 120 ratepayers of the City of Adelaide. The purpose of the meeting, as stated in the petition, was

to consider the Defence Act 1911 with special reference to those clauses which impose compulsory service upon the children of Citizens and such other clauses of the said Act as vests in Military Bureaucracy the power to limit and control the liberty of the subjects.

The evening promised to be a lively one, as supporters of the Defence Act began to rally their forces. On the morning of the 21st, a notice appeared in the Adelaide newspapers inserted by the South African Soldiers' Association. This called on members, "Veterans and others who have witnessed the horrors of War" to attend the meeting and support the



Minister of Defence "in his heroic efforts to ensure peace in this fair land." The Register noted that opponents of the Act were "not likely to have matters all their own way" since "organized opposition" would be offered by "a large section of the Civil Service" as well as the veterans' association. The mayor, too, anticipated trouble, and arranged for extra police to stand by that night.

The promise of a heated debate attracted a crowd that packed the Town Hall so that some of the audience overflowed into the organ stalls. All reports of the meeting commented first on the noise: "a mimic warfare, a bedlam in full blast"; "like only to the roar of a tremendous crowd at an exciting football match."

According to the Advertiser's report, opponents of the Act contributed most of the din, the "militarists" among the audience being less numerous.

The proceedings were officially opened by J.F. Hills who put the motion:

That this meeting of Adelaide citizens strongly protests against the compulsory clauses of the Commonwealth Defence Act, and pledges itself to work for their repeal.

Five speakers for the motion followed Hills, three of whom were certainly members of the Freedom League: the Reverend Murphy, Edwin Ashby and John Barry. The others were the eccentric Arthur Henzell and an "H. Taylor, J.P." Together they covered the range of arguments against compulsion usually provided by League members. The motion's three main supporters, Hills, Barry and Murphy, concentrated on the threat to civil liberties that the spread of militarism posed. Hills raised the question of a referendum, arguing that compulsion was not popular. Murphy, as he had done at the Port Adelaide meeting, scoffed at the notion of a Japanese menace and claimed that Australia's defence needs could be met by a naval force, voluntarily recruited.

Supporters of compulsion presented a counter-motion that compulsory military training was "the only practical means of preserving Australia from the horrors of war." This was put by N.A. Webb and supported by J.H.S. Olifent, E. Yates and Captain C. Reynell. Olifent and Yates were both ULP members and Reynell a serving army officer. Reynell tried to



impress the audience with the reality of the Asian threat. China was growing in strength and could not, in the future, be expected to put up with such acts of racial discrimination as refusing admittance to Mrs. Poon Gooley. The threat to Australian labor and the horrors of miscegenation made it imperative that the present immigration policy be maintained. Webb spoke on the same theme, but, like all the defenders of compulsion, had to face a barrage of almost ceaseless heckling. At one point, goaded by an interjector, he cried: "Wait till your wife and children are in Japanese concentration camps", thereby providing one of the evening's more memorable sayings. Olifent sought to arouse a sense of patriotism in the crowd by reciting "The Flag of Australia", producing the flag itself on the lines:

Then hurrah for the flag, the flag of the free,  
The red, white and blue of Australia.

whereupon Henzell shouted: "The flag of slavery!" to the accompaniment of "hoots" which, according to the Advertiser, were directed at the flag, and not Henzell. Olifent's speech and recitation provoked the singing of the patriotic songs, "Rule Britannia" and "Sons of the Sea", presumably initiated by the "militarists"; Hills' speech was accompanied by "The Song of Australia" and, when he paused to take some water, "My Drink is Water Bright".

The singing and the lack of physical violence (none was mentioned by reporters obviously on the look-out for sensation) imply that the mood of the crowd was generally good-natured. Perhaps this was because the opponents of the motion were heavily outnumbered by its supporters. It is clear, too, that many of the audience had come as spectators, simply to join in the fun. The newspaper reports said very little about the composition of the crowd except that "nearly a thousand ladies" were present, many of whom occupied the dress circle seats. They obviously supported the motion, rising and "waving their handkerchiefs delightedly" when it was accepted. The only other comment on the character of the audience came from a letter to the Register which complained of the presence of "Women and babies" and of "many children who must have been under 12..." He dearly would have loved to evict the "larrikins who assuredly were not troubled with opinions on either side..." On the whole the crowd's behaviour reminded him of "a mob of baboons" rather than "the conventional silent crowd of Old England."

The tone of newspaper reports similarly expressed shocked disapproval at the rowdiness of the meeting. Certainly, the conduct of the audience showed that feelings ran high in Adelaide over the compulsory military training issue. But as the Advertiser commented, the success of the motion should not be taken as "an index of the will of the community as a whole". The meeting had been called by the Freedom League, and the League's supporters clearly predominated among the crowd. No doubt, too, many came simply to enjoy themselves and to make use of the freedom that the occasion allowed to cause the maximum amount of disruption.

The incident is significant in so far as it marked the climax of the Freedom League's campaign to attract public opinion in South Australia to its cause. As such, the meeting apparently failed, since there were no subsequent signs of increasing public demand for amendments to the Defence Act. If anything, the excessive rowdiness of the night of 21 October confirmed the majority of staid South Australians in their suspicions that opponents of compulsion included too many "cranks and red-raggers."