

LUCK OF THE DRAW

Discussion points

Conscription

- A number of countries around the world have compulsory military (CMT) service, a form of **conscription**. This practice requires that people of a certain age are obliged to spend a period of time in their country's armed services. Some 32 countries have CMT for terms longer than 18 months with North Korea the most extreme, conscripting men for eleven years in total and women for seven years. Israel is another country that conscripts men and women, with terms of 32 and 24 months respectively. New Zealand had CMT for males at various times between 1909 and 1972.
 - Why do you think some countries continue to have CMT?
 - What are some of the advantages and disadvantages you can think of for having CMT?
 - Do you think New Zealand would ever reinstate CMT?
 - How would you personally feel about being required to serve in the armed forces for two years? What would you do if you were forced into training?
- In 1900, thanks in part to enthusiasm generated by the South African War, military cadet training was introduced in New Zealand schools. In 1909 military training was made compulsory for nearly all boys from the year they turned twelve. This involved 52 hours of training each year as junior cadets.

Conscription was introduced in New Zealand in 1916 during the First World War because after two years of war too few men were volunteering to fill reinforcement drafts for the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. The Military Service Act enabled the government to conscript ('call up') any man of military age (20–45 years) for service. Around 19,000 (20%) of New Zealand personnel who served abroad during the war were conscripts. Many New Zealanders believed conscription ensured 'equality of sacrifice' across the whole of society. Others saw it as an outrageous violation of individual civil rights and a move towards the militarisation of society. Conscription had an effect not only on the conscripted but also their family members and loved ones.

Each man could appeal against his calling-up. Appeals were heard by his district's three-person Military Service Board. Hearings were held in public, allowing their proceedings to be published in the local press. There was no further right of appeal after the hearing, so the boards' decisions were final. Nearly one-third of all conscripted men appealed on one ground or another.

The vast majority of appellants asked to be excused on the grounds that they performed essential work, or that their absence would inflict great personal hardship on themselves or their families. Around 5% of all appeals were made by men seeking exemption on philosophical, ethical, or religious grounds (conscientious objectors). Only 73 men were exempted on religious grounds during the war. Some conscripted men refused any form of military service, and 286 such men were court-martialled and sentenced to terms of imprisonment.

The government recognised that the key to making conscription work lay in punishing those who tried to evade the system. It was illegal to publicly criticise conscription. Even mild remarks could lead to imprisonment. Joseph Herbert Jones, Paddy Webb, and future Prime Minister Peter Fraser were among 88 people convicted of seditious or disloyal statements for their remarks opposing military conscription. Balloted men who failed to present themselves for service could be imprisoned with hard labour for up to five years, and employers could be prosecuted for hiring them. Ultimately, 2320 men were deprived of their civil rights for 10 years for deliberately avoiding military service.

New Zealand reintroduced conscription during the Second World War but all military engagements New Zealand has been involved in since the Second World War have been carried out by volunteer rather than conscripted troops.

- Look at the film footage of the first conscription ballot in 1916. Describe what is happening.
- Do you think conscription was a fair way of ensuring 'equality of sacrifice'? Explain your answer.
- At various times in our past some people have argued that a spell serving in the armed forces would be a good way of 'dealing' with young New Zealanders who are unemployed or in and out of trouble with the law. What do you think of this idea?
- How do you think you might have reacted had you been conscripted in the First World War?
- Do you think New Zealand as a society today would be more or less willing to accept conscription if we had to go to war? Explain why or why not.

The artists and their work

You can consider individual answers to the following discussion of the artists and their representation of the conscription debate or you could assign different students/groups to one piece each and then share responses.

- It can be difficult to relate to something that happened a long time ago. How can you compare life then with life now? The pressures people were under at that time, the values and expectations of the time and the particular circumstances people faced can be hard to relate to our lives today. Expressions like 'luck of the draw' or 'when your number is up', were commonly used to describe the randomness of the conscription ballot and life and death on the battlefield. Through the works of eight young artists, the *Luck of the Draw website* explores contemporary ideas around the issue of conscription, war and the apparent randomness of the ballot that forced 20,000 New Zealanders to fight overseas during the First World War.

After you have viewed these works consider your responses to the following discussion points:

- Do the artistic responses shown on the *Luck of the Draw website* help you to relate to First World War conscription? In what ways?
- What themes do you see coming through in these artistic responses?
- Freedom of speech is considered to be a basic human right today, something worth fighting for. Do you think it was as highly valued during the First World War? What

would society be like if we didn't have freedom of speech? Would the artists be able to create works like this?

- Akshay's dance 'The Fading Puppet', paints conscripts as powerless puppets at the mercy of their puppet master (the government). Do you agree with this analogy? Why or why not?
- Kauri's film seeks to explore Māori and Pacific men who served in the Pioneer Battalion, a military labour force that helped create trenches, roads, and other vital infrastructure. Kauri sees a link between this and the numbers of Maori and Pasifika men working similar jobs in contemporary New Zealand such as roading, construction and civic infrastructure. Do you agree with this sense of the link with the past? Why or why not?
- Liam sees the ballot film as being disconnected from the reality of conscription and sought to show this contrast in his animation. In what ways does the film seem disconnected from reality? Why do you think this is?
- Nathan compares the conscription ballot process with the novel/film, 'The Hunger Games'. He seeks to show this absurdity in his play. Do you think this is a useful comparison? What are the similarities and differences with conscription and 'The Hunger Games'?
- Etanah's GIFs reflect the idea that conscription in the First World War was a 'glitch' in our history, much like when a computer makes an unexpected error. Do you agree? What other metaphors can you think of for conscription?
- MC Oblique and Madison's song uses conscription as a metaphor for modern life where we sometimes find ourselves in situations that are out of our control. What, if any, similarities do you see between conscription and issues people face today?
- Moana's artwork explores the different stages of conscription as she sees them - being at home, going to war and the end of the war. What do you think of her interpretation? How does it help you reflect on conscription?