Setting the precedent for Commonwealth intervention in schooling: National military education in Australia 1911-1929

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Abstract

Drawing on records of parliamentary debates, this paper investigates the first Commonwealth intervention in schooling. It reveals that compulsory provisions associated with formal schooling were employed to support a policy of compelling boys to undertake training. It shows how military training was positioned as a neglected aspect of ordinary education to enable the Commonwealth to deploy schools and teachers in the service of the scheme and to make schools subordinate to military authority. The paper points out that Commonwealth intervention in schooling articulated the nation-state as the intended beneficiary, a view of education alien to educationists at the time.

Introduction

In 1910, the Commonwealth amended the Defence Act to require schools across Australia to enroll all 12 and 13 year old male students as junior cadets. Boys aged 14 to 17 had to register for training as senior cadets. The Commonwealth requested that the states make playgrounds of public schools available as drilling sites for junior and senior cadets. Teachers were obligated to instruct the boys in what was often referred to in the national Parliament as 'military education' and principals and schools became accountable to military authorities for their implementation of the scheme. Prior to 1911, schooling had been a matter for the states. The 1911 scheme established a precedent for Commonwealth intervention in schooling.

This paper examines the aims of the scheme and traces its history. Using parliamentary records as its principal source, the paper explores the arguments that facilitated Commonwealth intervention in schooling.

It reveals that the compulsory provisions attached to schooling were used to justify Commonwealth intervention. It shows that military training was framed as a 'missing' or neglected aspect of formal education, which enabled the Commonwealth to charge schools and teachers with responsibility for implementing and running the scheme. The paper clearly shows that Commonwealth intervention in schooling was not initiated with the developmental needs of the young uppermost in mind. Rather, it was driven by the desire to use young males (and schools and teachers) in the service of the state. The paper suggests that this raises a more general question about the motivations for Commonwealth intervention in schooling. Is the Commonwealth always obliged to take the nation-state as the client to be served through intervention? Is government of a nation-state only rational on the condition that the state is the client? The paper argues that this is an important issue because educationists and education curricula invariably identify the student as the intended beneficiary of schooling. While it is judged worthwhile in itself to trace the history of the Commonwealth's first foray into schooling, in the end the broader purpose of the paper is to draw attention to a possible dramatic and serious disjuncture between the Commonwealth and educationalists views about the function of schooling.

Early arguments for Commonwealth intervention

Shortly after Federation, in 1901, the new Commonwealth Parliament of Australia considered a proposal for compulsory military service for adult males as a means to preserve Australia's 'racial purity' (see, for example, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD) 1901, pp 4822-3 and p. 3065). The scheme was rejected, largely because of fears over how it would be received by an electorate that in the post-Boer War climate was intolerant of any signs of 'militarism' (Inglis, 1968).

In 1903, the legislation was re-introduced but foundered again on the general conviction that men would refuse to train, and that voter resistance to the scheme would place political careers in jeopardy. The refusal of Parliament to endorse the plan encouraged proponents to try for a variation, compulsory military training for Australian male youth:

> If I had my way, I certainly should impose compulsory service on this Commonwealth, and I should do so without the slightest hesitation. But if we cannot impose compulsory training on men between the ages

> of 18, and 22 or 23 years of age, we must fall back on the compulsory training of our youths... (Senator Dobson, CPD, 1904, p. 8385).

The 'fall back' proposal was, as the words perhaps imply, partly intended as a foot in the door for the scheme originally proposed. There was also the attraction that young males targeted under the plan could not voice their objections through the ballot box. W. M. Hughes, the future Prime Minister of Australia and an advocate of the scheme more or less acknowledged the tactics and the thinking when he wrote in an editorial in the *Call*, the organ of the Australian National Defence League, that a youth training scheme would be effective because 'the members to be dealt with on the initiation of the system will be more manageable, and so the system can be gradually and almost imperceptibly fitted on to the people' (Jauncey 1935, p. 14).

How could such a cynical proposal be represented as a legitimate activity of government? To establish the right of the Commonwealth to compel boys to undertake military training, an analogy was drawn with compulsory schooling:

> The principle underlying the system which I advocate is that we have a right to call on the youths of the Commonwealth to train themselves in the art of defence just as we have the right to compel them to go to school and learn to read and write (Dobson, CPD 1904, p. 8386).

Rifle and drill practice for young Australian males was then transformed into 'education' (Dobson, CPD, 1904, p. 8388). Dobson then pointed out that education was an antidote to ignorance:

> I wish to get hold of every healthy boy, whether he be a street boy or a college boy. I wish the Senate to acknowledge that, just as the State teaches and compels boys to learn how to read and write, lest their ignorance should be a danger to the community, so it ought above all things to teach them the art of self-defence, lest their ignorance should become a danger to the community (Dobson, CPD.1904, p. 8388).

Dobson peppered his speeches with quotations from 'experts' - mainly British – whose views supposedly supported the vision of compulsory military training as a (neglected) aspect of formal education:

> Military or naval training should be made compulsory for every able-bodied youth between fourteen and nineteen as a branch of, or as a continuation of ordinary education. In working out the details the line of existing educational machinery should be closely followed. Military training would rank as an additional branch

> beside elementary, secondary, and technical education being most nearly allied, by its compulsory character, to elementary education (CPD, 1904, p. 8389).

Since military training was to be regarded perhaps as a 'continuation of ordinary education', logically the obvious and proper venue for instruction was the school:

> Physical training on scientific principles and military drill should be made compulsory as part of the educational course in all schools (Dobson, CPD, 1904, p. 8385).
>
> ...military exercises should be compulsory in schools up to the age of eighteen (Dobson, CPD, 1904, p. 8389).

In Britain, the Elgin Commission of 1902-03 recommended compulsory service and the Norfolk Commission of 1903-04 proposed military training for the whole adult male population, but 'British public opinion was considered to be opposed to compulsion, so the government did nothing along these lines' (Barrett, 1979, p. 43). The British National Service League (BNSL), an organization dominated by a 'cluster of peers' (Barrett 1979, p. 44), then attempted unsuccessfully to have compulsory military training introduced in schools for boys between fourteen and eighteen years of age (Jauncey 1935, p. 10). Thwarted at home, militarists in and outside of the British Parliament turned their eyes towards Australia and New Zealand:

> Organizers of the British National Service League then decided to try to establish their scheme in the Colonies, and then when newspapers in England had pronounced compulsory military training a 'success' in the 'democratic Colonies' the task of persuading the British public to accept their proposals would be much easier (Jauncey 1935, p. 11).

In the Australian Parliament advocates of the compulsory training scheme made use of support from the president of the BNSL, Lord Roberts. Dobson referred to the 'good example' (CPD 1905, p. 3192) of the BNSL and read out the League's proposals for incorporating military training into schooling (CPD 1904, p. 8385; CPD 1905, p. 3192). On an inspection tour of Australia's defense forces, Lord Kitchener advocated for the proposed policy with such effect that in popular terminology, his name was soon put to the scheme (Barrett 1979, p. 42).

In the Australian Parliament, support for the scheme always transcended party affiliations. Senator Dobson, for example, was a Free Trader while his ally on compulsory training, W.M. Hughes,

represented Labor. In 1904, it was Senator O'Keefe (Labor) who took the opportunity 'to indorse [sic] very heartily what has been said by Senator Dobson as to the absolute necessity for inaugurating some system of training the youths of Australia' (CPD, 1904, p. 8389). Prime Minister Deakin and Ewing, both Protectionists, exerted a major influence on the shape of the legislation. The scheme became law under a Free Trader/Protectionist coalition government and was first administered by the office of Labor Senator Pearce! In 1912, Senator Millen correctly observed that 'the principle of compulsory training is a principle to which both parties in this Parliament are equally committed' (CPD, 1912, p. 416).

The path to legislation

Ironically, the representation of compulsory military training as a 'missing' branch of 'ordinary education' created some difficulties for the proponents of Commonwealth intervention. Despite the bluster about the Commonwealth's established 'right' to compel young Australians to do its bidding, traditionally schooling was a responsibility of the states. In 1904, it was suggested that the proposal be put on the agenda for the Premiers' Conference (Drake, CPD, 1904, p.8391), but nothing came out of the meeting. In October 1905, it fell again to Dobson to speak for the proposal. He advised his colleagues that to implement the initiative all that was required was 'a change in our system of education' (CPD, 1905, p. 3190). He reiterated that military training would prove 'an indispensable complement to our system of universal education' (Dobson, CPD, 1905, p. 3194). Of significance to the themes of this paper, to press his case Dobson focused on the obligation of the young to the state:

> It is monstrous for us to shrink from the idea of saying to the youth of the Commonwealth – You are bound to serve the State, in return for the privileges and advantages which the State gives you (CPD, 1905, p. 3196).

Foucault (1988) has argued that governance of a nation state can only be rational on the condition that it is conducted in the interests of the state. That is, the legitimate aim of governance of the state is the strengthening of that state and nothing else. Dobson and fellow proponents of the scheme typically sought to base its appeal in political utility. Young males were effectively represented as a resource of the state to be 'educated' in its service. For example: 'It stands to reason

that the compulsory training of our youth would have a very marked beneficial effect upon the physique of the nation' (Dobson, CPD, 1905, p. 3194). The young had to be 'improved' for the good of the state. Dobson actually went so far as to claim the state was threatened by the 'deterioration' of male youth, a claim that lead to a bizarre exchange in the Senate:

> [Dobson]: ...it is evident that a committee at Home has gathered the facts; and they show that in every way the physique of our people is deteriorating.
> [Senator Playford]: The honourable and learned senator ought to show that in Australia the people are deteriorating.
> [Dobson]: I cannot show that.
> [Playford]: Because we have not deteriorated.
> [Dobson]: Does the Minister of Defence think that the statistics of the old country have no analogy with the statistics relating to the Australian youth?
> [Playford]: Precious little; none at all, so far as I know. The present generation of Australians are [sic] bigger than their fathers.
> [Dobson]: If the Minister will walk down Bourke-street [sic] and observe the boys who are selling race-books and newspapers, he will see that they are shrivelled individuals who would have been all the better for a little compulsory training (CPD, 1905, p. 3195).

Dobson strenuously maintained that British educational experts favoured introducing military studies into school curricula. For example, he told Parliament that the British Association of Head Masters recognized that '[m]ental without physical training is a lop-sided experiment' (CPD, 1905, p. 3198). Rudyard Kipling, a BNSL member, was also apparently in Dobson's camp on this question of 'education':

> I recollect reading a letter by Mr. Kipling, in which he referred to the enormous contribution universally levied on boys in the pursuit of football, cricket, and other games. Whomever heard of a boy attending school, and not taking part in these games? I suppose that in most schools boys are compelled to take part in them. Mr Kipling, in his letter, pointed out that if a youth is at school between the ages of twelve and seventeen years, he will have been compelled practically to put in 2,500 hours at football, cricket, and other games, and if he is at school from ten to eighteen years of age, he will have been compelled to devote about 4,000 hours to such recreations. He adds, that if we took 10 per cent, of that time and devoted it to military drill, and rifle practice, our school-boys would be fitted to some extent to take their part in defending the country. I should think that we might take more than 10 per cent, of this time; a third, or a fourth, would be well

> employed if devoted to some kind of military training (CPD, 1905, p. 3201).

Not only did Dobson have to deal with the fact that schooling was traditionally a responsibility for the states, but he also needed to have the Defence Act amended to bring in the 'educational' reform. For this he needed support from the Minister of Defence. In 1905, the said Minister, Senator Playford, was not convinced that the Commonwealth had the authority to interfere in schooling. He was willing to admit that 'compulsory military service is the best system a country could adopt' (CPD, 1905, p. 3209), but he maintained that the states 'would laugh at the Commonwealth Government, who have not the power to call upon them to do this work' (CPD, 1905, p. 3206). He applied the same argument to the 'education' of the boys: 'We could not compel them to handle rifles and to go through drills as part of the ordinary school curriculum' (CPD, 1905, p. 3210). Cost was also apparently a stumbling block. Playford feared the expense of the projected scheme would be enormous (CPD, 1905, p. 3209). To these doubts Dobson retorted that '[w]e compel our youths to learn reading and writing, but we are not to have compulsion for physical training and drill' (CPD, 1905, p. 5921). Finally, Playford agreed to earmark some funds for developing the existing school-cadet training scheme, and Parliament voted a sum of £7,000 for that purpose. There, for 1905, the matter ended.

In August 1906, Dobson tried to have Parliament agree to provide for compulsory military 'education' for all Australian males to eighteen years of age (CPD, 1906, p. 2540). At pains to present the scheme as an educational necessity, but obliged to press for amendments to the Defence Act to enable the Commonwealth to interfere in schooling, Dobson experienced further semantic difficulties in discussions with the Minister of Defence:

> [Dobson]: At present our system of compulsory education is incomplete.
> [Minister of Defence, Playford]: I have nothing to do with education.
> [Dobson]: The Minister has everything to do with it. He can, if he likes, insist that our system of compulsory education shall be made complete by teaching the youths not only reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and the other subjects in our educational curriculum, but also the virtues of patriotism and courage, and their civil duties (CPD, 1906, p. 2543).

Once again in this appeal, education is identified and valued as service to the state (patriotism, sacrifice and duty). Dobson declared that 'there is

nothing as important as education' and demanded to know 'why should we not give 50,000 pounds, or 75,000 pounds a year to educate our boys?' (CPD, 1906, p. 2548). The motion for national military education again lapsed, but in September 1907, Dobson returned to the fray with a Bill to amend the Defence Act to allow the compulsory 'education of all boys and youths over twelve and under nineteen years of age' (CPD, 1907, p. 2873). In 1907, parliamentary support for the 'education' scheme reached unprecedented levels. Among those who spoke in its favor in the Senate were J.P. Gray (Free Trade), E.D. Millen (Free Trade), G. Henderson (Labor), and Senator Pearce (Labor). However, the 'ignorance' of young males was neglected for a few years, and the expansion of their 'education' in the service of the state was delayed by the collapse of the Deakin Government and subsequent ministries.

The scheme is introduced

'Some day history will tell of this military persecution; it will tell how the men of 1910, with a coward's courage, bound the soldier's knapsack upon the shoulders of voteless boys, while they themselves went free' (Reverend Leyton Richards in Pamphlet No.10 of the Sydney Branch of the Australian Freedom League, 1912).

In 1910, the Defence Act was finally amended to cater for the new 'education' initiative. The Commonwealth required that all males who turned fourteen to seventeen in 1911 had to register for military training, and boys reaching twelve or thirteen in that year had to be enrolled through their schools and train at their schools. A total of 155,000 youths registered in 1911, and 92,463 were required to begin training immediately (Barrett, 1979, pp. 69-71).

As has been pointed out, the logic behind intervention was to make use of young males in service to the state. Even though it was represented as an 'educational' initiative, the scheme was clearly not oriented towards meeting the needs of those young males it targeted. It was hardly benevolent intervention. Rather, the young were to be utilized and harnessed for service. Simply put, their 'education' was required not for their sake, but for the good of the state. With this logic, legislation inevitably had to focus on ensuring compliance. As an example, Section 134 of the Defence Act provided for a fine of up to £100 for parents or employers who prevented youths from registering for or attending training (Jauncey, 1935, p. 28). Employers were not compelled to pay youths for working hours lost to compulsory drill

because policy makers had seen no reason for youths to be paid to attend to their education (Jauncey, 1935, p. 30). Absenteeism or 'truanting' was a punishable offence. Section 135 of the Defence Act stated as follows:

> Every person who, being a person liable to training under this part fails, without lawful excuse, to attend a compulsory drill, or commits a breach of discipline while on parade shall be guilty of an offence and shall, in addition to any liability under section one hundred and thirty-three of this Act, be liable to a penalty not exceeding Five pounds (Jauncey, 1935, p. 29).

Under the Act, boys who refused their obligations could be arraigned in front of a military court. Over the next few years, some offenders appeared in the civil courts, but the preferred option was that 'shirkers' and conscientious objectors should be dealt with by military authorities, who could drill or detain them in barracks. Relevant sections of the Defence Act included the following:

> Section 135 (4)
> ...to confinement in the custody of any prescribed authority for such time not exceeding twenty days as it sees fit, or for a time corresponding in duration to the time which, in the opinion of the (military) court, would be taken up in rendering the personal service required.
> Section 135 (5)
> Any person committed to the custody of a prescribed authority in pursuance of this section may be detained by that authority at any prescribed institution or place, and while so detained shall be subject to the regulations governing that institution or place, and to the training and discipline as prescribed.
> Sub-section Regulation 30
> The following shall be the prescribed 'institution' or 'place' referred to in Section 135, Sub-section (5) of the Act:- Any place kept or used for military purposes, or any other institution or place approved by the Minister (Jauncey, 1935, p. 29).

Transgressors against the Act were denied the right to protest their punishment publicly. Moreover, military standing orders forbade any public complaints by youths about any aspect of their treatment under compulsory training. Regulation 115 stated that

> Officers and soldiers are forbidden to publish or communicate to the press any information, without special authority, either directly or indirectly. They will be held responsible for all

> statements contained in communications to their friends which may subsequently be published in the press.

Regulation 116 stated:

> They are not to attempt to prejudice questions under investigations by the publication, anonymously or otherwise, of their opinions, and they are not to attempt to raise a discussion in public about orders, regulations, or instructions issued by their supervisors (Jauncey, 1935, p. 39).

In hindsight, it is perhaps hardly surprising that an 'educational' policy intended simply to make use of boys in the perceived interests of the state encountered substantial resistance from the ranks of those targeted. By mid-1912, almost 20 per cent of youths who should have registered had not complied with the regulations (Barrett, 1979, p. 128). By July 1912, Senator Millen was warning his peers that something was going 'radically wrong' (CPD, 1912, p. 415) with the new 'education' scheme. Millen (CPD, 1912, p. 416) asked for an urgent and bipartisan response to the 'unquestionable evil' of absenteeism. In reply, the Minister of Defence noted that since the scheme represented 'a revolutionary change in the lives of the youths of Australia' (CPD, 1912, p. 421) some resistance was to be expected. However, he indicated that defaulters would be punished, by fines, and, if necessary by incarceration. It is noteworthy that the favoured term was 'detention', perhaps in keeping with the argument that military training was simply an aspect of ordinary schooling:

> Where a fine is inflicted, and there is a penalty of imprisonment for non-payment, the officers are instructed that, instead of the lads being imprisoned in a gaol, they shall be sent to a place of military detention. We wish to remove the criminal taint from these prosecutions (Senator Pearce, CPD, 1912, p. 422).

Pearce offered a general statement on the progress of the scheme explaining that some of the difficulties could be attributed to its scope:

> In the case of the primary schools, practically all the pupils belong to the Junior Cadets, and they are being instructed by the school teachers. So far as the Senior Cadets are concerned, some of the schools have senior cadet battalions, but in addition to those, we have had to provide for between 60,000 and 70,000 Senior Cadets (CPD, 1912, p. 422).

The wide scope of the scheme may have mattered, but the politicians were more troubled by the threat of insurrection:

> I find that a great deal of insubordination prevails, and there is much trouble, throughout the country in connexion (sic) with the scheme. Thousands of prosecutions are pending, and we find some of the lads on the verge of open mutiny (Ryrie, CPD, 1912, p. 506)

Jauncey, (1935, p. 53) reported that, in 1912-13, prosecutions averaged 262 per week, and that they rose in 1913-14, to 269 per week. In general, the figures make astounding reading:

> In the first three years 27,749 prosecutions were launched, or one for every four-and-a-half lads at drill. Most resulted in fines, but 5,732 young men were actually imprisoned. (Inglis, 1968, p. 27).

Jauncey (1935, p. 53) points out that since the entire number of compulsory trainees for Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania was only 22,575, the volume of pre-War Commonwealth prosecutions actually exceeded the numbers of cadets supplied by these three small States! The opposition of the male youth population to the scheme appears to have been understated in the official record:

> A slight amount of opposition to the system has been manifested. Though principally from shirkers, there are also a small number of persons who oppose military service on religious grounds (Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, No. 12. 1919).

In August 1912, the Commonwealth Parliament was told that the courts were having difficulty coping with the numbers of boys on charges. By then, under the Act, more than 17,000 cadets had been identified as liable to prosecution (Jauncey, 1935, p. 53). Parliament was advised of how one magistrate had decided to deal with a court backlog of nearly three hundred pending prosecutions by hearing fifty cases at a sitting (Palmer, CPD, 1912, p. 1594).

The deployment of school staff and facilities

Under the Defence Act, provisions had been made for drilling youths in school playgrounds, and by December 1912, progress was reported. Mr Finlayson, the M.P. for Brisbane, asked the Minister of Defence, upon notice, whether any requests had been addressed to the Department of Education in any of the States, that the playgrounds attached to the public schools be made available for drilling the Citizen Forces? He also asked if any school-grounds had been used for this purpose, how many school-grounds were being utilized and if any school-grounds had been so

used and permission subsequently withdrawn, what reasons had been given for such withdrawal.

The Minister (Roberts) replied in the affirmative to the first two questions, stating that forty school grounds were being used for drill purposes. Where permission to use school grounds for drill had been withdrawn, it was for alleged disorderly conduct of cadets resulting in damage to school property (CPD, 1912, p. 6565).

During 1913, steady progression was made with harnessing public schools as parade and drill grounds. One outcome of 'national military education', of the conflation of the military and educational curricula, was that schools became increasingly accountable to the military. This was a curious arrangement in a democratic nation:

> Schools and colleges in the Commonwealth were really under the control of the military authorities, for, if any head-master incurred the displeasure of the military people, they had the power to declare the compulsory training of the school as not up to standard. A school under this handicap would have found it difficult to continue operating. Consequently, militarists actually had a weapon for controlling the education of Australia. That almost all schoolmasters in the Commonwealth were at that time in complete accord with the aims and aspirations of the militarists did not mean that this would always be so (Jauncey, 1935, pp. 42-3).

In 1914, Conroy, the M.P. for Werriwa, tried to persuade the Commonwealth Parliament to transfer the burden of compulsory training to an older age group. He failed, partly because his colleagues seemingly supported the argument that the compulsory military training scheme was indivisible from education:

> Most of those [military men] whom I have consulted fixed the age at which our youths should be called upon for purposes of defence at eighteen years, and the earliest age suggested by any of them was seventeen years. We are doing a distinct injury to the community in calling upon our youths for defence purposes before that age.
> [M_2 Page, the M.P. for Maranoa]: Then, why should we send them to school before eighteen years of age? (CPD, 1914, p. 1228).

Further problems with 'truants'

By 1913-14, military barracks in capital cities had become over-crowded with detainees. One solution to this problem involved sending batches of offenders to remote coastal fortresses (Barrett, 1979, p. 141). Community unease about the practice of removing boys from school and home and dispatching them to isolated coastal garrisons prompted some interesting public relations exercises. For example, the *Argus* (10/1/1914, p. 9) carried a semi-official report in which the Swan Island fortress (near Fort Queenscliff in Victoria) was described as a 'popular seaside resort' in which (incarcerated) youths 'enjoyed themselves'. It is hard to reconcile these visions with some of the practices allowed at the fortresses. For example, at Queenscliff, youths who failed to undertake the daily six hours of drilling were sometimes given a week in solitary confinement (Barrett, 1979, p. 185). At Fort Largs, stubborn youths were 'manhandled, threatened and put in a cell about 12ft x 9ft, on a bread and water diet' (Barrett 1979, p. 87). Perhaps the tone and wording of the report in the *Argus* can be partly explained by the authorities' confidence in Military Regulations 115 and 116. As mentioned, these regulations forbade youths from making public criticisms of their treatment. Was 'detention' really such an enjoyable experience as sometimes represented? Not everyone thought so:

> It needs no little courage for a youth in his 'teens to face the array of policemen, soldiers, officers, lawyers, clerks, officials, who throng about the court, and who, for the most part, seem to regard the prosecution of the boys as a comedy. It needs more courage to face the life of a military fortress. There the boys are beyond the jurisdiction of the civil courts, and have no appeal against the possible abuses of military domination; they must drill for six hours every day or else face a military punishment. Should they complain after their release, or attempt in any way to air their grievances, they are guilty of a military offence, punishable without reference to the civil courts. Once a couple of boys escaped from the fort at Queenscliffe [sic], in Victoria, whereupon the remainder were removed to an island, and it was intimated by the Melbourne Argus that 'they would be unlikely to escape, as the water was deep and infested with sharks' *(Reverend Richards, Pamphlet No. 10 of the Sydney Branch of the Australian Freedom League, 1912).*

In 1914, and under the weight of increasing public disquiet, the issue of solitary confinement for conscientious objectors became more obviously contentious. The specific case that proved most troublesome to Parliament was that of a youth aged sixteen. His name was Tom Roberts. In June 1914,

Roberts was spending seven days of his three weeks of 'holidaying' at Fort Queenscliff in solitary confinement. Roberts suffered poor health, was the son of Quakers, and had, under parental instruction, refused to sign on for compulsory training. Under the provisions of the Defence Act, Roberts was sentenced to twenty-one days at Fort Queenscliff. When he still refused to drill, the Army provided him with seven days in solitary confinement. The boy's parents embarked on a campaign to have their son released, the mother protesting to the Prime Minister and the father writing to newspapers, politicians and even to the American Secretary of State (Barrett, 1979, p. 190).

There had been a number of other earlier instances of determined rebellion. In November 1912, for example, a fourteen year old boy by the name of Victor Yeo had refused to pay his £5 fine and had received two months imprisonment. After twelve days he was released but when he continued to refuse to comply with the Act, he was sentenced to a further two months detention at Port Adelaide. While awaiting incarceration, Yeo refused to attend a medical examination and received a month's imprisonment in Broken Hill. There he was confined to his cell for twenty-two hours out of every twenty-four. Released, he was speedily charged again, but apparently because of the negative publicity generated by his continued prosecution, his case was discontinued (Barrett, 1979, p. 178). However, Roberts was in solitary confinement at the moment when Parliament was in session. He showed no signs of surrender, his parents were campaigning vigorously on his behalf and the bad publicity the case was receiving would not die down. Senator Rae pointedly asked the Minister of Defence just how far the matter of punishment could be taken. The Minister replied:

> If the military authorities find that they cannot break down the lad's spirit by resort to the barbarous system of solitary confinement, they should then, to be logical, resort to flogging, and, if the lad was still obstinate, end up the punishment by hanging or shooting him (CPD, 1914, p. 1930).

Rae was most concerned at the contradictions that were being promoted. It was unwise to punish youths for displaying obedience to their parents, so he suggested punishing the parents:

> If we are going to retain the compulsory system, I would say, in the first place, that if a youth is acting under his parents' orders we should punish the parents, who are the instigators of this insubordination, and who are the natural protectors and teachers of the youth...The whole of our moral teaching in Sunday schools,

> churches, and day schools is that a child's first obedience is to his parents. If we are going to teach children that obedience, then punish them for observing it... *(CPD, 1914, p. 1931).*

Senator de Largie had a different solution. His idea was to make drill shirkers do double-time and to have them remain at attention while drills were on: 'It is just as easy to keep these youths at attention on the parade ground as to keep them in solitary confinement' (CPD, 1914, p. 933). Senator Gardiner (CPD, 1914, p. 1933) agreed with de Largie and said that he was not surprised that the Roberts' case was causing problems because solitary confinement 'has been discarded even in our gaols'. Senator Stewart (CPD, 1914, p. 1934) seemed to attach little value to the concerns expressed about the policy, remarking that he would like to take young objectors 'down to Port Melbourne, or some other port, put them on a steamer, and send them to another country'.

Senator Pearce also thought community concern was misplaced. He rejected the suggestion that enforced drilling and solitary confinement were severe punishments. He presented an alternative view of these practices: 'In this case, the penalty is exceedingly humane. It cannot be said that detention and drill - healthy physical exercise - is inhuman' (CPD, 1914, p. 935). Moreover, said the Senator, just as military detention was not imprisonment, solitary confinement for trainees in military institutions was not really solitary confinement as the term was usually understood:

> When this boy refused to drill, he was separated from the other detainees, put in a cell, we are told, and taken out for an hour's exercise twice a day. Could that be said to be solitary confinement such as takes place under our penal laws? It is something totally different *(CPD, 1914, p. 1936).*

Pearce also rejected any suggestion that conscientious objectors should receive an exemption from training, arguing that the attitude embodied in the refusal to take up arms was 'reconcilable only with the immediate repeal of the Act' (CPD, 1914, p. 1936). Taking heart perhaps from Senator Stewart's interjection that conscientious objection was 'sheer laziness' (CPD, 1914, p. 1936), Pearce declared himself 'prepared to go as far as any one in securing the humane treatment of the detainees but whilst the Act is on the statute-book it will have my support' (CPD, 1914, p. 1936). Senator Keating felt that the punishment inflicted on the detainees was 'entirely misrepresented' and 'that 'detention' rather than 'imprisonment' was the proper word to describe their treatment' (CPD, 1914, pp. 1936-7). Senator Russell (CPD 1914, p.

1937) seems to have been certain that the current penalties were quite gentle and that detention in Fort Queenscliff really involved just 'a trip to the seaside'. Russell also agreed that wrong terminology was generating opposition to the scheme. He suggested that Parliament had to be more judicious in how it represented what was happening under the Act:

> My experience has been that what ought to be a good and effective system of compulsory training is being made unpopular, not altogether by what is done as much as by some of the terms that are used. For instance, we have had a discussion today about solitary confinement. I believe that the bulk of the public and most modern reformers are absolutely against this form of punishment, but the discussion to-day is only another illustration of the fact that we use here expressions which have absolutely no application to the facts (CPD, 1914, p. 1938).

Admonishing his peers by saying that '[w]e are lacking in intelligence if we cannot devise a suitable system of punishment', Russell stated that he would not give 'the slightest support' to any system of confinement. However, he was in favor of increasing detention. For Russell, the terms 'detention' and 'confinement' were mutually exclusive: 'I think that the difficulty can be got over. For instance, if a boy will not do the training outside, let him be detained for double the length of time outside', and then if he still refuses to train, '[l]et him be detained for twice the time' (CPD, 1914, p. 1938). In the House of Representatives, it was left to the expressive Conroy to speak out against solitary confinement:

> When solitary confinement has been abolished throughout the civilized world, even in the hulks and convict prisons, surely there ought to be in this House a party who would abolish this form of punishment in the case of at least children (CPD, 1914, p. 2068).

The furore over the Roberts case seems to have decided Parliament against the continued use of solitary confinement as a punishment. On 26/6/1914, the Prime Minister, Mr Joseph Cook, stated that the Government was 'not going to put any more boys under...solitary confinement' (CPD, 1914, p. 2648). Roberts may have been the last youth sentenced to solitary confinement. However, the fining and 'detention' of absentees continued. Though he asks that the numbers be seen in 'the context of the times, the causes, the penalties and the whole training scheme', Barrett (1979, p. 213) reported that, between 1911 and 1919, there were in total 56,000 prosecutions. Even in the aftermath of the

Roberts case Parliament did not deprive itself of the right to inflict solitary confinement on truant and disobedient youths. Instead, under Regulation 30 (c) of the Defence Act (effective 23/4/1915), it simply took authority away from the military and gave the civil courts the power to impose solitary confinement on youths in breach of the Defence Act (Jauncey, 1935, pp. 61-2).

In the war years, 1914-18, the military 'education' of young males continued at the nation's schools. Teachers continued to double as military officers and principals continued to be subservient to military authorities. However, the House of Representatives and the Senate were relatively silent on the scheme. As in 1901, the key issue of relevance was civilian adult male conscription. The cost of mounting a war also quelled enthusiasm for spending Commonwealth funds on 'educating' youth. In the lean post-war years, the organization of training centers, and indeed the whole infrastructure of compulsory training, came to represent a barely acceptable drain on the nation's purse (Jauncey, 1935).

A desultory end to 'national military education'

In 1919, the Federal Labor Party pledged to repeal the compulsory clauses of the Defence Act (Inglis, 1968, p. 46), but the Party did not win office and under the Nationalists, the compulsory training scheme continued on throughout the 1920s. The bipartisan approach had ended though it hardly mattered. In terms of their support for the policy, the Nationalists appear to have only gone through the motions. The will to make youths comply with the regulations, arguably the disposition of the Parliaments of 1907-1915, was missing. At one stage in the 1920s, authorities re-designed the training program to include sporting activities, but according to Jauncey (1935), this effort did not succeed in resurrecting much enthusiasm for the scheme. Meanwhile, various influential groups in the community continued to wear away at youth conscription. In 1923, for example, the Conference of the Australian Catholic Federation embraced this resolution:

> That this conference urges the abolition of compulsory military service, but whilst such continues demands that the regulations governing the compulsory drill of Australian youth be so altered as to ensure that no Public Holiday or Saturday afternoon shall be encroached on in compliance with such regulations (Jauncey, 1935).

Post-war Governments discontinued the practice of vigorously prosecuting offenders, and when, in 1929, the Scullin Labor Government attained office, the compulsory provisions of the Defence Act were suspended. The Depression ensured that the scheme was not resurrected.

As a footnote to the discussion of the 1911-29 scheme it is worth pointing out that the arguments used to justify intervention have been re-visited. Certainly, they established a precedent for the debates that lead to the passing of the National Fitness Bill in 1941. (See, for example, CPD, 28/5/1941-4/7/1941, pp 1-926). They were also resurrected by the Commonwealth in the 1960s to justify national service. (See, for example, CPD, 15/10/1968-28/11/1968 , pp 1909-3519 and CPD, 12/8/1969-28/8/1969, pp 1-922). As a third example, in 1950-51, when politicians in Canberra were once again trying to introduce compulsory military training (and service) for male youth, Kipling was again harnessed to the cause (Wentworth, CPD, 1951, pp 121-2). Again, the obligation of youth to the state and the virtue of harnessing the young to the needs of the state were stressed (see, for example, CPD, 1950, p. 2723, CPD, 1951, p. 38, p. 43, p. 56 and p. 122). Compulsory education was once more used to justify compulsory military training. 'Does the honourable senator (Cameron) contend that children should be consulted before they are compelled to go to school?' demanded Attorney-General Spicer (CPD, 1950, p. 3874) of one critic of the military training proposal. Once again, politicians insisted that the educational curriculum for youth should naturally incorporate compulsory military training:

> I stress that this is a bill not for war but for education, because one of the needs of modern civilization is to educate people for the hazards of life ... John Milton ... -wrote, 'I call therefore a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war'. I deplore the tendency in education to write off war before it has written itself off...It has been said that because the young men who will be called up first have no vote we have no right to call them up. How absurd! A child is not given a vote before it is taught arithmetic or the alphabet. These young men are immature in mind, just mature in body. Discipline is a necessary part of education, and is all the more necessary because discipline is to-day somewhat neglected in the home as well as in some schools (Senator McCallum, CPD, 1951, p. 126).

In 1950-1, parliamentary discourse re-visited the arguments put forth by Dobson and others, that military training was education

and that the Commonwealth had the right to compel male youth to train because of the compulsory provisions accepted for education. At least one dissenting politician recognized the strategy and set out to re-establish a distinction between compulsion in education and in military training:

> I remind the Attorney-General (Senator Spicer) that children who do not go to school are not put in gaol and placed in solitary confinement. Yet that action was taken in Australia, and involved, in some instances, boys of twelve years of age. That is the difference between compulsory education and compulsory military training. The homes of parents are not invaded, and schoolboys are not arrested, because they do not attend school (Cameron, CPD, 1950, p. 3874).

Cameron insisted that the Commonwealth should learn from its own history:

> Without referring to any other country, let us see what has happened in Australia in the past. The late Senator E.D. Millen, and ex-Senator Sir George Pearce, during the two and a half years between the 1st January, 1912, and the 30th June, 1914, were responsible for instituting 27,749 prosecutions against youths on charges of evading military service. In many cases, fines were imposed, but in no fewer than 5,732 cases youths were imprisoned in fortresses or in civil prisons. That indicates quite clearly that the powers were grossly abused...That was in this country. It shows conclusively that the system of management was one to which strong objection should be taken. An examination of records reveals that, in many instances, military officers took it upon themselves to usurp the authority of parents. In fact, they were given that authority by the Government (CPD, 1950, p. 3871).

Cameron's warnings were dismissed by proponents of compulsory military training. For example, Senator Gorton (CPD, 1950, p. 3884) accused the Senator of taking his audience 'back to the days of the Napoleonic wars' and making references to 'outworn practices of a bygone age'.

After 1914, no school children were incarcerated in military fortresses or civil prisons in Australia for refusing to comply with compulsory military training provisions, so such practices perhaps were a product of the 'Age'. However, arguments claiming that military training 'belongs' in education and that the compulsory aspects of education give legitimacy to Commonwealth legislation compelling young males to do military service have been resurrected many times in the national parliament.

Conclusion

The national military education scheme of 1911-29 set the precedent for Commonwealth intervention in schooling. The Commonwealth's right to compel Australian youth to undertake military training was justified by representing such training as simply a 'continuation of ordinary education' and then appealing to the compulsory provisions that attached to formal schooling. Proponents won over their parliamentary colleagues by arguing that youth had an obligation to serve the state and by situating the state as the beneficiary of the scheme. As a result of these constructions, schools were utilized as drilling places, teachers were made to instruct students (cadets) in military training and principals and schools were subordinated to military authority. 'Truants' from the scheme were 'detained' (after school) in their thousands in military prisons.

It seems reasonable to suggest that those charged with the governance of a nation state may well use what they see as the state's needs as the rationale for intervention in the education of its youth. This is certainly the logic that informed the Commonwealth Government's first intervention in the nation's schooling. However, from today's perspective, what was lacking in the formulations that gave rise to and directed policy in 1911 was an appreciation of young people not solely as potential human capital, but as individuals in their own right. In the continuing debate over the role the Commonwealth should have in educational policy-making, it is vitally important to consider not only possible gains for the state, but the consequences for young people in schools.

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