

# poster study:

## anti-conscription and anti-war posters

**SENDING AUSTRALIANS TO A FOREIGN WAR** has always provoked public debate. The conflict in Vietnam was no exception. While many Australians supported the need for 'forward defence' and were keen to demonstrate that we would fight beside our Asian and US allies, others opposed Australia's involvement in the war. A major issue for those opposing the war was selective conscription by ballot. They considered it unfair that some should be compelled to go and others not. Another issue was that 20-year-olds did not have the vote at that stage.

By the late 1960s those who actively opposed the war and conscription began to outnumber those who actively supported Australia's continuing involvement. One of the methods used by those opposing the war to inform and persuade their fellow Australians was the use of anti-war and anti-conscription posters like those in the exhibition.

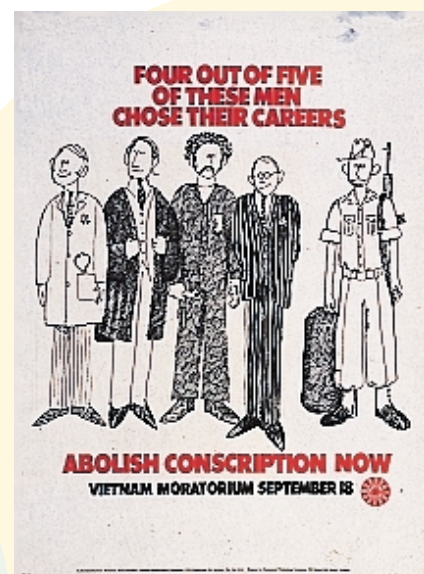
Examine the anti-conscription poster then read the summary of how conscription worked in Australia during the Vietnam War to answer the questions overleaf.

### A summary of how conscription for national service worked in Australia from 1964 to 1973

- Conscription is compulsory service in the armed forces.
- In November 1964 the Australian government introduced selective conscription under the National Service Act.
- All twenty-year-old Australian males were required to register for national service.
- Only a limited number were needed, so a ballot system was created for selecting who should serve and who should not.
- The ballot consisted of drawing a predetermined number of marbles out of a barrel. The marbles were marked with a birth date. If your birth date was drawn you would be notified and directed to report for a medical examination with a view to being 'called up' into the Australian Army. If your birth date was not drawn you were notified that your national service commitment had been indefinitely deferred.
- A barrel draw occurred every six months, and the number of marbles drawn varied in each ballot. On average an Australian male stood a one in ten or one in twelve chance of having his birthday selected.
- University students could apply to have their national service deferred until they had completed their studies.
- The period of national service was two years. Unlike earlier periods of conscription there were no restrictions on sending national servicemen to fight overseas. They could be, and were, sent to fight in Vietnam.

artist unknown

*Four out of five of these men chose their careers 1970*  
lithograph in red and black, 50.6 x 38 cm  
AWM (V866)



THE AUSTRALIAN TASK FORCE that served in South Vietnam included both regular troops and conscripted national servicemen. Over 18,000 of the 64,000 Australians selected for national service between 1965 and 1971 were sent to Vietnam. Their level of professionalism was as high as that of the regular soldiers, despite the controversy about their deployment to the war. You cannot tell from the photographs the difference between the two. Some national servicemen became officers and led men in battle (including Trevor Lyons, the creator of one of the works of art on display). Many volunteered for national service in Vietnam even though they had not been selected in the ballots.

In Australia public opinion began to change from support for national service to opposition to it. Selective conscription came to be seen as one of the great injustices of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. Study the anti-conscription poster and read the summary of how conscription worked in Australia during the Vietnam War to answer the following questions.

---

## suggested questions

### PRIMARY LEVEL

#### *What do the words mean ?*

- Find out what conscription means and explain how it works to your classmates.
- What is a moratorium ? When did the protest movement moratoriums take place, and how many people were involved ? (Hint: the time-line in the folder might help)
- Why are four of the people on the poster smiling and the fifth not?

### SECONDARY LEVEL

#### *Power of the poster*

- Posters need clarity and drama to grab your attention. Has this poster achieved this ?
- What is the poster trying to say ? Describe the methods the poster uses to convey its anti-conscription message.
- Compare this poster with the other anti-war ones. How do they differ in style, subject and message ? Which one do you find most powerful and why ?
- Find out what you can about the sunburst symbol used on the moratorium posters. Why are distinctive logos important on posters?

### EXTENSION QUESTIONS

- Compare and contrast the anti-conscription poster with an Australian recruiting poster from the First World War. What are the differences in messages, symbols and images ? Which do you find most compelling ? Discuss your feelings to this media.
- By the time of the Vietnam War television had replaced posters in recruiting soldiers and informing the population about the course of the war, but the anti-war movement used them to persuade people to their point of view. Why did the anti-war movement not use TV? Research the use of posters by anti-war movements.
- Create your own poster about an issue like a current military conflict or the role of the Australian defence forces.

### References:

Gray, Anne, 'Artists' visions of Vietnam' in Pierce, Peter, Doyle, Jeff and Grey, Jeffrey (eds.), *Vietnam days: Australia and the impact of Vietnam*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1991  
Edwards, Peter, *A nation at war: Australian politics, society and diplomacy during the Vietnam War 1965-1975*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian War Memorial, Sydney, 1997, (Especially appendix.)