



THE GREAT DEBATE: CONSCRIPTION AND NATIONAL SERVICE 1912-1972



MILITARY HISTORY AND
HERITAGE VICTORIA INC.

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE HELD AT
THE POMPEY ELLIOT MEMORIAL HALL,
CAMBERWELL RSL BY MILITARY HISTORY AND
HERITAGE, VICTORIA.

30 MAY 2015

Proudly supported by:



Australia's Boy Soldiers: Conscripted Cadets, 1911-1929

Dr Craig Stockings

Many scholars, authors and those with an interest in the military history of Australia are aware of the *Defence Act* of 1909 which heralded a universal military training system for 18-25 year old males in operation in Australia from 1911-29. Born of the perceived failure of the post-Federation army, and with as much attention to social consideration as military, this scheme marked the first application of universal peacetime conscription in the Anglosphere. Certainly the system had its advocates, including those who would later argue the AIF could not have achieved what it did from 1914-18 without its conscript militia foundation. Equally it had its critics, not least of them the War Office and many Australian officers who railed against what they saw as a large investment for negligible military return. One aspect of universal military training in this period has, however, received considerably less attention than the conscript militia. Along with universal adult service, the system also had a compulsory cadet branch. That is, all Australian boys aged 14-18 were compelled to train as cadets, as a type of apprenticeship to the adult army. This was a significant social and military activity. Hundreds of thousands of cadets were placed in uniforms and graced the drill halls newly built in almost every city, town and village of the nation. Yet theirs' is, in many ways, a hidden story. The purpose of my paper is to shine some light upon it.

Empowered by the new Act, military authorities ordered registration for compulsory cadet service to commence at the beginning of 1911, with actual training initially limited to boys turning 17 in that year. Importantly, it was only after these decisions had been made that the Defence Minister, George Pearce, announced that the famous British military figure, Field Marshal Lord Kitchener, had been invited to visit Australia to advise the government on matters relating to the organisation and efficiency of the army. Having already decided on compulsory military service, the government hoped that the imperial warlord would lend credibility to its plans whilst raising public confidence and interest in defence. Kitchener's judgement that Australia's forces were 'inadequate in numbers, training, organisation and the munitions of war', was precisely the exercise in public relations the government required to

launch the compulsory scheme, while his reputation as a military organiser ensured that the new defence measures – including a conscripted cadet force - would not likely be faulted.

In mid-1911 then, following Kitchener's recommendations, another change in government, and an amendment to the Defence Act, compulsory cadet training commenced under firm military control. For administrative and command purposes the country had already been divided into Military Districts, roughly corresponding to state boundaries, and on 1 January 1911 these Districts were further divided into 93 geographically based Battalion Areas, each of which was to provide one militia and one cadet battalion. Each Battalion Area itself was further divided into two or three smaller Training Areas, depending on whether they were metropolitan or country based, with each Training Area furnishing one or more cadet companies.

To support such an unprecedented military structure scores of new full-time army officers were appointed, predominantly as provisional captains and lieutenants, as Area Officers responsible for administering each of the 224 new Training Areas. With them an additional 58 permanent officers and 425 NCOs of the Administrative and Instructional Staff were also recruited. Typically, two officers of the latter were allocated to each Brigade Area to act as Brigade Major and Assistant Brigade Major, responsible to the District Commandant, while both Brigade Majors and Area Officers were allotted permanent NCO instructors to help train their cadets and militia conscripts.

The compulsory cadet system also operated on a 'quota' system with a quota defined as the set of boys who became eligible for registration when they turned 14 in any given year. In 1917, for example, there were four cadet quotas under training: the 1900 (17 year olds); 1901 (16 year olds); 1902 (15 year olds) and the 1903 (14 year olds). So long as the scheme had four quotas running then boys were trained for four years. When two quotas were running they trained for two years and so forth. This system was implemented in two phases with the first running from January to June 1911. During this period medical examinations were conducted for boys turning 14-17 that year. The second phase ran from July 1911 to June 1912 with the registration of boys turning 14 in 1912 and the beginning of actual training for those already enrolled.

Revealing the ambitious scope of the conscript cadet scheme, in January 1911, the army's Quartermaster-General, Lieutenant Colonel J.G. Legge, began a national lecturing tour to explain and provide advice to military personnel tasked to administer it. He predicted that of the 188,000 boys in the country aged 14-18 years, 100,000 of them would be under training when the scheme matured. Legge estimated that the average Area Officer would be working with between 300-550 cadets and that the cost of the cadet branch of the universal training system alone, once it was fully up and running, would approach £161,000 per annum. The end of his tour coincided with the beginning of cadet training activities in July 1911.

The sheer scale of the new scheme made it a considerable social phenomenon. From January to July 1911 alone, a total of 102,194 cadets were medically examined and of these only 3,725 were rejected as unfit for service with another 2,697 deemed temporarily unsuitable. By 31 December, six months after the commencement of the system, 155,132 cadets were registered with 93 per cent of these adjudged fit for training. Of these, 57,949 exemptions were granted leaving a total of 89,138 cadets in uniform at the end of 1911. This enormous cadet body was organised into 92 battalions, each containing 8-16 companies (a total of 905), with unit strength varying considerably due to the unequal size and population distribution of Training Areas. From 1913 cadet companies were divided into platoons with strengths of 40-80 each and this arrangement remained in place without significant change up to 1922.

It is important to note exemptions from compulsory cadet training were granted to those deemed by the military authorities to be temporarily or permanently unfit for service, those who were not 'substantially of European origin or descent', and theological students. In addition, the Governor General could grant a temporary exemption of up to one year to boys residing outside areas in which training was carried out or those living at such a distance from training locations (more than five miles) that compulsory attendance would cause 'great hardship.'

Not surprisingly, the first challenge for the cadet organisation was finding enough volunteer adult officers to man the multitude of new cadet units. Indicative of widespread initial community support, however, by 1912 the cadet battalions were short only five Commanding Officers and 804 regimental officers (from an overall requirement of 2,712).

Consequently, the Inspector General of the Australian Military Forces, Major General G.M. Kirkpatrick, considered the conscript cadet system to be successfully established by 1913 and commented on its satisfactory progress in his annual report. Despite Kirkpatrick's optimistic remarks, however, as will be discussed later the scheme was not implemented as smoothly as official sources claimed.

Once it was established, any study of the compulsory cadet movement requires due consideration of the military and social impact of the First World War. There is no doubt that wartime circumstances had a significant effect on issues such as the provision of adult cadet officers and military instructional staff. Certain elements of training were also influenced by the war. More significantly, the social effect of the conflict, including the debates over conscription for overseas service with the AIF in 1916 and 1917, was of considerable importance in shaping public opinion as to the continuing appropriateness of universal service. Indeed, changing community attitudes contributed appreciably to the eventual fate of the compulsory system. In relative and general terms, however, the *direct* influence of the war on the movement was limited. There were three reasons for this. First, the cadet scheme was *compulsory* and therefore issues relating to recruiting and retaining cadets during the war were all but irrelevant. Second, the scheme was part of the wider system of universal military training. Government and public commitment to this broader system from 1914-18 meant that the compulsory cadet movement was far less vulnerable to changing wartime priorities than it would have been had it stood alone. Last, the First World War was never about immediate national survival for Australia, which dulled its potential impact on the cadet scheme compared to the situation on the home front in Australia in 1942.

One aspect of the cadet system that *was* heavily influenced by the war, however, was the quality of its voluntary adult staff. During the war many of them volunteered for service with the AIF and in scores of cases were transferred, without a reduction in rank or qualification, to serve as regimental officers in combat units. This course of action, however, had the unfortunate effect of leaving the cadet movement in the later war years with a high proportion of adult staff who were too old, incapacitated, or not inclined to volunteer for service abroad. It was thus from 1918 that the first serious complaints about the performance of cadet officers began to be raised in military circles. A growing number of Area Officers, for example, began voicing concerns that the adult staff remaining within the cadet organisation were neither reliable nor competent. Or rather they were entirely satisfactory

when on parade but ‘they are so seldom on parade that they can seldom be relied upon’ and the balance of workload regularly fell back onto the Area Officers. If Commanding Officers or company staffs were less than enthusiastic or proficient the reality was cadets were administered by their Area Officer and were ‘led to regard their own particular sergeant-major as the chief military executive officer of the Commonwealth.’ In some cases this resulted in an almost complete absence of battalion identity. The fact that something like this situation existed in 1911 was understandable, given the inexperience of many cadet officers, but the capitulation of command responsibility to Area Officers from the later war years became an institutional weakness of the system.

The conduct of cadet training also suffered as a result of wartime circumstances. From 1914 many units were stripped of army instructional staff called to duty training reinforcements for the AIF. So too, the pressures of war meant that from July 1915 to June 1917, parade requirements were reduced significantly with compulsory drills suspended for three months from the 1 November 1915, and yearly training targets reduced from 64 hours to 48 hours (revised back up to 64 hours from July 1917). There was a rapid turnover of attached army personnel as they were promoted or posted to meet wartime requirements and, compounding these demands, from July 1918 to June 1920 portions of cadet training were cancelled altogether as a result of the Spanish Influenza epidemic. An important outcome of these wartime difficulties was a necessary change of focus from purely military training to other forms of instruction not so reliant on army support including physical education, swimming lessons and so forth. This move away from a wholly military emphasis continued after the war with unit training programs by 1925 regularly describing route marches, physical, signals, sports and ‘general’ activities whereas fourteen years earlier drill and musketry exercises dominated.

Despite the long-term transition of training orientation encouraged by the war, in many ways the compulsory cadet scheme always rested upon a perceived requirement for a stockpile of young men with basic military training that could be fed into the militia without undue time being wasted on elementary instruction. Although never officially endorsed as a substitute for adult recruit training, the scheme was clearly interpreted by many military figures with this outcome in mind. Lieutenant Colonel N.M. Brazier, writing in the *Australian Military Journal* in 1914, answered the question ‘why are we training our youth?’ by explaining that it was ‘to prepare them to take their place in the army, full of life and

patriotism and so defend our country from those foreign nations whose eyes are ever on our fertile shore.’ Indeed as late as 1925, the Commanding Officer of the 29th Cadet Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel M.J. Ulrich, wrote to his Brigade Headquarters describing his quarterly training program as having ‘been drawn up to cover as far as possible elementary recruit training as preparation for entering the ranks of the Citizen Forces.’ Interestingly, one of the few voices in opposition to this principle was the man used by the government to ease the passage of universal training legislation in the first place. Lord Kitchener never envisaged cadets as replacing adult basic training, claiming that ‘while cadet training is valuable as a preparation, it cannot ... replace recruit training, which is a necessary preliminary to the production of an efficient and trained citizen soldier.’

Even conceding the dominance of military purpose, however, to conclude that educational and social outcomes were absent from the compulsory cadet agenda would be inaccurate. The pedagogical importance of cadet training was entrenched in the minds of many teachers. Canon W.P.F. Morris, founder of Brisbane Church of England Grammar School, for instance, believed vehemently in the character-building aspects of mandatory training. He announced, when his school was established in 1912, that ‘in my own formula – chapel, cadets, rugby and prefects – the cadets have the higher priority ... leadership in the cadet corps is on a broader basis.’ In the same way there remained clear social outcomes identified for the compulsory cadet scheme in the context of widespread community concern about the degeneracy of youth, particularly in the cities, which characterised the era. Indeed, as early as the debates surrounding the *Defence Act (1903)* the benefits of obligatory military training were espoused as a means to ‘improve the health, physique and discipline of Australian youth.’ It would help overcome the ‘degrading, unhealthy and immoral influences of city life’, while in the country it would apparently make life ‘more enjoyable through fellowship.

In any case, the power of changing *post-war* military circumstances, combined with the effect of budgetary pressure, shaped the compulsory cadet movement in important ways. A fundamental reorganisation of the cadet system was wrought in 1922 which heralded a series of upheavals that plagued the system for the next seven years. On 13 September 1922, in an effort to bring about greater cooperation between cadets and the militia, to remove the expensive separate allotments of instructional staff, and to redefine the confusing duties of Area Officers, cadet battalions ceased to exist as independent units. From this point cadets

were attached as companies to parent adult militia battalions and designated 'E' or 'F' Cadet Company of, for instance, the 1st Battalion. Each cadet company was organised into platoons consisting of one officer and 60 other ranks with, depending on the number of cadets present, strengths varying from one to six platoons. Three years later in July 1925, the practice of cadet companies attaching to militia battalions was replaced by a system of appending individual cadet platoons to militia companies. This reorganisation was fully instituted by the end of May 1926. From 1927, each time the militia battalions were reorganised or reduced in strength (a regular occurrence), so too their attached cadet platoons had to be restructured. From this point even the platoon-based system began to unravel. In that year, for example, permission was granted for select school-based detachments to drill at home locations rather than with the rest of their platoons at militia training localities.

Further manifestations of the perpetual problems of finance were difficulties associated with clothing and arming cadets. From the outset the cost of providing free uniforms was a concern for government and military authorities alike. A conference of militia officers in 1912, for example, recommended that for reasons of economy cadets should not be issued with boots. Notwithstanding this frugal proposal, they *were* issued with footwear but were ordered not to wear it except when on parade, an order that was, of course, ignored by many boys whose families were not in a position to buy quality shoes. Under conditions of war the military supply system found it even more difficult to outfit the enormous number of cadets rotating through the organisation. Cadets at Adelaide High School only received their uniforms in mid-1913 and a report on cadet training in Area 5A (South Melbourne) revealed that in November 1918, of a parade state of around 500 cadets, 30 attended parade in civilian clothes and about 150 wore civilian shoes. Nor were uniforms easily replaced if damaged or worn out with the single issue of woollen breeches supposed to last a growing cadet for four years.

The provision of cadet weapons was another problem. The demands of war and fiscal constraint meant that in 1916 many units had their belts, pouches and rifles withdrawn by the military for use by the adult army. In 1918, in one Melbourne detachment, there were only enough weapons to arm 50 per cent of cadets on parade despite the fact that on average only around 75 per cent of them actually turned up for training. In 1923 virtually all weapons, except for a few to be used for instructional purposes, were withdrawn permanently from cadet units.

In the end one of the key weaknesses of the compulsory cadet scheme proved to be the nature of the training imposed upon its conscripts. Amendments to the *Defence Act (1909)* had, by 1911, watered down the training requirements for cadets almost before they had begun. From what was originally planned, the length of whole day drills was reduced from six to four hours, half-day drills were reduced from three to two and night drills became one rather than one and one half hours long. In 1918 quarter-day drills, of not less than one hour and conducted in daylight, were introduced to replace an equivalent number of night drills. Actual training parades existed in two types: statutory (prescribed and compulsory training periods), or voluntary (where those slow to assimilate training, those who needed to make up for missed parades, were able to gain extra instruction.)

In the early years of the compulsory cadet system training activities conducted at such parades were supposed to focus on basic combat-related skills. In general terms this included marching, discipline, handling arms, musketry, physical drill, navigation, first aid, guards and sentries, tactical training as part of a company, elementary field work and basic battalion drill. That, at least, was the plan. Unfortunately, for the duration of the scheme the bulk of cadet training tended to revolve around parade ground drill with musketry training hardly begun and field training not conducted at all in 1912. The Brighton Grammar School cadet detachment reported in that year that its *only* activities were ‘company drill and rifle exercises.’ As early as September 1911 many cadet officers were concerned about the monotony of training and a number of Brigade Majors felt that company drill was simply not enough to stimulate cadets. They suggested the introduction of signalling, scouting, knotting and lashing and elementary field fortification but Army Headquarters did not support the idea on the grounds that the necessary instructors were lacking. The syllabus of cadet training, published in 1912 was described as ‘wearisome, monotonous, and interest-killing alike to cadets and cadet officers.’ A typical quarterly training program, for example, might see *every* parade containing musketry drill and *every* half-day parade or night drill begin with 20 minutes physical training. Even if cadets displayed an absolute knowledge of the material within a year, they faced the prospect of three more years of the same training. What was boring often became a nuisance and what was a nuisance became a cause of dissent and absence.

Perhaps even worse, despite full control over training methods and objectives, military expectations of cadet efficiency were consistently disappointed. To make sure that cadets (and militia soldiers) were moving towards efficiency as the training year progressed, Captain J.L. Whitham was appointed as the Inspector of Universal Training in 1912. Whitman's investigation of 218 Training Areas revealed considerable difficulties in all cadet brigades. A Class I area contained greater than 90 per cent cadet attendance as well as efficient training and administration, a Class II area between 80-90 per cent attendance and satisfactory training standards, while a Class III area was considered below standard in some respect. Only 15 of the 218 areas inspected (7 per cent) reported Class I cadet companies while 133 (61 per cent) were unsatisfactory. This issue was never resolved and cadet inefficiency plagued the compulsory system throughout its existence.

Nor were militia officers happy in their misguided expectation that the cadet scheme would produce, at 1 July each year, fully trained soldiers ready for integration into adult units without the need for further recruit training. This misinterpretation of the scheme's purpose was the cause of significant angst, with many militia officers levelling harsh and unfair criticism at the cadet organisation on the grounds that graduates could not fully participate in adult battalion-level activities. There 'was such a violent hurry to get on with collective company and battalion training' within militia units, wrote one military observer, that 'preliminary recruit training is overlooked and the whole fault passed on to unsatisfactory training given to Senior Cadets.' It was doubly unfair to charge an unsatisfactory state of militia recruit training to poor standards attained by cadets up to 1915 as new militia recruits, to this point, had not completed the full four year regime of cadet training.

Just as surely as community attitudes facilitated the founding of a compulsory cadet scheme so too changes in the social climate undermined it. The fact that cadet training was compulsory did *not* mean that it was universal, even accounting for those excused for various reasons, and throughout its existence the scheme faced a degree of dissent from cadets, parents and certain other elements of the community. Importantly, however, the traditional acceptance of the view that 'Australians went against compulsory training, almost from the start of it' was not the simple truth of the matter. There is too much emphasis in the published literature on the immediacy of protest, non-compliance and rejection of the compulsory cadet scheme while too little attention is accorded its widespread community support – especially in the early years. There was certainly resentment in some quarters but widespread resistance

to conscript cadet-hood was slow to gather momentum, and took nearly twenty years to effect change, because it reflected a *gradual* movement of social opinion.

Accepted wisdom also suggests that, if not for the First World War, the immediate unpopularity of the compulsory training system would have seen it dismantled within a decade. This line of thinking, however, neglects the fact that agitation *for* compulsory cadet training had existed in political circles since the drafting of the original Defence Act in 1903, the concept was supported widely when enacted in 1909, and the system continued to function for eleven years after the war had ceased. In fact, the system of universal training was instituted with overwhelming community support which only began to fade during the war and in the aftermath of peace that followed. Again it was the *gradual* shift of public attitudes and the *slow* growth of general dissent against mandatory training that marked important elements of the conscript cadet story. It is within this context that the movement against compulsory cadet training bears further examination.

Although in the very early stages there were some meek voices of opposition to the conscript cadet system in that it seemed a little like militarism, there was an almost complete absence of organised resistance in 1911. More serious complaints only found voice when small numbers started protesting the hardships involved as ‘rain and cold made the experience of training all the more disagreeable.’ Indeed, it was a pre-emptive desire to mitigate this type of unpopularity that Pearce, as Minister for Defence, introduced the Defence Bill of 1911 reducing overall cadet training commitments. Despite Pearce’s amendments, problems of evasion became almost immediately inherent. The issue of boys presenting themselves for registration but failing to appear for parades in the first quotas of 1911 was serious enough for military representations to find their way to the Attorney General for advice on the application of the truancy penalties prescribed by the Defence Act. The Brigade Major of the 20th Cadet Brigade in South Australia, for example, had 560 cadets absent on 28 October 1911 and complained of the ‘moral effect’ of these absences, believing that if immediate legal action were not taken it would cause a ‘serious falling off in attendance.’

Resistance slowly gathered momentum. The registration of the 1912 intake of 14 year olds proved problematic and by the end of May, four months after the due date, some 10,000 were still unaccounted for. Importantly, on 18 April 1912, the Australian Freedom League

came into being as the foremost organisation in opposition to compulsory training and began to harness the passive discontent generated by the sheer nuisance of compulsory drill. A second type of emergent anti-cadet agitation also came to emerge in the form of 'international socialists' who dissented on the basis of a rejection of militarism as it affected the working classes. As these forces gathered opposing organisations like the Defence League, so crucial in convincing politicians to adopt universal training in the first place, began to lose public support after its implementation.

As the problem of cadet absenteeism grew ever more serious the military was forced to act. Financial penalties could be levied against employers or parents who prevented their sons from attending mandatory parades, and any cadet who evaded training was liable for a fine of between £5-£100. On top of this penalty, or in lieu of it, a court could commit an offender into custody and confinement for the time corresponding to the length of service missed. Subsequently, from the beginning of 1912 until the middle of 1914, 27,749 court cases were launched against those failing to render cadet service and of these 5,732 resulted in confinement. What these numbers represented, in proportion to the size of the overall scheme, should not, however, be overstated. Government statistics note that from 1911-13 6.9 per cent of boys eligible for training did not appear and were prosecuted, although the real figure was smaller as these numbers included multiple offenders and employers or parents that hindered training. In 1914 this tally was reduced to 5.4 per cent. In addition, those that were tried were treated with great leniency on behalf of the military which made every effort to provide offenders with the opportunity to make up for missed parades. Indeed, militia officers complained about such 'soft' attitudes in 1912 insofar as that the non-enforcement of fines for non-attendance at drill for cadets was having a prejudicial effect on the parade attendance of adult units whose members naturally expected the same clemency to be extended to them.

The military's attempts to enforce the compulsory provisions of the cadet system were also frustrated consistently by civil magistrates. A test case in Footscray, Victoria, involving the prosecution of one R.A. Barkly, resulted in the magistrate rejecting the idea that any financial penalty could be imposed on a defaulting cadet if it could not be recovered until a boy was 18. The Attorney General agreed with this ruling and declared that 'until the Act is amended, or until the High Court decides the questions raised in this case, different magistrates will give different interpretations of this section.' Therein, with particular

reference to inconsistency, lay a serious problem. There was no uniformity across the states as to how courts treated cases of defaulting cadets. The situation forced Pearce, by mid-1912, to relent on the strict provision of punishments for cadets neglecting to comply with their training requirements. He wrote to the Attorney General on 25 July requesting that recently inflicted fines imposed on defaulters be reduced and ordered no action be taken against cadets who attended at least 54 hours of training per annum, despite this being ten hours less than stipulated.

From 1913, even when penalties were enforced, they were done so reluctantly and gently. Indeed, the military grew so sensitive to criticisms directed at the confinement of offending cadets that it directed prosecutions to secure confinement only be instituted against those who 'willfully neglected to obey an order of a court to make up deficiencies in drill.' In South Melbourne, for example, one offending cadet was found to be 182 training hours in arrears over 18 months and had made no effort to make up the missed parades. The defaulter was punished with a paltry period of five days confinement. The net result of such military and magisterial policies was predictable. Absenteeism was endemic by 1920 and as the decade progressed, even with reduced training quotas, the authorities were increasingly unable to enforce universal training regulations.

The cadet scheme, like the adult universal training system it paralleled, was gradually wound down from 1922 and finally dismantled on 31 October 1929. If changing social attitudes had set appropriate pre-conditions for this outcome, it was finance, however, that helped crystallise government decision making. The beginning of the end for compulsory cadet training came out of Australia's representation at the International Conference in Washington on 11 November 1921 when a choice was made by the government, primarily on financial grounds, to continue with universal military service in a reduced format. Directed to lower cadet costs and numbers, a meeting was called by the Military Board which resolved to reduce the number of cadet training quotas from four to two, which meant that from this point only 16 and 17 year old boys were to be trained.

Two years later, the Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Sir Harry Chauvel, recommended that as the term of the universal training requirement for adults was to be increased by one year, in order to save money the period of cadet service should be correspondingly reduced to one quota. Under this arrangement, training would begin in a

cadet's 17th year and would continue for twelve months before transfer to the adult forces. This, Chauvel believed, 'would have the effect of reducing the strength of the cadet organisation by half and would enable it to be handled by the Area Staff with a minimum of outside assistance.' The Military Board agreed and from 1925-29 a single quota of cadets kept numbers at around the 16,000 mark.

The final blow for the compulsory cadet system, however, was political recognition that the mood of the population had changed. The message was delivered on 7 September 1929 when a senior Labor parliamentarian and unwavering pacifist, Frank Brennan, put a motion to the House of Representatives condemning the entire system of universal military training. This was the first occasion that the scheme had been attacked by a direct motion in the House with Brennan criticising it as morally wrong, wasteful of resources, and inefficient. The Minister for Defence, Sir William Glasgow, attempted to discredit the motion by focusing principally on his belief that Australia's war effort, had it been based on the old volunteer and militia system, could not have assumed the proportions that it did. While Brennan's motion did not pass it indicated the tide of changing opinion in that support for obligatory military training was fading fast. Finally, on 22 October 1929, the Scullin Labor government won office and on 1 November that year the mandatory provisions of the Defence Act were suspended. After 18 years the era of compulsory cadets ended.

There were many factors which contributed to the eventual failure of the compulsory cadet scheme. Apart from cadet dissent and general community distaste for military activities following the war, the long-term effect of boring and repetitive training played a part insofar as it was not long after the cadet experience that men gained power at the ballot box and an ability to influence the future of the system. In this way the restrictive nature of cadet activities helped to gradually build a public perception that four years service did not provide an adequate return on investment. The abandonment of the compulsory cadet system was also influenced strongly by the belief that the AIF was still available for defence if required and the general neglect of the adult army in the 1920s was a clear precursor to its demise. Nor can factors of economy be underestimated. From 1921-22, almost 10 per cent of the defence budget was expended on cadets and it was money that the military desperately wanted to spend elsewhere. So ended Australia's singular experiment with compulsory cadet training and, although its value or success are very difficult to define or statistically gauge, it remains a significant episode in Australian social and military history.