

# “Lucky Laidlaw” and “Worried Webb”: The Robert Laidlaw Exemption Case and Public Attitudes to Conscription in 1918

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## Abstract

In February 1918 businessman Robert Laidlaw successfully applied for exemption from conscription, arguing that he alone had the skills to manage his large mail order business Laidlaw Leeds. Opponents of conscription, and many conscription supporters, saw Laidlaw's exemption as proof that New Zealand's conscription system was failing to guarantee equality of sacrifice. Debate was intensified by the fact that Labour MP Paddy Webb was facing imprisonment for refusing to be conscripted. This paper examines what the Laidlaw case tells us about attitudes to conscription among politicians, the media and the general public in the New Zealand of 1918.

The Greymouth watersider, unionist and balladeer Harry Kirk, “the Mixer,” in 1918 wrote a song entitled “The Bloke that Puts the Acid On.” The anti-conscription song described men going before the Military Service Board seeking exemption. Their disabilities included wooden legs, old age and being dead. In every case the Board was about to grant an exemption, until “the bloke that puts the acid on” intervened. He argued that each man was perfect for military service “so of course he’s got to go.” In contrast, when a businessman with class A fitness appeared before the Board, the “bloke” reacted with:

This man can’t go away,  
His business would decay!  
We can’t afford to let him pass,  
He’s wealthy don’t you know;  
And his case is the same as Laidlaw’s -  
So of course he cannot go!<sup>1</sup>

The song referred to businessman Robert Laidlaw, owner and director of the trading firm Laidlaw Leeds. Laidlaw's exemption case became a lightning rod for the tensions over class, wealth and privilege that surrounded the New Zealand conscription system of 1918.<sup>2</sup> Paul Baker, in his pioneering work on conscription, cited the Laidlaw case in particular to illustrate the controversy that arose when business owners were exempted from military service.<sup>3</sup> The issue of equality of sacrifice was central to this debate, with many New Zealanders convinced that the burden of military service was falling too heavily on some groups, while others were not doing their share. There was a growing perception that the wealthy or influential could avoid conscription, whereas the majority of working-class men could not. This view went hand in hand with the idea that farmers and businessmen were making large profits from the war, while those on lower incomes struggled to cope with wartime inflation. Conscription raised the issue of the exemption of essential occupations. Considerable disagreement existed over how to define the occupations that should be considered essential to society, with further argument over who should make such decisions. Critics of the Laidlaw case held a range of positions. Some argued from a stance of complete or conditional opposition to conscription. Others supported conscription, but felt Laidlaw's exemption justified their fears that the existing New Zealand system was not guaranteeing equality of sacrifice.<sup>4</sup>

By 1918 conscripts made up the bulk of the reinforcements for the NZEF, volunteering having fallen off markedly since conscription was introduced in September 1916. Supporters

of conscription had advanced a strong argument that such a system ensured equality of sacrifice, whereas relying solely on volunteers allowed “shirkers” to avoid doing their bit for King and country. An element of war weariness was evident by 1918, the public now having no illusions about the scale of sacrifice being asked for. Many people had by then come to believe that conscription was failing to spread military service evenly, with certain privileged groups supposedly avoiding the call up. The issue became more fraught as the supply of largely single conscripts from the First Division of reservists began to run out. Men classified as belonging to the Second Division were starting to be balloted. These were mostly men with dependents or married men whose weddings had taken place before 1 May 1915.<sup>5</sup>

### **Robert Laidlaw; a Christian Businessman at War**

Robert Alexander Crookston Laidlaw (1885-1971) was a well-known public figure by the time the Great War broke out. Born in Scotland, he came out to New Zealand with his family in 1886. Growing up in Dunedin, Laidlaw worked as a clerk in his father’s hardware business and then as a travelling salesman. In 1909 Robert Laidlaw established the mail order business Laidlaw Leeds in Auckland, concentrating on supplying goods to rural areas. Laidlaw was owner and manager of Laidlaw Leeds until May 1918, when he sold the company to the Farmers’ Union Trading Company. As a result, Laidlaw Leeds merged with Farmers, with Laidlaw becoming the director of the enlarged company. In his time as manager of Laidlaw Leeds, Robert Laidlaw had worked in a hands-on fashion, personally overseeing the buying and selling of goods and the compilation of the sales catalogue. Laidlaw’s two younger brothers were also directly involved in the business. John Ritchie Laidlaw, known as Jack, was Robert’s right-hand man in managing Laidlaw Leeds, while Arthur Laidlaw was a departmental manager.<sup>6</sup>

Robert Laidlaw was a benevolent paternalist to his staff of almost 200 workers. He organised firm picnics, musical evenings, sports and other team competitions for his employees. Laidlaw produced a newsletter called *The Optimist*, which he largely wrote himself, communicating his ideas and business news to staff. The newsletter included poems, fictional stories and articles emphasising Laidlaw’s views on business, morality and Christianity. Laidlaw appears to have usually maintained a good relationship with union members among his staff. During the 1913 strike Laidlaw agreed that unionists had a right to cease work. He even advised his company’s unionised carters to follow their union’s call to strike, thus avoiding any possible repercussions for continuing to work. However, Laidlaw also believed that “free labourers” had a right to take up work abandoned by strikers and that striking workers had no right to prevent this. As long as the carters were on strike, Laidlaw and his brother Jack operated the company cart. Escorted by mounted special constables they regularly broke the picket line at the wharves. Seven of Laidlaw Leeds’ employees joined the Auckland foot specials and Laidlaw lent his own horse to an eighth man who enrolled in the mounted specials.<sup>7</sup>

Laidlaw was a staunch Christian, affiliated to the Open Brethren but committed to interdenominational evangelism. A dedicated philanthropist, from 1910 he consistently donated 50% of his personal earnings to charity. Laidlaw did not drink and personally believed in complete prohibition. From 1915 he supported the “patriotic temperance crusade,” calling on New Zealanders to abstain from drink for the duration.<sup>8</sup> Supporters of this initiative argued that drunkenness reduced the fitness of workers and soldiers, while the resources going into the liquor industry could instead be directed into the war effort. Their call for either restraint or total abstinence for the duration had an added moral dimension based around sacrifice. While men were sacrificing life and limb to defend the empire, it was only right that those at home should sacrifice their ordinary pleasures to show support for the war effort. There were calls for people to give up activities such as drinking, tobacco and gambling, with the often cited

example of King George V, who apparently swore off alcohol until the war was won. From some more extreme quarters came demands that sports meetings, horse racing and dancing should be abandoned.<sup>9</sup>

Laidlaw publicly campaigned for the more moderate section of this movement. On behalf of the Auckland Businessmen's Committee he promoted the 6 o'clock closing campaign of 1917. On 26 June 1917 Laidlaw headed a deputation of 500 people, gathered at the Auckland Chamber of Commerce to present three city MPs with a 37,000 signature petition calling for 6 o'clock closing of public houses.<sup>10</sup> In addition to working for the temperance crusade, Laidlaw was involved in war-related YMCA activities and fund raising for the Red Cross. He supported members of his staff who enlisted, guaranteeing their positions would be held open until they returned. Laidlaw backed the introduction of conscription in 1916, but, in contrast to his strong promotion of temperance, he kept a relatively low profile on this issue.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Laidlaw Exemption Case**

Laidlaw received his own call up papers in December 1917. At that time he was 32 years of age, with a wife and a young son. He was, however, part of the First Division of reservists, having been unmarried on 1 May 1915.<sup>12</sup> Laidlaw's brothers Jack and Arthur had both enlisted before conscription was introduced. Arthur Laidlaw was serving in France with the Auckland infantry battalion by December 1917. Jack Laidlaw had been killed in a flying accident at Hendon, in May 1916, while training as a pilot for the RNAS.<sup>13</sup> The personal tragedy of his brother's death affected Robert Laidlaw deeply, but also highlighted a developing business crisis. Laidlaw Leeds' managers and staff were mostly young men, meaning a high proportion of them had volunteered or been conscripted. Since the start of the war 35 of his staff had joined up, among them five departmental heads. Laidlaw believed this meant his own hands-on role management role had become essential. Up to that time he had never made an employer's appeal to exempt any of his staff on the grounds that their employment was essential to Laidlaw Leeds.<sup>14</sup>

Laidlaw applied for an exemption before the Auckland Military Service Board in January 1918. Military Service Boards each consisted of three civilians appointed by the Defence Minister, with the chairman usually being a magistrate. A board would also have an attached Military Representative, usually a lawyer who was also a Territorial officer. The Military Representative's role was largely to challenge each appellant's case and argue for their conscription. "The bloke that puts the acid on" in Harry Kirk's song was probably based on the Military Representative. Military Service Boards were given a considerable degree of freedom to interpret the Military Service Act. This led to some inconsistencies between the decisions made by different boards around the country.<sup>15</sup> When Laidlaw's case was heard, the Auckland Military Service Board were already embroiled in a controversial appeal case. In November 1917, Charles F. Gardner, brickworks manager of New Lynn, had appealed for exemption, arguing that he was essential to the continued operation of his brickworks. Gardner's case angered a group of New Lynn citizens who held a public meeting. They gathered a petition of 250 signatures, arguing that Gardner was not essential to the brickworks and should be conscripted. The Board was obviously finding this case difficult, having postponed it until late January 1918 for further consideration.<sup>16</sup>

When Laidlaw appeared before the Board he pointed out that although he was the last of three brothers remaining in New Zealand, he had no wish to shelter behind this fact. He appealed on the grounds that his call up was contrary to the public interest, stressing his willingness to serve had this not been the case.<sup>17</sup> There is no reason to question Laidlaw's sincerity, but his basic arguments were not unusual. Both Baker and Littlewood, in their respective works on conscription, have shown that public interest and personal hardship were easily the two most common grounds of appeal. Baker and Littlewood both point out that such

appellants usually declared they would have been willing to go if their circumstances had been different.<sup>18</sup>

Laidlaw stated that he was in sole charge of Laidlaw Leeds, arguing that it would be impossible to find someone with the skills to take over the complicated mail order side of the business. If the business collapsed its 189 employees would be put out of work, along with further losses to local factories and overseas suppliers. Their customers, particularly farmers, would also have difficulties, as the company dealt with about £300,000 worth of goods annually. Laidlaw emphasised the fact that people had lent him money to operate the business on the strength of their trust in him. The collapse of the company would lead to major financial losses to these lenders, to whom he had given personal guarantees of repayment.<sup>19</sup> The Military Service Board regarded Laidlaw's case as a particularly difficult one. They heard a number of witnesses, deliberated for a month and finally on 20 February 1918 granted Laidlaw an exemption by adjourning the case sine die. They accepted his arguments that his conscription would result in economic losses to the community. The Board specifically noted the fact that his two brothers, who could have helped him with the business, had both gone to serve overseas, with one being killed.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Mainstream Press Reaction**

The mainstream press at first reported Laidlaw's exemption largely without comment, usually simply printing the United Press Association release. Most papers seem to have considered there was nothing remarkable or untoward in the Board's decision.<sup>21</sup> The Auckland Star did show its editorial approval of the decision, illustrated through the way letters discussing the case were treated. At the head of its letter columns the Star printed a letter from J. W. McLaren, a farmer who supported Laidlaw's exemption. McLaren's correspondence was reproduced in full and without comment. Beneath it were excerpts from four letters opposing the decision. "Old Colonist" declared the decision was "absolutely against our democratic ideas and will assuredly and rightly give great offence to our workers." Auckland socialist Tom Bloodworth noted the determining factor in the Board's decision seemed to be the potential suffering of wealthy people who had loaned money to Laidlaw. Bloodworth asked what would happen to Laidlaw's business if the indispensable manager should ever die? The Star made the editorial comment on these dissenting letters that "the decisions of the Board have been remarkably judicious, impartial and worthy of public confidence." The protesting correspondents had failed to see that "it is in the interest of every class that, so far as war conditions will admit, the motto 'business as usual' should be maintained."<sup>22</sup>

Critics of the Laidlaw exemption feared that it was indeed business as usual, with the Military Service Boards favouring the wealthy over the poor. Their indignation was fuelled by exemptions granted to businessmen George Browne of Browne Ltd, ironmongers, and James Borthwick of the meat company Thomas Borthwick and Sons, along with John C. Tole, an Auckland solicitor.<sup>23</sup> Many of those who relied on wages or the profits from small businesses were deeply concerned by wartime inflation in the costs of basics. Families whose breadwinners had enlisted or had been conscripted were faced with reduced incomes. Their situation was contrasted with the enormous profits being made by farmers, whose products were being requisitioned by the Government for Britain's war effort. Shipping companies were also doing extremely well from the war. Such circumstances led many people, even if they supported the war, to believe that war profiteers were making money while others were making sacrifices. The exemptions of businessmen such as Browne, Borthwick and Laidlaw may have made economic sense, but to some these decisions were proof of the inequality of sacrifice. It appeared that making profits from the war economy had become a justification for avoiding the sacrifice of military service.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Wellington North by-election**

The event that really drew public attention to the Laidlaw case was the Wellington North by-election, following the resignation of Alexander Herdman, Reform MP and Attorney General.<sup>25</sup> The Labour Party's candidate for Wellington North was Harry Edmund Holland, the editor of the *Maoriland Worker*, "a journal of industrial unionism, socialism and politics" and the official paper of the United Federation of Labor. Holland campaigned on a platform opposing conscription, the harsh treatment of conscientious objectors and war profiteering.<sup>26</sup> The Reform Party candidate, Wellington Mayor John Pearce Luke, declared himself strongly in favour of conscription, ensuring it was a constant topic of by-election debate.<sup>27</sup> The New Zealand Labour Party, formed in 1916, had adopted the policy of not directly criticising the war. Instead the party strongly opposed conscription of men without an equivalent conscription of wealth. Most who followed this view were unconvinced by Government claims that it had devised tax and war loan systems to mobilise wealth.<sup>28</sup>

Laidlaw's exemption was announced on 20 February, just over a week before polling day in Wellington North.<sup>29</sup> The case inevitably became part of the ongoing war of words, with the first shots being fired by the *New Zealand Times*. The Wellington based *Times* was generally supportive of Joseph Ward's Liberal Party, in contrast to the *Dominion* and the *Evening Post*, which supported William Massey's Reform Party. From August 1915, the Liberals were Reform's junior partner in a coalition National Government, with Ward as Deputy Prime Minister to Massey. No official Liberal candidate stood in the Wellington North by-election. Labour supporters considered the *New Zealand Times* a pro-government paper, which made the *Times* leading article of 25 February even more notable. The leader suggested electors think carefully before effectively giving a vote of confidence to the Government by voting for Mr. Luke. Nevertheless, the article listed a range of "scandals, incompetence, extravagance and unfulfilled promises" over the war years, all of which showed the Government had too much power. In particular, the Government was unable to ensure equality of sacrifice through conscription. "Did it [the Government] do so last week when one Laidlaw, a wealthy merchant of Auckland ... was exempted from service on the declared ground that he was a wealthy merchant?"<sup>30</sup>

### **Paddy Webb's Conscription Crisis**

On 27 February, the day before polling, the *Maoriland Worker* gleefully reprinted the entire *New Zealand Times* article. While the *New Zealand Times* argued the Laidlaw case showed the need to reform conscription, the *Maoriland Worker* saw it as evidence that conscription was wrong. The Laidlaw case received three further mentions in this issue of the *Worker*, all comparing his treatment to that meted out to conscientious objectors. The article "Sty Politics" compared Laidlaw's fate directly with that of Labour Party MP Patrick Charles "Paddy" Webb, who faced his own conscription drama.<sup>31</sup> Webb, originally elected as Social Democratic Party MP in the 1913 Grey by-election, became one of four Labour MPs when that party was formed in 1916. As a former coal miner and a founder of the Red Fed union movement, Webb had the strong backing of the Grey Valley coal miners, who saw him as uniquely placed to represent them effectively.<sup>32</sup>

Many conservatives across the country were appalled that Webb, a single man, refused to volunteer for the war. In October 1917 he was called up in the conscription ballot. The coal miners' union and a group of Webb's constituents appealed, arguing that he should be exempted to continue representing his electorate. On the refusal of the appeal Webb resigned from parliament, forcing a by-election with conscription as the main issue. As the National Government refused to stand a candidate against him, Webb was returned unopposed in December 1917. The Wellington Military Service Board rejected another exemption application, while the Government claimed it was powerless to intervene in the matter. When

called to camp in March 1918, Webb argued that he would not join the army, as his constituents wanted him to represent them in parliament. He also stated that the Government had no mandate to introduce conscription and should hold a referendum on the issue, as the Australians had done. Webb refused non-combatant service and, on being sent to camp at Trentham, was court-martialled for refusing to obey an officer's order to pick up his kit.<sup>33</sup>

The Maoriland Worker pointed out that the appeal of "THIRTY THOUSAND WORKING CLASS PEOPLE OF THE GREY" for Webb to stay on as their MP had been dismissed. In contrast "a handful of capitalists" had successfully appealed for Laidlaw "because he is necessary to the further amassing of profits."<sup>34</sup> Labour supporters were particularly galled that the Wellington Military Service Board did not consider Webb's parliamentary service essential, while the Auckland Military Service Board viewed Laidlaw's management of his own large, profitable business as an essential activity. For critics of the Government, the Laidlaw case proved conscription was not guaranteeing equality of sacrifice. Furthermore, it appeared that businessmen such as Laidlaw, Borthwick and Browne, once exempted from war service, could return to war profiteering.<sup>35</sup> A number of newspapers carried the report that, in the Wellington North campaign, Labour had made "the exemption of Mr. Robert Laidlaw ... the subject of a pamphlet to suggest that the Military Service Act is administered with class distinctions."<sup>36</sup>

Webb tried to raise the issue of the Laidlaw case during his court martial, citing it as proof that the Military Service Boards were politically biased. The military court would not allow this evidence. Webb was sentenced to two years hard labour and sent to the tree-planting camp at Kaingaroa.<sup>37</sup> Unions around the country made official protests. The Wellington branches of the Tramway Workers' Union, the Plumbers' Union, the Operative Butchers' Union and the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants all raised the issue that the Military Service Boards had seen fit to conscript Webb and exempt Robert Laidlaw.<sup>38</sup> A delegation of Labour MPs and delegates met with Prime Minister William Massey on 13 April 1918 demanding Webb's release. The delegation included Harry Holland, who had been narrowly defeated in his bid for the Wellington North seat.<sup>39</sup> When Massey stated that conscription was applied to every man rich or poor, Holland asked the question "Mr. Laidlaw too?" Massey was adamant that no exception had been made for Laidlaw, pointing out that he was liable for exemption as the last of three brothers. Massey clearly saw this as a better line to emphasise than the business arguments behind Laidlaw's exemption. It need hardly be stated that Massey refused to support any call for Webb's release.<sup>40</sup>

### **Truth Enters the Fray**

In early March 1918, New Zealand Truth entered the Laidlaw debate, having been drawn by the cause célèbre status of the case during the Wellington North campaign. Truth in 1918 was a left wing populist scandal sheet; a national paper with sales of around 40,000 copies a week, claiming to have the widest circulation of any weekly in New Zealand.<sup>41</sup> With its associate editor Robert Hogg, a radical socialist, writing many of the paper's leading articles, Truth campaigned against conscription for most of the war. By 1918 the paper had changed its stance to one of grudgingly accepting the reality of conscription, but demanding that the system should be carried out fairly.<sup>42</sup> The case of the man they dubbed "Lucky Laidlaw" contained a range of features that fired up the muckraker's righteous indignation. Truth described Laidlaw as one of the "Calico Jimmies," a rich businessman who supported conscripting others but avoided going himself. He was referred to sarcastically as "a man who is indispensable—The Christian Head of a Christian Firm."<sup>43</sup> As a "Holy Joe" and a "wowsler," actively involved in the temperance campaign, Laidlaw was an anathema to Truth. The paper presented itself as the champion of its largely male, working class readers who appreciated such simple pleasures as the pub and the race track. In addition to reflecting strong opposition to temperance and prohibition, Truth

also spoke for many who either opposed conscription or felt it was being applied unequally. Laidlaw was seen as having adopted the moral high ground, trying to deny workers and soldiers access to alcohol for the good of the war effort, while safely staying at home to make money.<sup>44</sup>

Truth also discussed the case of Paddy Webb, referring to him as “Worried Webb.” The paper held that Webb must obey the law of the land, including military law now he was conscripted. Truth qualified this with, “We say clearly that as a member of Parliament his duty to his country lies in Parliament, and the haste to send him to the trenches, to drag him off to gaol, clearly shows what politics have come to in New Zealand.” Laidlaw in contrast was cited as an example of the Military Service Boards’ discriminatory policies, exempting wealthy men “who by no stretch of the imagination were indispensable.”<sup>45</sup>

Truth asked whether Laidlaw Leeds would survive if the indispensable Laidlaw ever died? They pointed out that the firm had survived perfectly well from March to August 1915, while Laidlaw made an extensive trip to the USA and Canada for business and health reasons. Truth was particularly concerned that small businessmen and farmers could be forced to sell up when conscripted, whereas the Auckland Military Service Board considered Laidlaw Leeds too big to sell easily. Truth saw this as sacrificing small businesses for the sake of large companies.<sup>46</sup> Robert Laidlaw was in fact able to sell Laidlaw Leeds to the Farmers Union Trading Company in April 1918. This was effectively a merger, with Laidlaw personally taking over the position of General Manager of Farmers. Somewhat surprisingly Truth covered the sale in its business columns without attempting to connect it to Laidlaw’s exemption case.<sup>47</sup>

Also in April 1918, Arthur Laidlaw was reported to have been killed in action in France on 27 March, leaving Robert Laidlaw as the sole surviving brother.<sup>48</sup> The Auckland edition of Truth printed a short article acknowledging the death and stating that these circumstances altered the case. While restating that Laidlaw had not appealed on the grounds of being the sole surviving son, Auckland Truth felt that the Laidlaw family “has done its bit.” It is interesting that this acknowledgement only appeared in Truth’s Auckland edition.<sup>49</sup> A week later the national edition of Truth printed an article on Laidlaw’s status as a sole surviving son. The article reprinted allegations from a number of correspondents claiming that poorer men appealing on the same grounds had failed to gain exemptions.<sup>50</sup>

### **Laidlaw’s Pro-conscription Critics**

The Maoriland Worker and Truth both criticised the Laidlaw case from left-wing standpoints. The Worker strongly opposed conscription and fully supported Paddy Webb, while Truth was sceptical about conscription and gave qualified support to Webb. The satirical paper the Observer also criticised the Laidlaw case, but from a quite different political perspective. The Observer had campaigned in favour of conscription from 1915, vehemently attacking “shirkers” who refused to do their bit.<sup>51</sup> Having strongly argued that conscription’s purpose should be to ensure the equality of sacrifice, the Observer saw Laidlaw’s case as exposing the system’s failure to do so. Laidlaw was described as a “super manager” with extremely dubious claims to be essential to industry. When Laidlaw sold Laidlaw Leeds to Farmers, the Observer asked why he should not go to the front, having now met his financial obligations to his creditors. The paper grudgingly acknowledged Laidlaw as a sole surviving son, but argued that this did not change the fact that his original exemption grounds no longer applied.<sup>52</sup> The Observer was strongly anti-union, anti-socialist and anti-Labour Party. It was bitterly critical of Paddy Webb, devoting far more space to attacking him than to Laidlaw or any other businessmen who had avoided conscription.<sup>53</sup> The Observer’s position was made clear by a William Blomfield cartoon depicting Webb as a shirker mollicoddled in the luxurious accommodation of the Kaingaroa holiday camp, rather than being sent to the front.<sup>54</sup>

The Laidlaw case was denounced in parliament by pro-conscription MPs. In April 1918, during a debate on reinforcements, the Liberal MP for Riccarton, George Witty, a member of

the National Government and strong supporter of conscription, raised the question of sending a range of different “shirkers” to the front. Witty’s list included military policemen and other soldiers serving in New Zealand, men serving on hospital ships, and wealthy men who had been exempted. He cited the examples of Laidlaw and Tole, stating “the wealthy men are left in this country while the poor have to go.”<sup>55</sup> Defence Minister James Allen was compelled to investigate their cases, reporting back to parliament four days later. Allen read out the Auckland Military Service Board’s decision on Laidlaw. He went on to state that the National Efficiency Board, established in 1917 to consider wartime industrial efficiency, was investigating these matters. The NEB thought that their Commissioner should report on cases when an industrial manager asked for exemption. Allen maintained that most exemptions had been for workers in essential industries such as coal miners, slaughtermen, shearers, seamen and farm workers, supposedly proving there was no class bias. Allen added that Laidlaw had lost two brothers overseas and, as sole surviving son, was eligible as of right to be exempted under section 18 of the Military Service Act.<sup>56</sup>

While the Military Service Act appeared to specify that sole surviving sons were entitled to exemption, this was not necessarily accepted by all Military Service Boards. In a Nelson case, in late April 1918, former local MP Harry Atmore spoke before the Canterbury Military Service Board on behalf of Leslie Dixon, a sole surviving son. Atmore referred to the Laidlaw case, citing James Allen’s statement in parliament that sole surviving sons were entitled to exemption. The Board chairman, J. S. Evans S.M., replied that the conditions of exemption must be those that applied when the applicant’s ballot was drawn, when Dixon’s brother had still been alive. The chairman stated that the Boards, not the Minister, administered the Act. Such declarations only reinforced public perceptions that Boards were applying different rules for the rich and the poor.<sup>57</sup>

### **The Grey by-election**

The Laidlaw case made one more appearance in the political realm. Webb resigned as MP for Grey following his court martial. Legal authorities maintained that his two year sentence made him ineligible to vote or stand in an election.<sup>58</sup> Harry Holland was selected as Labour candidate for Grey, having only narrowly lost the Wellington North by-election. In the Grey contest he faced T. E. Coates, officially independent but regarded by Labour and Liberal supporters as a Reform candidate. The Grey electors had on two previous occasions voted in Webb as their MP, but Holland had some disadvantages in this new campaign. He was a rather austere character, without Webb’s local popularity, gregarious nature and knowledge of the coal mining industry.<sup>59</sup>

Holland made conscription and Webb’s imprisonment central issues of his campaign, frequently comparing the former Grey MP’s treatment with Robert Laidlaw’s exemption. Holland stated,

He was not urging that Mr. Laidlaw should be sent to war against his will. He was merely contrasting the amount of consideration given to the interests of a privately owned trading concern with the absolute refusal to consider what 50,000 people held to be a matter of public interest.<sup>60</sup>

The Grey Labour Representative Council paid to have regular columns in the Grey River Argus presenting Labour views.<sup>61</sup> Laidlaw continued to feature in the Labour campaign, including the party’s columns in the Argus. The Grey LRC reprinted the entire New Zealand Times article from the Wellington North by-election, which included criticism of the Laidlaw decision. An introduction was added acknowledging the source of the article and explaining the substitution of “Grey” for “Wellington North” and “Coates” for “Luke.”<sup>62</sup> In further items, the Grey LRC challenged Coates to justify the imprisoning of Webb, “who represented men and women,” and

the exemption of Laidlaw, “who represents money.”<sup>63</sup> The same issue carried a reprint from the Dominion of the decision to exempt Laidlaw, under the heading “The Reason Why You Should Vote Labour” and followed by “How about Mr. Webb? Vote for Holland and Stop Class Distinction.”<sup>64</sup>

Although Holland was elected as MP for Grey, his majority was substantially reduced from those gained by Webb in the 1913 by-election and 1914 general election. Voter turnout in 1918 was also significantly lower than in the previous two elections. In 1913 and 1914 a large number of Liberal supporters appear to have voted for Webb rather than support a Reform candidate. Holland’s reputation as a more militant socialist than Webb, along with the Labour Party’s opposition to conscription, may have put off many Liberal voters, who chose not to vote. It is also possible that in May 1918 the emphasis on the Laidlaw exemption was not as effective a tactic as it had been earlier in the year. Robert Laidlaw may by this time have gained slightly more public sympathy, given the knowledge that both of his brothers had been killed on active service. It could be that giving prominence to conscription and to the Webb and Laidlaw cases actually worked against Holland in the Grey by-election, whereas it certainly did not harm his previous Wellington North campaign.<sup>65</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The Laidlaw case highlighted the ways a range of different groups within New Zealand society viewed conscription in the context of class, wealth and privilege. At the heart of each of these differing views was the discourse of equality of sacrifice.<sup>66</sup> Supporters of conscription generally believed that it should ensure such equality. However, by 1918, a significant group of conscription supporters were beginning to doubt that the supposedly egalitarian system was bringing in all eligible men. A number of issues increased this anxiety. By January 1918 large numbers of First Division men had been conscripted, so the married men with dependents in the Second Division were beginning to be balloted. As has been noted, while Laidlaw himself was a married man with a child, the fact that he had married after 1 May 1915 technically placed him in the First Division. Public anxiety was also raised by events at the Front over the first half of 1918. The same newspapers that brought news of the Laidlaw exemption, the Webb case, and the Wellington North and Grey by-elections, also brought disturbing news of the German Spring Offensive of March 1918 and the continuing heavy casualties. Even by May 1918, there was little indication that the war would be over by the end of the year.<sup>67</sup>

For Massey, Allen, the National Government and their newspaper supporters, the Laidlaw case showed that conscription was working. They held that Military Service Boards were making rational decisions based on the country’s overall economic good rather than emotive arguments over whether rich men were being exempted. The fact that Massey and Allen soon began to emphasise the fact that Laidlaw was a sole surviving son, clearly shows the lack of traction the economic arguments for exempting businessmen had in public debate.<sup>68</sup>

In 1918 many supporters of conscription believed that the New Zealand system was failing to guarantee equality of sacrifice. For these people the Laidlaw exemption was a prime example of all that was wrong. The New Zealand Times, the Observer and MPs such as George Witty, all saw the case as showing that members of the business elite were able to avoid conscription by virtue of their wealth. These critics held the fault was not with conscription as such, but with the way it was being administered. For the Observer and for Witty, such a stance also carried with it the idea that the critic was in fact a stronger supporter of the war than those who were allowing war profiteers to escape active service. The criticisms from the New Zealand Times, a Liberal newspaper, and from Witty, a Liberal MP, also show that conflicts between the supporters of the Liberal and Reform parties continued to be a factor in wartime politics, despite the coalition Government.

New Zealand Truth's opposition to the Laidlaw exemption was heavily influenced by the paper's opposition to people it regarded as Christian wowsers. As Truth saw it, Laidlaw's Christian temperance beliefs, as expressed in the six o'clock closing campaign, squarely placed him among those dedicated to restricting the working-man's pleasures. Laidlaw's exemption showed that while he was prepared to call on others to make sacrifices, he was not prepared to sacrifice his own business or risk his own life. Truth regarded the case not only as proof of the failure of conscription to guarantee equality of sacrifice, but of the hypocrisy of wowsers, more interested in enforcing rules on others than in making sacrifices themselves. While Truth had abandoned its stand against conscription by 1918, the Laidlaw case fitted perfectly with the paper's stance that if there must be conscription it had to be fairly applied.

Harry Holland, the Maoriland Worker, the Labour Party and many unions had views of the Laidlaw case based around the idea that conscription was guaranteeing inequality of sacrifice. They either opposed conscription or believed that men should only be conscripted if there was an equivalent conscription of wealth. The Laidlaw exemption was proof positive that businesses were benefitting from war profiteering, while the conscription system actively worked to protect wealthy businessmen from having to fight. The contrast in treatment between Laidlaw, a wealthy businessman, and Paddy Webb, a former coal miner representing a working class electorate, was a further indication of what these critics saw as the transparent injustice of the wartime state.

The Laidlaw case had gained a great deal of publicity. This was partly the result of Laidlaw's own prominence as a public figure. Publicity was increased through the case becoming an issue in two hard-fought by-elections, both campaigns having conscription as a central issue. The Laidlaw exemption also coincided with Paddy Webb's high-profile conscription battle, keeping this issue in the news. Public reactions to the Laidlaw and Webb cases indicate that New Zealand in 1918 did not have a consensus opinion on conscription or on how it operated. The widely circulating weeklies the Maoriland Worker and Truth, along with the Labour columns in the Grey River Argus, meant there were media outlets for views attacking the Government and its conduct of the war. The opinions of both the New Zealand Times and the Observer on the Laidlaw case show that even supposedly pro-Government, pro-conscription papers could be strongly critical of the way the National Government was carrying out conscription. New Zealand, in contrast to Australia, did not have a strong anti-conscription movement in the Great War. The Laidlaw case does, however, draw attention to the fact that many New Zealanders were anxious about the way conscription was operating and deeply sceptical of the idea that the system guaranteed equality of sacrifice.

## **Appendix:**

The Bloke That Puts the Acid On  
by Harry Kirk ("The Mixer")

The Milit'ry Service Board  
Sat in state the other day  
To refuse or give exemptions-  
Just in the usual way  
The first case was a wharfie  
Who'd a wooden leg from birth  
The Chairman said "Exempted;  
Now hop home for all you're worth"

But the bloke that puts the acid on

Got up and shouted: "Bosh!  
A wooden leg by gosh!  
Such tales will never wash!  
It was our gallant hearts of oak  
That beat the foreign foe,  
And mahogany legs can do the same-  
Why, of course he's got to go!"

They call'd upon the next case;  
Then a woman rose and said:  
"My husband was a miner,  
And I've come to say he's dead."  
The Chairman said: "Well he's exempt,  
He needn't come again."  
"Oh thank you" said the widow,  
And she ran to catch her train.

But the bloke that puts the acid on  
Got up and shouted: "Hi!  
How dare your husband die,  
He was A1 in July,  
What's that you said? 'He's in heaven now?'  
Well just you let him know  
I'll send a squad to fetch him back-  
For, of course he's got to go."

They called upon a sailor next,  
And smiling all serene,  
He stated: "I am sixty-one;  
You've got me down nineteen."  
The Chairman said, "What, sixty-one?"  
Then, with a thoughtful frown  
He said: "You're right, you're right;  
I had your papers upside down,"

But the bloke that puts the acid on  
Got up and shouted: "Say,  
Don't let him go away,  
Tho' his ship does sail today!  
There are men that follow up the sea  
Just as good as him I know;  
And I'm sure they're a damn sight older-  
So of course he's got to go."

The next exemption candidate  
Walked in as though on air.  
The Chairman said "How do you do?"  
And placed him for a chair.  
He sounded him, and said: "You're fit  
To keep the Huns at bay;

You're just the stamp of man we want-  
I'll pass you as Class A."

But the bloke that puts the acid on  
Got up and shouted "Hey!  
This man can't go away,  
His business would decay!  
We can't afford to let him pass,  
He's wealthy don't you know;  
And his case is the same as Laidlaw's-  
So of course he cannot go!"

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Kirk, "The Bloke That Puts the Acid On," in *Shanties by the Way: A Selection of New Zealand Popular Songs and Ballads*, ed. H. Roth and R. Bailey (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1967), 116-17. "The Bloke That Puts the Acid On" was first published in the October 1918 edition of the watersiders' union monthly *New Zealand Watersider*.

<sup>2</sup> A version of this paper was first presented to the Stout Research Centre's Rethinking War conference, held at Victoria University of Wellington, on 28-30 November 2013. I would like to thank the peer reviewers for a number of very useful suggestions for improving the paper.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Baker, *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1988), 123-24.

<sup>4</sup> On New Zealand debates over service and conscription in the First World War, see Baker, King and Country, and S. Loveridge, "Soldiers and Shirkers: An Analysis of the Dominant Ideas of Service and Conscientious Objection in New Zealand during the Great War" (master's thesis, University of Waikato, 2009). For further analysis of the tensions within wartime New Zealand see G. Parsons, "Debating the War: The Discourses of War in the Christchurch Community," in *New Zealand's Great War: New Zealand, the Allies and the First World War*, ed. J. Crawford and I. McGibbon (Auckland: Exisle Publishing, 2007), 550-68; S. Eldred-Grigg, *The Great Wrong War: New Zealand Society in WWI* (Auckland: Random House, 2010); S. Loveridge, *Calls to Arms: New Zealand Society and Commitment to the Great War* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Baker, King and Country; see in particular 89-90, 102-10, 123-24, 133-38, 142-52; Loveridge, "Soldiers and Shirkers," 46-59.

<sup>6</sup> Graham C. Stoop, "Laidlaw, Robert Alexander Crookston," from the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 30 October 2012, URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/312/laidlaw-robert-alexander-crookston>; Ian Hunter, *Robert Laidlaw: Man for Our Time* (Auckland: Castle Publishing, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Hunter, Robert Laidlaw, 89-91; *Maoriland Worker*, 31 December 1913, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Hunter, Robert Laidlaw, 20-21, 35, 57, 114-15; Stoop, "Laidlaw, Robert"; *New Zealand Herald*, 23 March 1915, 9.

<sup>9</sup> S. Loveridge, "'Sentimental Equipment': New Zealand, the Great War, and Cultural Mobilisation," (doctoral thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2013), 263-69; Parsons, "Debating the War," 559-61; Baker, King and Country, 30. On the debates over sport, including horse racing, during the Great War see F. J. Hall, "'The Greater Game': Sport and Society in Christchurch during the First World War," (master's thesis, University of Canterbury, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> *New Zealand Herald*, 26 June 1917, 7; 17 September 1917, 4; *Auckland Star*, 18 September 1917, 7.

<sup>11</sup> On support for the Red Cross, see *Auckland Star*, 25 October 1917, 6; *New Zealand Herald*, 29 October 1917, 6; 31 October 1917, 5. Laidlaw was Auckland co-Vice President of the YMCA, which carried out welfare work for members of the NZEF: *Auckland Star*, 8 August 1916, 7. On his support

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for conscription, see Auckland Star, 18 September 1917, 7. On keeping positions open for staff serving overseas, see New Zealand Herald, 19 February 1918, 6; Thames Star 20 February 1918, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Hunter, Robert Laidlaw, 116-17. Auckland Star, 4 December 1917, 7, lists "R. A. Laidlaw, merchant, Shelley Beach Rd," among the names of 5,000 married men balloted for service. The wording of the Star's introductory paragraph implies that all the married men balloted, including Laidlaw, were part of the Second Division. Men married on or before 1 May 1915, other than those widowed or separated, were classified as Second Division reservists. Men married after 1 May 1915 were included in the First Division. Robert Laidlaw married Lilian Viola Watson on 26 July 1915. Military Service Act 1916; Baker, King and Country, 89; Hunter, Robert Laidlaw, 107.

<sup>13</sup> Auckland Star, 18 March 1916, 9; Hunter, Robert Laidlaw, 47-48, 110-11.

<sup>14</sup> Auckland Star, 19 January 1918, 5; Evening Post, 22 January 1918, 6; New Zealand Herald, 19 February 1918, 6; Thames Star, 20 February 1918, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Baker, King and Country, 115-17, D. Littlewood, "'Should He Serve?': The Military Service Boards' Operations in the Wellington Provincial District, 1916-1918" (master's thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 2010), 13-42. Littlewood argues that the Government had considerably more control over the Military Service Boards than acknowledged by Baker and other scholars. On the role of the Military Representatives see Baker, King and Country, 116, Littlewood, "'Should He Serve?'" 19-20, 52-54.

<sup>16</sup> Auckland Star, 6 November 1917, 5; 11 December 1917, 2; 31 January 1918, 3; New Zealand Herald, 27 November 1917, 6; 11 December 1917, 2; 31 January 1918, 4.

<sup>17</sup> New Zealand Herald, 19 February 1918, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Baker, King and Country, 106, 119-124; Littlewood, "'Should He Serve?'" 64-74. Littlewood has re-examined the figures on the overall number of men who appealed to be exempted from military service. Baker calculated that about half of those called up lodged an appeal. Littlewood, in contrast, has derived a considerably lower figure, with around one third of those called up making an appeal. Littlewood, "'Should He Serve?'" 55-61.

<sup>19</sup> Auckland Star, 19 January 1918, 5; 7 February 1918, 2; 19 February 1918, 4; Evening Post, 22 January 1918, 6, New Zealand Herald, 19 February 1918, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Auckland Star, 20 February 1918, 4; New Zealand Herald, 21 February 1918, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Examples include New Zealand Times, 21 February 1918, 5; New Zealand Herald, 21 February 1918, 4; Wanganui Chronicle, 21 February 1918, 5; Wairarapa Daily Times, 21 February 1918, 5; Dominion, 21 February 1918, 4; Nelson Evening Mail, 21 February 1918, 5; Marlborough Express, 23 February 1918, 4; Press, 22 February 1918, 4; Otago Daily Times, 21 February 1918, 6. The Otago Daily Times published the short United Press Association report on the Laidlaw case directly under another article about Labour MP Paddy Webb's bid to gain exemption from military service.

<sup>22</sup> Auckland Star, 26 February 1918, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Baker, King and Country, 123-24; New Zealand Parliamentary Debates, 11 April 1918, 71; New Zealand Truth, 2 March 1918, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Parsons, "Debating the War," 564-65; B. Gustafson, Labour's Path to Political Independence (Auckland: Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press, 1980), 95-104; Baker, King and Country, 123-4.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Butterworth, "Herdman, Alexander Lawrence," from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 9 October 2014, URL <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/3h18/herdman-alexander-lawrence>. On the Wellington North by-election see P. J. O'Farrell, Harry Holland: Militant Socialist (Canberra: Australian National University, 1964), 78-80; Gustafson, Labour's Path, 132.

<sup>26</sup> New Zealand Times, 8 February 1918, 6; Evening Post, 8 February 1918, 3; Dominion, 8 February 1918, 6.

<sup>27</sup> New Zealand Times, 8 February 1918, 6; Evening Post, 8 February 1918, 3; Dominion, 7 February 1918, 6; 8 February 1918, 6. There were also two other candidates in the Wellington North by-election, Independent Reform candidate Alfred de Barthe Brandon and Independent Liberal candidate Angus Neville Polson. Both were supporters of conscription, though not necessarily of the Government's management of the system: New Zealand Truth, 2 February 1918, 6; Dominion, 13 February 1918, 6; Evening Post, 4 February 1918, 6; 21 February 1918, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Gustafson, Labour's Path, 110-19; O'Farrell, Harry Holland, 72-73, 78-79.

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- <sup>29</sup> Auckland Star, 20 February 1918, 4.
- <sup>30</sup> New Zealand Times, 25 February 1918, 4.
- <sup>31</sup> Maoriland Worker, 27 February 1918, supplement, 3, 4.
- <sup>32</sup> Len Richardson, "Webb, Patrick Charles," from the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 1 April 2014, URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/3w5/webb-patrick-charles>; Gustafson, Labour's Path, 133-34; Len Richardson, "The Workers in Grey District Politics During Wartime 1914-1918" (master's thesis, University of Canterbury, 1968), 166-76.
- <sup>33</sup> Richardson "Webb, Patrick Charles"; Richardson, "The Workers"; Gustafson, Labour's Path, 133; Grey River Argus, 16 February 1918, 2; Maoriland Worker, 13 March 1918, 4; Evening Post, 16 March 1918, 3.
- <sup>34</sup> Maoriland Worker, 27 February 1918, supplement, 3. Capitalisation is in original text.
- <sup>35</sup> Maoriland Worker, 27 February 1918, supplement 3, 4; Grey River Argus, 28 May 1918, 4.
- <sup>36</sup> Oamaru Mail, 27 February 1918, 3; Hawera & Normanby Star, 27 February 1918, 5; Poverty Bay Herald, 28 February 1918, 5.
- <sup>37</sup> Maoriland Worker, 20 March 1918, 4; 27 March 1918, 4; Baker, King and Country, 163.
- <sup>38</sup> Evening Post, 28 March 1918, 6; 2 April 1918, 8; 10 April 1918, 6; Dominion, 16 April 1918, 4, Colonist, 12 April 1918, 4. Even before Webb's imprisonment the Auckland Waterside Workers' Union had passed a resolution "emphatically protesting" against the Laidlaw exemption. Auckland Star, 16 March 1918, 4.
- <sup>39</sup> The Wellington North election night vote counts were Luke (National Government) 2,986, Holland (Labour) 2,566, Brandon (Independent National) 816, Polson (Independent Liberal) 720. Holland had more than doubled the percentage, (and actual number), of Labour votes in 1918, compared to those he gained as Social Democratic candidate for Wellington North in the 1914 general election. Dominion, 1 March, 8; Evening Post, 1 March 1918, 3; Gustafson, Labour's Path, 132.
- <sup>40</sup> Auckland Star, 13 April 1918, 8; Otago Daily Times, 13 April 1918, 5; Poverty Bay Herald, 13 April 1918, 8.
- <sup>41</sup> New Zealand Truth, 2 March 1918, 1; R. Yska, Truth: The Rise and Fall of the People's Paper (Nelson: Craig Potton Publishing, 2010), 46.
- <sup>42</sup> Yska, Truth: Rise and Fall, 59-63. An article that sets out Truth's position on conscription in 1918 is "Men, More Men," in New Zealand Truth, 20 April 1918, 5.
- <sup>43</sup> New Zealand Truth, 2 March 1918, 1. The expression "Lucky Laidlaw" is from New Zealand Truth, 16 March 1918, 2.
- <sup>44</sup> New Zealand Truth, 2 March 1918, 1. On Truth's opposition to wowsers see Yska, Truth: Rise and Fall, 24-26. Laidlaw wrote a letter to Truth, dated 12 March 1918, setting out replies to accusations made against him and his company in the 2 March issue. To ensure that the letter was published he offered to pay for it at the usual advertising rates. Truth refused to charge for the letter, publishing it as a legitimate reply to an article, New Zealand Truth, 23 March 1918, 3.
- <sup>45</sup> New Zealand Truth, 23 March 1918, 1.
- <sup>46</sup> New Zealand Truth, 2 March 1918, 2.
- <sup>47</sup> Hunter, Robert Laidlaw, 128-31; New Zealand Truth, 3 August 1918, 2.
- <sup>48</sup> New Zealand Herald, 9 April 1918, 6; Auckland Star, 9 April 1918, 4.
- <sup>49</sup> Auckland Truth, 20 April 1918, 6.
- <sup>50</sup> New Zealand Truth, 27 April 1918, 1.
- <sup>51</sup> Baker, King and Country Call, 30, 44, 46-47; Loveridge, "Soldiers and Shirkers," 34, 51, 56-57, 76-82.
- <sup>52</sup> New Zealand Observer, 18 May 1918, 2; 15 June 1918, 4; 20 July 1918, 4.
- <sup>53</sup> For example New Zealand Observer, 13 April 1918, 12; 6 April 1918, 16; 13 April 1918, 2.
- <sup>54</sup> New Zealand Observer, 13 April 1918, 12.
- <sup>55</sup> New Zealand Parliamentary Debates, 11 April 1918, 71-72. Witty's quote is on 71.
- <sup>56</sup> New Zealand Parliamentary Debates, 15 April 1918, 249-50. These parliamentary debates received wide newspaper coverage: Evening Post, 12 April 1918, 3; 16 April 1918, 8; Wairarapa Daily Times, 12 April 1918, 4; 16 April 1918, 4; New Zealand Herald, 12 April 1918, 6; 16 April 1918, 6; Auckland Star, 12 April 1918, 2; 16 April 1918, 6; Ashburton Guardian, 12 April 1918, 4; Nelson Evening Mail, 12 April 1918, 4. The Marlborough Express examined the issue in detail in an editoria<sup>85</sup> Journal of New Zealand Studies NS20 (2015), 72-86

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entitled "Two Classes of Shirkers." The editorial pointed out that unless they could be proved justifiable, the exemptions of rich businessmen were very damaging to public faith in the egalitarian nature of conscription (Marlborough Express, 13 April 1918, 4).

<sup>57</sup>Colonist, 29 April 1918, 2; Nelson Evening Mail, 29 April 1918, 3; New Zealand Truth, 1 June 1918, 8. It should be noted that in the end Dixon did not get sent to war. In August 1918 the Canterbury Military Service Board reconsidered his case, after an appeal from Dixon's mother. This time the same chairman maintained that mothers had no legal right to appeal, as only the person called up or their employer had appeal rights. The Board nevertheless recommended that Dixon be given extended leave. This appears to have been a way of side-stepping legal niceties and a de facto acknowledgment that Dixon should be exempted. As the war finished in November he was never sent overseas. Nelson Evening Mail, 3 August 1918, 6; Colonist, 5 August 1918, 3.

<sup>58</sup>Grey River Argus, 11 April 1918, 3; 20 April 1918, 3; 22 April 1918, 2.

<sup>59</sup>Gustafson, Labour's Path, 133-134. Richardson, "Workers and Grey District Politics," 177-88.

<sup>60</sup>Grey River Argus, 3 May 1918, 3.

<sup>61</sup>At this time the Grey River Argus was not yet a Labour paper. Outside of Labour's paid columns the Argus officially maintaining a neutral editorial stance on the by-election.

<sup>62</sup>Grey River Argus, 10 May 1918, 3.

<sup>63</sup>Grey River Argus, 18 May 1918, 3.

<sup>64</sup>Grey River Argus, 18 May 1918, 4.

<sup>65</sup>Holland got 2,865 votes against Coates' vote of 2,717; a majority of only 148. The Grey voter turnout in 1918 was 5,582 compared to 6,509 in the 1914 general election. In 1914 Webb had represented the Social Democrats in a two horse race against Michel of Reform, winning by 3,734 votes to 2,775. The 1913 Grey by-election had operated under the second ballot system. There had been a turnout of 6,319 voters for the first ballot. Webb, standing for the Social Democratic Party, gained 2,091 votes against 2,189 for the Reform candidate, Michel, and 2,039 for the Liberal candidate, Hannan. As no candidate had a majority over the combined votes for the other candidates, a second ballot was held. In this poll the two most successful candidates stood against each other. A total of 6,288 voters took part in the second ballot. Webb won with 3,477 votes to Michel's 2,811. The second ballot system was abolished before the 1914 election. Gustafson, Labour's Path, 78, 86, 133-34, Richardson, "Workers in Grey District Politics," 202-05, Grey River Argus, 11 December 1914, 5; 30 May 1918, 3.

<sup>66</sup>On discourses of war and sacrifice see Parsons, "Debating the War," 550-68.

<sup>67</sup>An example of this can be seen in the Marlborough Express, 13 April 1918, 4. This page carries the leading article "Two Classes of Shirkers," discussing the Laidlaw case. On the same page is an article headed "Incessant: Continuous Hun Waves: Heavy Fighting on the Whole Front."

<sup>68</sup>For example, Massey in Poverty Bay Herald, 13 April 13, 1918, 8; Allen in New Zealand Parliamentary Debates, 15 April 1918, 249.