

CONSCRIPTION TO REPLACE THE DEAD

Tavistock Peace Action Group



YOU MUST FIGHT!

The Military Services Bill was passed in January 1916, enlisting all unmarried men aged 18 to 41 years old.

In May this was extended to married men.

- Many men were exempted, because of essential war work like miners, railway workers and those in the armaments industry.
- Many were exempted to continue a family business or work on the farm.
- Many of those seeking to enlist were rejected because of their poor physical condition or ill health. They were often given non-combatant duties which included working in agriculture.
- Then there were those who had conscientious objections, usually on religious grounds.

The law did not apply to Ireland in recognition of the independence movement. Ireland did supply 140,000 volunteers of whom 35,000 died.

By 1918 Britain was running out of young men to replace the dead and wounded.

In April 1918 Conscription was extended to include men up to the age of 50 and allowed young men aged 18 and six months to fight overseas after six months training. It also now applied to Ireland (previously exempt) but it was never implemented there due to riots.

Altogether, 2,400,000 men were conscripted.

MILITARY SERVICE ACT 1916

**EVERY UNMARRIED MAN
of
MILITARY AGE**

Not excepted or exempted under this Act
CAN CHOOSE

ONE OF TWO COURSES:

- ① He can **ENLIST AT ONCE** and join the Colours without delay;
- ② He can **ATTEST AT ONCE UNDER THE GROUP SYSTEM** and be called up in due course with his Group.

If he does neither, a third course awaits him:
HE WILL BE DEEMED TO HAVE ENLISTED

under the Military Service Act
ON THURSDAY, MARCH 2nd, 1916.

HE WILL BE PLACED IN THE RESERVE, AND BE CALLED UP IN HIS CLASS, as the Military Authorities may determine.

On first day of the Battle of the Somme, along a line of twenty miles there were 57,000 British casualties of whom 19,000 died. (1st July 1916)



The loss of life and the number of wounded was staggering.

On the first day of the Battle of the Somme half the British force of 120,000 were killed or injured - about 1,000 dead per mile - one dead and two wounded every four feet.

At the end of the battle over four and a half months later, there were
420,000 British and 194,000 French casualties.
There were about 600,000 German casualties.

There was an acceptance of this slaughter by the High Command.

Sir Douglas Haig noted, "I said if I attacked with say 450,000 men the War Office should be prepared to provide **50% wastage** of that number in two months"

The **Director of Recruiting** complained that commanders in the field were looking on the new recruits as "**expendable stores**".

Opposition to the war

There was a small but significant group who opposed the war.

The weekend before the war started there was a huge peace rally in Trafalgar Square led by Keir Hardy. In 1916, 200,000 signed a petition for a negotiated peace.

The No-Conscription Fellowship was founded in 1914 with the lifelong pacifist and campaigner Fenner Brockway as its first Secretary. As the men were arrested for not joining the Army, women became more involved in keeping it running and supporting conscientious objectors.

Catherine Marshall, daughter of a Harrow School housemaster, was its secretary.

Its activities were considered subversive by the Government and its meetings were often disrupted by noisy protesters.

Ramsay MacDonald, the future Prime Minister, was a leading member - and the eminent philosopher Bertrand Russell was acting Chairman when the previous one was imprisoned.

Eventually fewer than 2% of total applicants, 16,000, applied to be exempted on the grounds of conscientious objection.

Union for Democratic Control, founded in 1914, was a pressure group with 650,000 members that campaigned for:

- ① Parliamentary control over foreign policy;
- ② Negotiation after the war with other countries about how to avoid further conflicts;
- ③ The terms of peace should not humiliate the defeated country nor should there be artificial rearrangement of frontiers that might in time cause future wars. They advocated national self-determination and arms control.



SOME THOUGHT "WAR IS WRONG"