

Conscription

The First World War



Background information

Due to heavy losses on the Western Front the government introduced conscription in 1916. Conscription required selected men to enrol in the armed forces. Whilst many of them were happy to fight for their country, others objected on moral grounds.

Source A (picture): Conscripts going to

France.

Source B: From the East Grinstead Observer, March 25th 1916.

John Johnson, a stockman of Belle View Farm, Tilgate, Crawley, shot himself on Friday evening. A gunshot was heard outside John Johnson's home on his birthday and the deceased was found under a yew tree. The poor fellow had placed the barrel of the gun in his mouth, the bullet penetrating the brain and emerging at the top of the skull. It transpired that one of John Johnson's sons had just been killed and another badly wounded in the war. The third son was being called up shortly.

Source C: Appeal to the organised workers, 1916.

The armed forces of the nation have been multiplied at least five-fold since the war began, and recruits are still being enrolled well over 2,000,000 of its breadwinners to the new armies, and Lord Kitchener and Mr. Asquith have both repeatedly assured the public that the response to the appeal for recruits have been highly gratifying and has exceeded all expectations. What the conscriptionists want, however, is not recruits, but a system of conscription that will bring the whole male working-class population under the military control of the ruling classes.

Statistical information relating to servicemen during the Great War.

Percentage of men:	Killed	Injured	Captured/ Missing
Great Britain	10.20%	23.47%	2.15%
France	16.36%	50.73%	6.39%
Russia	14.17%	41.25%	20.83%

Now go to the second sheet.

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Activities

Questions to test your knowledge

Short answers are sufficient for these questions.

- 1) When did the First World War begin?
- 2) What were 'Pals' regiments?
- 3) Why were people happy to volunteer for the army in 1914?

Questions to see how well you interpret source material.

- 1) How reliable is Source A?
- 2) What does Source B tell us about the consequences of conscription?
- 3) Does Source C support or oppose the idea of conscription? Explain how you come to this conclusion.

Look at the Statistical data relating to allied servicemen in the First World War.

- 4) Calculate the overall percentage of enrolled soldiers in each allied army who, for whatever reason, were unable to fight throughout the whole war.
- 5) Why did the government need to introduce conscription?

A question to see how well you can analyse and evaluate Historical sources.

Source D

In November 1917 a widow asked Croydon Military Tribunal to let her keep her eleventh son, to look after her. The other ten were all serving in the British armed forces. A man from Barking asked for his nine son to be exempted as his eight other sons were already in the British Army”
(<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWconscription.htm>)

Question

Conscription was unfair and unnecessary.

Using all of the information provided on these sheets explain whether or not this statement is true.