

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 116

“What Did *You* Do in the Great War?”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

The Liberal government in Britain had gone into the Great War with the benefit of widespread public support, but as the war continued in all its terrible destruction and bloodshed, with victory seemingly no nearer, that support eroded.

Britain was not alone. Every government fighting the war had to contend with dwindling public support.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 116. What Did *You* Do in the Great War?

Back in episode 110, I told the story of the shell shortage and its political ramifications in the United Kingdom. But even after the Government took steps to rectify the shortage, criticism continued to mount.

The criticisms of the Government included lack of leadership, inadequate provision of arms and ammunition to the soldiers, and bungled front-line conduct of the war. The British public in general—and the opposition Conservative Party and its press allies in particular—were wont to blame the Liberals. And the criticism wasn’t just that the Liberals were bad managers. It was that Liberal policies were to blame. Liberal policies had made the nation weak and ill-equipped to fight the war and were now hampering the war effort.

For example, the Liberal Party had had a longstanding policy of reducing military spending. This made it easy for the Conservatives to argue that Liberal penny-pinching with regard to the military left the nation ill-prepared for the war and resulted in the shell shortage of 1915. Blaming the shell shortage on the Liberals’ well-known aversion to spending money on the military was an easy and effective way to criticize the Government. It was also unfair. No one had foreseen *this* kind of war. No one had anticipated it would go on this long or demand this many shells. Not even the Conservatives.

And the shell shortage hadn't only been about the numbers of shells but about their kind. Lord Kitchener, the War Minister, had ordered too many shrapnel shells and not enough high explosive shells, which were much more useful on the Western Front. But this isn't a political question. Kitchener wasn't a politician. He was in the Cabinet because he was a senior military officer. There was nothing partisan or ideological about this misjudgment; at worst it suggested that Lord Kitchener was getting old and his military experience was becoming obsolete. Of course, the Army and the War Ministry are large organizations with many senior officers and officials besides Kitchener; there's no record that any of them were agitating for more high explosive shells or of Kitchener overruling them.

There's also the question of nationalizing munitions production, as had been done in the other Great Powers. Again, the Liberals have historically been staunch proponents of free trade and free markets; nationalization was anathema to them. But if Germany was doing it, then here is a case where the Liberals were going to have to rethink their free market ideals. We are seeing modern warfare mobilize whole nations and whole economies; perhaps Britain could no longer afford the Liberal aversion to a larger government role in the economy.

As we saw back in the episode on the Shell Crisis, the suggestion was also being made, both by the Government and its critics, that workers in the munitions factories bore some of the blame. The War Ministry promoted "The King's Pledge" to abstain from alcoholic beverages for the duration of the war. Alcoholic drinks were watered down, and the opening times for licensed pubs were restricted to three hours at lunchtime and three hours in the evening, with a mandatory gap in between, from 3:00PM to 6:30PM. This ban on late afternoon pub hours would not be lifted until 1988.

(Wait, did I read that right? That's what it says...)

Conservatives mocked The King's Pledge, but they were just as willing to blame the workers in war-related industries. And the Liberals, of course. In their view, the Liberals' coddling of labor—empowering labor unions, granting reforms on hours and pay and pensions—had brought not economic justice but discord to the workplaces. The years leading up to the Great War had seen more strikes and labor strife than ever before. The Tories blamed this on the unions. The unions had agreed not to strike during the war, but the Conservatives took the view that under the Liberals, old-time virtues of hard work and ambition had been cast aside as Liberal policies tempted the working class to grow increasingly lazy and self-indulgent, and now the British nation was paying the price.

Then there was the question of conscription. As I've pointed out several times by now, Britain was the only Great Power in Europe that hadn't already had a conscription program in place when the war began. There were a number of reasons for this, including the fact that the Royal Navy usually got priority in British strategic planning, which stems from the fact that Great Britain is an island. Another was the British tradition of democracy and individual rights. Seen in

that light, conscription looks oppressive, and it was primarily the Liberals making that argument. The same Liberal devotion to free trade that makes nationalizing munitions factories anathema makes nationalizing the labor of ordinary British subjects equally repugnant.

Conservatives disagreed. Most Conservatives believed that if nationalizing factories and conscripting workers was now the way the world waged war, then Britain would have to follow suit, for King and Country. The Tories also argued that the Liberal reluctance to enact conscription was based not so much on high-minded ideals of individual rights as it was on more sordid political considerations—specifically, that the Liberals needed the votes of the Labour Party and the Irish Parliamentary Party to hold onto their majority in the Commons, and both of these coalition partners were dead set against conscription.

Labour's opposition to conscription was rooted in its pacifistic socialism as well as in the more pragmatic argument that nearly half of the British working class men of military age did not have the vote, and conscription would therefore mean forcing these men to go off to war and perhaps give their lives at the direction of a government they had had no say in electing.

Conscription was also controversial in Ireland. Irish Home Rule had at last passed Parliament in the early days of the war; Parliament had then promptly suspended Home Rule for the duration of the conflict. Irish nationalists opposed military conscription imposed from London. In their minds, this was a perfect example of why Ireland needed its own government. An Irish Parliament meeting in Dublin would have the moral authority to order conscription, a moral authority that Westminster lacked. This is not to say that Irish did not volunteer to serve in the British Army; they certainly did. Meanwhile though, in Ulster, the Unionists were volunteering at a much higher rate. They saw no problem with conscription in Ireland so long as it were imposed on the same terms as in Great Britain. And to them, the fact that the Nationalists opposed even that reasonable compromise was a telling sign that the divide between them was too wide to bridge.

[music: "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit-Bag"]

The British shell shortage and the issue of conscription and the political debates that arose from them are just one symptom in one nation of a larger aspect of the Great War. As the war comes up on its one-year anniversary, we are seeing how the economic strains of modern warfare, the endless demand for new soldiers to replace the ones dying on the battlefields in unprecedented numbers coupled with the economic demands to arm, equip, and support so many soldiers at such huge levels are beginning to take their toll. Britain is actually having the easiest time of it. The strain is far worse in other countries.

The German invasion of France had led to the loss of a disproportionately large share of French industrial capacity. French industry at this time was still conducted mostly in small-scale factories and workshops, quite different from the huge integrated industrial corporations of American-style manufacturing like U.S. Steel or the Ford Motor Company. On the plus side,

France's large and productive agricultural sector meant it was not yet suffering the kinds of food shortages of the other Continental powers. The biggest problem in French agriculture was lack of manpower due to the large numbers of French men who had been called up for military service: over five million by this time, far larger than the number of volunteers the British Army had enlisted so far. The obvious solution to this manpower shortage was of course womanpower, and by 1915 women were doing an unprecedented share of the agricultural labor in France. That is, the women who had not already been lured into industrial jobs by the ever-rising wage offers there. Record numbers of women were employed in factories and offices. Gender roles are beginning to change.

Dissatisfaction with the conduct of the war would lead to a Cabinet reshuffle in France later in 1915, just as it had in Britain, but at this stage of the war, the French, like the British, are still at least well fed. That's good for the French government, because nothing promotes revolution like hunger.

Which brings us to Germany. Germany had perhaps the most advanced and industrialized economy in the world at this time. Britain may have had an edge in industrialization overall, but German industry was newer, more modern, and more innovative. We've seen many examples of this over the course of the podcast. And Germany, with its more autocratic system of government, found it easier to quickly organize the German economy. Her chief administrator for war production was Walter Rathenau, a Jewish German engineer whose family owned AEG, which was then a major manufacturer of electrical equipment. Rathenau helped set up a department within the German War Ministry to regulate distribution of strategic raw materials, especially those that were in short supply due to the British blockade. The German government addressed shortages of men to work in war-related production by recruiting women as factory workers, something that was becoming increasingly common everywhere, in all nations fighting the war.

Germany had more difficulty, though, with maintaining adequate supplies of food. Food prices began to climb as soon as the war was declared. In July 1914, a 25-kilogram sack of potatoes sold for three marks. A month later, and it's going to cost you nine marks. Calls began for price controls, particularly from the Social Democrats. The German government was slow to address the problem, perhaps due to complacency. The previous year, 1913, had seen record harvests. But agricultural production dropped in 1914 and it dropped further in 1915. For all Germany's advanced industry and technology, German agriculture was still largely un-mechanized and still dependent on young men and horses, both of which had been conscripted for the war. Farming in rural East Prussia had been disrupted by the Russian invasion of 1914, not to mention the loss of imports from Russia and the unavailability of migrant farm laborers, mostly from Russian Poland, who had in years past helped bring in the German harvests.

By the first winter of the war, the German government was putting controls on food prices and distribution. First, the newly created Imperial Grain Agency began regulation of grains like

wheat, barley, and oats and the flours and breads made from them. Soon potatoes, butter, eggs, and fish would also come under price controls. Prices of uncontrolled foods continued to climb, which had the perverse effect of discouraging consumption of these less critical foods and encouraging consumption of the very items already in short supply, which forced the introduction of rationing.

In the spring of 1915, with grain stocks continuing to shrink, the Imperial Grain Agency ordered a mass slaughter of pigs, which had the unforeseen effect of sharply reducing available manure at a time when fertilizer imports had also been cut off. German industry would manage, but Germany's struggle to feed itself will grow increasingly dire as the war drags on.

The situation was much the same in Austria-Hungary, only more so. Austrian agriculture was less mechanized even than German agriculture and her manpower shortage that much worse. The Russian invasion of Galicia had taken some of Austria's best farmland out of production. So even though Austria-Hungary was largely an agricultural economy, its harvests declined even more sharply. The 1916 harvest will be only half the size of the 1913 harvest. The situation further aggravated the difficult internal political tensions in the Dual Monarchy when the government of Hungary banned food shipments to the Austrian half of the Empire.

And then we come to Russia. Amazingly, despite the fact that Russia has huge amounts of land devoted to farming and less of a manpower shortage than the other powers, despite the fact that Russia was a major food exporter before the war, food is becoming scarce even here.

The explanation here is different from Germany's and Austria's. You already know that Russian industry was underdeveloped and its workers restless and prone to strikes. Russia's production not only of artillery shells but of such basic items as rifles and ammunition for the war effort has been shockingly inadequate, forcing Russian soldiers into the front lines unarmed. This is a situation that would be comical if there weren't so many young men getting killed and wounded because of it.

Even more shocking is that the Great War is revealing the very same kinds of problems in the Russian economy and military that we saw all the way back during the Russo-Japanese War of ten years ago. Imperial Russia has had ten years to correct these problems, but it now seems clear the opportunity was wasted, and the Imperial government is every bit as corrupt and incompetent as ever. In mid-1915, a coalition of parties in the Duma consisting of everyone except the parties of the extreme left and the extreme right banded together and demanded a greater say in government policy. Emperor Nikolai's response to this demand was to prorogue the Duma and send everyone back home.

Russia's real economic vulnerability is its very size, something which we're accustomed to thinking of as a strength, particularly in military terms. For instance, Russia doesn't have enough railroads. And at the beginning of the war, Russian rail had fewer locomotives and fewer cars than British rail had, even though Russia is one hundred times larger than Britain. The Russian

economy managed well enough in peacetime, despite the scarcity of rails and trains, but the war has thrown distribution into turmoil, creating new demands that Russian railroads just can't meet.

You'll recall I mentioned before that the most industrialized part of Russia is the northwest of the country, especially Petrograd, the Baltic coast, and some inland cities like Moscow. The coal that powered industry in this region and kept Russian homes warm in the winter and also kept the trains moving, came into the country by ship from Wales. This in spite of the fact that Russia has some of the world's largest coal and oil reserves. But this Russian coal and oil is far to the south, thousands of miles away from where it was needed. It was cheaper to buy British coal off of ships than it was to haul in Russian coal from so far away.

The Great War brought with it a blockade of Russian ports in the Baltic and Black Sea. Russian exports, mostly food, can't get out, and imports can't come in. Russia needs coal to power her industries. Russians need coal to heat their homes. Russians need coal to keep their trains running. The blockade of the Baltic means no more Welsh coal. Now it has to come from the southern Ukraine and Caucasus region across thousands of miles of railroads.

The Russian arms industry can't produce enough weapons and ammunition to supply the Russian Army even if the factories run at full capacity. But they *aren't* running at full capacity because they can't get enough coal. Russians can't even get enough coal to heat their homes, and let me remind you once again that winters are very cold in Russia.

And speaking of supplying the army, Russian trains are also in demand to carry supplies to the armies fighting at the front. It's not just arms and ammunition and equipment for the soldiers, it's also food. And fodder for the horses, which at this time is a big share of an army's supply demands.

And you know that the Russian Army has been in retreat for most of 1915, and it's been following a "scorched earth" policy of destroying crops and farm animals rather than allow them to fall into enemy hands. The earth that the Army has been scorching includes some of Russia's most valuable agricultural land. Not just because it's productive, but because it's relatively near Russia's main population centers. The food being destroyed here can be replaced by, oh, let's say, some of that agricultural surplus in the Ukraine that Russia used to sell abroad back in peacetime, before the blockade of the Turkish straits. Except that the demand for soldiers and horses at the front is reducing the number of laborers available for the harvest. And even what does get harvested is still thousands of miles away from the hungry mouths of Moscow and Petrograd, requiring, you guessed it, more trains to deliver the harvest to where it's needed, and more coal to power the trains.

Britain and France were trying to aid Russia, and the United States was willing to sell arms and ammunition, but the blockade means that the only Russian ports available to receive foreign imports are Vladivostok and Archangelsk, or Archangel. Vladivostok is in the Far East. The

harbor freezes in the winter, although the Russians are becoming adept at using icebreakers to help keep the port open. Still, even under ideal circumstances, goods unloaded from ships at Vladivostok need to ride 10,000 kilometers, or over 6,000 miles via the Trans-Siberian Railroad to get to Petrograd. We saw how difficult it was for the Russians to use this line to supply their forces in the Far East during the Russo-Japanese War. The line has been improved since then, but it is still single track for much of the distance.

The port of Archangel, on the White Sea, also freezes in the winter. It's a shorter rail distance, just 1100 kilometers away from Petrograd, or 700 miles. The Russians are even building a new port at a better location in the far north, near the town of Alexandrovsk, a location where the sea never freezes at all. This new port will eventually become Murmansk.

But not only will Russia have to build a new port there, she'll have to build a new rail line to the new port. Despite these efforts, as the Allies ship aid and equipment to Russia through these distant ports, the aid will accumulate into larger and larger piles in the warehouses and on the docks because Allied ships can bring supplies to the ports faster than Russian railroads can carry them from the ports to where they're needed.

Russia also badly needs tools. Before the war began, Russians largely relied on imported tools. Now, those factories struggling to supply the army with ammunition are finding they can't get access to machine tools, things like drill presses and lathes, which they need to expand production. They can't even replace the machines they already have when these wear out. And it isn't just industrial machine tools. Even simple tools like hammers are becoming hard to find. And how exactly are the coal mines supposed to keep up with the increasing demand for coal when there aren't enough picks and shovels to go around?

And if this picture isn't dire enough already, consider this: not only is the number of locomotives and railroad cars available to Russia hopelessly inadequate to meet Russia's wartime needs, but that number is going to shrink as the war goes on. Russian locomotives, Russian cars, and the tracks themselves are going to wear out from the heavy use they're getting, and Russian industry, crippled as it is by these shortages of vital materials, will not be able to make up the difference.

The various regions of the vast Russian Empire will find their trade ties to other parts of the Empire weakening as the war drags on. Russia, in short, is experiencing economic disintegration.

Most galling of all were the food shortages. It seems preposterous to suggest that a nation the size of the Russian Empire would have to struggle to feed itself, but that's exactly what was happening. Besides all the reasons I've already mentioned, I also have to add one more: as the war effort demanded more arms and ammunition and labor became scarce, factory wages rose. This drew workers away from the farms and into the cities, reducing food production still further. And it was a cruel irony for those newly urbanized workers. They had come to the cities for the opportunity to get paid more money than they had ever seen before, but then food prices

rose, and they soon found those good wages eaten up by rising food costs, which in turn led to labor unrest and strikes.

Nothing promotes revolution like hunger. And the three Great War belligerents with the most hungry, unhappy citizens are going to be Russia, Germany, and Austria. You should not be surprised to see revolution in any of those countries.

There's an irony here in that historians of our day tend toward the view that one of the major reasons these three nations—Austria, Russia, and Germany—were so confrontational during the July Crisis that led to this war was out of a desire to promote national unity. The governments of all three of these autocratic powers were wrestling with serious internal divisions. In Russia, it was the anti-imperial democrats and the socialists. In Germany, it was the socialists. In Austria it was the increasingly strident nationalism of its ethnic minorities. In this view, these nations were more willing to gamble on war because they saw war as potentially having a unifying effect on their peoples, uniting them against an external threat. But far from relieving these internal strains, the Great War is exacerbating them.

[music: "Your King and Country Want You"]

When we left off at the end of episode 110, there was a new British Cabinet that included all the parties and there was no official Opposition. The new government had a mandate to resolve the shell shortage and ramp up the war effort.

Progress came quickly with regard to munitions. In July, Parliament passed an act creating a separate Ministry of Munitions to deal with the shell shortage and giving the new ministry extraordinary powers to increase munitions production. David Lloyd George would be named the new Minister of Munitions.

By the time the Act passed Parliament, Lloyd George was already at work on his new assignment. The new ministry would set to work on the complex task of requisitioning and organizing the necessary raw materials for the factories, including crucial nitrates, which are in short supply in Britain. There were also issues of quality control. Shell components could be made at separate facilities and then brought together for assembly, but in 1915, you couldn't count on all the parts fitting smoothly together right out of the crate. Skilled workers were needed to machine the parts for the proper fit.

The ministry brought together some of the finest managerial talent in the country to oversee the ministry. Large numbers of women were recruited to work in the factories. Labor unions agreed to forgo strikes; in return, the ministry promoted worker health and safety in these factories, an important consideration in manufacturing where dangerous chemicals are involved. The ministry helped provide food and lodging and eventually even day care for its workers. By a year later, when Lloyd George left the ministry, it was the largest employer, the largest purchaser, and the largest vendor in the United Kingdom.

These improvements would make David Lloyd George the most popular political figure in Britain, among Liberals and Tories alike. He was compared to a magician in his ability to conjure up munitions and end the shortages. He didn't do it alone, of course, but he became the public face of the new war effort.

It seems ironic that so much of what we today might call "Big Government" was introduced into the British economy at the behest of the Conservatives, who demanded more government intervention and over the resistance of the Liberals, who preferred marketplace solutions. Such is the paradox of war, and of history. Modern British Conservatives might well point to this era as the birth of "Big Government" in Britain, and they would be right. But they would also have to acknowledge that it was Conservatives who acted as the midwives.

While the munitions situation seemed to be improving, there was still the question of the size of the Army. The government's critics wanted to see more progress here as well. To give you one example, the *Daily Mail* printed a chart of the Western Front which purported to show that the French Army was covering 543 miles of front line, whilst the British Army was responsible for a mere 31 and three-quarters miles, a situation the *Daily Mail* derided as "ignoble."

That's the *Daily Mail* as in Alfred Harmsworth, Lord Northcliffe. You'll recall him from episode 110, and you'll recall that the *Daily Mail* had been the paper that revealed the shell tragedy. And if you didn't remember that, all you need to do is check out the front page of the *Daily Mail*, which is now proudly touting itself as "the paper that revealed the shell tragedy."

This moment, when the shell crisis led to a new Cabinet, has to be regarded as the high water mark of Lord Northcliffe's political power. With that battle won, he and his papers turned their attention to one of Northcliffe's other hobby horses: conscription.

The Liberals in government resisted the idea of conscription as did many in the UK of the time. This resistance seems hard to understand to us today, especially in light of Britain's being a part of the biggest war in human history, a war in which every other power is frantically conscripting every able-bodied young man it can find. The answer to this question, like the answer to most questions, is history. It was not merely a point of convenience that Britain had risen to the status of most powerful nation in the world without having to resort to conscripted armies. It was a point of pride. Military greatness, whilst also maintaining a high standard of living and more freedom and democracy than you'll find most other places. That's the British way.

But the British way was beginning to look antiquated. Lord Kitchener had ambitious plans to build up the Army, and he figured he needed about 90,000 new recruits every month. Over half a million had signed up in the first two months of the war, but enlistments declined thereafter. By the summer of 1915, after the most enthusiastic of young men had already signed up, monthly recruitment totals were down to about 60,000, and the numbers were still dropping.

The British population of this time included over five million men of military age. Over a million of them did civilian work that was deemed “essential” to the war effort. More than a third of those who did volunteer failed the medical exam. I mentioned this before, during the Boer War, but many poor and working-class British men didn’t meet the Army’s physical standards because of the poverty and malnutrition they had grown up with. The average working class volunteer was four inches, or eleven centimeters, shorter than the average volunteer from the upper classes. If we extrapolate over the whole recruiting pool, we might estimate that there were only about two and a half million men of military age who were fit enough for the Army and also weren’t already engaged in an essential occupation.

If our calculation is correct, then by the summer of 1915, nearly half of the eligible young men have already enlisted. That would certainly explain why the number of enlistees is shrinking every month. There were also hundreds of thousands of boys who enlisted before they had reached the age of 18, when they were still technically ineligible to serve, but it had become common practice in the British Army when this happened to look the other way.

Although there was no official and enforceable system of conscription, there was social pressure to enlist, and as the war went on, the pressure became stronger. Some employers refused to hire men eligible for service and administrators of public assistance programs sometimes refused to provide men of military age with support. Some women’s groups took to sending out their members into the streets to publicly hand out white feathers to military age men and thus publicly shame them. Newspaper editorials condemned “shirkers,” as the men who refused to enlist were called.

On the incentive side, well, there were those posters of Lord Kitchener pointing his finger at you. Another famous poster of the time depicted a sheepish-looking father being asked by his children, “Daddy, what did *you* do in the Great War?” I’ve put up an image of this poster at the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com, if you’d care to have a look.

The Army introduced what were called “pals battalions.” Under this program, groups of men who enlisted together, say, men from the same town or neighborhood, or workers from the same factory or members of the same football club, would be guaranteed to serve together in the same unit; that way you’d never lose touch with your mates.

And then there were the music halls. Military recruiters would appear onstage during a show and invite men in the audience to come up and enlist right then and there. Music hall singers would perform not only patriotic songs, but songs especially written to promote recruitment. My personal favorite of these is a little ditty called “I’ll Make a Man of You.” Now, this is not to be confused with “I’ll Make a Man *Out* of You,” the song sung by Donny Osmond in the 1998 Disney film *Mulan*. No, I’m talking about the song written by Arthur Wimperis and Herman Finck in 1914. I couldn’t find a suitable recording of it to play for you, probably because the song was deemed too racy to record, but I hope you’ll indulge me if I just read out the lyrics to

you myself. You should be aware that the phrase “take the shilling” is a British colloquialism meaning “enlist in the military.” And of course, it dates from a time when the enlistment bonus was a shilling. That was a long time ago, even in 1914, but anyway, the song goes like this, and you should try to imagine a woman singing it:

*The Army and the Navy need attention
The outlook isn't healthy you'll admit
But I've a perfect dream of a new recruiting scheme
Which I really think is absolutely it
If only other girls would do as I do
I believe that we could manage it alone
For I turn all suitors from me, but the Sailor and the Tommy
I've an Army and a Navy of my own*

*On Sunday I walk out with a Soldier
Monday I'm taken by a Tar
Tuesday I'm out with a baby Boy Scout
On Wednesday a Hussar
On Thursday I gang out wi' a Scottie
On Friday the Captain of the crew
But on Saturday I'm willing if you'll only take the shilling
To make a man of any one of you*

*I teach the tenderfoot to face the powder
That gives an added lustre to my skin
And I show the raw recruit how to give a chaste salute
So when I'm presenting arms, he's falling in
It makes you almost proud to be a woman
When you make a strapping soldier of a kid
And he says, “You put me through it and I didn't want to do it
But you went and made me love you, so I did!”*

*On Sunday I walk out with a Bosun
On Monday a Rifleman in green
On Tuesday I choose a Sub in the Blues
On Wednesday a Marine
On Thursday a Terrier from Tooting
On Friday a Midshipman or two
But on Saturday I'm willing if you'll only take the shilling
To make a man of any one of you!*

Anyway, recruiting numbers continued to fall in spite of these incentives. In the fall of 1915, the War Ministry's new Director General of Recruiting, the Earl of Derby, introduced what came to be called the Derby Scheme. This was a plan that was about as close as you could get to actual conscription without, you know, actually conscripting. Under this plan, canvassers were sent

across the country with the goal of personally interviewing every single man of military age who was not working in an essential occupation.

Each man canvassed would have to make a declaration face to face with a canvasser. No one else could answer for him. The need for soldiers would be explained to him and he would be required to answer whether or not he would attest to join the armed forces. If he said yes, then he would be required to report to a recruiting station for a physical. If he passed the physical, he was assigned to one of 46 groups, based on age and marital status, with the promise that they would be called up for service by group, and that the married men would not be called up until after the single men.

Everything possible was done to make it difficult to refuse. The canvassers tended to be either veterans themselves, or else fathers of soldiers, which made them pretty hard to say no to. The times being what they were, there were incidents of canvassers threatening men who refused to volunteer.

The Derby Scheme led to a spike in enlistments as soon as it was introduced. Many men, it seemed, would rather just turn up at the recruiting office and enlist, rather than face one of those canvassers. But that didn't last, and by 1916, the numbers were dropping again. In January, Prime Minister Asquith finally introduced the Military Service Act, which would at last bring conscription to Great Britain. Ireland was still exempt. For now. The Act was controversial within the Liberal Party; the Home Secretary, Sir John Simon, resigned rather than support it.

Overall, more than two million would be conscripted into the British Armed Forces over the course of the Great War. They account for 46% of Britain's soldiers and sailors. The majority, 54%, were still volunteers.

Before I end today, I should also take a moment to mention the 42-year old philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell. He lectured at Cambridge and was already one of the most prominent academics in Great Britain when the war began. Russell struggled with his strong feelings of patriotism and his equally strong anti-war and anti-imperialist sentiments. He came to denounce the war as "trivial, for all its vastness. No great principle is at stake, no great human purpose is involved on either side...the English and the French say they are fighting in defense of democracy, but they do not wish their words to be heard in Petrograd or Calcutta."

Russell would rise to the leadership of the No-Conscription Fellowship, a group which denounced the war, opposed conscription, and offered support and advocacy to conscientious objectors in defiance of the British conscription law, which made no allowance for conscientious objections. Russell himself would eventually be dismissed from Cambridge and serve a term in prison for his anti-war activities, which would only raise his standing as one of the best known and most influential thinkers of the twentieth century.

We'll have to stop there for today. As always, I thank you all for listening, and I'd like to thank Terrell for making a donation, and thank you Jonathan for becoming a patron of the podcast. New donors and patrons are always welcome; if you'd like to become one or the other, go to the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com, and after you've paused to admire the "What did *you* do in the Great War, Daddy?" poster, click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

This is the last in the current run of three episodes, so I'll be off next week, which is also Memorial Day weekend in the United States, but as usual, I will be writing and researching for future episodes. I'm still not caught up. Real life keeps insisting on interfering with my work on the podcast, but I'll see what I can do about that. Anyway, I hope you'll join me in two weeks' time, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we turn our attention back to France and the Western Front to ask, What Are the French Doing? That's in two weeks' time, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. If you're interested in British music hall songs of the period, I can't urge you strongly enough to check out the 1969 British musical comedy *Oh, What a Lovely War!* directed by Richard Attenborough and based on the 1963 stage musical of the same name.

The film is an allegorical retelling of the story of the Great War from the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand through to the armistice using period songs, including the songs "Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit-Bag" and "Your King and Country Want You," which you heard in today's podcast, and of course, the title song, "Oh, What a Lovely War!"

The principal characters are four English brothers named Smith who all enlist in the Army. At one time the Beatles were in talks to play the roles of the Smith brothers in the film, an idea first proposed by none other than the now 95-year old Bertrand Russell. Regrettably, that plan fell through and the Beatles do not appear in the film.

Still, it boasts a cast that includes some of the most famous names in British film portraying historical figures we've already met in this podcast, including Sir John Gielgud as Count Leopold Berchtold, Sir Laurence Olivier as Sir John French, Dame Vanessa Redgrave as Sylvia Pankhurst, and Sir Ralph Richardson as Sir Edward Grey. Oh, and you can also hear Dame Maggie Smith belt out her rendition of "I'll Make a Man of You."

[music: Closing War Theme]