

20th Century case study: Why were conscientious objectors treated so harshly?

Do Now

- 1) What is happening in the poster?
- 2) What is the difference between the two soldiers?
- 3) Which man do you think is supposed to be saying the text at the bottom?
- 4) When do you think this poster was created?
- 5) What is the overall message of the poster?

Understanding terminology:

Desist: to stop doing something

Conscience: a person's sense of right and wrong. It usually influences behaviour.



Title: 20th Century case study: Why were conscientious objectors treated so harshly?

Learning Objectives:

- To know what conscientious objectors were.
- To understand why conscientious objectors were punished.
- To be able to evaluate the factors that influenced the treatment of conscientious objectors.

Understanding terminology:

- **Desist:** to stop doing something
- **Conscience:** a person's sense of right and wrong. It usually influences behaviour.
- **Conscientious=** relating to someone's conscience.
- **Objector=** someone who opposes or disagrees with something
- **Tribunal =** a special kind of court in which disputes are settled.
- **Pacifist =** a belief that violence and war is wrong.

Should people who object to a law, be made to obey it?

The state makes laws. A citizen has to obey those laws. But what if a citizen thinks the law is wrong?

Do you think they should obey it? Why?

The State says: we have passed this law for the good of the people as a whole; you must obey it.

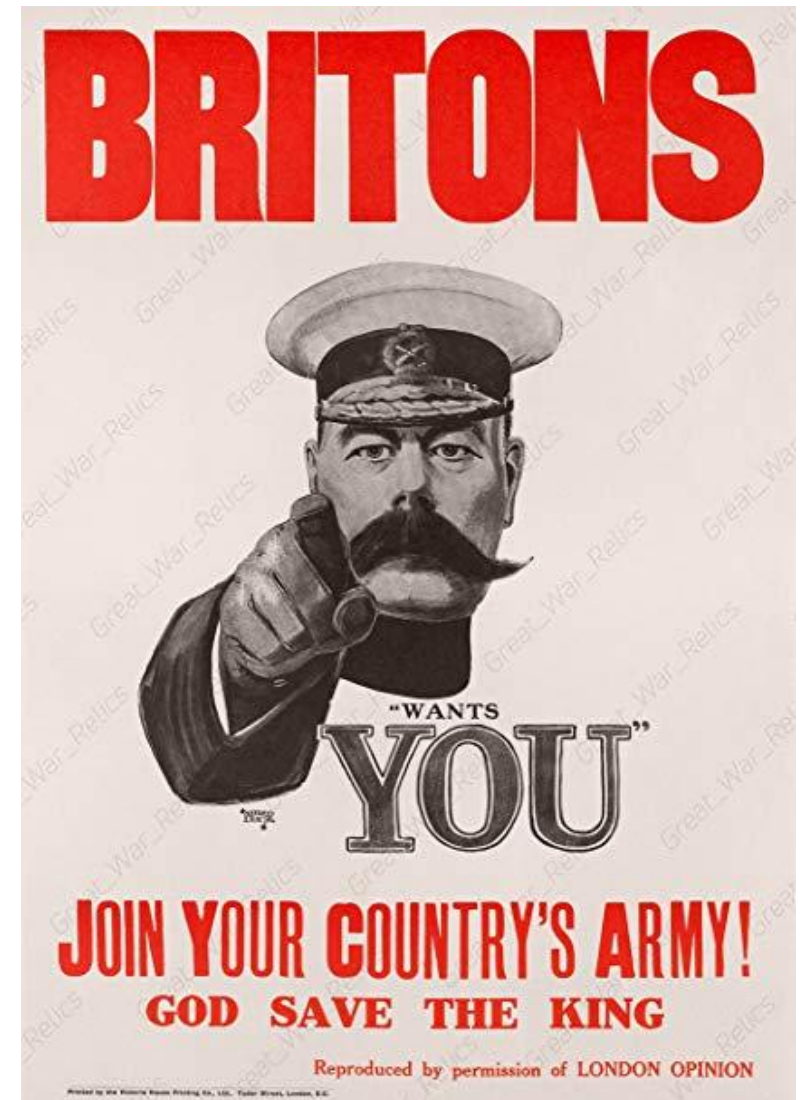
The citizen says: my conscience tells me this law is wrong, but I will obey it because I belong to this society and so must accept its rules.

But suppose we push this situation to the extremes?

Look at the poster to the right – what is the poster encouraging people to do?

Why might some people think that this is an example of the state going too far in its expectations of citizens?

Why might this have been a particular problem in the 20th century?



What is the purpose of this poster?

In 1914 the First World War broke out in Europe...

WHAT IS YOUR ANSWER TO YOUR COUNTRY'S CALL?



Key dates:

World War One: 1914-1918

World War Two: 1939-1945

On 7th August, 1914, Lord Kitchener, the war minister, immediately began a recruiting campaign by calling for men aged between **19 and 30 to join the British Army**. At first this was very successful with an average of 33,000 men joining every day and a total of 1 million men joining the war effort.



An example of a **propaganda** poster that was supposed to persuade men to sign up to the army.

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.

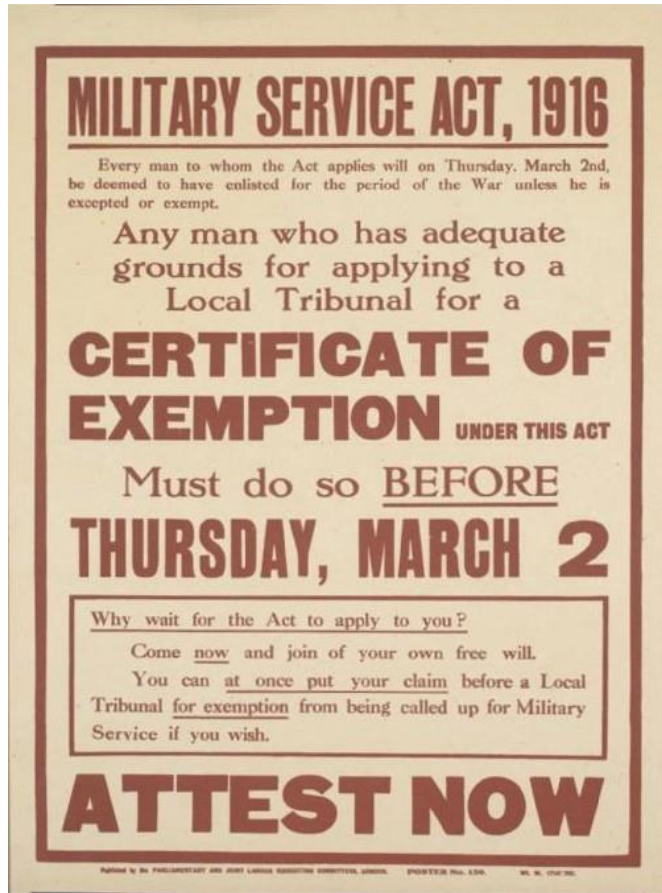
1916 – a turning point

Military Service Act: What has this act stated?

Military age was deemed to be between the ages of 18 and 41.

By May 1916, this Act had been extended to married men.

How could COs object?



What does this poster suggest people were allowed to do?

This option had been made available due to Quaker MPs. *Elizabeth Fry was a Quaker - what do you remember about her?*

Conscientious Objectors were individuals who opposed military service on the grounds of their conscience. The Military Act allowed for this – it was called the ‘**conscience clause**’.

Many refused to fight due to **religion**: They took the Bible very literally when it said ‘Thou shalt not kill’.

Others refused to fight due to **politics**: They disagreed with the aims of the war

Quick Recap - on lined paper in your ppt

1. Write a definition of a conscientious objector
2. What happened in 1914?
3. Why was 1916 a turning point?
4. Why would some people be conscientious objectors?
5. What religious group of people introduced the 'conscience clause'?

How could COs object?

Military Tribunals

14,000 COs went before the tribunals, which were mostly made up of retired soldiers. These tribunals were held locally and selected by the local authority.

Tribunals in action, 1916

- (a) Chairman of the Wirral Tribunal: "I wish the government had not put in this clause about conscientious objectors. I don't agree with it myself."
- (b) A Councillor at Shaw, Manchester: "I think you are exploiting God to save your own skin. A man who would not help to defend his country and womankind is a coward and a cad. You are nothing but a shivering mass of unwholesome fat."

The results of the Tribunal Cases

400 were given absolute exemption from the war.
6,000 were sent to do 'work of national importance' such as farming & mining.
5,000 were given non-fighting duties in the army, such as a stretcher bearer
2,600 had their case complete rejected

Use the source and the statistics to suggest **3 reasons why** the Military Tribunals were not a fair hearing and could cause further problems

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

Do you think all COs accepted their sentence? What do you think might happen if they refused?

What punishments did COs receive if they refused to fight?

Look through and read the sources on the next slide.

1. What type of punishment have they received?
2. How harsh is the punishment (give it a rating /10)
3. Why do you think they were given this as a type of punishment?
4. What do you think were the consequences of the punishment on the individual?



COs in a quarry on Dartmoor. About 1,000 COs were imprisoned at the prison on Dartmoor and made to work in the local granite quarries.



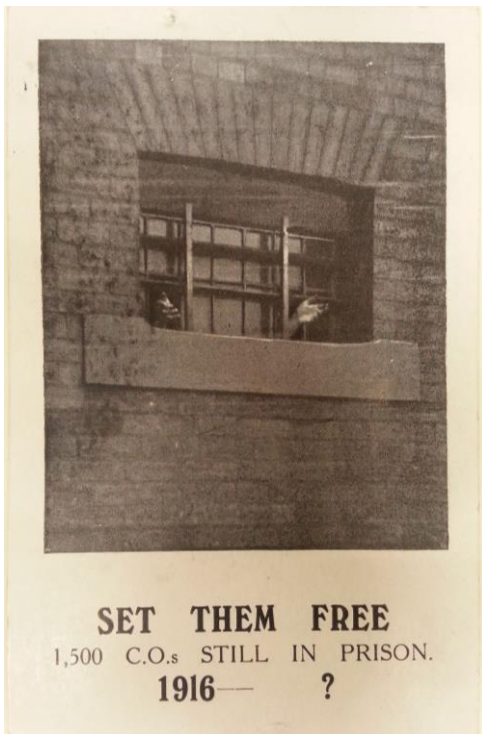
Howard Marten, taken from Harwich Prison to France

The soldiers began to form themselves into a kind of huge square until several thousand were present. There was a hush and the Adjutant read out the sentence. 'Private Marten, tried by Field Court Martial for disobedience. Sentenced to death by being shot.'

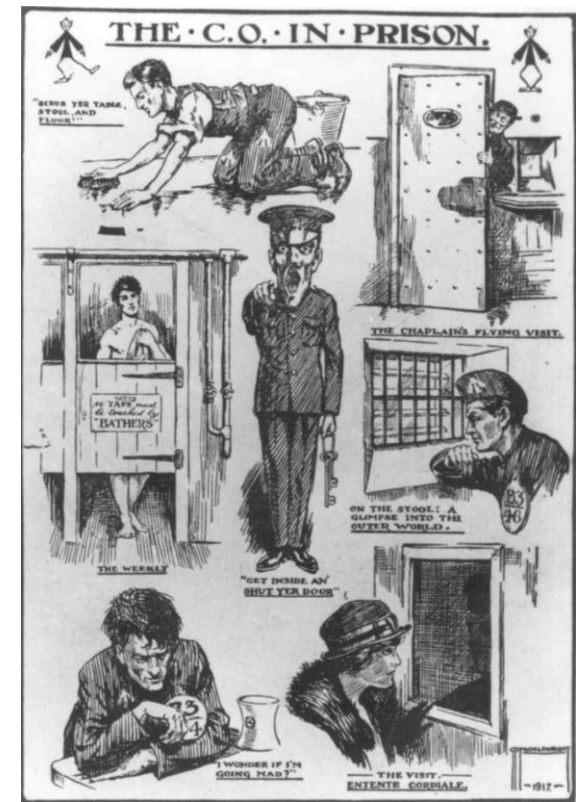


Extract from a poem by CO Harry Stanton in Harwich Prison

'That strength enables me to firmer stand
Than ever in the cause of truth; for laws
If right, 'gainst those of might; at His
command
I turn again unwounded to the strife
Against war, for love – Nay more, 'gainst
death, for life.'



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Extract from a poem by CO Harry Stanton in solitary confinement in Harwich Prison, in which he asks God to give him strength

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AN "OBJECT" LESSON

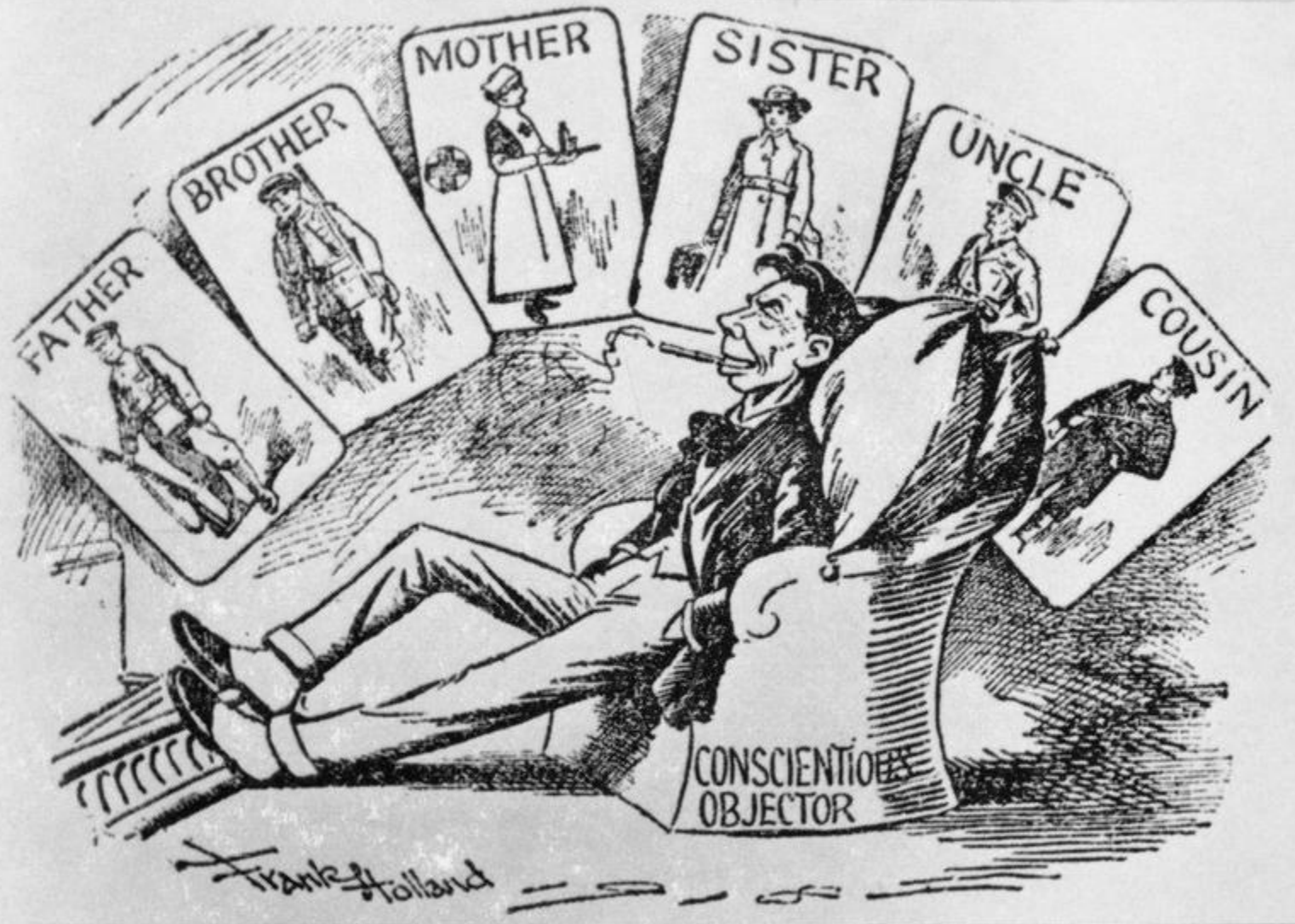


PLATE 9.

—By permission of John Bull

“This little pig stayed at home”

IWM

Why were conscientious objectors treated so harshly?

Of the 13,600 who were **not granted exemption** from the war 60,000 **refused** to accept the tribunal's decision.

Some argued that even if they were not fighting, by helping the war effort they were going against their conscience. These were called **absolutists**.

Common punishments were:

- Solitary confinement in prison
- Shot by firing squad
- Long prison sentences with hard labour

By the end of the war, 73 COs died from their treatment and 31 had been driven insane.

Those who did survive, lost the right to vote for 5 years.

Task

You sheet contains 8 different reasons for why COs were treated so harshly.

Draw arrows between different boxes to show which ones are linked together - **each box must be linked to at least one other.**

- 1) Label each link showing how the boxes are linked.
- 2) What factors do you think influenced each idea? E.g. War/Attitudes.
- 3) Which idea do you think best explains why COs were treated harshly?

The Vietcong troops did not have a huge amount of money to spend on weapons, so they had to play to their strengths. This meant they used their local knowledge to their advantage.

The American army only knew how to fight traditional battles; they were not trained to engage in guerrilla warfare.

The Vietcong was supplied with weapons by the Chinese. These weapons were not as powerful as the USA's, but the Vietcong used them effectively.

The Vietcong were determined fighters, and were willing to go to extreme measures to defeat the USA.

The Vietcong were extremely difficult to beat

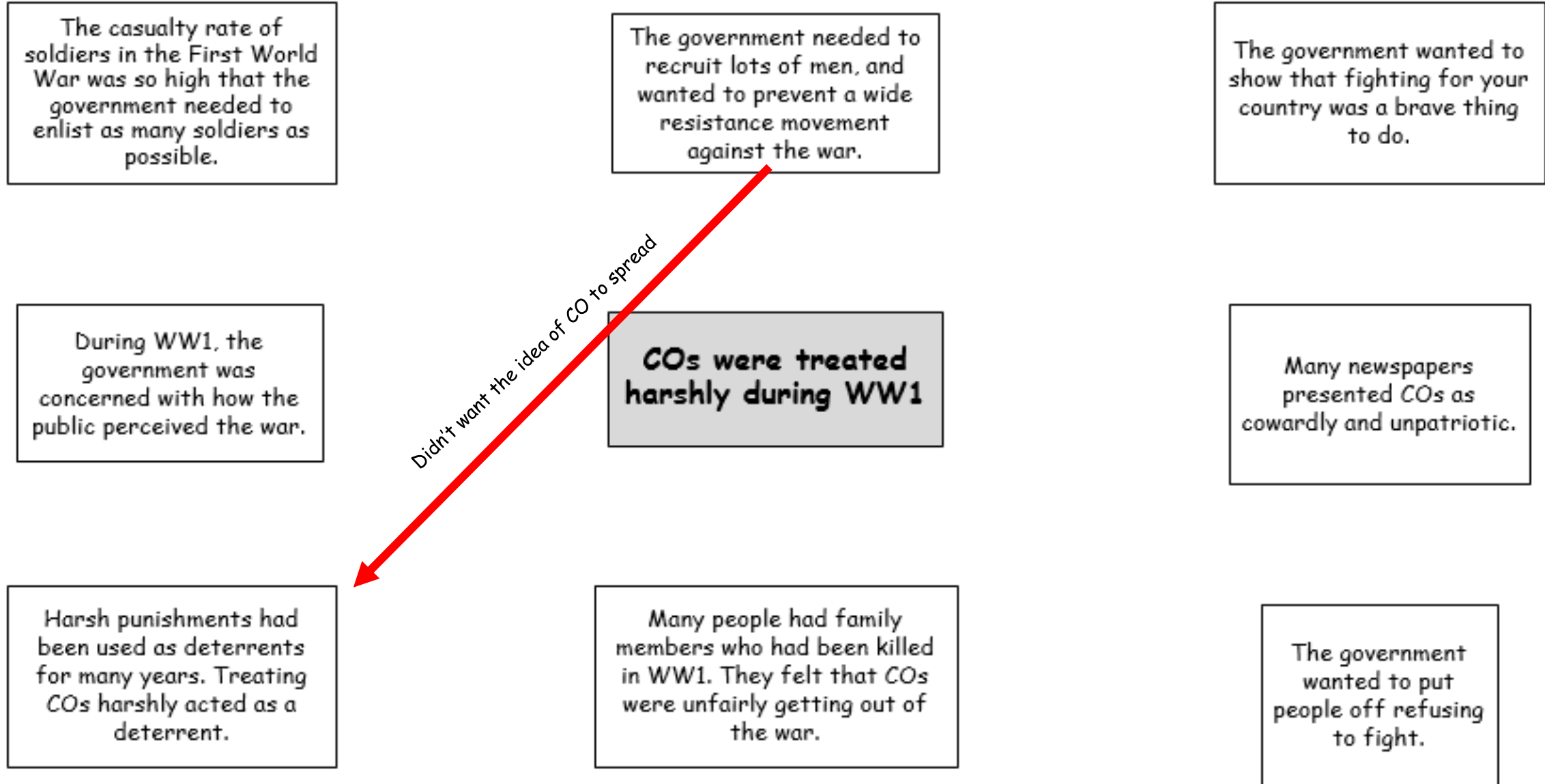
US troops were not equipped to deal with the conditions in the Vietnamese jungle. They found the terrain difficult to navigate.

The Vietcong knew the local area extremely well, and could outsmart the American troops. This allowed them to hide and carry out surprise attacks.

The US troops did not know the local area very well, and this meant that they were easily tricked by the Vietcong's tactics.

Booby traps such as the punji sticks killed 6000 US troops and injured many others.

Why were conscientious objectors treated so harshly during WW1?



Why were conscientious objectors treated so harshly during WW1?

The casualty rate of soldiers in the First World War was so high that the government needed to enlist as many soldiers as possible.

The government needed to recruit lots of men, and wanted to prevent a wide resistance movement against the war.

The government wanted to show that fighting for your country was a brave thing to do.

During WW1, the government was concerned with how the public perceived the war.

COs were treated harshly during WW1

Many newspapers presented COs as cowardly and unpatriotic.

Harsh punishments had been used as deterrents for many years. Treating COs harshly acted as a deterrent.

Many people had family members who had been killed in WW1. They felt that COs were unfairly getting out of the war.

The government wanted to put people off refusing to fight.

Which best describes why COs were treated so harshly?

To act as
a
deterrence

The
attitudes
of the
Public

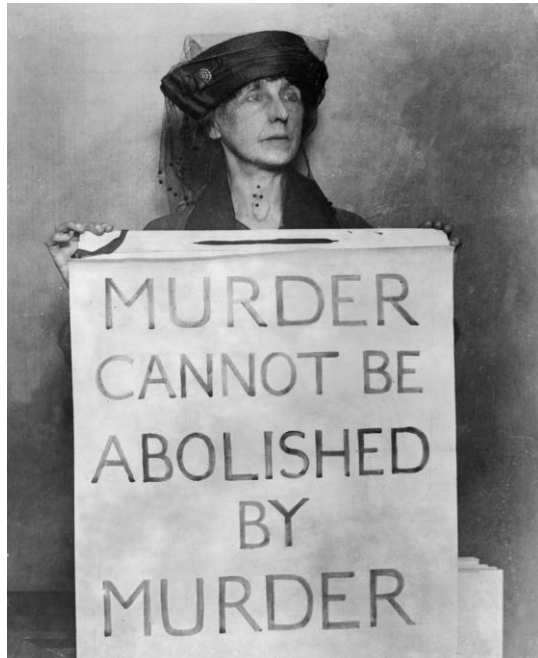
The
desperation
of the
Government

How did the Second World War change attitudes towards Cos?

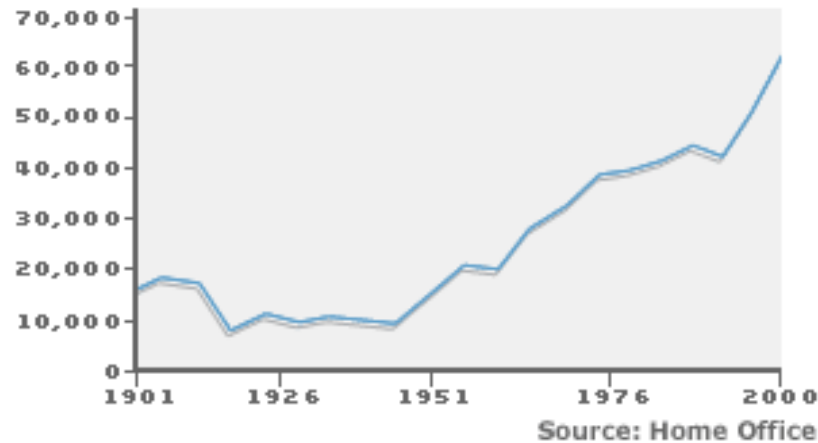
The Second World War signified a change in attitudes.

We saw this when it came to punishments in 20th Century.

What was different in the attitudes to punishments and why?



Male prison population 1901 - 2000



How will this link to a change in the attitudes towards Cos?

How did the Second World War change attitudes towards Cos?

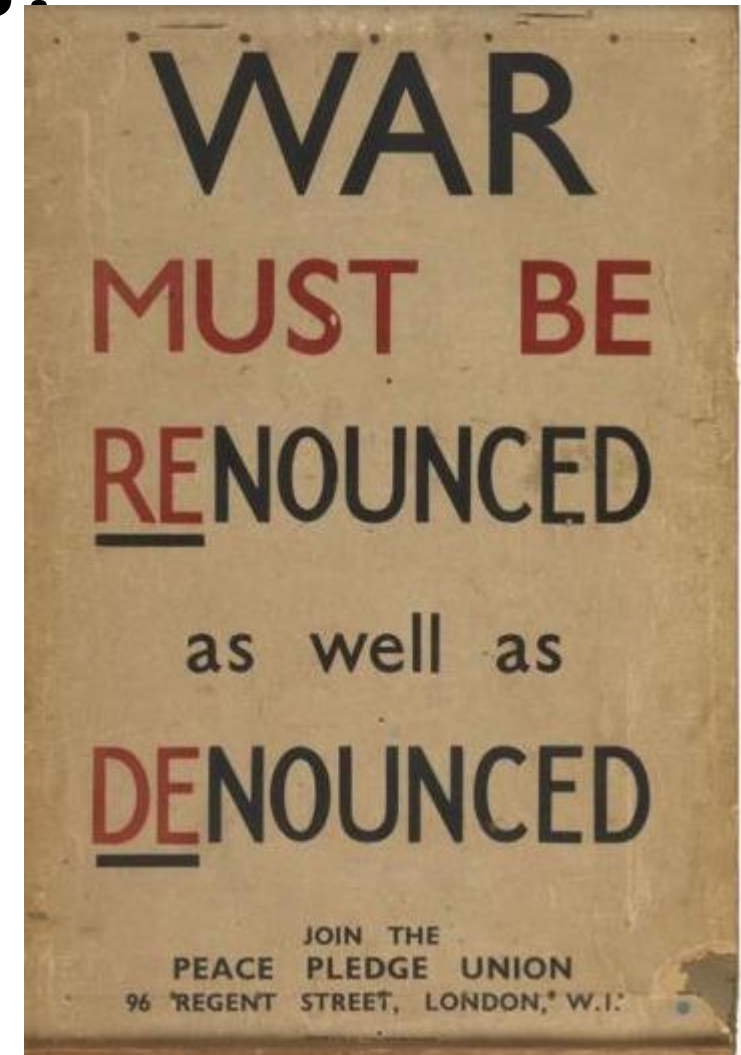
In 1939, conscription was introduced again for the Second World War. Nearly 60,000 registered as Cos. This time, the authorities treated them differently. Prison was generally only used as a last resort for them, and as a deterrent for other potential objectors. Tribunals were not allowed to include ex-soldiers. A greater effort was made to find alternative work, such as farming or in industries like munitions.

– *why do you think attitudes were so different?*

Those who actively campaigned against the war could find themselves in court. For example, an organisation called the Peace Pledge Union (who printed anti-war posters), were put on trial.

– *why?*

However, the attitudes of the British public was much slower to change...It was still very hostile. People often shouted at COs in the street; some were even attacked. In addition, some people lost their jobs because employers disapproved of their actions. Many were accused as cowardice and treason. But, none suffered in the way they had in the First World War.



Next to each factor, give one piece of precise detail that explains the treatment of COs.

1. The attitude of the British public
2. The actions of the Government
3. The First World War
4. The Second World War
5. The role of the printing press

Explain one way in which the treatment of Conscientious Objectors changed between WW1 and WW2.

Point

Success criteria:

In World War One...

Evidence

An example of this...

Explain

The reason for this change was...

Link

As a result...

Challenge

What other punishments (in different time periods) are similar to this? Why?