

New typed

In 1914, the British Army was solidly based upon the principle of voluntary recruitment, despite more than a decade of warnings by pro-conscriptionists that the system was not capable of meeting the needs of a major war. George F. Shee had provided "the first logically complete statement" in favor of a conscription system as early as 1901 and Royal Commissions investigating the adequacy of British forces had reported in 1902 and 1904 that only the adoption of conscription would provide the strength to meet a "great national emergency." The National Service League, formed in 1902 in response to Shee's book, provided an increasing number of publications and public speakers favoring compulsory service. However, the League found it politic to adopt synonyms such as "national service" and "universal training" for the word "conscription", due to the public's association of the latter with the degrading, brutalistic systems of the continent.

The conscriptionist cause gained a major boost in 1904 when the former Commander-in-Chief of the Army and hero of the South African war, Lord Roberts, became convinced that ~~nation~~ conscription was necessary to meet modern warfare manpower requirements. The cause was further aided in 1908 by the purchase of the London Times by the outspoken Lord Northcliffe. Northcliffe used his newspapers to express "his enthusiasms, among them . . . compulsory training. . . ."

Opponents of compulsory service were equally influential. The Secretary for War, Haldane and his successor, Colonel Seely, both adamantly opposed any system not based on the principles of voluntarism. In his introduction to a strongly anti-conscriptionist

Haldane was
created Viscount in 1911

book by former Adjutant-General Sir Ian Hamilton, Haldane insisted that ~~the Navy was~~ the true "first line" for Home defense lay in the home Fleet and that the excessive costs of a conscript army would necessarily "trench upon what is requisite for the maintenance of

Hamilton 20-21 the proper standard of seapower." This argument naturally found favor with the supporters of a strong British Navy. ~~Both~~ Viscount Esher ~~and Lord Fisher~~ claimed that "if conscription was adopted 'The primary danger would be to our sea power. . .'" since a strong

d'Ombra, n. 77home army would "surely lead to the weakening of the fleet." The
p. 237

First Sea Lord, John Fisher, was more blunt in his opposition,
stating that "There's only so much money for the Defense Services, and
every penny given to the Army is two pence taken from the Navy."

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

Lord Haldane also accused the continued agitation over the conscription issue with hindering the recruiting for the Territorial Forces created under his reorganization scheme in 1909. Other anti-conscriptionists foresaw even more dire results among the regular forces. Colonel F. N. Maude claimed that German volunteers under Frederick the Great and English volunteers on the peninsula held their ground with only 10,000 men to the mile, while the 'conscript' continental armies were "obliged to provide 30,000 to 40,000 men to the mile of position." Maude assured his readers that "'the line' is the ideal fighting formation ~~mf~~ for all, but only an Army raised by voluntary enlistment can risk its employment."

FF Sachy d. S. mm

To refute Hamilton's volume, Roberts published Fallacies and Facts: An Answer to 'Compulsory Service.' Comparing the two works, the Quarterly Review distinctly favored Roberts' arguments, *it really made no difference anyway.* but noted that ~~the English people seldom took the army seriously.~~ *Logic of*

According to the Review, the nation "cares so little about compulsory service that it has not troubled, except in the most cursory and superficial manner, to investigate the material and ethical transformations which the adoption of such a policy involves." 13

Of ~~more importance~~ *greater import* for the future, however, the conscription issue had become intertwined with party politics, although no *major* party made it an official party stand. Liberals generally favored

voluntarism, "while most of those who advocated national service were associated with the Conservatives." *H Labourites and trade unionists* ~~The General Staff, considering~~ saw *adversely opposed compulsion of manpower for any use,* "no nonsense" conscription, ~~as practiced on the Continent,~~ *whether military or industrial.* as vital *Liberal* to the adoption of a continental strategy, but The Prime Minister,

Asquith, ~~and other leading politicians of both parties~~ *was certain* felt that "any government which proposed ^{it} [compulsory service] would have committed political suicide." 15 *most ardent conscriptionists* Even the ~~leading Conservatives~~ saw the program ~~conscription~~ *compulsory service* as "militarily wise but politically foolish as conditions stood" before the war, but in their private correspondence

they assumed that it would be a "necessity in the event of involvement in a European War." Bonar Law later wrote that he did not think "that it would have been either possible or wise to raise the question of compulsion until the voluntary system has failed." 16

Failure of the voluntary system was hardly a consideration in

~~the~~

AA 575

Mackie 52
~~MacDonald~~

BB 90
~~MacDonald~~

Asquith *General* 214
Mackie 83

Mackie 108

Mackie 112

The early days of the war

The call of the new Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, for volunteers for his "new army" was met with a great wave of enthusiasm, particularly after news of the retreat from Mons. By

10 September the Prime Minister was able to announce that ~~439,000~~ 439,000 men had joined, including ^{over} 33,000 recruits on ~~3 September~~ 3 September.

alone. ¹⁸ Because the flow of recruits was more than the army could equip or train, a scheme of deferred enlistment was devised, with the delayed men receiving sixpence per day. After remonstrances from Parliament

about the inadequate amount, Asquith raised the payment to three shillings per day. * In the meantime, Kitchener ^{slowed the influx of new by} ordered that minimum recruiting

standards be raised by increasing height and chest measurements by two inches each. ¹⁸ Refusal of the Asquith government to explain the reasons

for these various actions appear to have left the general public

~~slightly~~ slightly bewildered, just at the time when the initial spirit of enthusiasm began to wear thin.

*Although the increased stipend caused another brief flurry of enlistments, particularly from among the poorer classes, the deferment plan was soon out of favor and was quietly dropped.

Barnett p 377

Times
11 Sept 1914
p 9

B 11
L 569

Hayes, 150 the end of

By 1 October, the rush to the recruiting offices had decreased

sharply. Although Government spokesmen continued to publically express satisfaction ~~at~~ with the response to appeals for volunteers,

L 569
J B Firth, in the London Telegraph reported condensed in "Creating the British Army" Current History 4 (July 1916): 670

privately they were becoming concerned that adequate replacements for casualties might not be found. ^{Within the cabinet, a special recruiting comm} Recruiting posters became more strident ^{was organized to ... suggestions discussed about} in their appeals and the ^{was again} topic of conscription became more frequently ^{cabinet recruiting comm found} discussed. ^{more} Officials refused to release the data on recruiting, ^{manpower procurement} manpower procurement ^{deficiencies} pleading that such information would help the enemy, but overall results

were made obvious when the minimum height was reduced to five feet four inches and the maximum age limit was ²⁰ raised to thirty-eight. In

the popular press and various periodicals, articles began to appear ^{again}

calling for the imposition of compulsory service. When the Lord Lieutenant of Mid Lothian, Lord Rosebery, told a recruiting meeting ^{January}

in Dalkeith, Scotland that some sort of compulsory service would ~~pro~~ probably soon be inaugurated and that he thought it ~~would~~ "would not be unwelcomed," the audience responded with cheers. ⁴

The Times (London) also welcomed Lord Haldane's January change in attitude when the former ~~Secretary of State~~ Cabinet Minister commented that "Compulsory Service

is not foreign to the Consitution of the country, and in a great national emergency it might be necessary to resort to it." ²²

Times 11 Jan p. 4

Times, 22 Jan p. 33

See also, D294

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in Parliament
Regularly, the question was put to the Government as to whether any inquiries or planning had been commenced as to the possibility of introducing a program of national service, ~~for which the Government was not prepared~~ and regularly ~~the Prime Minister~~ it was denied that such an inquiry was necessary. When asked on 20 April "whether the Government was satisfied with the rate of recruitment," Lloyd George responded that "The Secretary of State for War is very gratified with the response . . . for voluntary enlistment."²² The Government, ~~however~~ refused to reveal the ^{se gratifying} recruiting results, but ~~and in fact~~ there were indications that recruiting had fallen off. In a leading article, the Times reported that what was needed was "a clear statement of the country's needs" instead of "the vague and humiliating appeals" being plastered on every wall in the country. The article ~~also~~ ridiculed ^{an} the abortive attempt under the auspices of Sir Francis Trippel to conduct "registration by newspaper-coupon."²³

A former adherent to voluntarism, Sir L. G. Chiozza Money, was also critical of what he termed the "'most extraordinary series of advertisements" by which the authorities were attempting to ~~induce some~~ He called the ~~men~~ women of England "to send their men to enlist. A attention to the way in which official posters were supporting the voluntary correspondent to the Westminster Gazette characterized the recruiting system by threats."²⁴ program as one of "shrieking posters and a journalistic clamour against 'shirkers,' and loud abuse of professional footballers." The writer argued that the exertion of "moral pressure, with the outcries of public indignation, in order to drive civilians from their work into the army" was nothing more than "'a most undignified compulsion."²⁵ Other ~~writers~~ critics likened the voluntary program to "conscription by

cajolery" or noted that the traditional British recruit often volunteered as a result of economic pressures which differed little from compulsion.²⁶
~~Former advocate of the voluntary system~~ (Signature)

Ex. Consc 1

Consc 2-3

T 29 MAR
P. 9

EE 866

GG 371

Times, 10 July
1915, p. 7R

FF 223

Former advocates of the voluntary system, such as ex-Cabinet Minister Ellis Griffith and Major-General Alfred E. Turner, joined in demands that a system of national service be adopted.²⁷
Within the Government, both Churchill and Lloyd George were reported to be ready to advocate conscription, ~~but~~

but the Conservatives were still carefully ~~avoiding making~~ awaiting a better time to challenge the Government on the issue. Curzon cautioned Long and Law "against any declaration in favor of conscription which might even retard its ultimate adoption by tempting the

Government to declare prematurely against it." " By spring 1915 it had become obvious to even the most uninformed that the European struggle would be neither short nor glorious. Not only were the casualty lists growing daily longer, but serious ~~disruptions economic~~ labor difficulties were arising, occasioned by the undirected ~~and~~ early voluntarism which had stripped industry of thousands of skilled workers just when they were needed most. Rumours of shortages of heavy

munitions were soon confirmed in the Northcliffe newspapers, leading to the fall of the Liberal Government and the formation of the first Coalition. Asquith, however, continued as Prime Minister and the Government's recruitment policy continued to be based on the voluntary principle, even while Kitchener ^{again lowered} altered the physical standards, this time to a minimum height of five feet two inches and a maximum age of forty.²⁹ ~~Other previous opponents of conscription, however, were no~~

~~longer so adamant in their views. Both Churchill and Lloyd George were reported to be ready to advocate conscription. Sir L. Chiozza-Money, Ellis Griffith, and Major-General Alfred E. Turner publically declared their reversal of position on the issue and demanded that a system of national service be adopted.~~

T, 22 MAY 15.96

Mackie 113

Mackie 113

F 1297
see displaced from
Repington
Times 14 May 1915
p 7

Mackie 113

~~under the Coalition~~ was still

Times 10 July
p. 78

people were ahead

1-29 MAR 15
P. 9

Mackie 298

The feelings of the country were also indicated on 9 July by the reception given the Guildhall speeches of Kitchener, Carson and Long. The Times reported that "nothing . . . was more loudly ~~appx~~ applauded than his [Kitchener's] hint that 'something more was required' than the present methods of appealing for recruits." Sir Edward Carson's statement that "if voluntary recruiting . . . fail, does anybody for a moment suppose that we ought to hesitate to apply compulsory service" was also "cheered to the echo." ³⁷ Asquith continued to report that "recruiting was very satisfactory." ³⁸ ~~on 28 July.~~

~~The Times of 16~~ Despite the Prime Minister's assurance, the Times of 16 August carried a Manifesto ~~xxx~~ signed by fifty prominent men, including Lord Milner, urging the Government to make a national service policy. The following month a statement calling for compulsory service, signed by twenty-two Peers and thirty Members of Parliament presently serving on active duty, appeared in all the London newspapers. The following day, the Prime Minister ^{finally} admitted that recruiting had fallen off in the last few weeks, but upon inquiry, refused to supply the particulars. ³⁹ ~~on recruiting.~~

Times 10 July
p. 7

Consc 34

Times 16 Aug
p. 7

Times 15 Sept
p. 77, Consc 23

Consc 26
" 35

By early fall, it appeared that the Prime Minister could no longer put off a Cabinet crisis over the compulsion issue. The demands of members of Parliament and of the press were becoming more strident every day. (For resolution of the issue) A sampling of major newspapers between 12 April and 16 May 1915 had ~~revealed~~ ^{discovered} only twenty-three editorials, letters, or stories concerning the voluntarist versus conscriptionist issue ~~during the period.~~ ^{A subsequent} Another sampling, beginning 19 August and ending 30 September 1915, ~~discovered 699~~ ^{revealed a thirty-fold increase} ~~in interest, with articles~~ ^{in interest, with articles} ~~revealed 699 items~~ ^{revealed 699 items} on the topic, including 257 editorials. Although the majority of the ~~items~~ ^{newspapers} continued to favor voluntarism, it was significant that the letters ~~to the editors~~ ^{from individuals} were almost evenly split on the topic. ⁴⁰

Mackie 298

Another disquieting aspect of the conscription issue was the attitude of the labour unions. In mid-September, ^{J.H. Thomas, of the} ~~the powerful~~ powerful railwaymen's union, told the House of Commons that if conscription ~~with any possibility of its being followed~~ were enacted, it would be followed by "industrial revolution."⁴¹ Delegates ~~to the Trade Union Congress in Bristol~~

M 374

to the Trade Union Congress in Bristol were equally opposed to any system of compulsion, declaring that it had not been shown that the voluntary system was inadequate.⁴² On 28 September, the Prime Minister attended ~~a secret meeting of the~~ a secret ~~meeting of the~~ Labour Conference, where he reportedly repeated his opposition to conscription. However, Kitchener, who also attended the conference, apparently left the impression that compulsion would soon be used if requirements were not met voluntarily. When

N 417

questioned in Commons, the Under-Secretary for War, Mr. Tennant, denied that any threat of compulsion had been authorized.⁴³ The pro-conscriptionists in the Cabinet, however, prepared to bring matters to a head.

L 573-74

Parl 38

Gilbert 551-57

Consc 44

Gilbert 558,
561

Threatened with a major cabinet split, Asquith successfully circumvented the problem once more by appointing the universally popular Lord Derby as Director General of Recruiting on 6 October. Compulsionists were promised ~~that Derby~~ that if Derby's voluntary scheme failed, Asquith would recommend "some form of legal obligation" ^{a division in the Cabinet} 44 The Prime Minister's efforts to avoid ~~the existence~~ ^{as} were given a helpful Carson boost by the resignations of ~~Asquith and the Salomonson~~ and Churchill over the conduct of affairs in Salonika and the Dardanelles, respectively. 45 The sudden removal of these two strong conscriptionists strengthened ~~the~~ Asquith's position.

To give voluntarism one more "fair trial," Lord Derby, who

Threatened with a major cabinet split, Asquith successfully circumvented the problem once more by appointing the universally popular Lord Derby as Director General of Recruiting. Derby, who had been particularly successful in recruiting in Lancashire, was given the task of resurrecting a new form of the deferred enlistment program which had failed and been discarded the previous year. Under the Derby scheme, the eligible population would "attest" to their willingness to serve and would be ~~placed into individual groups~~ classified by age-groups. These groups would then be called upon as the government required. A unique feature of the plan was that the married men were placed in separate groups from those who were single and that the married groups would ~~not~~ ^{be called} ^{up after} until all the single groups had been summoned. Provisions were made for tribunals to determine whether individuals should be exempted ^{from service} or postponed to later groups for various reasons. Asquith told Commons that the success or failure of the scheme would be known by 30 November. ⁴⁶

Consc 43

Despite an apparently favorable beginning, the plan soon faltered.

In an effort to stimulate volunteers, Lord Derby issued a press ^{assuring} statement ~~assuring~~ the married attestors that ~~they would not be~~ ^{called until} if the single men did not "come forward voluntarily, other and compulsory means would be taken before the married men were called upon to fulfil their engagement to serve." ⁴⁷ When anti-^{voluntarist} ~~conscriptionist~~ members of Parliament called upon Asquith to say whether this press release represented the government position, the Prime Minister ~~merely~~ ^{said} merely called attention to his statement of 2 November in which he ^{said} stated that the obligation of the married men should not be binding "until—I hope by voluntary

Consc 52

Consc 45
60

effort, if it be needed in the last resort, as I have explained, by other means—the unmarried men are dealt with." ⁴⁸ This ambiguous statement satisfied no one, and Asquith was later forced to support the ~~promise of the Derby, his~~ ^{promise of the Derby, his} ~~Director General~~ ^{Director General} ~~in a recruiting committee~~ ^{in a recruiting committee} ~~from~~ ^{from}

In addition to these pledges of Derby and, eventually, from Asquith, local recruiting committees ~~and~~ frequently did not hesitate to give various assurances implying that attestors would be given preference or favorable treatment if compulsion ever came. Even so, the response from the eligible population was so poor that the Government found it necessary to extend the canvass deadline from 30 November to 13 December. Under increasing threats of compulsion, 1,070,478 men attested in the last four days of the ^{extension} scheme, almost 40 percent of the total number attested during the whole eight weeks campaign. Despite this last minute response, Lord Derby's efforts had proven voluntarism as failure. Of the five million men of military age, over two million had failed to volunteer. More importantly, 650,000 single men not exempt from military service had failed to ~~appear, thus placing the P.M. in a difficult position.~~ ⁵⁰ ~~attest.~~

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Despite the results of the Derby scheme, Asquith told the House of Commons on 5 January 1916 that in his opinion "no case has been made out for general compulsion." ^{and that he "would not be a party to any measure which had that for its object."} ~~Instead, Asquith introduced a Military Service Bill providing for compulsory service for all single men~~ ^{the P.M. then}

75-26

between the ages of eighteen and forty-one, unless otherwise exempted. ^{Asquith} ~~The Prime Minister~~ ^{his previous statements} explained the apparent contradiction by noting

74-75

that the measure was presented specifically to fulfil the "promise" ⁵² ~~he made the married men.~~ ^{Significantly, the Bill nowhere in the B.M. was} Sir John Simon, unable to accept ~~the~~ Asquith's ^{the word "conscription" used.} ⁵³ niceties of distinction, resigned his Cabinet position. ^{in protest.} ⁵⁴

356-61

Times 1 Jan 1916, p. 5

L 578

Consc 124

~~The Prime Minister~~ Neither the Prime Minister ~~xx~~ nor any of his supporters explained why compulsion should be applied to 1,000,000 unattesting single ~~unmarried~~ men while the government ignored the fact that 1,150,000 married men also failed to appear under the Derby scheme. Nor did they explain why a married twenty-year-old should enjoy preference over an unmarried forty-year-old. Despite the obvious inequalities, the Bill easily passed with ^{the second reading} 431 ~~Ayes~~ versus only 39 ⁵⁵ ~~Noes~~. The extent of their victory must have surprised even the most ardent advocates of compulsory service.

Mackie 274-75

However, the action in the House of Commons accurately reflected the changing mood of the nation. The last week in December saw ~~the emergence of a conscriptionist majority among the nation's editorials for the first time~~ "the emergence of a conscriptionist majority among the nation's editorials for the first time," with fifty favoring conscription and forty-two against it. ~~The~~ Even strongly voluntarist papers like the Westminster Gazette became converted to the need for compulsion. In January, while the ~~amended~~ Military Service Bill was being debated in the House of Commons, over eight hundred editorials, letters, and articles on the issue appeared in the major national newspapers. Pro-compulsion editorials outnumbered the following month, voluntarists by almost a three to two ratio. By ~~February~~ when it was announced that the Military Service Act would take effect on 10 February 1916, only the extreme pacifist and labour journals remained in opposition. ⁵⁶ Asquith could finally hope that the

Mackie
Appendix

Times 4 Feb p7

conscription controversy had received its last airing.

Proclamation

Act

With the ~~passage~~ of the Military Service ~~Bill~~, the long argued compulsory system had become a reality, even if it only applied to a limited part of the British population. Under the provisions of the act, unattested single men between the ages of eighteen and forty-
 one had three options. First, ~~they~~ as Lord Derby continued to urge, they could voluntarily attest until midnight, 1 March 1916, and be placed into the appropriate age groups. Second, they could enlist for immediate service. *Finally,* If the unattested single individual did not chose one of the previous courses by midnight, 1 March 1916, he would be "deemed to have enlisted" automatically and would be called up by age-
 class at the option of the authorities.

Times 5 Feb p3

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HH 132

Case 356-57

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Case 357

requirements

In the meantime, the ~~needs~~ of the Army could not wait for the completion of political maneuvering. ~~Despite~~ The Need for men to replace losses was emphasized in December with the release of the showing total British losses of 528,000 casualty figures ~~for the first fifteen months of the war~~ men in the first fifteen months of the war. Despite the gain of ~~about 200,000~~ 275,000 direct enlistments during the Derby enrollments, it became necessary to call up the first four eligible groups of unmarried attested men on 20 December 1915. Groups 2 through 5 were to report on 20 January 1916.⁵⁹ On 8 January Groups 6-9 were called up and again on 28 January four more age groups were summoned.⁶⁰

On 10 February, the first effective day of the Military Service Act, the Government announced the first calling of the classes of unattested single men, ordering Classes 2 through 12 unexempted to report on 10 March. This took in all ~~single unexempted~~ single men between the ages of nineteen and thirty.⁶¹ Two days later, an article

in the Times reported that the size of the army was no longer a problem with the working of the Derby Scheme and the Military Service Act. It therefore came as a shock when, on 14 February the Government announced the calling up of all remaining classes of unattested men. The reason became apparent when the Times reported that "It is stated that from the groups already called up the percentage of recruits actually obtained has been very small" ⁶²

^xGroup 1, the eighteen year-olds, was passed over as a result of the Government's previous promise that no recruit would be summoned until he passed his nineteenth birthday. Times, ~~20 January 1916~~, p. 8. 21 December 1915

16a

T 25 Feb p. 9

On 25 February the nation suffered another shock when it was announced that the call up dates for the married groups would be released in a few days. Since the first of the unattested single classes would not report for two weeks yet, the married men considered this announcement a betrayal of the promises of Derby and the Prime Minister. ~~From stilling~~ The first few mutterings of discontent in February grew into a roar of anger in March. Far from stilling the compulsion debate as Asquith had hoped, the

T 1-31 Mar

operation of the Military Service Act merely added fuel to the fires of controversy. In just one newspaper, the Times, 111 editorials, letters, ~~and~~ and articles on the subject appeared in the month of March alone. Irate protests were made concerning administrative inconsistencies by tribunals, the lack of government guidance for local boards, and the numerous bureaucratic errors being made. Especially criticized were the excessive number of single men given exemption because they were employed in reserved occupations and the Government's failure to take adequate steps to track down those individuals who failed to report when called up. On 1 March, Lloyd George, speaking for the Government in the House of Commons, said that steps were being taken to reduce the large number of men claiming to be

T, 2 Mar p 12

"starred, badged, or in reserved occupations." 65

T 25 Feb p 9

On 25 February the nation suffered another shock when it was announced that the call up dates for the married groups would be released in a few days. Since the first of the ~~singles~~ unattested single classes would not report for two weeks yet, the married men considered this announcement a betrayal of the promises of Derby and the Prime Minister. Increasingly, protests were heard concerning the excessive number of exempted singlemen in reserved occupations and of the government's failure to track down those unattested individuals who had failed to ~~report~~ report. On 2 March, Llyod George, speaking for the Government in the House of Commons, said that steps were being taken to reduce the large number of men claiming to be ~~in~~ starred, badged, or in reserved occupations."

24 Feb p 9
T 6 MAR p 9
11 MAR p 7
L 583
C 209-8, 208-226
220-239
Amend Cond
1 MAR p 9

Married attestors, suddenly faced with the realities of a military obligation which many had never actually expected to happen, demanded that they be allowed to replace single men working in the reserved occupations. The attested men also realized that the one million married men who had not attested were snug and secure behind Asquith's declaration against any extension of the existing act. The letters to the Times and the debates in Commons became filled with bitterness and recriminations over pledges broken. Within a few days, the first proposals for organized action among the married men were heard. Mass meetings ~~were held~~ were held to demand that the Derby pledges be carried out and on 11 March an Independent candidate who ~~was elected~~ favored the married men was elected over the Unionist candidate. ~~The~~ "Association of attested married men" also put up an independent candidate for the by-election in the

T, 11 Mar p 7

Harborough Division of Leicestershire. In Manchester, they went

T, 15 Mar p.5

a step further and decided to form a "National Union of Attested
rally in Hyde Park, London,
 Married Men." A protest ^{on behalf of the married attested men} *reportedly*

T, 20 Mar p5

drew a very "business-like" crowd of ~~a~~ eight to ten thousand men. ⁶⁷
Faced with the growing protests in the press and in Parliament,
 Asquith once more attempted to evade the real issues.

Government announced that the
~~behind these protests.~~ The call up of further married groups *would be*

delayed and a conference under the direction of Walter Long was
 given the task of reducing the lists of reserved occupations, in

Consc 264

an effort to release more single men for duty. On 6 April, the
 Prime Minister promised the House of Commons that he would make a
 statement on the recruiting problems before the Easter Recess.

However, on 18 April Asquith again delayed his statement and on the
 19 April he announced that disagreement within the Cabinet made the
 break-up of the ~~g~~overnment possible. ⁶⁸

~~Behind the~~

continued

Behind these delays was the Prime Minister's ^{continued} attempt~~x~~ to avoid being forced into a full scale program of ~~conscription~~ ~~by~~ compulsion. ~~by~~ The conscriptionists in the Cabinet, who had patiently bided their time for so long, had finally decided to exert their power. On 17 April, Bonar Law ~~had~~ told the Prime Minister that he believed "a coalition government was in the best interest of the nation, but that to prevent a breakup of the coalition it would be necessary to adopt a program of "general compulsion." Law stated that it would be impossible for him to carry his party in favor of ~~the~~ Asquith's program any longer, but that the Prime Minister could carry his supporters in favor of compulsion if he tried. 69

Following secret sessions on 25 and 26 April 1916, Asquith attempted to introduce another half-way measure ^{but it} that met with so little support in the House ~~of Commons~~ that he was forced to withdraw it. 70 ~~It appeared that the Asquiths would use the situation as another exhibition.~~ However, ^{however,} news of the uprising in Dublin and of the disaster at Kut^{however,} provided the excuse for announcing that a more sweeping proposal embracing general compulsion would be proposed.

On 3 May 1916, the Prime Minister who had fought against conscription for so long introduced the "'Military Service (General Compulsion) Bill" in the House of Commons, explaining that "Such a measure is, in the unanimous opinion of all members of the Government and of the Army Council, urgently needed for the successful prosecution of the war." 71

On 4 May 1916, ~~after nearly twenty one months of delay, after entering the war, the House of Commons finally demanded national service from~~ ^{enacted a general conscription} ~~all her citizens~~ ^{also.}

Consc 320

On 4 May 1916, nearly twenty-one months after entering the war, the House of Commons ~~finally~~ enacted a general conscription law with only thirty-six dissenting votes. A. J. P. Taylor, in his English History, 1914-1945, says "compulsory service did not achieve its alleged purpose of providing more men for the army," citing the reduced enlistment rates during the first six months of conscription as his authority. ⁷² What Taylor fails to consider is that enlistment rates were already falling and that the Cabinet's impotent stop-gap measure of trying to call up the attested and unattested single ^{a stimulus to voluntarism} classes ^{as} in early 1916 was a failure of the Government to fully accept the need for national service. The fault lay not with the principle of conscription, but with the Government's failure to commit itself to a measure which many politicians thought would incur a generally unfavorable reaction from the people. In this the Government were misgauging the willingness of the people to get on with the war.