

## Chapter 1 - Conscientious objection to military service

questions and activities

### 1.1. What is a conscientious objector?

1. Write a definition of a conscientious objector (CO) in your own words.
2. How many conscientious objectors were there during the First World War? How many people were COs during the Second World War?
3. What kind of treatment did First World War COs receive?
4. Discussion: Do you agree or disagree with the statement Arthur Creech Jones made at his Court-martial? If he genuinely believed these words, do you think he should have been forced to fight, or should he have been allowed exemption from fighting?

further **RESOURCES**  
**Conscientious objection**

'I believe in human brotherhood and in the common humanity and common interests of all nations. I believe in co-operation, and not competition to the death, between individuals and nations. I view war as merely the test of might... It is a stupid, costly and obsolete method of attempting to settle the differences of diplomatists, in which the common people always pay with their blood, vitality and wealth. I believe there is a better way... I cannot, therefore, participate in any military organisation, every part of which is designed to make the machine of militarism efficient, and the method of which is the destruction of human life. I claim liberty of conscience and, therefore, cannot obey military orders.'

*31 August, 1916. Arthur Creech Jones - Court-martial.*

5. Research: Do you know any conscientious objectors? Were there any conscientious objectors in your area? What did people think of conscientious objectors during the First and Second World Wars? Use the local library or Internet to research newspapers from the First World War, or ask older members of your family to find out more about conscientious objectors.

### 1.2. Why become a conscientious objector?

1. Why did some religious people become COs?
2. Why did some pacifists become COs?
3. Why did some socialists become COs?
4. Discussion: Who should make important decisions about your life? You? The government? The United Nations? Your parents? Teachers? Somebody else? Read the statement Sydney Turner made at Deptford Tribunal and discuss the questions.

further **RESOURCES**  
**Pacifism**

"I deny the right of the State to compel me to undertake any service to which I have a conscientious objection. My life is my own and I claim to dispose of it as I will..."

*1916. Sydney Turner - Deptford Tribunal.*

5. Writing: Do you think it was right to be a CO in the First World War? Do you think you might have become a CO if you found yourself in the same circumstances? Say why you agree or disagree with the reasons (religion, pacifism, socialism) people became COs during the First World War.

### 1.3. Where do you draw the line?

1. What were the three categories of CO?
2. Write a definition for each type of CO and explain what they would or wouldn't do.
3. Why were some COs willing to do things which others refused to do?
4. Discussion: Conscientious objectors had to find their own answers to some very difficult questions. Look at the following questions and think how you would answer them. When you have finished, consider how different kinds of CO might have answered them.
  - a. Would you be prepared to put your own life at risk for someone else?
  - b. Would you be prepared to put other people's lives at risk for your own?
  - c. Would you be prepared to defend your family by killing somebody?
  - d. Would you be prepared to kill somebody else's family?
  - e. Is it wrong to kill somebody who is trying to kill you?
  - f. Is it wrong to kill somebody who isn't trying to kill you?
  - g. Would you be prepared to shoot somebody you have never met or spoken to if ordered to do so in the army?
  - h. Would you be prepared to shoot somebody you know if ordered to do so?
  - i. Would you be prepared to fire a missile 200 miles at a town, knowing that it will kill a large number of civilians?
  - j. Would you help build a hospital for injured soldiers?
  - k. Would you help build a hospital for injured civilians?
  - l. Would you be willing to do farming or forestry work if ordered to do so by the government?
  - m. Would you be prepared to take another person's job knowing that they would be sent to fight on the front line?
  - n. Would you be prepared to suffer hardship, criticism and rejection for your beliefs?
  - o. Would you be willing to join the army?
5. Writing: Imagine you are a CO (choose which type) in the First World War. Write a short letter to a friend explaining why you refuse to fight and the dilemmas you faced in making your decision.

### 1.4. Examples of conscientious objection since the First World War.

1. Why did Vic Williams and Moshin Khan go Absent Without Leave (AWOL) from the UK armed forces? Why didn't they apply to leave the armed forces as conscientious objectors?
2. How many US conscientious objectors to the Vietnam War were there in 1971? What did many young men do to show their opposition to fighting in the Vietnam War?
3. Think of a time when you were asked or told to do something you believed to be wrong? Explain how you felt and what you did? Are there any similarities to how COs might feel when ordered to become soldiers?
4. Research: The 'refusenik' conscientious objectors in the Israeli military believe they have been given illegal orders. Should soldiers obey illegal orders? Who is responsible if they do? To help you answer these questions, do some research into the Nuremberg Trials after the Second World War and find out what was said about obeying illegal orders.
5. Writing: Imagine you are one of the civilian train drivers in Scotland who refused to move munitions for use in the Iraq War. Write a letter to other train drivers explaining what you did and why.

#### further RESOURCES

**Nuremberg Trials**  
**Illegal orders**

External links in this documents provide additional information but do not indicate any endorsement on the PPU's part

### 1.5 . human rights focus - past & present rights

1. Look at the Universal Declaration. How many different human rights are there? When was it written? Why do you think it was written at this time?

2. The Preamble (the introduction) to the Universal Declaration states: "the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world". What does inalienable mean?

3. Which of the following rights do you think could be found in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights? Look at the Universal Declaration to check your answers.

- a. The right to live in a big house.
- b. The right to get married.
- c. The right to eat chocolate.
- d. The right to grow long hair.
- e. The right to leave your country.
- f. The right to healthcare.
- g. The right to party.
- h. The right to have a mobile phone.
- i. The right to express your opinions.

4. Here are 14 of the human rights that have been achieved in the UK. Put the rights in chronological order to match with the correct date they were achieved.

1215	Right for middle-class men to vote
1624	Right to free medical treatment
1689	Right to withhold labour (strike)
1824	Right to free state education
1832	Right to form trade unions
1833	Right to conscientious objection to military service
1870	Right for all men and women to vote
1882	Right to a trial if arrested
1906	Right to go to church other than the established church
1916	Right not to be the slave of another
1918	Right to free speech in parliament
1928	Right not to be caned in state schools
1948	Right for all men to vote, and women over 30
1987	Right of married women to own property

5. Discussion: How can respect for people's human rights bring "freedom, justice and peace in the world"?

**1.6. human rights focus - war & human rights**

1. What effect does war have on human rights? Complete the chart to show some more ways war affects health, food, property, children, movement and speech.

	<b>How war affects human rights</b>
Health	1. Civilians and soldiers are killed in many ways and access to medical care is difficult or impossible for many people during war. 2.
Food	1. War destroys crops and stores and leaves people hungry. 2.
Property	1. Governments and armies seize or steal people's private property in wars. 2.
Children	1. Many children become orphans when war kills their parents. 2.
Movement & Speech	1. People can be arrested for just for saying the 'wrong' thing in public. 2.
Other	

2. Which Article in the Universal Declaration refers to the human right to life? Why is this right so important?

3. Which Article is about conscientious objection? Copy out the Article and explain what it means in your own words. .

4. Activity: Working in groups, choose what you think are the ten most important rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Put your chosen ten rights into the pyramid provided. The most important right chosen should go at the top point of the pyramid, followed by the second most important right in the second row and so on.

5. Discussion: Are there any rights which everyone chose to include in the pyramid? Are there any which nobody chose? Which was the most popular choice for the human right at the top of the pyramid? Which rights were chosen for the second row, and why? Discuss any difficulties you had putting them in order.