

conscientious objection

Tribunals and Tribulations **Teacher's notes**

The aim of this enquiry is to get students to investigate a range of original documents relating to the Tribunal Hearing of a particular Conscientious Objector. Students will look at the letters, transcripts and official documents that serve to structure the hearing, as well as investigating some of the legal and moral framework behind Conscientious Objection. By interpreting these documents they can examine how CO's arrived at their ideas, how the authorities reacted to them and the difference between interpretation and implementation of law.

After examining the documents the student task is to write a narrative history of Carl Titford's Tribunal hearing suitable for a history textbook. However, there are many other ways of engaging with this task - students may be encouraged to use other media in creating podcasts, videos, radio or TV style interviews or produce newspaper articles, creative projects or propaganda in a contemporary style.

General prompt questions for use with each document:

Who wrote this document?
When was it written?
Why was it written?

What is the purpose of this source?
Does the source show the writers opinions and values?
What is the intended audience for each document?

Does it link to other documents in the collection?
Does it agree or disagree with other documents?

More specific questions on each source are included in the resource guide document.

Working in Groups

In place of the background information given above, teachers may wish students to work in small groups to uncover the narrative of Carl's Tribunal for themselves. Students may start work by looking at some of the documents in small groups, or pairs, before comparing with another group. As Conscientious Objection can be a complicated topic, it is still advisable that students have access to some of the background material and prompt questions.

Suggested groups of resources for small-group work

Attitudes towards Conscientious Objection:

Source 2 - Newspaper articles
Source 4 - Letter One
Source 5 - Letter Two

Questions and Answers:

Source 6 - List of Tribunal Questions
Source 7 - Transcript

Perceptions of Tribunal hearings:

Source 3 - Hearing Notice
Source 8 - Tribunal Image
Source 9 - Tribunal Cartoon

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Tribunals and Tribulations Sources Guide

Source 1: The Military Service Act

This source is a document outlining the Military Service Act 1916. It is a print of the complete legal copy of the law. The highlighted passages cover conscientious objectors.

Prompt Questions:

- What is the purpose of the Military Service Act?
- What are the Tribunals?
- What could the Tribunals decide about Conscientious Objectors?

Source 2: Newspaper article

This source is from the Sutton Advertiser and contains a statement from the Military Representative sitting on the Tribunal for the area. His statement covers his opinions of Conscientious Objectors and is fairly typical of the standard perception of COs that Military Representatives had. The statement is highlighted in the source. This source is provided by the Sutton Local Studies and Archives Centre.

Prompt Questions:

- What is the Military Representative's opinion on Conscientious Objectors?
- Would a Tribunal hearing with this man be fair?

Source 3: Hearing Notice

This source is a letter notifying Carl when his Tribunal hearing would be. Receiving this letter in the post was the first step towards a hearing and the prompt for many COs to begin preparing for what was often a difficult and unpleasant experience.

Prompt Questions:

- How would a CO feel when they received this letter?
- Why is much of the letter stamped on instead of written?

Source 4: Letter One

Men applying for exemption could submit letters and other evidence supporting their claim. For Conscientious Objectors, this evidence would often be letters explaining their views on war and supporting the legitimacy of their claim. Letters from individuals and groups who could tell the Tribunal that a CO had held their beliefs for a long time were very useful to prove that they were "real" Conscientious Objectors.

Prompt Questions:

- What is the purpose of this letter?
- Why does this letter support Carl's Objection?

Source 5: Letter two

Some letters tell us as much about the author as they do about the CO. This letter supports Carl's objection, but in a very different way. Letters such as this one show us an interesting glimpse into how COs were viewed by the general public.

Prompt Questions:

- How is this letter different from the first?
- How do you think Carl felt when reading this letter?
- Do you think the attitude of the writer is unusual?
- Do you think this letter helped or harmed Carl's case?

Source 6: List of Questions (COPYRIGHT)

Tribunals were provided with a list of questions designed to test whether or not a CO was genuine. The answers to the questions were supposed to show the Tribunal that an applicant had long standing objections to fighting in the war. This source is owned by the National Archives at Kew and forms part of their MH/47 Middlesex Appeal Tribunal record.

Prompt Questions:

What kind of questions are asked?
Are some more difficult than others?
Are these questions fair and balanced, or are they biased?
Are there any questions you think might be “trick questions”?

Source 7: Carl's Tribunal Transcript

We are lucky to have some transcripts of CO's Tribunal hearings. This source is a record of Carl's hearing and shows the questions asked by the Tribunal and Carl's answers to them.

Prompt Questions:

Does Carl convince the Tribunal of his claim?
Do the Tribunal take him seriously?
What is the verdict of the Tribunal?
Aside from Carl and the Tribunal members, who else speaks at his hearing?

Source 8: Tribunal Image

This source is a photograph showing the arrangement of a small Tribunal. Many Tribunals were convened in larger venues, as Carl's was. The Tribunal sit before an applicant. In the background, a group of people, who may be supporters or simply the public sit and watch the hearing.

Prompt Questions:

Is this how you expected a Tribunal hearing to look?
This arrangement often made COs feel powerless and small. Why?

Source 9: Tribunal Cartoon (COPYRIGHT)

This source is a cartoon of a Tribunal hearing drawn by a Conscientious Objector at Dartmoor Work Centre in 1917. It shows a “CO's view” of a Tribunal and the men running the hearing. This source is provided by the Imperial War Museum.

Prompt Questions:

Look at the faces of the men on the Tribunal. Why were they drawn this way?
What differences can you see between source 8 and source 9? Why are they different?
Who is the intended audience for this source?