THE CONSCRIPTION CONTROVERSY IN GREAT BRITAIN 1900 - 18

R·J·Q· ADAMS & PHILIP P· POIRIER

Despite the efforts of Lord Roberts's National Service League—and the covert support of the army—mandatory service was considered an extremist's nostrum in the years before August 1914. With the unprecedented manpower demands of the First World War, a bitter conflict erupted between voluntarists and conscriptionists among British statesmen—settled only after the collapse of voluntary recruiting and the passage of the National Service Acts in 1916. For the remainder of the conflict Britain's leaders struggled with the question of how best to use these broad new powers both to send enough men to the trenches and to keep enough back to make munitions and necessary consumer goods. By 1918 Britain stared into the bottom of the manpower barrel.

For a note on the authors, please see the back flap

THE CONSCRIPTION CONTROVERSY IN GREAT BRITAIN, 1900–18

Also by R. J. Q. Adams

**ARMS AND THE WIZARD: Lloyd George and the
Ministry of Munitions, 1915–16**

Also by Philip P. Poirier

**THE ADVENT OF THE LABOUR PARTY
LEONARD HOBHOUSE'S *THE LABOUR MOVEMENT*
(editor)**

The Conscription Controversy in Great Britain, 1900–18

R. J. Q. Adams

and

Philip P. Poirier

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To Susan and Carole

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Preface and Acknowledgements

The inhabitants of medieval Britain, like their continental neighbours, were not strangers to enforced military service. The strength of feudal loyalties and oaths, at least for men above the class of serfs, frequently received their ultimate test in battle. The Anglo-Saxon Fyrd which fell at Hastings was composed largely of citizen-warriors, whose duty it was to defend the community in time of war. Once settled in their new home, the Norman rulers of England developed a hybrid form of feudalism, which stipulated that military service was owed by each freeman to his lord. The greatest lord of all, the King, held the power to enforce the ultimate demand for such service. The centralizing monarchs of the latter Middle Ages institutionalized a more comprehensive form of conscription, following the lead of Henry II. This clever and ruthless father of the Angevin line showed the way in the twelfth century with his Assize of Arms, which defined what was expected in time of war of each class of men.¹

Modern times saw the tradition continued. The Civil War, for so long pictured rather romantically as the struggle between tyrannical monarchy and representative institutions, was, at least in part, a war fought between impressed armies. A portion of the men who fought on sea and land during the great imperialist wars with France of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were also conscripted into service. From the mid-eighteenth century through the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the nation raised her armies through periodic militia ballots, which entailed the drawing of lots among the eligible male citizenry of each county to decide who would make up the shire quota. In the years immediately preceding the First World War, conscription enthusiasts never tired of reminding their fellow Britons that both Trafalgar and Waterloo were victories of conscript forces.

The century after the defeat of Napoleon witnessed no general wars, and no large conscript armies were needed. There was little enthusiasm for compulsory service in the Victorian Britain of Peace, Retrenchment and Reform, and these years regularly witnessed the annual suspension of the Militia Ballot Act. The little wars of the last century were fought with small professional armies and large econo-

mical navies, also manned by long-service volunteers. Compulsion simply ceased to be an issue of consequence in the time of Gladstone, Disraeli or Salisbury. Not until the early years of the twentieth century did a small and dedicated party of compulsory-service zealots, supported to a degree by other enthusiasts of other 'modern' ideas, again raise the issue. It is their history which is the initial subject of this book.

The Great War, as it was termed by an entire generation, changed the lives of millions of men and women alive at that time. Its long-term effects, direct and otherwise, have altered the face of the earth and all its people. Among the many ways in which it altered political and social life in Britain during the 1914–18 period was that it thrust the once-obscure issue of conscription into the centre of political decision-making. For a time, compulsory service became the most crucial issue to be debated by Parliament, the press and the electorate. An examination of how that debate was conducted and concluded provides the subject of the second portion of this book.

Once conscription became law in 1916, however, it was discovered that the complex issues of manpower provision and control were not settled. Because of the enormous demands for men both to fight a war of attrition and to work in the factories, mines and farms, it was necessary to learn how best to establish priorities and appropriately allocate the shrinking manpower pool. All the while, of course, the leaders of the British democracy were required to keep in mind the limits of tolerance of the electorate. Consideration of these questions occupies the final portion of this book.

The Conscription Controversy came to be written under unusual circumstances. It is a kind of collaborative effort on the part of two men who never met – at the same time it is a tribute by one of the authors, myself, to the other, Philip P. Poirier.

Dr Poirier died tragically prematurely in 1979, at the age of 59. He had been for twenty-seven years a member of the Department of History at the Ohio State University. A student of British politics and society in the early years of the twentieth century, he was the author of many books, articles and papers. In 1958 he published *The Advent of the Labour Party*, which was honoured with the Triennial Prize of the North American Conference on British Studies. More recently he edited a new edition of the long-out-of-print *The Labour Movement* by L. T. Hobhouse. A painstaking mentor, he would no doubt be pleased to be remembered as the teacher of a large and admiring

cadre of research students; many of these men and women have gone on to make their own marks in the historical profession.

More than ten years ago, Philip Poirier became interested in the question of state control in Britain and planned a book examining the conscription issue in the period of the First World War. Taking issue with the pathfinding work of A. J. P. Taylor and Alfred M. Gollin, among others, he had concluded that the Freedom or Control thesis exaggerated the ideological importance of war socialism. He wrote in 1975:

I believe I can show convincingly that the pressure of circumstances and the economics of scarcity made some men collectivists out of grim necessity but that the portrayal of Lloyd George and other ministers of state as interventionists in any ideological sense is almost wholly without merit.

Even before publishing, in 1978, a study of Lloyd George and the evolution of Government control during his time at the Ministry of Munitions, I began work on a research project examining the question of state intervention during the early twentieth century, including an examination of the development of manpower policy under the three successive wartime cabinets. After Dr Poirier's death, I was asked by his literary executors, Dr Carole Rogel Poirier and Dr Richard Poirier, to take temporary possession of the large corpus of documentary materials, notes and papers he had collected and complete without restriction a broad work dealing with the conscription and manpower issues. An indefatigable and gifted researcher, he had gathered a monumental collection of data. This book is the result of combining the products of Dr Poirier's researches with my own.

The arguments and conclusions of *Conscription Controversy* – warts and all – are my own, and I accept full responsibility for them. Yet for reasons which must be obvious to all those who read these words, and despite the fact that he might have taken issue with some of the judgements reached herein, this book belongs as much to Philip Poirier as to me. I am honoured, therefore, that his name appears with mine on its title-page.

I must express my thanks to the many individuals and institutions who made available to Philip Poirier or myself materials without which this study could have never been completed; many are noted below. I also must thank the librarians and staffs of the following

institutions who aided the authors so generously during the many hours of research which now lie behind them: the Royal Archives, Windsor Castle; the House of Lords Record Office; the British Library; the Public Record Office; the India Office Library; the National Library of Scotland; the National Army Museum; the Imperial War Museum; the Liverpool City Library; the Manchester Central Library; the West Sussex County Record Office; the Wiltshire County Record Office; the Imperial War Museum; the National Army Museum; the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the University Library, Cambridge; the British Library of Political and Economic Science; the Library, New College, Oxford; the Library, Nuffield College, Oxford; the Library, Churchill College, Cambridge; the Library, the University of Birmingham; the Library, the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne; the Library, the University of Sheffield; the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London; and the Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas.

Individuals who made documents available to the authors include the Clerk of the Records, the House of Lords Record Office; the Rt Hon. Julian Amery, MP; Dr George Boyce; Mrs Elizabeth Clay; Vice-Admiral Sir Ian Hogg; Captain Stephen Roskill; the Hon. Sir Stephen Runciman and Major C. J. Wilson. Access to papers within their control was also granted by the Warden and Fellows of New College, Oxford, and by *The Times* and the *Spectator*. I am pleased to offer my thanks to them.

In addition to those archives and libraries named above, I wish also to thank the librarians and staffs of the Library of the Ohio State University and the Sterling C. Evans Library of the Texas A&M University, without whose generous assistance these attempts to write British history in the United States would have been quite hopeless. It is my pleasure also to record my thanks to Dr B. S. Benedikz of the University of Birmingham, who shared with me his amazing knowledge of the massive Chamberlain Collection which is in his care and who made me feel like so much more than a visiting patron.

I have to acknowledge the gracious permission of Her Majesty The Queen for permission to quote from materials from the Royal Archives. For permission to quote from papers to which they hold copyright, I wish to thank also Mr A. J. P. Taylor, FBA, and the Trustees of the First Beaverbook Foundation; the Curators of the Bodleian Library; the Warden and Fellows of New College, Oxford; the Master, Fellows and Scholars of Churchill College in the Univer-

sity of Cambridge; the British Library Board; the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum; the Controller of HM Stationery Office; the Clerk of the Records, House of Lords; the Earl of Derby; Lord Hankey; the Rt Hon. Julian Amery, MP; The Hon. Mark Bonham Carter; the Trustees of the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives; and the University of Birmingham. If I have unwittingly infringed upon the copyright of any persons or institutions, I hope they will accept my sincerest apologies and notify me of the oversight.

For permission to use materials which appeared in my recent articles in the *Journal of British Studies* and *Armed Forces and Society* in America, I am grateful to their editors.

I wish to acknowledge the gratitude of the authors to the Ohio State University, the Texas A&M University, the American Council of Learned Societies and the American Philosophical Society for financial assistance which, in part, made these researches possible.

It would be quite impossible to thank adequately all those who aided in the making of this book. As I have noted in another place, a book of this kind is a kind of collective effort in which the authors share the birthright with friends, colleagues and students who contribute so materially to its development. I would like to single out for special thanks Professor Alfred M. Gollin for encouraging me to pursue and believe in the importance of the mandatory service question. I shall never be able adequately to thank Mr George Dangerfield for his many contributions to this and any other historical work I undertake; inadequate though the gesture is, I record my gratitude again here. Many colleagues read portions of this book in manuscript form over the past two years; I am particularly thankful to Professor Michael J. Moore, the editor of *Albion*, and Professor Thomas C. Kennedy, the historian of the No-Conscription Fellowship, for their close readings which time and again saved me from snares of my own creation. I would also like to thank Professor Lowell Satre for his generous assistance in helping me to understand better the Brodrick army reforms. I benefited very much from the acute editorial eye of Dr Olwyn Blouet, who also read large portions of the manuscript. For their encouraging words over the past several years I also offer my thanks to President Frank E. Vandiver and Professor James M. Rosenheim of the Texas A&M University and Dr Gordon P. Eaton, formerly Provost at that university and now president of the Iowa State University.

I am saddened that the premature death of Professor Stephen Koss prevented me from presenting this to him. He played an important

role in bringing the work of Professor Poirier and myself together at a crucial point, and I humbly offer this book as a memorial to him.

I wish to thank my son, Ian James Tucker Adams, who regularly found time to emerge from his own battles with Latin and algebra to share the triumphs and tragedies which came to me over the lifespan of this project.

Finally, I am pleased beyond words to record my thanks to two remarkable women without whom there would be no *Conscription Controversy*: Carole Rogel Poirier and Susan Charlotte Turner Adams. They know what wonders they have worked, and I am pleased to dedicate this book to them.

Bryan, Texas

R. J. Q. ADAMS

Bibliographical Note

This study is based upon several collections of papers, public and private; upon the newspaper and serial press and the *Parliamentary Debates*; as well as upon a number of published sources. The purpose of the endnote references is not only to show the sources of quotations or to provide evidence for the authors' conclusions, but also both to direct the reader who wishes to pursue further the lines of thought developed in these pages and to illustrate how the authors exploited these sources. Perhaps this will be accepted as some defence by critics who grow tired of endnotes which begin with the words 'In this regard see...' or the like. No doubt there were other published and unpublished sources which the authors ought to have read, and new ones are being created or revealed at a remarkable pace. This having been said, the authors might be permitted to have the use of a wonderful phrase from Mr John Grigg's masterful examination of the early life of David Lloyd George: 'All the same, the footnote references supplied throughout the book may have shown that the research for it has not been desultory...'

In addition to the manuscript sources listed below, the reader is directed to several published sources which are indispensable to understanding the conscription question. For many years the sole study of the conscription movement in the early twentieth century has been Denis Hayes, *Conscription Conflict* (London, 1949). John W. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience* (London, 1922), examined the lot of conscientious objectors during the Great War while the memory of their sufferings was still fresh in his mind. Published during the War by an anti-conscription MP was Richard C. Lambert (ed.), *The Parliamentary History of Conscription* (London, 1917), which consists of verbatim quotations of all references and debates in the Houses of Parliament dealing with mandatory service between August 1914 and the passage into law of general conscription in May 1916. More recently, two excellent works have been published which, again, concentrate on the anti-compulsion movement: John Rae, *Conscience and Politics* (London, 1970), and Thomas C. Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience* (Fayetteville, Arkansas, 1981). John Morton Osborne, *The Voluntary Recruiting Movement in Britain*,

1914–1916 (New York, 1982), has painstakingly examined the mechanics of voluntarism during the period up to the passage of the first Military Service Bill. The interest of the authors in the subject of mandatory service in the early years of this century owes much to the pioneering essay by Theodore Ropp, 'Conscription in Great Britain, 1900–1914: A Failure in Civil-Military Communications', in the Summer 1956 number of the American journal, *Military Affairs*. The authors have benefited greatly from having the use of several unpublished doctoral dissertations. Michael W. Heskett, 'Battlefield and Factory: British Manpower and the First World War' (University of California, Santa Barbara, 1976), surveys the entire sweep of manpower policy during the War. Two others, Gerald H. S. Jordan, 'The Politics of Conscription in Britain, 1905–1916' (University of California, Irvine, 1974) and William W. Mackie, 'The Conscription Controversy and the End of Liberal Power in England', 1905–1916 (University of North Carolina, 1966), examine the compulsion issue from the advent of the Campbell-Bannerman Government through the passage of the National Service Bills. M. J. Allison, 'The National Service Issue, 1899–1914' (University of London, 1975) and H. R. Moon, 'The Invasion of the United Kingdom: Public Controversy and Official Planning, 1888–1918' (University of London, 1968), are extremely helpful in understanding the pre-War climate of opinion and the activities of the pro-conscription party.

All studies of the political and administrative struggles over mandatory service during the Great War owe a debt to two works which proclaimed the importance of the subject more than twenty years ago: A. J. P. Taylor's 1959 Raleigh Lecture, 'Politics in the First World War', published in that author's *Politics in Wartime and Other Essays* (Cambridge, 1964), and A. M. Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics: A Study of Lord Milner in Opposition and in Power* (London, 1964).

The documentary sources which the authors have consulted include the departmental papers of the Cabinet, the Foreign Office, the War Office, the Admiralty, the Home Office and the Ministries of Munitions, of National Service and of Labour, as well as the periodically issued Command Papers and the Parliamentary Debates. It should be noted that all quotations in the text from parliamentary speeches are taken from this official source; exceptions are noted.

Other archival sources which were considered significant in shaping this work include:

- King George V Papers, The Royal Archives, Windsor Castle.
Lord Addison (Christopher Addison) Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
H. O. Arnold-Forster Papers, British Library.
Leopold Amery Papers, courtesy of The Rt Hon. Julian Amery, MP
Earl of Oxford and Asquith (Herbert Henry Asquith) Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
Earl of Balfour (Arthur James Balfour) Papers, British Library.
Lord Beaverbook (Max Aitken) Papers, House of Lords Record Office.
Lord Beveridge (William Beveridge) Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science.
Robert Blatchford Papers, Manchester Central Library.
R. B. Blumenfeld Papers, House of Lords Record Office.
Lord Buxton (Sydney Buxton) Papers, courtesy of Mrs Elizabeth Clay.
Sir Austen Chamberlain Papers, University of Birmingham Library.
Neville Chamberlain Papers, University of Birmingham Library.
Marquess Curzon (George Nathaniel Curzon) Papers, India Office Library.
Marquess of Crewe Papers, Cambridge University Library.
17th Earl of Derby Papers, Liverpool City Library.
Master of Elibank Papers, National Library of Scotland.
H. A. L. Fisher Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
Lord Gainford (Joseph Albert Pease) Papers, Nuffield College, Oxford.
J. L. Garvin Papers, Humanities Research Centre, University of Texas.
H. A. Gwynn Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, courtesy of Dr George Boyce.
Earl Lloyd-George (David Lloyd George) Papers, House of Lords Record Office.
Lord Grey of Fallodon (Sir Edward Grey) Papers, Public Record Office.
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- Reginald McKenna Papers, Churchill College, Oxford.
- Leopold Maxse Papers, Chichester County Record Office.
- Viscount Milner Papers, Bodleian Library, courtesy of New College, Oxford.
- Lord Northcliffe Papers, British Library.
- Parliamentary Recruiting Committee Papers, British Museum.
- Passfield (Sidney and Beatrice Webb) Papers, British Library of Political and Economic Science.
- Field Marshal Lord Roberts Papers, National Army Museum.
- Field Marshal Sir William Robertson Papers, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London.
- Geoffrey Robinson (Dawson) Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
- Lord Runciman (Walter Runciman) Papers, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne Library, courtesy of the Hon. Sir Stephen Runciman.
- Lord Samuel (Herbert Samuel) Papers, House of Lords Record Office.
- Lord Selborne Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
- J. A. Spender Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
- Lord Stanfordham Papers, Royal Archives, Windsor Castle.
- J. St Loe Strachey Papers, House of Lords Record Office.
- Lord Willoughby de Broke Papers, House of Lords Record Office.
- Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson Papers, Imperial War Museum.

1 Victorian Legacy

I

On the evening of 5 January 1916, Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith rose in his place in the House of Commons to introduce the Military Service Bill (No. 2). Calling for the compulsory enlistment of unmarried men between the ages of 18 and 41, the bill passed quickly through Parliament and received the Royal Assent three weeks later. The Prime Minister's speech was generally undistinguished, but it contained the following passage which appears quite remarkable indeed:

The bill that I am about to ask leave to introduce is one, I think, which can be sincerely supported by those who, either on principle, or, as my case, on grounds of expediency, are opposed to what is commonly called conscription.

Asquith's speeches frequently are, to the modern reader, trials of convolution and rhetorical exegesis – as somehow befits one of the last great Victorian parliamentarians. However, the leader of the last Liberal Government of Great Britain seemed to be bringing in the first conscription bill of modern times with the unequivocal promise that it merited the support of all opponents of the policy it embodied – including himself.

The passage into law of compulsory service entailed many such apparent contradictions, though it seems quite clear that Asquith would never have found himself in his terrible predicament had the greatest war that man had never imagined not changed his – and virtually all other – lives. That is no contradiction. The Act changed much: it altered the way Britain raised her armies; it affected the alignments of interest groups within the Coalition Government; it changed the varying expectations of the statesmen who constituted that incohesive Government.

An understanding of this remarkable story requires an examination of the Great War of 1914–18, and an inquiry into the party politics of the Edwardian and early Georgian years which preceded that conflict. The historian of wartime compulsory service must, as well, examine both the development of the pro-conscription movement

during this extraordinary period and the climate of opinion which proved fertile for its growth. It would be well to turn first to such considerations.

II

The advent of the twentieth century was thought to be a time of great promise by many Europeans, but for many thinking Britons it brought only deep concern and, perhaps, dread. The passing of Queen Victoria, the dominant figure who had lent her name to an age, the accession of Edward VII, the cheerfully irregular monarch who was her son, as well as the spirited economic and political competition of European, American and Asian neighbours all were reasons for concern. Nothing, however, troubled the informed Englishman more than the shocking reality of the South African War.¹ For if the production figures for German steel or American coal chiefly knit the brows of the British economic analysts who read and understood such figures, the clumsy performance of the British Army in the veldt required no expert interpretation.

Catastrophe followed catastrophe in the first year of hostilities. The surrender in November 1899 at Nicholson's Nek was followed a month later by 'Black Week', encompassing the defeats at Stormberg, Magorsfontein and Colenso. The new year brought only further humiliation with the muddled maneuver at Spion Kop, which, incidentally, forever earned for General Sir Redvers Buller the unfortunate cognomen 'Reverse', in memory of his withdrawal from the Kop, as the Boers retreated in the opposite direction. Even the first notable victory, that of Lord Roberts over General Cronje at Paardeberg in February 1900, was blackened by an enteric fever epidemic among the British troops which in its worst phase sickened thousands and killed fifty men per day. Who could blame the British Commander-in-Chief in London, Lord Wolseley, who wrote in January to his wife: 'I am in despair at all our misfortunes. God seems to be with the Boers and against us.'²

When peace came officially in May 1902, after more than a year of vicious guerrilla action, countered with the desperate policy of 'reconcentration' of the civilian population, the reputations of the War Office and of the command structure of the Army were in tatters. Those reputations, earned in recent memory in 'little wars'

against imperial peoples, wars won on the cheap, owed much to the hymns of praise of the voice of imperialism itself, Rudyard Kipling. His 'Tommy Atkins' and the heroes of the 'thin red line', had been enough to secure the Empire in the past, and small thanks they received for it. That would no longer do. Like an angry Old Testament prophet, Kipling flayed his people from the pages of *The Times* in January 1902, with 'The Islanders':

And ye vaunted your fathomless power and ye flaunted your
iron pride

Ere – ye fawned on the Younger Nations for the men who
could shoot and ride!

Then ye returned to your trinkets; then ye contented your
souls

With the flannelled fools at the wicket or the muddled oafs at
the goals.

Given to strong delusion, wholly believing a lie,

Ye saw that the land lay fenceless, and ye let the months go
by

Waiting some easy wonder, hoping some saving sign –

Idle – openly idle – in the lee of the forespent Line.

Idle – except for your boasting – and what is your boasting
worth?

If ye grudge a year of service to the lordliest life on Earth?³

As Samuel Hynes has pointed out in *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, the expected outpouring of protest from 'athletes and headmasters' did materialize; yet letters to *The Times* supporting the poet's message outnumbered those opposing it by two to one.⁴ Kipling knew his public.

The question before that public involved far more than team sports or, for that matter, battles lost – it dealt in national values and cultural fibre. At the heart of this new era of self-examination was the difficult subject of national courage; and questions of bravery – particularly given the terrible experiences of 1899–1902 – frequently resolved themselves into questions of warfare. The public was barred from the War Office and the Staff College, and no doubt, many were satisfied to have it so and to remain unconcerned about these matters. Some chose, however, in the early years of the new century, to speculate on questions of war and strategy and the remarkable wonders of technology applied to them. For some it created a new patriotism, a latter-day 'jingo-ism'; for others, however, it fathered a

new fear – an exciting, even a delicious, fear of a bigger and a closer war.

One need look no farther for examples than popular literature and theatre in the years following the Boer War.⁵ Invasion literature was not a new genre in Britain, and as early as 1871, and the publication of Col. George Chesney's 'The Battle of Dorking' in *Blackwood's Magazine*, the direction of such scare stories changed materially. In previous such tales the bogey was invariably France, while Chesney cast the German Empire in that role. His skill as a writer and his practical military experience were combined to produce a tale of greater quality, realism and commercial success than those which preceded it.

There was no immediate successor to 'The Battle of Dorking', but the effect of the South African disasters prepared the ground for an entirely new generation of such tales. In 1903, a worthy heir appeared in Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands*, a splendid adventure novel including elements of espionage, an invasion threat and individual heroism. Like Chesney, Childers cast Germany in the villain's role. Unlike his predecessor, however, he addressed a reading public prepared by recent memories of a disappointing war in which German sympathy was clearly with the other side. Childers's success was rapidly copied by a number of authors who followed the now familiar formula: an unready Britain, an aggressive Germany and a near-successful sea-borne invasion.

Less artistically satisfying but even more successful at the book stalls was William Le Queux's 1906 novel, *The Invasion of 1910*. Already a successful author of lurid adventure tales, Le Queux had been commissioned by Lord Northcliffe to write the manuscript, which the press lord serialized in his *Daily Mail*. Readers found a facsimile letter from Lord Roberts bound into copies of the book appealing to them 'for the sake of all they hold dear', to consider the terrible consequences reserved for an unprepared people. In fact, 'Little Bobs', conqueror of Afghanistan, hero of the South African War and the last Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, had vetted the manuscript and advised the author on the credibility of his invasion plan. Translated into twenty-seven languages, the book reportedly sold more than a million copies. Aided by Roberts, who was to make security against invasion the last consuming effort of his long life, the invasion mania became a growth industry.

At least as interesting was the success in the 1909 theatre season of a melodrama titled *An Englishman's Home*, with the author identi-

fied only as 'A Patriot' The work was written by Maj. Guy du Maurier, then serving in South Africa, whose good fortune it was to have as his brother a successful actor-manager who produced the play without the author's knowledge. Du Maurier's invaders were, again, German – though they were thinly disguised to avoid offending the Lord Chamberlain who, in turn, wished to avoid offending Berlin. If the full houses to which it played are any indication, as with *The Invasion of 1910*, the public overlooked the modest quality of *An Englishman's Home* and enjoyed the thrill of the fright given them. The message was by this time familiar: unprepared Englishmen, grown flabby and untrained in the arts of war, could not resist the trained citizen soldiers of the enemy. Military enlistments, particularly in London, were certainly enhanced during the run of the play. Ready to take advantage of the turn of events, the War Office set up a recruiting booth in Wyndham's Theatre which did a thriving business signing up men for the recently created Territorial Force.⁶

In addition to the fact that Germany had replaced France as the adversary in the invasion literature of the period, two other points are worth noting: first, the attention of the reader was directed toward British decadence rather than German perfidy – the lesson was clearly 'prepare before it is too late'. Second, these curious products should not be confused with anti-war literature. On the contrary, the tribunes of preparedness who fulfilled the public appetite for frightening polemics gave their works a kind of gilt-edged moral tone. To risk the nation's birthright through weakness, they insisted, was the highest treachery. Regarding their attitude toward war itself, one historian has noted: 'All these books shared a common assumption that war was a splendid thing. . . a glorious spectacle fought with means which far out-paced the crude imaginings of their forefathers.'⁷

The popularity of military preparedness and discipline manifested itself as well in the growth of paramilitary youth organizations.⁸ Like invasion literature, this movement pre-dated the Boer War. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century such groups as the Boys' Brigade, its imitators, the Anglican Church Lads' Brigade and the Catholic Boys' Brigade, and similar groups were associated with religious foundations and drew their adult leadership from among the clergy and interested laymen. Only in 1899, under the sponsorship of Lord Meath, was the first entirely secular paramilitary youth group, Lads' Drill Association, founded and the ties to the churches somewhat loosened.⁹

Certainly the best known and most long-lived of these organizations was the Boy Scouts, formed by Lt.-Gen. Sir Robert Baden-Powell, the heroic defender of Mafeking during the Boer War. A popular military figure after the conflict, Baden-Powell published *Scouting for Boys* in 1907, and gave his full attention to his creation after his retirement from the Army in 1910.¹⁰ His goals were simple and his methods direct; he meant to counteract the physical and moral deterioration of the nation's youth. Pointing to what he interpreted as the weakening effects on the population, young and old, of the social legislation of recent Governments, the old soldier meant to rely on woodcraft and paramilitary drill to save the next generation. He wrote in 1911:

Free feeding and old age pensions, strike pay, cheap beer and indiscriminate charity do not make for the hardening of the nation or the building up of a self-reliant, energetic manhood.¹¹

No doubt many who encouraged their sons – and later, with the founding of the Girl Guides, their daughters – to become scouts and who attended the plays and purchased the novels which cautioned preparedness, had read of the 40 to 60 per cent rate of rejection of volunteers during the Boer War. As the Director-General of the Army Medical Service suggested in 1903, the implications of such facts exceeded their military aspects: 'if these men are unfit for military service, what are they good for?'¹² The Inter-Department Committee on Physical Deterioration, to which the Director-General testified in these terms, reported in 1904, and its findings constituted a litany of facts and numbers setting forth the poor condition of the national physique which severely shook many of its readers. To the middle-class Victorian, national vigour was measurable in population growth, in immigration statistics, in averages of height and weight and productivity. While Le Queux's threats were fiction, and Maj. du Maurier's invaders removed their greasepaint after each performance, the concerns of the Committee were only too real. Some who shared those anxieties, products willing or otherwise of a society much influenced by social-Darwinist thought, could not help but interpret them in terms of national survival.

III

In July 1902, eighteen months after burying the sovereign he had served for so long, Lord Salisbury retired from the premiership and

was succeeded by his nephew, Arthur James Balfour. A philosopher and scientist by predilection, he was thought a dilettante and given the sobriquet 'Prince Arthur' during his early days in Parliament. He had proved his mettle, however, while serving as his uncle's Chief Secretary for Ireland during the tumultuous days of Parnell's Plan of Campaign. He had been Leader of the House of Commons and Salisbury's political heir apparent, and now it was his inheritance to refurbish Britain's exhausted military machinery and adjust her foreign policy to relieve her isolation among the Great Powers.

Balfour was to play a significant role in supporting the efforts of Admiral Sir John Fisher to ensure that Britain remained unchallenged as the world's greatest naval power.¹³ The army was another matter, for it had recently taken more than two years and 400 000 troops, at a cost of £200 million and 22 000 lives to subdue an enemy whose entire force never equalled 90 000 men.¹⁴ To secure advice about how to remedy the apparent weakness of Britain's land forces, the Prime Minister created several royal commissions of inquiry.

The first of these bodies, appointed in October 1902, and chaired by Lord Elgin, was charged to 'inquire into the military preparations for the War of South Africa and into the supply of men, ammunition, equipment and transport by sea and in campaign and into the military operations up to the occupation of Pretoria'.¹⁵ The Elgin Commission, after hearing fifty-five days of testimony by 114 witnesses, did manage to offer the outlines of a plan to reform the War Office, but its report primarily 'denounced abuses rather than proposed remedies'.¹⁶

There was at least one point upon which the commissioners were willing to be more specific, and that was the fact that the home islands had been all but denuded of regular troops during the recent war. In the early spring of 1900, during the blackest days of the conflict, there were but 17 000 regulars in Britain.¹⁷ They concluded that 'no military system will be satisfactory which does not contain powers of expansion outside the limit of the regular Forces, whatever that limit might be'. It had been standard fare in the invasion novels of the period to cast Britain as vulnerable if an unforeseen crisis left her without fleet or Regular Army for protection. At least one, Le Queux's *Invasion of 1910*, implied that 'expansion outside the limit of the regular Forces' was realistically possible only through mandatory service.

A second commission, chaired by the Duke of Norfolk, was appointed in April 1903, and charged with examining the condition of

the second line of defence, the Militia and the Volunteers.¹⁸ In its May 1904 report, the Norfolk Commission took an even bolder position in advising the Government than did their predecessors. The section on training, drafted by the military correspondent of the *Morning Post* and future Chichele Professor of Military History at Oxford, Spenser Wilkinson,¹⁹ counselled:

The principles which have been adopted, after the disastrous failure of older methods, by every great power of the European continent are, first, that as far as possible the whole able-bodied male population shall be trained to arms; secondly, that the training shall be given in a period of continuous service with the colours, not necessarily in barracks, and thirdly, that the instruction shall be given by a body of specially educated and highly trained officers. . .

We are convinced that only by the adoption of these principles can an army for home defence, adequate in strength and military efficiency to defeat an invader, be raised and maintained in the United Kingdom.²⁰

While these conclusions of the Norfolk report were satisfying to the nascent pro-conscription movement in Britain, they were far from popular. Wemyss Reid wrote in July 1904, in the *Nineteenth Century and After*, of the report: 'Seldom has a document of this importance been received with [such] general and outspoken denunciation.' Taking their lead from that reaction, the Government moved quickly to still rumours that a compulsion bill was under consideration. Both H. O. Arnold-Forster, the recently appointed Secretary of State for War, and Lord Lansdowne, Foreign Secretary and Leader of the House of Lords, stated in the most official manner that the commission had exceeded its terms of reference with these recommendations and that no such advice would be taken.²¹

There was a third committee which perhaps played the most important part in this bureaucratic inquiry into military preparedness. The War Office Reconstitution Committee was chaired by the remarkable Lord Esher, who, though he held neither high office nor military rank, was perhaps Britain's most influential adviser of Governments on defence policy during the Edwardian period.²² A member of the Elgin Commission, Esher had submitted a supplementary paper to that committee entitled 'War Office Reform', which was published as an appendix to the full report. His new appointment gave him influence to effect those changes outlined in his earlier

paper. His colleagues were Admiral Sir John Fisher, the First Sea Lord, and Sir George Sydenham Clarke, the first secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence and, at this time, Governor of Victoria, Australia. 'The Triumvirate', as they were called, were appointed to formulate plans to modernize the operation of the War Office and to counteract the damaging criticisms which had been heaped upon it. They advised the abolition of the office of Commander-in-Chief and the creation, in its place, of a true General Staff. In addition, they recommended the appointment of an Army Council, modeled on the Board of Admiralty, made up of the highest-ranking officers of the Staff and the members of the Government responsible for the War Office. A full complement both of offices and officers was raised to begin these and other changes, meant to put the British Army on an equal footing of organization, if not size, with their continental brothers.²³ The initial reforms were begun in 1905, by Letters Patent and Orders in Council, thereby avoiding submission for the approval of Parliament. The Balfour Government was close to the end of its troubled lifespan, and even such directorial methods did not provide sufficient time to do more than begin the creation of a modern military machine.

The years of the Balfour Government were not a time of encouragement for British patriots. The reports of the aforementioned and other investigative committees had revealed that the nation's defence posture was inadequate. The organization of the high command of the Army was outdated, the supply and distribution machinery of the War Office was rusty and the capacity of the recruiting department to raise troops of sufficient mental and physical capacity was weak. Arthur James Balfour had many burdens, of which this was but one. Britain's isolation was no longer 'splendid', if it ever had been, and the restructuring of foreign policy to gain useful allies was a concern of high priority. Furthermore, despite the great costs, both in money and controversy, he supported the efforts of Admiral Fisher to overhaul the strategy, training and technology of the Navy.

Balfour had two successive War Secretaries, and each attempted to bring in a suitable reform plan for the Army. St John Brodrick favoured remaking the home Army into two distinct units of three corps each. The purposes of one unit were to be the defense of the Empire and, in emergencies, foreign intervention, while the other group of three 40 000-man corps was to serve as a home defense reserve. His designs to shorten terms of service and increase pay

made him the victim of criticism from a retrenchment-minded House.²⁴

Brodrick's failure to inspire sufficient support for his plan led to his replacement in 1903 by Hugh Oakley Arnold-Forster, who wished to return to a pre-Cardwellian system of long-service regulars for foreign and imperial service, supplemented by an overhauled reserve force for home defense. Like his predecessor, Arnold-Forster was unsuccessful as, in the end, his plan pleased almost no one. The necessity of raising military pay in order to attract enlistees to an extended term of service made it expensive, and the prospect of overhauling the traditional reserve forces outraged thousands of weekend soldiers who protested that the Yeomanry and Volunteers did not require reorganization on the Arnold-Forster model. The fall of the Balfour Cabinet in December 1905 simply provided to the still-born reforms a decorous excuse for interment.²⁵

Despite the immense efforts made by A. J. Balfour and his Cabinet in three years in office, they were unable to solve all of the problems which faced them. With their party split by the Tariff Reform campaign of Joseph Chamberlain, the Conservative Government gave over to their Liberal opponents, among other things, the unfinished matter of army reform. Before considering the work of the great War Secretary, Richard Burdon Haldane, it would be well to consider the ideas on this subject of certain men who did not occupy the front benches in Parliament.

IV

On 26 February 1902, a meeting was held at Apsley House, the London residence of the Dukes of Wellington. Present, among others, were Col. J. E. B. Seely, a Tory backbencher who was destined to become a Liberal War Secretary; Leopold Amery, soldier and publicist; Leopold Maxse, editor of the *National Review*; Sir Clinton Dawkins, banker and disciple of Lord Milner; Lord Hardinge, diplomat and statesman; and Lord Newton, who had inspired the meeting.²⁶ The host, the third Duke of Wellington and the grandson of the Iron Duke, proposed that they form a permanent organization called the National Service League in order to press for the passage into law of compulsory drill in schools for boys and compulsory military service for young men. Thus was founded the body which for the next dozen years was at the centre of pro-conscription agitation in Great Britain.²⁷

The Duke became the first President of the League, and George F. Shee, a self-proclaimed Liberal Imperialist and author of the controversial *The Briton's First Duty: The Case for Conscription*, was appointed Secretary. Offices were opened at Dacre House, Victoria Street, Westminster, and a journal, the *National Service Journal*, was planned. Dues were fixed at one shilling per year, and the League set about convincing the electorate of the advantages of conscription on the continental model. Within two years the organization boasted of a celebrated, if not a large, membership, including Field Marshal Lord Wolseley, Rudyard Kipling, Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, the Bishop of Chichester and the Dukes of Argyll and Westminster. Lord Derby became Honorary Vice President in 1904, the same year that a ladies auxiliary was formed.²⁸

Due to its failure to generate enthusiasm – or members – Wellington's call for genuine conscription was reduced over the next few years to a demand for mandatory training for all young men aged 18 to 22 – two months under canvas, followed by annual drill periods of two weeks in each of the following three years.²⁹ This program, however, was a compromise between the diehard conscriptionists and those who favoured compulsory training on the Swiss model. There was some confusion about the actual program of the League in this early period, particularly in light of the fact that during the year 1905, the *National Service Journal* ceased regular national distribution due to its excessive cost. In 1906, a new magazine, the *Nation in Arms* replaced it and remained in print during the period up to the War.

These first years in the lifespan of the League cannot have been happy ones for George Shee, who was charged with daily operation of the association, or for his fellow ideologues. It was stigmatized by its critics as a small band of militarist peers, half-pay colonels and cranks. During the year 1905, however, the National Service League began to break free from the isolation of the political fringe, and in the decade which followed its membership grew to more than 250 000.³⁰ The change in the League's fortunes was due largely to Lord Roberts's agreement to assume leadership of the group. Earl Roberts of Kandahar was Britain's most beloved soldier in the early years of the twentieth century. He had served as Commander-in-Chief in India, Ireland and South Africa; he held the Victoria Cross as well as most of his country's other major decorations. When he returned from the Boer War he was hailed as his nation's saviour and voted a grant of £100 000 by a grateful Parliament. 'Bobs Bahadur' was retired from his post as the last Commander-in-Chief of the

British Army with the implementation of the recommendations of the Esher Committee. His popularity still immense, he was bundled off to become the sole salaried member of the Committee of Imperial Defence. In January 1905, the old soldier entered the political controversy over military reform. To the great annoyance both of Balfour and the beleaguered Arnold-Forster, he did so by publishing an article entitled 'The Army – As It Was and As It Is', in a popular journal of opinion which frequently served as a forum for national service views.³¹ Therein, Roberts sought to redefine the British context of national service:

Compulsory service is, I believe, as distasteful to the nation as it is incompatible with the conditions of an Army like ours, which, even in peace time, has always such a large proportion of its units on foreign service. I hold, moreover, that the man who voluntarily serves his country is more to be relied upon as a good fighting soldier than he who is compelled to bear arms.

Having thus severed himself from any connection with continental conscription, the Field Marshal suggested that the best way to prevent the need of ever requiring true conscription was to ensure that the Regular Army enlisted a sufficient number of men of healthy physique and keen mind, suitably prepared through mandatory training:

Men of all classes, who, for one reason or another do not care to serve in time of peace, must be prepared to undergo such a modicum of training as will make them useful as soldiers when called upon by their country for personal service in time of need.

Roberts's coming forth, while it annoyed the Cabinet, brought an immediate response from the governing committee of the National Service League, who requested that the old soldier accept their presidency. While he did seriously consider the offer, seeking the permission both of King Edward and the premier, he declined in the end. His reason was that he sensed that the membership was not willing to abandon any claim on compulsory service as it was known on the continent.³²

Disappointed in his hope that his essay might force the hand of the Balfour Government over the matter of national service, Roberts again courted controversy. In August, he addressed the London Chamber of Commerce at the Mansion House, taking as his subject

the Boer War and military preparedness.³³ He reminded the assembled City men of the difficulties the nation had faced in raising 300 000 troops, and of the need created virtually to denude the nation of Regulars. He posed a question: What would occur if a similar imperial war happened again with the same manpower results, only to be followed by a simultaneous European conflict involving British interests? He gave an answer which recalled the January article: The sole guarantee of the defence of the home islands when the Regular Forces were out of the country was a prepared citizenry. His only expressed hope of achieving that goal depended upon the implementation of a program of compulsory military training.

The next two months found the 73-year-old Field Marshal in the eye of the storm in Westminster which blew up around his public statements.³⁴ Finally, on 7 November, in the absence of the Prime Minister, Roberts presided over the Committee of Imperial Defence. He had provided for them a memorandum of six pages which explained his analysis of the weaknesses of the Government's successive military reform plans.³⁵ Referring to the findings both of the Elgin and Norfolk Commissions, he called for the establishment of cadet training in the schools for boys and for mandatory training periods for youths of 18 and 19, with annual riflery training until the age of 30 years. Knowing the Government's displeasure with his plan, he also announced his resignation. In writing to his friend and admirer, King Edward VII, he expressed his desire to take up the presidency of the National Service League. Despite having risen to his high place through concentrated effort and disciplined ambition, Roberts was a simple and modest man. Like Lord Kitchener, his subordinate in South Africa who enjoyed similar acclaim during the early years of the Great War, he was not a great speaker. Unlike Kitchener, he did not present an imposing figure which could command a room. One of his greatest admirers wrote of him:

If I were asked to name Lord Roberts' highest intellectual quality I should say unhesitatingly that it was his instinct. And if I were asked to name his highest moral quality I should say, also unhesitatingly that it was the unshakeable confidence with which he trusted his instinct. . . . What gave him his strength in counsel, as in the field, was the simple modesty of his confidence.³⁶

One may ask, at this juncture, of what was he confident? The answer is in two parts. First, he was certain that his country was vulnerable to attack by invasion, most likely by Imperial Germany.

Second, he had become convinced that the crumbling Conservative Government of Arthur James Balfour was unable or unwilling openly to address the issue. It was during the months between the publication of his January article and his Mansion House speech in September that he drew such a conclusion.

In 1903, before Roberts's retirement from the Army, the Committee of Imperial Defence had conducted an inquiry into the possibility of an invasion of Great Britain. This was the initial study during the pre-war period of the so-called 'Bolt from the Blue' theory – that is, an invasion by a force large enough to carry out serious operations but small enough to elude interception by the fleet.³⁷ The number of such a force was set at 70 000 by Roberts's response to an inquiry in the CID.³⁸ The findings of the study, printed in November, were that such an invasion would be impossible.³⁹ Within the next two years he would begin a campaign against these conclusions which was to occupy him for the remainder of his life.

His January 1905 article was meant to spur further discussion of defence, and in that regard it was a success. In May, the Prime Minister revealed on the floor of the House of Commons the conclusion of the 1903 study; and Roberts interpreted, quite correctly, that Balfour wished his listeners to assume that the then-Commander-in-Chief was in full agreement with those findings.⁴⁰ Even worse, in Roberts's eyes, was the implication that the navy could be entrusted with total responsibility for home defence, regardless of conditions. Balfour did not go so far as to say 'the fleet is there, sleep in peace'. However, he did share the Admiralty's feeling, seconded by the CID, that mines and submarines were sufficient insurance against invasion even in the absence of the capital ships of the Fleet.⁴¹

Roberts and his followers were not confident that mines and submarines were an adequate substitute for the home defence force which they sought. From December 1905 until his death in the early weeks of the World War, Lord Roberts made it his cause to keep these concerns before the British public and made the National Service League his instrument. His message would always be the same: the security of the home islands depended upon a reserve force of trained citizens, ready when the Regulars were called away; and, he stressed, the only viable method of raising such a force was through the implementation of mandatory service.

He was not in the end successful. However, during the nine years of life remaining to him, he was materially responsible for increasing

the National Service League from a small extremist association on the fringe of politics, to a national pressure group of size, audacity and influence.

2 Conscription Controversy

I

Lord Roberts had faced and defeated many enemies in his long career, and his impressive collection of decorations was more than just a record of courtesies extended toward a commander of high rank. In his seventy-third year, however, he was to face a new and terrifying opponent, an enemy mysterious to him in many ways – public opinion. After his Mansion House speech, as he prepared to begin his national-service campaign, a peer with more experience in the political wars could not resist chiding him for taking up a cause doomed before the electorate because of the deadening impact of the very word ‘conscription’¹

There is no record that Roberts was in the least deterred by Lord Rosebery’s gentle chaffing, but there is no doubt that the point made by the former premier was correct. Anyone who dared lead the nation in the direction of compulsory service was swimming against the political current. Arguments based upon national security and economics and patriotism had done Joseph Chamberlain little good in his herculean efforts to make his Tariff Reform campaign a popular movement, and the political master of Birmingham had few peers in manipulating public opinion. Even Roberts’s friends might have wondered if the old soldier’s last campaign was to be as quixotic in result as, many of them perhaps thought, it was in intent.

Herbert Henry Asquith, later to demonstrate that he also had few equals as a master of public opinion, wrote of the issue of national service in the years before the First World War:

It would have split the Cabinet, split the House of Commons, split both political parties, and split the nation; if indeed that can be described as a split which would have been regarded as the vagary of a minority insignificant both in authority and in numbers.²

Asquith's primary point, that the issue of compulsory service in virtually any form was politically dangerous, is well taken. It did not become law until the Great War was eighteen months old. Yet, at the same time, the historian of the British conscription movement is confronted frequently with the following view of another observer of this period, Caroline Playne, who wrote in 1928:

Probably there was no other propaganda pre-war organization which permeated the social life of England to the same extent as the National Service League.³

Miss Playne, in her frequently cited *The Pre-War Mind in Britain*, also addressed the matter of the breadth of League activity in terms equally hyperbolic. 'The National Service League,' she wrote, 'carried its propaganda into every nook and corner of England.'⁴

Each of these authorities was partially correct; yet each is also misleading. The National Service League could not be 'a minority, insignificant both in authority and in numbers' while at the same time be said to have 'permeated the social life of England' like no other single-issue pressure group. As we shall see, the League grew to be much more than just another 'cave' of extremists. None the less, it will become equally plain that it never 'permeated' the society and politics of its time sufficiently to overcome opposition to its goals. Its campaigns in the decade before the War, however, are both helpful and instructive in understanding the conscription controversy after August 1914.

II

The acceptance by Lord Roberts of the presidency of the National Service League lent to that organization a sort of legitimacy which had previously been denied it. There is no doubt that this was a principal factor in the increases in membership which the League enjoyed. By 1907 it boasted 10 000 members; by 1909, over 32 000; by 1910, 62 000; and, as we have seen, by the eve of the War, it claimed 270 000 members.⁵ Certainly the twists and turns of British foreign relations during this period played their parts in these increases. Without the Field Marshal serving as its symbol, however, there is little doubt that the League would have been hard-pressed to survive and prosper long enough to enrol members who joined, for example, as a result of the 1908 naval estimates controversy or the 1909 or 1911 North African crises.

Instrumental in persuading Roberts to take up his new responsibility was Lord Milner, the former proconsul and zealot of empire.⁶ Milner also lent his unquestioned administrative and fund-raising talents to the League in these years.⁷ Soon after the League gained Roberts's leadership, the Tariff Reform movement lost its own guiding hand, as Joseph Chamberlain was incapacitated by a cerebral hemorrhage soon after the 1906 election. Milner assumed a much greater significance among many of the supporters of that imperialist creed, as a replacement for the lost leader.⁸ While not an active Tariff Reformer, Roberts did oppose the Irish Home Rule agitation, and this brought him even closer to Milner, who fervently shared that opinion.

Important to understanding pro-conscription feeling in this period is that Milner's connections to Roberts and the League came to encompass an important body of imperialists: Halford Mackinder, the geographer; J. L. Garvin, editor of *The Observer*; Sir Clinton Dawkins; Sir Henry Birchenough; Waldorf Astor; L. S. Amery; all these were admirers of Milner who also became League supporters. It was the last named, Amery, who explained in 1905, in an essay entitled 'Imperial Defence and National Policy', that the plan of the National Service League had been accepted as the defence policy of the Tariff Reformers.⁹ Just as Milner was a link between the National Service League and the Chamberlainite Imperialist movement, so did Amery serve as a nexus with the Fabian Society, through his membership with Sidney and Beatrice Webb in the Coefficients Club. This group of twelve self-appointed experts on domestic, foreign and defence policy met regularly, from 1902, to discuss issues of national and international politics. Several members of the body were also Tariff Reformers or members of the National Service League. They served to intermingle their ideas of military policy with Fabian notions of the degeneration of the national physique, for example, or Liberal-Imperialist (Sir Edward Grey and R. B. Haldane were both Coefficients) ideas of empire and social reform.¹⁰

Amery formed another dining and discussion society in 1904, the Compatriots, which was made up entirely of Tariff Reformers – most of them Milnerites.¹¹ This second of what H. G. Wells called 'open conspiracies' also served, as did the Coefficients Club, as a centre of argument and propaganda for 'new imperialist' reform — including mandatory military service.

L. S. Amery had founded the Oxford Branch of the Fabian Society during his undergraduate days, thus beginning his association with

the Webbs.¹² Whatever else it was at this time, the Society was certainly an unorthodox collection of socialists. Enthusiastic as they were for extended mandatory public education, for social legislation leading to their concept of a 'national minimum' and for the cross-fertilization of political ideas with other rogue reformers, it is no surprise that the Fabian Society itself flirted with some form of mandatory training, combined with a broader curriculum in the state-funded secondary schools.¹³

As they saw that raising the school-leaving age was capable of decreasing unemployment as well as increasing literacy, the Webbs no doubt saw the benefit in mandatory military drill as much in increasing discipline among the young and improving the national physique – an attack on the 'sottishness' they saw everywhere in society – as it was an investment in security.¹⁴ We have seen above that this idea appealed to Baden-Powell and his fellow enthusiasts of the youth movement. While Lord Milner or the Tariff Reformers showed little enthusiasm for boy-scouting or socialism, the circle of ideas did close somewhat in these arguments favouring mandatory service of one sort or another. The proconsul outlined to Leopold Maxse a proposed speech, in February 1907:

My own line will . . . be the absolute independence of the case of general service of any particular immediate theory – 'blue water' or the opposite – German menace or no menace. I shall in ten minutes repeat my two old points, viz. that (1) whatever happens & whoever may be the ultimate enemy, a people wh. can fight will prevail in the long run over a people that can't. & (2) even if they never fought, the trained people would still prevail in *peace* by virtue of its greater grit and all-round efficiency.¹⁵

While rather warlike in tone, Milner expressed quite plainly the pro-conscription arguments of the believers in efficiency: regardless of the form of compulsion, whether the Webbs' secondary-school drill, Roberts's mandatory training or Milner's 'general service'. the notion shared by these and other self-proclaimed reformers of various stripes was that mandatory service was an abstract benefit to the nation and its people, independent of the issue of national defense. J. St Loe Strachey, editor of the *Spectator* and a warm supporter of Roberts's plan, defended his own position by arguing that conscription could serve as a vehicle of social engineering capable of at once improving the physical condition of the many and

better integrating them into society. It was, he wrote in 1907, simply 'one of the most powerful moral agencies at our command'.¹⁶

III

If there was evidence of acceptance for national service ideas among certain British intellectuals in the pre-War years, there was less so among the working classes. The National Service League was able to boast of great increases in its membership during this period, but it did not succeed in enrolling large numbers of working-class members. Despite constant attempts to interest the masses in their message through contests and reduced membership fees, the League never became a true mass movement. The reactions of the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party, which did not equal in ferocity the position of the Independent Labour Party on the issue, was consistently hostile to any form of conscription.¹⁷ Despite Lord Roberts's attempts to unite the desire for social reform with the 'privilege' of service, labour opinion was not moved. The National Service League, despite the growth of its numbers, remained a soundly middle- and upper-class association.¹⁸

Cast in the roles of pugnacious exceptions to the rule, however, were several self-declared tribunes of the people who did dare openly to espouse national service. The most significant of these was Robert Blatchford, the editor and proprietor of the *Clarion*. In 1908, Blatchford published a series of articles meant to alert his readers to what he perceived to be the danger of German militarism and aggression. They earned him only a thorough debunking by the mainstream labour leadership. Undeterred, in the following year, after travelling in Germany, he wrote another series published this time in Northcliffe's *Daily Mail*, under an arrangement fostered by Blatchford's old friend Fenton McPherson of the *Mail*. Later reprinted in a hugely successful pamphlet, these essays spelled out both his sense of the Germany military menace and his prescription for survival: full-scale conscription with two full years of service for young men, compulsory secondary school training and an immediate vote of £50 million for the Navy.¹⁹

Blatchford, unlike most socialists, had been a soldier, having risen to the rank of sergeant in the 103rd Dublin Fusiliers, and he credited barracks life with having taught him to better himself. Like the 'open conspiracies', to borrow Wells's phrase, he too advised that discipline and organization would better prepare working-class lads for a life of

achievement. Robert Blatchford later turned against conscription, but only because during the labour unrest of 1912 he came to fear that the propertied classes might employ such an army against the masses.²⁰

An unlikely ally of Blatchford was Henry Mayers Hyndman. A strange amalgam of Marxist socialist and British imperialist, Hyndman had founded the Social Democratic Federation and had quarrelled with virtually every leading light in the working-class movement at some time or other. This son of a wealthy mercantile family joined the former sergeant in the 1908–9 campaign sparked by the *Daily Mail* articles, calling for a great 'Citizen Army' and an expanded Navy as insurance against German militarism. A letter is preserved in the papers of Leopold Maxse, written to the right-wing editor by Hyndman:

It may interest you to know that the SDF has formulated a Bill for a genuine 'National Citizen Army' which makes military training compulsory on every citizen.

No doubt he took pleasure in adding:

If, as I hope & believe, things will get hot here before I go over to the majority we shall probably be shouldering rifles on opposite sides. But at any rate we don't want the Germans to come over to keep the peace between us.²¹

Blatchford and Hyndman did not sway the official organs of labour opinion; nor did Will Thorne or Harry Quelch or the others who made up the small band of labour proponents of compulsion. Working-class opinion as expressed within the Labour Party or the trade unions or the labour press indicated the poverty of conscriptionist thought among that large segment of society. The majority of working men and women in these years were not socialists, nor did they believe in Keir Hardie's pacifism or Hyndman's class warfare, but neither were they compulsionists. Beginning in 1907, virtually any of the *Annual Reports* of the Labour Party or the issues of the *Daily Herald* or *Labour Leader* give adequate evidence of opposition to one or more of the elements of the National Service League program: conscription, increased armaments and secondary-school training.²² In 1912, when foreign affairs contained much which caused anxiety among the Great Powers, *The Nation* defined the patriotism of the National Service League as 'fear, force, hatred and

vain-glory' The real enemy, it continued, was poverty – not Germany.²³

IV

As there was little support for national service among the leaders of the working classes, so the two great parties of the State offered slight prospect of taking up the conscription cause. The Liberals – Radicals and Imperialists alike – were disinclined to break so totally with their Gladstonian past as to support conscription. Once in office, after December 1905, even those few Liberals who might have been willing privately to consider such a revolutionary tenet were unwilling to say so in public. The Liberals had been out of office for most of a generation and had returned to the Government only when the Tariff Reform campaign branded the Tories with the stigma of economic apostacy. Few Liberals were willing to chance a similar fate by challenging voluntarism – at least, as we shall see, by challenging it openly.

Among the Conservatives there was, perhaps, more hope. While Arthur Balfour and his two successive War Secretaries had rejected peacetime conscription, there were many prominent Conservatives who were adherents of the National Service League, and we have already noted the prominence of NSL ideas among the Tariff Reform wing of the party. In 1911, after six years in opposition, the Conservative Party threw off the patrician leadership of Balfour and took as its chief Andrew Bonar Law. Like Balfour (or, for that matter, the late Liberal leader, Campbell-Bannerman) he was a Scot, but there the likeness ended.

Bonar Law was a private, even a cold, man, with modest ambitions and few sources of pleasure. He had become Leader only when the deadlock between the two logical successors to Balfour, Austen Chamberlain and Walter Long, made his compromise candidacy a necessity. He believed in Ulster Unionism, Tariff Reform and the unity of the Tory Party; and he had no intention of jeopardizing the issues which gave purpose to his political life by announcing his adherence to compulsory service. He was a friend and admirer of Lord Roberts, and the two certainly shared a passion for Ulster Unionism. As we shall see, he also believed that conscription was the most efficient way for Britain to raise an army. However, he did not take up the cause of mandatory service in the pre-War period.

Lord Roberts himself did not particularly long for the partisan embrace. Despite the knowledge that Tories constituted the majority among his followers, he wrote to Maxse in 1912: 'Please don't speak as if the National Service League were a Unionist body. It was formed in 1902 when the Unionists were in power, and they are as much to blame as the Liberals that we are still without a National Army.'²⁴ Roberts favoured an all-party solution to the conscription question – an answer which was to be secretly put forward in another context by the Liberal Chancellor, David Lloyd George, in 1910. The former Commander-in-Chief wrote to Bonar Law in the last full year of peace before the World War: 'Nothing but agreement between the two parties will, I fear, get the country to accept Universal Military Training.'²⁵

'Little Bobs' claimed that the two 1910 elections had brought 177 MPs into the House of Commons who were supporters of the National Service League.²⁶ While a recent study has shown that when this statement was made, 1911, no more than 80 Members were on the rolls of paid-up members of the League, it is quite likely that many more expressed their support to Lord Roberts than were willing to take a public position favouring compulsion.²⁷ It is certainly true that at no time in the years before the War did 177 MPs vote in favour of a conscription bill of any kind.

The former Conservative Secretary of State for War and Foreign Secretary, Lord Lansdowne, served as Tory leader in the House of Lords both under Balfour and Bonar Law, and he advised the latter in 1912, regarding the issue of conscription: 'I am under the impression that most of the *data* for this purpose are readily available.' Bloodless facts, however, were not the most important issue to Lansdowne, as he continued: 'and that what we have to consider is the political rather than the military aspect of the case'.²⁸ Roberts was surely not the only soldier ever to rail against what he considered the perfidy of statesmen. Surely had he known the remainder of Lansdowne's message it would have confirmed his worst suspicions:

Whatever may be our external policy, we must contemplate the possibility of a prolonged war . . . My own opinion is that some form of compulsory service is inevitable; but such a proposal would, I am afraid, not be popular, and I am not at all sure that as a Party we are prepared to back it up.

Lansdowne's mild expression of doubt was, in reality, an expression of surety. He knew full well that a party which had still not

healed the wounds of the Tariff Reform struggle or the loss of three successive elections, and which was embroiled in the Irish Home Rule unrest, had no need to take up another highly contentious issue. While many Tories, like Lansdowne, may have considered mandatory service 'inevitable' – unlike their Liberal opponents – they were no more inclined as a party to take up the cause than were the supporters of the Government.

V

The issue of conscription for the army in the years before the First World War was not entirely new in modern Britain. One student of the Victorian army has written:

Because recruitment continued to falter during the [last forty years of the nineteenth century], many others came to feel that a form of coercion might be inevitable. Lord Roberts and Lord Wolseley each took up this view, and the army reforms introduced by St. John Brodrick during the Boer War clearly threatened conscription unless the necessary men could be raised by voluntary means.²⁹

The British Army, however, in the long Victorian period maintained both the Empire and their reputation without any encouragement that compulsory service would receive even token consideration. The potential increased costs of such a radical departure were thought exorbitant, for example. The major argument which was levied against any effort to increase the size of the army in peacetime was a geopolitical one: Britain was an island – more properly an archipelago – separated from her continental adversaries by the Channel and the North Sea. This 'Blue Water' theory of defence was unavoidable throughout the century.

Perhaps the most unalloyed axiom of 'Blue Water' reasoning applied to the home islands and the Empire was laid down by the Colonial Defence Committee, which advised defence officials throughout the Empire in 1896:

The maintenance of sea supremacy has been assumed as the basis of the system of Imperial Defence against attack over the sea. This is the determining factor in shaping the whole defensive policy of the Empire, and is fully recognized by the Admiralty, who have accepted the responsibility for protecting all British territory

abroad against organized invasion from the sea. To fulfil this charge, they claim the absolute power of disposing of their forces in the manner they consider most certain to secure success, and object to limit[ing] the action of any part of them to the immediate neighbourhood of places which they consider may be more effectively protected by operations at a distance.³⁰

The purpose of the Regular Army, then, was plainly limited. Its uses were laid down in 1888, in a memorandum by Edward Stanhope, then Secretary of State for War. They were, in descending priority: the maintenance of public order; Indian defence; garrisoning fortresses and coaling stations; and, finally, home defence.³¹ The Stanhope Memorandum foresaw no real possibility of employment of the army in any other place or fashion. Hence, particularly with the Cardwell reforms in place, the Army was seen as a kind of scarlet-coated police force for home and Empire. The Fleet, on the other hand, was synonymous with survival.

The nineteenth-century Army had conscientiously adapted to the inevitable, and was 'noted for its gallantry, its self-indulgent amateurism, its loyalty and its well-bred bearing' ³² As Nicholas d'Ombrain has written, it was not noted for its efficiency or its systematic planning; but given its decidedly secondary place behind the Senior Service it was no wonder that it appeared to be more concerned with 'playing the game' than was the British Navy. Admittedly the Army game was also potentially deadly, but the stakes were decidedly lower.

After the experience of the 1899–1902 war, or perhaps because of renewed interest in military reform, the manner of men who led the British Army underwent a change. The so-called 'thinking' soldier, blooded in that brief but pivotal conflict, began to replace the older commanders who had accepted subservience to 'Blue Water' ideology. These 'New Professionals' had experienced command under Roberts's leadership, and, like him, they considered the latest round of army reform too important to be left to politicians. John French and Douglas Haig, future commanders of the British Expeditionary Force; James Grierson; future Commander of the Imperial General Staff 'Wully' Robertson; and Ian Hamilton – Roberts's favourite general – all fit into this new mold to a greater or lesser degree.

None, however, exemplified the new style like General Henry Hughes Wilson and Lt.-Col. Charles à Court Repington.³³ Each had served in South Africa, and Wilson returned to the War Office to

become, first, Assistant Adjutant General and, in 1907, Commandant of the Staff College, Camberley. In 1910 he became Director of Military Operations. Wilson was both a close friend and unshakeable admirer of Marshal Ferdinand Foch, and through the future Allied Supreme Commander, Wilson became captivated by the French Army. He gained notoriety while at Camberley by his intemperate support both of conscription and the need to commit British foreign policy to intervention on the side of France in any future war with Germany.³⁴ So certain was he that therein lay the future of the army, that he became rather famous for his bicycle tours of the French–Belgian frontier – the venue, he presumed, of a future war.

There is a certain irony in linking the names of Wilson and Repington, for the two had entered the army at about the same time and were widely presumed to be rivals for its most glittering prizes. Repington's military career was shattered, however, in 1902, for he was forced to resign his commission when his love affair with the wife of a British diplomat, Sir William Garstin, became public. There is no doubt that the brother officer who revealed the affair to their superiors was Henry Wilson.³⁵ Repington, faced with finding a new career, turned to his pen, and in a few years' time he became the heir to Spenser Wilkinson as Britain's most influential military journalist.

Repington, like Wilson, saw a great continental war on the horizon, and, though he was not as thorough an admirer of the French Army as was Wilson, he felt Britain must take her place in such a conflict at the side of France. Although Repington's personal feeling for Roberts did not approach that of his former rival, he and Wilson served as well-connected conduits of information for the President of the National Service League. The General leaked military secrets with abandon, and the journalist – especially after he joined the staff of *The Times* in 1904 – fed political information he gleaned from his influential sources.³⁶

Henry Wilson was not the only soldier of high rank who favoured some form of compulsory service to raise a force better suited to the dreams of the 'New Professionals'. Wilson's arguments were extreme only in the power and openness with which he expressed them, and his career did not suffer as a result even of that. One reason for this was that most of his colleagues and superiors agreed with him. Haldane's predecessor, Arnold-Forster, had noted that the Army Council had been 'solidly conscriptionist from its earliest days',³⁷ and

Sir Charles Harris, civilian head of the Financial Department at the War Office, wrote to General Sir Ian Hamilton in 1910: 'There are indications of a tendency in certain quarters here to test very severely all statements made, if they appear to be obstructions on the road that leadeth to Conscription.'³⁸ Two months later, Hamilton wrote to Lady Roberts that the entire General Staff favoured conscription on the 'Continental basis'.³⁹ The 'thinking soldiers' found mandatory service palatable because they presumed to predict the nature of the next war. At least so far as Britain was concerned, given the anti-conscription political climate, they engaged in a desperate game. Favouring commitment to France, as expert counsellors to the Government they began as early as 1906 to formulate a policy in which risk could be minimised only if Britain raised a large army. This required mandatory service; the General Staff well knew it, 'and none worked harder for it in secret. But come what may, they were determined to get to Europe with or without the necessary means.'⁴⁰ The coming of the Entente with France gave them what they longed for, the possibility of alliance with a great continental power.

VI

In December 1905 the Liberals took office for the first extended period since Gladstone's 1880-85 administration. They constituted a Cabinet of remarkable talent. While the Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, was a Gladstonian Radical near the end of his career, he gave office to an unusually able group of younger men: among the Liberal Imperialists Herbert Henry Asquith became Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Edward Grey went to the Foreign Office and R. B. Haldane took the War Office. Among the most promising younger radicals were David Lloyd George, who became President of the Board of Trade, and the recent convert from Conservatism, Winston Churchill, who took the Under-Secretaryship at the Colonial Office.

Among the concerns which the Liberals inherited from their Tory predecessors was the new diplomatic arrangement with France. The Liberals were quick to learn that the colonial agreements and settling of spheres of influence in Morocco and Egypt, signed in April 1904, were viewed by Imperial Germany as a threat. In the celebrated Morocco Crisis, in March 1905, Kaiser Wilhelm II landed in Tangier and challenged the strength of the bonds between the new Entente partners. Quite logically, the French turned to London for support.

It is clear that Lansdowne, before he left the Foreign Office, had pledged diplomatic support to France in her quarrel with Germany, and it is likely that some 'unofficial' discussions between military attaches occurred.⁴¹ However, the regularized staff talks desired by the French have their origins in several connections: informal meetings between Maj.-Gen. James Grierson, then Director of Military Operations, and Maj. Huguet, the Attache at the French Embassy; encouragement by Sir George Clarke, Secretary to the CID, and the ever-present Lord Esher; and skillful midwifery by Lt.-Col. Repington.⁴² Most important in the origins of the talks, however, were Grey and Haldane. The former, supported and advised by his friend, the War Secretary, gave his approval to discussions between Grierson and Huguet over the possibility of British intervention in the case of a German attack on France, and the 'official' talks began on the same day the Conference at Algeiras began, 16 January 1906. Despite denials to the contrary by his colleagues, there is no evidence that the Prime Minister was fully informed of the nature of the talks or of Grey's role in authorizing them and similar conversations with the Belgian General Staff.⁴³

The student of pro-conscription thought in these years need only note here that once begun, though they would ebb and flow in intensity, the staff talks continued until the eve of the Great War. Coupled with the Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese War, which blunted the Russian threat to India, and the heightened concern in Britain for German 'aggressiveness', this combination of events and perceptions came to be used by the 'New Professionals' in the Army as primary evidence that Britain's security lay with intervention on the continent at the side of the French Army.⁴⁴ In light of this climate of opinion and the undeniable fact that the Liberals were expected to present their own plan for army reform, the ground was prepared for a renewed controversy involving mandatory service.

Richard Burdon Haldane, like Campbell-Bannerman and Bonar Law, was a Scot. A middle-aged bachelor of philosophical bent, he had been partly schooled in Germany and enjoyed a life-long affection for German philosophy. He was by profession a chancery lawyer, a KC of great reputation and success, with ambitions to become Lord Chancellor. However, along with Grey and Asquith, Haldane had intrigued to remove Campbell-Bannerman to the House of Lords, and, when the plan failed, his claim on the Wool Sack evaporated. The Prime Minister had little affection for his countryman, and he put him down for the War Office, the grave of

ambitions – and reputations. ‘We shall now see,’ he was reported to have said, ‘how Schopenhauer gets on in the Kailyard.’⁴⁵ Considering the resources given him, even ‘C.-B.’ came to admit he got on very well indeed.

Haldane knew nothing of soldiering and had expressed few opinions on army reform. Speaking in late November 1905, he did indicate that the incoming Government would complete the unfinished task of reforming the army. ‘I don’t envy the man,’ he said, ‘who has got that job.’⁴⁶ Within a few years, however, he was to learn and accomplish much. Taking as his military private secretary Col. Gerald Ellison, former Secretary to the Esher Committee, Haldane set out to complete the creation of a general staff. He also brought to life the Officers Training Corps in secondary schools and universities, a plan which at least partially fulfilled Lord Roberts’s goal of making mandatory military drill a part of the higher-education curriculum.⁴⁷

Of more importance, perhaps, was his reorganization of the Regular Army and the reserve forces. Faced with the need to reduce costs and improve efficiency, Haldane reorganized the Regulars into two concentrated parts. Approximately one-half of the total manpower would be garrisoned throughout the Empire, with the largest number in India. The remaining seventy-two battalions would form the new Expeditionary Force of six divisions, with four brigades of cavalry, along with reserves and ancillary support troops, equalling approximately 160 000 men. Terms of service were to be seven years, with five years in inactive reserve status – a midway compromise between Brodrick’s short-term and Arnold-Forster’s long-term plans.

As a second-line force to which the Regular Army could look for drafts, he also recast the old Militia into a Special Reserve, requiring six-year enlistments – all but six months of which were to be spent on inactive status. The reserve was to be liable for foreign service, and plans were laid to attach them to Regular battalions in case of war. Special Reservists were obligated to spend a fortnight each year under canvas and were, when in uniform, on the same pay as Regulars.

Haldane’s plans were carried out expeditiously: the General Staff was transposed from an idea into a reality, the OTC was organized, the Expeditionary Force was brought to life, and the Special Reserve followed its lead. Haldane’s best defence against critics of his reforms was to argue from the evidence that he was, in fact, reducing the cost

of the Army. However, as Arnold-Forster in his time had discovered that the second-line force could be a greater source of difficulty than he first imagined, Haldane was to discover that his plans to reorganize the Yeomanry and Volunteers came to be the focus of the attention of Britain's conscription ideologues.

Britain's second line of defence was a poorly organized, badly equipped and led conglomeration of Militia, Yeomanry and Volunteers. The first body, as we have seen, was largely absorbed into the new Special Reserve to augment the Regulars. The other two organizations, part-time mounted and infantry units, respectively, presented other problems. They were expensive and inefficient, yet each had developed its own traditions and, as Arnold Forster had discovered, had its own rather influential constituency. Haldane's plan for these auxiliary forces was to combine them into a Territorial Army, giving local enlistment and organizational responsibilities over to area committees with the Cromwellian name of Territorial Associations, under the leadership of the Lords Lieutenant. By this method, the local tie was maintained and the pride of the notables preserved, while financial and other fundamental control remained with the War Office.

Young men between the ages of 18 and 24 were to be enlisted for four-year commitments, which required them to spend no more than a fortnight under canvas each year. Enlistees were advised to associate themselves with rifle clubs – then enjoying great popularity and praised independently both by Roberts and Haldane – to maintain the level of their marksmanship.⁴⁸ The Territorials were divided into fourteen divisions, with the former Yeomanry becoming their fourteen cavalry brigades, and received at least the skeletal beginnings of a staff organization for their intended 315 000 troops. The undoubted disadvantage of the new Force was that while it was more efficient and thus less wasteful than those which it replaced, it would be of little use in time of war until after several months of training.

Haldane had to restructure the Army within a Liberal framework which demanded economic retrenchment and voluntarism, and he did so. Unlike his adviser, Col. Ellison (or Repington, for that matter), he was an admirer both of Germany's culture and of her army. His plan was much in the spirit of the militarism of the decade, to his military secretary's displeasure, in the sense that it stressed the virtues of military organization and citizen sacrifice and heaped praise particularly on the nation's youth who answered the call. Haldane and Ellison were in agreement, however, in opposing

Repington, the National Service League and the 'New Professionals' of the army in their desire to implement conscription. The War Secretary, in fact, was an orthodox 'Blue Water' man in regard to defence theory and did not conceive of his second-line army as primarily a home defence force.

A day after his speech announcing his plan in the House, Haldane quoted the Prime Minister regarding opposition to these reforms: 'Beat them we must,' Campbell-Bannerman said, 'for an agitation for Compulsion is the inevitable result of failure.'⁴⁹ The Secretary of State for War, however, had no aversion to the abstract idea of mandatory service. He said to the London Rifle Brigade in 1909, 'In all probability [the slacker] would find a short and sharp Act of Parliament passed, if war broke out, compelling him to train himself.'⁵⁰ Haldane had no fear of wartime conscription – as he had no fear that the specialized training of the 'Terries' would come too late for them to aid their Regular comrades after war was declared – but he never accepted the idea of compulsory service in time of peace. As a member of the General Staff recorded years later, '[he] was always sympathetic, but I could never persuade him that the only way to be sure his 14 divisions of the Territorial Force would be "in being" and raised for war would be by introducing Compulsory Service for Home Defence'.⁵¹ Although in 1912 he did allow the General Staff to study the possibility of peacetime conscription, he remained unpersuaded.⁵² The National Service League and the interventionists on the General Staff, if they were to get the compulsory-service force they sought, would not obtain it with the willing co-operation of Richard Burdon Haldane.

VII

The position of the National Service League in regard to Haldane's Territorial Army was a difficult one. Roberts and his advisers, in the first place, regarded the reform as an improvement over the old disorganized system. In the second place, the leadership of the Territorial Associations, with the Lord Lieutenant foremost, were the natural constituency of the League.⁵³ Lord Roberts hailed the formation of the 'Terries' as 'the greatest step forward in the direction of a national army which has ever been made officially'.⁵⁴ He pointed out, however, what his League saw as the fatal flaw in the plan, which was the fact that the Territorial Force would be, by Haldane's own admission, virtually untrained until war came.

The time necessary for training the Territorials to readiness was presumed to be as much as six months, begun with the declaration of hostilities. Roberts's reply was to ask what would happen if the Expeditionary Force were called away to fight. Furthermore, he inquired if Haldane had taken into account the possibility of the Fleet being either engaged outside of the Channel or crippled in battle. Roberts had taken into consideration those possibilities and concluded that the Territorial Force would be unable to defend the country during the dangerous interval when it was a barely trained militia.

In addition, the League criticized Haldane's provision that left liability for foreign service to the individual discretion of each member of the Force. The War Secretary presumed that there would be mass volunteering in the event of hostilities; the League questioned that optimism and wondered aloud why such arrangements were to be put aside until the advent of war. Finally, Roberts and his cohorts took the line that the territorials were unlikely to raise the full number of their establishment – which, in the end, turned out to be true – and continually returned to the argument that if virtually all young men were trained under compulsion, the Regular Army would have millions from whom to choose. Those needed among the remainder would be entrusted with home defence.

While Haldane and Lord Roberts were to cross swords from time to time over the issue of the Territorial Force, they generally did so in a most civil and even friendly manner. 'You and I,' the Field Marshal wrote to the War Secretary, 'both desire to see the Army recognized by the people of this country as a part of their national life. We only differ as to the means by which that object can be obtained.'⁵⁵ This attitude of co-operation even saw Roberts agree to serve as honorary Colonel-in-Chief of the new National Reserve, organised in 1910 by Haldane as an adjunct to the Territorials.⁵⁶

In the final few years before the World War, however, the two adversaries were to clash openly on the issue of national service, and the debate was to center on the defence issue that more than any other caught the public eye: the possibility of foreign invasion. Given the nature of the war which came in 1914, the clash of wills produced little light; in the climate of opinion we have discussed, however, it gave off a very great deal of heat.

3 The Invasion Debate

I

The National Service League and its doughty president, Lord Roberts, looked upon the reforms of Richard Burdon Haldane rather as the last experiments in military voluntarism. In fact, the public position of the League in 1907 and 1908 on the Haldane reforms, particularly regarding the Territorial Force, was quite mild. Lord Roberts published a selection of his speeches, most written by Leopold Amery and the Scottish historian, John Adam Cramb, under the title *A Nation in Arms*, and frequently addressed the idea that mandatory service was the missing element needed by the 'Terries', but he let others lead public criticism of the Haldane plan. There was no shortage of censure, however – most of it from elements of the press.¹

While he wholeheartedly supported the idea, Roberts left to the Liberal Member for Stratford-on-Avon, Thomas Kincaid-Smith, the task of offering and defending an amending bill to Haldane's Territorial and Reserve Forces Act which would have grafted mandatory service in the Territorials to the recent reforms.² A member of the National Service League and a veteran of service in South Africa, Captain Kincaid-Smith was to leave the Liberal Party in 1909 to stand for re-election as an independent compulsory service candidate. His 1908 bill was defeated by an overwhelming margin on its first reading, and his independent re-election campaign suffered a similar fate. The effort of the Earl of Wemyss in the Lords a few weeks later, to revivify the Ballot Act under which conscripts were once chosen by lot, also met with failure.³

Efforts such as Kincaid-Smith's, though they were close to the heart of Roberts, were quite 'unauthorized' in the eyes of the leadership of the National Service League. The reason they enjoyed only polite support from the League is that Roberts and his followers had their own schemes for modifying Haldane's well-laid plans. The first of these was to raise again the issue on which Balfour's Government had passed in 1903: the question of foreign invasion.

II

The National Service League had employed the question of home defence as an argument to achieve mandatory service since its earliest days, and once Lord Roberts became its leader this was virtually its sole public justification of the policy. As we have seen, Roberts had aided the publication in 1906 of the sensationalistic *Invasion of 1910*, which enjoyed considerable success both in sales and in raising the level of public anxiety. The assistance given William Le Queux was no accident, for it was simply an early step in a new campaign to convince the nation of its vulnerability to invasion from abroad.

Lt.-Col. Repington played a crucial role in the League plan by returning again and again to the issue of invasion in the pages of *The Times*.⁴ At the same time, officials of each of the great British steamship lines, Cunard and White Star, assisted the League by gathering data in regard to 'questions of tonnages, harbour depths and other cognate matters', all useful to argue British vulnerability to cross-Channel assault.⁵ In the same vein, Lord Roberts allowed Lord Lovat to take the lead in raising the issue of the flaws of 'Blue Water' defence theory by barraging the First Lord, Lord Tweedmouth, in the upper house.

The general staff of the invasion crisis was a self-proclaimed 'Committee of Four': Roberts, Repington and Lovat, joined by the Conservative MP. Sir Samuel Scott. In the summer of 1907 they sought out the leaders of the Opposition, Balfour and Lansdowne, as well as the former First Lord of the Admiralty in the last Government, Lord Cawdor. Their reasoning was, in the first place, that the 1903 invasion study had been done under Balfour's aegis, and if he could be convinced to announce that circumstances had greatly changed since the last inquiry, the credibility of those conclusions could be compromised. Second, since the previous study had envisioned invasion by the French, they insisted a new investigation was needed to take into effect the changes in international relations: France, of course, was now a friendly power and Germany the potential adversary. Third, they hoped to take advantage of the fact that the Army experts appointed to any new investigative committee would almost inevitably support the call for compulsory service. Finally, the 'Committee of Four' had recruited to the League the Commander of the Channel Fleet, Admiral Lord Charles Beresford, as a counterbalance to the powerful opinion of Admiral Fisher.⁶

Balfour's predicament was this: Haldane's Army policy was unpopular among many Tories, while the Fisher Navy program, begun under Lord Cawdor, was highly regarded. Balfour, a 'Blue Water' man himself, was responsible for the findings of the 1903 inquiry, yet he could plead that the changes stressed by the conscriptionists made for an altered basis for judgement. In the end, despite his unease over the situation, he chose to take advantage of the opportunity to provide opposition to the Government, and agreed to intercede for Roberts and his friends. He promised only to set in train inquiries into reopening the invasion issue.

Under these conditions, then, he wrote to the Secretary of the CID, Sir George Clarke, on 20 July 1907. Pointing out first the correctness of the 1903 findings given conditions at the time, he referred to notes provided by Roberts's 'Committee of Four':⁷

The Notes, however, contain certain statements which suggest that under existing conditions, this natural assumption requires re-examination; and perhaps the most useful preliminary to such re-examination will be to compare the French position as explained in the Memorandum of 1903 with the German position as indicated in the Notes of 1907.

He then pointed out detail differences of military capacity of the two potential enemies in the two years:

It must be acknowledged that, if the accompanying Notes are accurate, the position of Germany in regard to each one of the particulars is now far more favourable than was the position of France in 1903.

The former Prime Minister and founder of the Committee of Imperial Defence then turned to his summing-up:

In ultimate analysis, the question of invasion on its naval side is, from the invaders' point of view, a question of secrecy and speed. .. The point to be determined is whether these differences in favour of Germany, if shown to be real, constitute any sufficient ground for taking a less sanguine view of our immunity from serious invasion than seemed justified but a short time since.

Campbell-Bannerman was seventy-one years of age and in failing health; and his position was a difficult one. If he ignored the challenge of the Leader of the Opposition he was naked to accusa-

tions of failing in his duty to protect the nation. If he gave in and reopened the invasion question, he provided a forum for the conscriptionists he hated. In the end, hands tied, he submitted the matter to a sub-committee of the CID. H. H. Asquith took the chair, and with him were Lords Tweedmouth, Esher and Crewe, Sir Edward Grey, Admiral Fisher and Captain E. J. W. Slade – the Director of Naval Intelligence – all solidly ‘Blue Water’ in allegiance. Also appointed were the Commander of the General Staff, Sir Neville Lyttelton, and Generals Sir William Nicholson, John French and John Ewart. Considering the fact that the Prime Minister was obliged to include generals among his committee, he could not have chosen better: Lyttelton was a conscriptionist, but he was a matter of months away from handing over his command to Nicholson. The latter, in turn, also believed in mandatory service, but his sense of political realism dampened his zeal. French was neutral on the issue and Ewart hostile. The committee was not likely to bring in a finding acceptable to Roberts or Repington.

Sitting between November 1907 and April 1908, the committee met sixteen times and heard evidence from, among others, the Committee of Four, who made the case for the threat of invasion.⁸ Because of the controversy surrounding the issue and the deep commitment both of the witnesses and of the examiners, the hearings were tense and often acrimonious. Fisher, for example, hated Repington and was furious that the issue was allowed to rise at all, and Cawdor supported him fully. Esher attempted to play the role of peace-maker, since he favoured both conscription and a predominant navy, and usually failed. Asquith, who would become Premier in April, developed an antagonism toward Repington because of the latter’s combative testimony, and Haldane frequently demonstrated his acute sensitivity to the need to divert criticism of his reforms but also combat naval supremacist thinking. Tweedmouth, whose sanity was shattered by the pressures of his office soon after this episode, attacked Roberts and his allies with a petulant irritation which embarrassed the decorous Esher.⁹

The NSL case for vulnerability to invasion postulated a ‘bolt from the blue’ – in the phrase of the day – that is, a strike without warning from a force of up to 150 000 men. The explanation of how such an untoward event could come to pass was that a small but technically superior German fleet, given the British Navy’s occupation elsewhere, would be required to gain control of the Channel for a mere forty-eight hours to carry it off. A Scottish landing would be most

likely, Repington argued in his testimony, and a beachhead could be expanded into a full-scale conquest, given the fact that general war would surely call away the British Expeditionary Force. The former intelligence officer conjured up terrible recollections of South Africa to convince his listeners of the jeopardy in which a nation left without Regulars and dependent upon the new Territorial Army would find itself. Leopold Maxse painted the appropriate picture in the *National Review*:

The German Army, once landed could easily live on the country. . . holding up for ransom the rich cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Leith &c. The British Fleet would be compelled to blockade its own coast closely to prevent a fresh landing being effected at some other point. During this blockade it would be unable to watch the German Fleet, and events might rapidly march in such a way as to compel England to make peace even before having been defeated in her own country in pitched battle.¹⁰

The Committee was unimpressed, and both Army and Navy professionals among its members vied to debunk Repington's scenario. The naval case was predicated on two points. In the first place, Repington had failed to take into account the implausibility of preparations for a large invasion going undetected by intelligence sources. Second, Captain Slade countered his arguments on the viability of a cross-Channel invasion – Repington's expertise was clearly limited to land warfare. The General Staff's case was that only small raids of no more than 12 000 men were remotely plausible. Invasion on the scale imagined by Roberts and Repington would be impossible.

In their findings, published in October 1908, the committee dismissed the entire case brought before them.¹¹ They concluded that invasion was impossible so long as Britain maintained her naval supremacy; without it, 'whatever may be the strength and organization of the home force, the subjection of the country is inevitable' Furthermore, in the unlikely event of small raids, by no more than 70 000 men, even if the Regular Forces were abroad in time of war, 'the new organization of the army at home will secure that there will be left in this country during the first six months a sufficient number of regular and other troops to deal with a force of 70 000 men'. Under pressure from Haldane, who had only just set out to prove the viability of his new Territorial Force, the General Staff acquiesced to

the assumption that two divisions of the BEF would be retained at home for the first six months of war.¹²

The invasion inquiry aided setting in train certain developments which, in the end, had little to do with invasion but much to do with warfare. It revealed that inter-service co-operation was nugatory and demonstrated the certainty with which the Army was set on intervention on the French side when the 'inevitable' next war began. It showed how rigidly 'Jackie' Fisher and his fellow admirals were determined to stick to their own still-born plan for coastal assaults against Germany, in the event of war. Finally, it prepared the way for the triumph of the Army planners over their Navy counterparts in the half-dozen years of peace which remained. The invasion study did not singularly bring about these ends, but it did provide the venue for what came to be the parting of the ways between Navy and Army war plans. As Fisher and his successors became increasingly annoyed with Army influence and withdrew more into themselves, they abandoned the field to the general Staff. Dominated always by the 'New Professional' viewpoint, the generals continued to press the continental commitment.

There was no doubt, however, that whatever the long-range results of the inquiry, it was a defeat for the National Service League zealots. Undeterred, they did not intend to allow the anxiety over invasion to die down, nor, for that matter, did other news which greeted the readers of the newspaper press. The entire year of 1908, for example, saw the rising emotional furor over *Dreadnought* building, cresting only in early 1909 with the final victory of the 'we want eight – we won't wait' movement. March brought renewed Franco-German confrontation over Morocco, this time at Casablanca, not laid to rest until the Hague Court of Arbitration had completed its intercession in February 1909. The summer, as the invasion inquiry was summing up, witnessed the greatest naval maneuver in history, as Fisher directed his fleets of 270 ships and 70 000 sailors to and fro in the Atlantic – to the immense enjoyment of British jingos and the fury of their German rivals.

The autumn brought the report of the invasion committee and the Austrian annexation of the Balkan *sanjaks* – and another war scare. These two events came in October, a trying month, for it brought also the affair of the Kaiser's interview with the *Daily Telegraph* of London, and the neurotic young monarch's self-sketch as the Anglo-philic emperor of a virile and angry Anglophobic nation.

In 1908, *The Invasion of 1910* continued to sell well, as did Robert

Blatchford's articles for the press, reprinted in pamphlet form. Letters appeared in most of the leading newspapers that denounced the presence on the east coast of vast numbers of German agents, posing as tourists or waiters.¹³ The popularity of German bands alarmed some Britons, for there were those who spread the gossip that these innocuous-looking brass ensembles were, in reality, secretly laying concrete foundations for siege guns.¹⁴ The following year saw the huge success of du Maurier's *An Englishman's Home*, as the anxiety over invasion continued. One historian of the period has written:

The following year – 1909, the year of the great dreadnought scare – Lord Curzon joined in the call for compulsory national service to guard against invasion which, if successful, would result in 'the crumbling and collapse of society itself. . . the utter subversion of the old order of things to which we are accustomed'; and in the Commons the Secretary of State for War was asked to comment on the rumour 'that there are, in a cellar within a quarter of a mile of Charing Cross, 50 000 stands of Mauser rifles and 7½ million Mauser cartridges'. The grave calculations of the Committee of Imperial Defence thus took place against a background of xenophobic paranoia which does much to explain the enthusiasm – almost the relief – with which the outbreak of war appears to have been so widely greeted in 1914.¹⁵

Public concern over the possibility of invasion peaked in the early spring of 1909, with the resolution of the political crisis over the naval building program; 'the "economists" or "pacifists" as they were variously designated, emerged from the fray with the shadow of victory, the "Big Navy" men with the substance' ¹⁶ Lord Roberts and his fellow national-service adherents, however, showed not the slightest intention of giving up the fight.

III

Proposed legislation had been brought before the Houses of Parliament in the early twentieth century designed to establish some form of national service; note has been taken of the independent efforts of Captain Kincaid-Smith and of the Earl of Wemyss in 1908. On 19 May 1909 the first compulsory-service bill prepared by the NSL was put before the House of Lords by Lord Newton, in the absence of Roberts, who was celebrating his golden wedding anniversary on that

day.¹⁷ The bill steered a wary course around the matter of continental conscription and called only for mandatory service in the Territorial Force for all young men reaching the age of eighteen. Service would be for four months, with fifteen-day camps mandatory in each of the subsequent three years, and liability to call-up for an additional eight years, 'in case of imminent national danger'

Maxse's *National Review* lent its customary aid and comfort to the effort, and after assessing the provisions of the bill noted the potential benefits to the nation contained therein:

In this way, with a minimum of cost and a minimum disturbance to civil life, and with the maximum advantage to the whole community, because the effect upon health, physique, and morals. . . would be incalculable, you would create a powerful national Militia. . . which would convince aggressive neighbours that we are no longer the line of least resistance, and the German cyclone would burst elsewhere.¹⁸

Roberts, a realist despite his enthusiasm, understood that the bill had no future if the leadership of the Conservative and Unionist Party were hostile to it. Overcoming his aversion to partisan involvement, he wrote to Balfour in April, a month in advance of the bill's introduction:

I have always hoped that the question of National Defence could be kept free from Party politics, but I cannot help thinking that this is no longer possible. . . Like all other Great Questions [it] will have to be settled on Party Lines, which is greatly to be regretted.¹⁹

The Field Marshal did not know that at the same time the ever-vigilant Haldane was conspiring with Balfour in order to make certain that the Opposition did not take up Roberts's bill.²⁰ While the former premier was willing to act in co-operation with the NSL leaders in instituting the 1908 invasion study, he would not allow his party to be associated with even the mildest conscription bill. In fact, Balfour had helped to insure the conclusions on invasion of the CID by submitting a paper debunking the entire 'bolt from the blue' theory and reasoning that the danger of invasion was greater after a war had begun.²¹ Roberts probably did not know of this secret paper, as he was also unaware that on 14 July Balfour dined with Haldane, Ellison, Lt.-Gen. Douglas Haig and Maj.-Gen. Archibald Murray,

and pledged that the emerging structure of the Army would be continued when his party returned to office.²²

Roberts's National Service (Training and Home Defence) Bill was defeated on its Second Reading, on the motion of the Duke of Northumberland, seconded by St John Brodrick, Viscount Midleton, by a vote of 123 to 103. Despite warm support from Milner and Curzon, the combination of the two Front Benches was far too powerful for the conscriptionist party. It is interesting to note, however, that ninety-eight Conservative and Unionist peers passed into the lobby in support of the bill. Conscription remained a significant issue among Tories, and almost one hundred had taken a public position in favour of it. Hence, even though he advised against passage of the measure, Lansdowne was careful to pay generous tribute to the patriotism and to the work of the League. He did not even quarrel with the principle of the bill, merely with its timing. The former Foreign Secretary, Roberts's biographer has noted, 'considered that the country was not yet ripe for the change and that for the Upper House to pass the Bill was by no means the best manner to prepare people for it' David James has added, quite rightly: 'In this he was probably correct.'²³

IV

The myth of the Edwardian Indian Summer, that brilliant construct of gentlemen of gravity and ladies of refinement enjoying the final pleasures of an elegant and fey society, has not survived the scrutiny of historians.²⁴ The years before the Great War, whatever they might have been, were no garden party, and there was no shortage of participants in public life at the time who so declared. Col. Lonsdale Hale wrote in the *Nineteenth Century and After*, in October 1910:

The word 'Unrest' in the heading of this article is in frequent use in the journalism of the day. We have our attention called therein to the 'Unrest' in India, Egypt, the Near East, or, it may be, in the Labour market. In fact, 'Unrest' seems becoming epidemic on the surface of our planet. Of 'Unrest' there are many kinds and species. On its dangerous side it may be the presage of grave trouble. But sometimes as here, it is the necessary preliminary stage of a growing recognition of the needs of the immediate future, and the inadequacy of the means at hand to respond to them; with, at the same time, neither light nor leading, or, at best,

divided counsels as to the betterment. It is in this condition that the vital subject, our National defence, stands with the general public at the present time. ...The very fairly reliable ditch, which secured us insular isolation but a few years ago, is rapidly shrinking in size; we are not merely coming closer to the European Continent: that Continent is coming unpleasantly closer to us.

Col. Hale believed that unrest, particularly regarding questions of national defense, need not be unprofitable, so long as the country seized the opportunity to institute national service. There were certainly many other sources of tumult from which one segment of society or another, like Col. Hale, hoped to claim its political prize: the Radical Budget of 1909 and the resultant constitutional battle between Lords and Commons, the suffragette outrages, the strike movement, the Home Rule struggle, all would fit neatly into his 'epidemic' of unrest. In 1910 there were, of course, two elections which wiped away the huge Liberal majorities of 1906. Leaving the two major parties virtually equal in strength, they ensured that the Liberals were thereafter dependent upon Irish Nationalist and Labour votes; the entrance into the House of more than 120 additional Opposition Members also guaranteed that the Conservatives would offer a more formidable resistance to the Government in the Commons.

Large numbers of the new Tory MPs were either members of the National Service League or were at least counted as friends by Roberts and his allies.²⁵ The Field Marshal and his counsellors were convinced that if they could keep the idea of conscription before the public and Parliament their chances of securing it would grow; they held unswervingly to that course. They were inclined to see, like Col. Hale, a certain unrest in defence thinking as profitable for their own purposes. Even before these electoral changes, the *Saturday Review* noted:

There can be no question that the idea of compulsion is growing. Take the case of the Norfolk Commission, which issued its report some five years ago. Its recommendations that compulsion might be necessary was then treated by Parliament and press alike as childish and irresponsible; and nearly all our leading journals derided it at the time in no measured terms. What a change, when practically every leading journal of the day now openly speaks of it as being quite within the region of practical politics! Indeed, all that is required to make it a fact is to get the nation to realise that it

must come; and when this happy consummation is reached the battle is well-nigh won.²⁶

Very few, even among the best informed in public life in Britain, would know at the time that the Chancellor of the Exchequer would consider mandatory service 'within the region of practical politics'

The impasse created by the Lords' rejection of the 1909 Budget, complicated by the heated emotions raised by the Home Rule controversy and the unprecedented balance between the two major parties in the Commons, led to the calling of a conference of the leaders of Government and Opposition in the summer of 1910. King Edward VII had died in early May. The truce was conceived by J. L. Garvin, editor of *The Observer*, as an attempt to employ the period of mourning to the constructive end of hammering out a settlement of major differences between the great parties. There were twenty-one meetings between June and November, but there never emerged the genuine possibility of agreement.²⁷ John Grigg has written of this episode:

The Conference was, therefore, an essentially futile exercise, tediously prolonged and more or less doomed to fail. But it was neither the only nor, indeed, the most significant political activity during the truce. There was a far more interesting 'play within a play', initiated by Lloyd George.²⁸

The Chancellor of the Exchequer composed a scheme in August, meant to settle all of the major issues which divided the two parties by setting up a kind of National Government. Germane to our interest is the fact that the Radical Chancellor, mistakenly assumed to be a pacifist because of his pro-Boer past and his 'economist' stance on military expenditure, considered the defence question along with social reform, Ireland, and foreign and economic policies. Pointing out in his preamble that 'none of these great problems can be effectively dealt with without incurring temporary unpopularity' Lloyd George came very close to the position of the National Service League regarding questions of raising the best Army by the most efficient method:

I doubt whether we are getting our money's worth in any direction. I am strongly of opinion that even the question of compulsory training should not be shirked. No Party dare touch it, because of the violent prejudices which would be excited even if it were suspected that a Government contemplated the possibility of

establishing anything of the kind. For that reason it has never really been looked into by statesmen in this country. The Swiss militia system might be considered and those liable to serve might be chosen by lot. We have no such need as Continental countries labour under of organizing an Army of 3,000,000 or 4,000,000 for defence; but we might aim at raising 500,000 armed militia to supplement our Regular Army to provide against contingencies.²⁹

Like Roberts, he envisaged mandatory service on a scale closer to that of Switzerland than of France or Germany. Also, as the old Field Marshal had recently been reminded, he saw that it would be highly unlikely that such a plan would pass into law as a party issue. The truce and the conference ended in November, without issue, doomed by Balfour's declaration that 'I cannot become another Robert Peel in my Party.'³⁰ Always a poor party man, the future prime minister, as we shall see, would play an important role in bringing conscription to Britain in the context of a different coalition.

About the same time that the Chancellor's proposal was being laid to rest, the conscription issue gained attention in another sphere, this time in full view of the public. Stung by criticism of flagging enlistments in the Territorial Force and fearing that this would strengthen the case for compulsion, Haldane authorized in November the publication of *Compulsory Service*, a lengthy memorandum written by General Sir Ian Hamilton, for which the War Secretary provided a lengthy introduction.³¹ An instant sales success, a second edition was hurried into print in early 1911, further buttressed with a supportive appendix by Admiral Sir Arthur Wilson, the First Sea Lord. The controversial book laid out the case which Haldane himself continually argued: mandatory service would raise an army inadequately trained, overly expensive and too large to fit the peculiar defence needs of an insular island power. What was called for, Hamilton stressed, was a great navy and a mobile strike force, supported by a volunteer citizen force available for emergency service – in short, the 'Blue Water' navy, the BEF and the Territorial Force, already in place. As Haldane himself had done, Hamilton left the door to wartime conscription slightly ajar; but there was no doubt that the book was meant to spike the guns of the NSL. Brisk sales of its two editions cheered the War Secretary. He rejoiced in the attention it received, and his correspondence is full of his ebullient letters discussing the good effects upon public opinion of *Compulsory*

Service. He wrote to Hamilton, recently appointed Inspector General of Overseas Forces: 'I think we ought to be able to kill the National Service scheme. I think we have rained shot and shell into [Roberts] and I do not intend to let him alone.'³²

To Lord Roberts, who still enjoyed amicable relations with Haldane, the publication of *Compulsory Service* was all the more unfortunate because of his long and close relationship with Hamilton, 'the lieutenant above others whom Roberts most loved and trusted' His biographer has written: 'Excepting only the death of his son, this was the most cruel personal blow that Roberts ever suffered.'³³

The aged Field Marshal was not too taken aback by the personal betrayal to counter-attack with the publication in the spring of 1911 of *Fallacies and Facts: An Answer to 'Compulsory Service'* The book consisted of three independent essays, written by Roberts, Amery and Professor J. A. Cramb, and it countered the earlier work by arguing that the acceptance of wartime conscription validated the principle but failed to take advantage of its practical benefits: the time to train armies was in advance of war. Second, *Fallacies and Facts* attacked the view that mandatory service was a purely defensive philosophy and asserted that masses of men, in possession of basic military skills, could supply what a small volunteer force could not – sufficient numbers to maintain an attack posture over a long period. Perhaps most telling was the point which made the Haldane–Hamilton book almost as controversial as its subject, that is, that the War Secretary had employed the services of two high-ranking serving officers in political debate in public print. Though Haldane denied the charge of officially employing his service experts for partisan activities, he found himself hard-pressed to defend himself against the onslaughts of his critics.³⁴

The storm raised by the two publications marked a distinct change in the conscriptionist campaign, for after 1911, criticism by NSL sympathizers of the Haldane reorganization of the military – particularly of the Territorial Army – became far more severe. As he so frequently did, the Field Marshal turned to Maxse's *National Review*, where he wrote of the Force:

Its strength (in 1912) in round numbers should be 314,000. It is 264,000. It should have 11,300 officers. It has 9,500. Finally 40 officers and 6,703 men were absent from camp this year without leave. We ask any open-minded man whether a force thus constituted is an army at all. .. We bring these facts forward

simply in order to demonstrate the impossibility of constructing a defensive Army equal to this country's needs on a basis of voluntary enlistment.³⁵

There was little doubt about his purpose, as he wrote to the editor of the *Daily Express*, R. D. Blumenfeld, some months later: 'The time has come when the people must be made to understand the weakness of our Army, and the Territorials to feel that they can be of no use until the Force is raised under a system of Compulsory Military Training.'³⁶

The late summer of 1911 had brought a third crisis over Morocco, and 1912 witnessed the wars of the Balkan League and Turkey. In domestic politics it brought the heightening of tensions over both Ireland and labour relations. Still unable to wring compulsory service out of Parliament, even in this tense atmosphere, the National Service League called upon their aged leader to take the primary place in a great speaking campaign; the time, as he had told Blumenfeld, had indeed come to unleash the final assault on voluntarism.³⁷ His most famous address was given in Manchester, in late October 1912, in which he spoke about international relations and the German Empire:

Now, gentlemen, at the present day, now in the year 1912, just as in 1866 and just as in 1870, war will take place the instant German forces by land and sea are, by their superiority at every point, as certain of victory as anything in human calculation can be made certain. 'Germany strikes when Germany's hour has struck.' That is the time-honoured policy of her Foreign Office. That was the policy relentlessly pursued by Bismarck and Moltke in 1866 and 1870; it has been her policy decade by decade since that date; it is her policy at the present hour.³⁸

'The interest of the great mass of the British public, quiet and largely inarticulate,' Denis Hayes has written, 'can be dated from October 22nd, 1912.'³⁹ The Manchester address and the speaking tour caused a furor which exceeded even the controversy over the competing conscription books, and it continued until the War. Roberts, by this time in his eightieth year, showed no signs of reducing his arduous schedule of public speaking or his duties with the League. Likewise he showed his usual good humour at the criticism he received in the anti-conscriptionist press.

The Committee of Imperial Defence, in 1913, again was directed to study the possibility of invasion. Unlike the 1908 affair, this investigation was prompted not by NSL propaganda but by the intervention of Col. J. E. B. Seely, who had replaced Haldane at the War Office in 1912. Seeley asked for another study, citing the theory that small raiding parties had replaced the previously assumed 70 000-man force as the real danger to Britain.⁴⁰ As in the previous case, a sub-committee of the CID, chaired by Asquith, conducted hearings between January 1913 and May 1914 and, also as before, concluded that there was no danger of full-scale invasion but reiterated that 'the equivalent of two divisions' of Regulars should remain at home in time of war.⁴¹

The youthful Conservative Member for the Wells Division of Somerset, George Sandys, attempting to take advantage of the climate of opinion of these months, brought in a conscription bill similar to that of 1909. While fully supported by the League, the bill was killed by the speaker, on a technicality.⁴² Save for a quixotic attempt by Lord Willoughby de Broke to pass a bill through the Lords conscripting the sons of the upper classes,⁴³ there were no further attempts to bring the issue of national service before Parliament in this period. Fearing the worst, however, and smarting from the redoubled criticism of the Territorial Army, Haldane founded in late 1913 the Voluntary Service Committee, giving it a rousing start with a great speech at the Caxton Hall.⁴⁴ Like these other efforts, however, this attempt to fight the League with its own methods was soon to become irrelevant and the debate over preparedness brought to a sharp end by the coming of the War.

V

The years 1900 to 1914 witnessed a remarkable struggle over the issue of military compulsion. The various contending sides had employed every weapon at their disposal to earn the approval of the public. There is little doubt that while the National Service League's mild form of mandatory training had gained both adherents and legitimacy during this period, conscription in any form still could not win an election. Not unlike the policy of Tariff Reform, with which it shared many adherents, compulsory service inspired exciting debate and captured the imagination of followers and opponents as few other issues could do. Also like Chamberlain's economic theories, there were, as we have seen, a number of explanations – political, geo-

political, social and economic – for the depth of feeling among the supporters of conscription, about which they were frequently less than candid with the electorate.

The undeniable record of the movement, however, is that it failed to pass any plan of national service into law in the pre-War years. However, the supporters of twentieth-century conscription were more united and more optimistic in the summer of 1914 than at any previous point in their brief history. Furthermore, their voluntarist opponents were well aware of these developments; witness, for example, the founding of the Voluntary Service Committee, coming on the heels of the publication of *Compulsory Service*. Haldane and his fellow voluntarists had much about which to be confident, but they did not underestimate their enemy.

The events of August 1914 gave each contending side a greater enemy, and for a time the differences over peacetime preparedness were, if not forgotten, at least submerged in the greater struggle into which European society plunged itself for the next four years.

4 The Lamps Go Out

I

On 28 June 1914 the unpopular heir-apparent to an ancient but unsteady throne was shot dead in a backward provincial capital of the empire he expected some day to inherit. In these inglorious circumstances began the final chain of events which prefaced the Great War.¹ Archduke Franz Ferdinand was brutally murdered by Serbian-trained nationalists, whose transparent plot gave Austria-Hungary the reason she sought to crush Serbia, drive back Russian ambitions in the Balkans and attempt a consolidation of her tottering and disparate empire. With full German support, she moved, but only very slowly. Revealing before the world what she considered to be the conclusive proofs of Serbian perfidy, on 23 July she issued to Belgrade an ultimatum designed to be a made-to-order *causus belli*. Acting finally a full month after the terrible event, Austria-Hungary had waited too long in carrying out her plan to wage a punitive war while world opinion was still on her side. She stood virtually alone, except for her constant friend, Germany.

Within eight days the distant tragedy became general war. On 28 July, Austria declared war on Serbia, and Russia – self-declared ‘Big Brother’ to the Slavic peoples – mobilized, starting a general trend among the remaining Great Powers. Three days later, Germany demanded a cessation of Russian mobilization and a guarantee of French neutrality in the event of a Russo-German war. Each ultimatum was rejected, and the following day brought the formal declarations of war. The alliance systems were called into play – Germany and Austria-Hungary on one side, France and Russia on the other – with two major exceptions. Italy, whose allegiance to the Triple Alliance was always questionable, stood solidly behind the clause in her treaties which allowed her to remain neutral. Great Britain, the other, was an altogether different case.

The Entente with France and Russia, as has been so frequently pointed out, was an informal linkage rather than a firm alliance. Though a guarantor of Belgium (herself an unwilling belligerent only because her geography put her in the path of her tormentor), Britain was not obliged by any treaty clause to come to the armed aid of either of her friends. As the slow descent into conflict quickened in

late July, Britain seemed anything but decided on war. The Cabinet was divided, the Prime Minister uncertain. He wrote on 31 July:²

We had a Cabinet at eleven and a very interesting discussion, especially about the neutrality of Belgium and the point upon which everything will ultimately turn – are we to go in or stand aside? Of course, everybody longs to stand aside, but I need not say that France, through Cambon, is pressing strongly for a reassuring declaration.

Two days later, with most of the Powers already at war and the German Army on its way through Luxembourg, Asquith revealed his own hesitancy about British intervention:

Happily I am quite clear in my own mind as to what is right and wrong. (1) We have no obligation of any kind either to France or Russia to give them military or naval help. (2) The dispatch of the Expeditionary Force at this moment is out of the question and would serve no object. (3) We must not forget the ties created by our long-standing and intimate friendship with France. (4) It is against British interests that France should be wiped out as a Great Power. (5) We cannot allow Germany to use the Channel as a hostile base. (6) We have obligations to Belgium to prevent it being utilized and absorbed by Germany.

Asquith completed his characteristically understated story of the British decision for war, noting on 4 August:

We had an interesting Cabinet, as we got the news that the Germans had entered Belgium and had announced that if necessary they would push their way through by force of arms. This simplifies matters. So we sent the Germans an ultimatum to expire at midnight requesting them to give a like assurance with the French that they would respect Belgian neutrality. ...The whole thing fills me with sadness. The House took the fresh news to-day very calmly and with a good deal of dignity, and we got through all the business by half-past four.

The decision to enter the War is a subject worthy of more attention than this essay can provide. It may be said, however, that while Britain was not treaty-bound to take part, both the immediate reasons – Germany's brutal invasion of Belgium, or her refusal to consider British attempts at mediation – and longer-term causes made it impossible for Asquith's Government to avoid participation

in the conflict. Among these latter, as we have seen, was the hostility which had grown up between these two Powers in the decade preceding this crisis. Furthermore, there was the popular belief that war without British participation would lead to a German-dominated Europe, a world in which Britain could not flourish. An historian of British foreign policy has recently written: 'It was widely believed that Germany would easily defeat France and Russia and then impose a new hegemony on Europe. . . and it was believed that the choice lay between third-rate obscurity and fighting Germany.'³ Once the 'September Programme' was revealed in the Reichstag, this social-Darwinist vision seemed to have at least some basis in fact.⁴

The decision to 'go in' was made no easier for Asquith and his colleagues by the fact that they were a Liberal Government, involved, until overtaken by these events, in the struggle to settle the Irish Home Rule issue and in bringing peace to the unsettled labour world. Peace and retrenchment, not war, were the natural forte of their party, and four ministers finally offered their resignations. Only two, John Morley, the last Gladstonian, and John Burns, the first working-class Cabinet member, persisted.⁵ The popular leader of radical opinion, Lloyd George, threw in his lot with the war party after the German invasion of Belgium; the popularity of intervention among the people was irresistible to him and to others who owed their places to the electorate.⁶

As the British demand to the Germans that they respect the 1839 Belgian guarantee treaty expired without answer, at 11 p.m. on 4 August, His Majesty's Government found themselves and their nation at war. Asquith, Lloyd George, Grey, Churchill, and Reginald McKenna gathered in the Cabinet Room at Number 10 Downing Street to await the response from Berlin. The Chancellor of the Exchequer wrote in his memoirs of his musings about the great war ministers of the past, as he waited with his colleagues:

In that simple, unadorned, almost dingy room they also had pondered over the problems which had perplexed their day. But never had they been confronted with so tremendous a decision as that with which British ministers were faced in these early days of August, 1914.⁷

Lloyd George, however, wrote with hindsight, for few saw the great conflict ahead – he certainly not among them. The reason was that war in the Victorian era had become more Bismarckian and less Napoleonic; that is, it had come to be thought of as brief, glorious

and cheap. The Prussian wars against Denmark, Austria and France, which had remade the continent, had been all of those things, and many in the nations which made ready for the 'great clash of arms' in August 1914 saw no reason to believe that this conflict would be otherwise. They had failed, of course, to understand the lessons of strategy of the American Civil War, or of technology and tactics in the Russo-Japanese War, or of preparation of the South African War. The British were not the only people who suffered this delusion and expected to welcome their brave lads home by Christmas. They were wrong, totally tragically wrong, and they paid dearly for the tuition to learn otherwise.

II

The Cabinet which now became a war Government remained almost unchanged, save for the addition of Lords Emmott and Lucas to replace the two ministers who resigned. There was one further change, as Lord Kitchener took the War Office. Horatio Herbert Viscount Kitchener, Field Marshal, and Consul-General and Sirdar of Egypt, had returned to Britain in June to receive his viscounty and to propagandize his plan to create an Egyptian Viceroyalty. He never returned to Cairo.

After being literally swept off the packet boat to Calais, on 3 August, the Field Marshal received word from Asquith's secretary that he was to remain in the country and to meet privately with the Prime Minister, presuming war was declared, on the afternoon of 5 August.⁸ Kitchener had no desire either to remain away from Egypt or to serve in an indefinite advisory capacity to the Government, hence only active command or the War Office held any appeal for him. Circumstances were such that he received the latter. That important office had been, since the Curragh incident in March and the subsequent resignation of J. E. B. Seely, without a regular incumbent. The Prime Minister had himself taken the seals in order, he hoped, to reassert Cabinet control over the Army. On the final day during which peace and war hung in the balance, Asquith deputized Haldane temporarily to return to the War Office until a regular appointment could be made.

It was obvious to the Premier that the Opposition and much of the press wanted Kitchener at the War Office, though those opinions did not weigh so heavily with him as did the outpouring of public feeling in favor of the Field Marshal. As promised, Asquith did see him

before the extraordinary war council which met on the afternoon of 5 August and offered him the Secretaryship-of-State. With a certain amount of dread, he accepted and became the first serving officer to hold cabinet office since General Monck in the time of the Restoration.⁹

His appointment was met by most of his new colleagues without enthusiasm and by the Army with indifference. To the people, however, the figure of the Field Marshal was reassuring and his appointment a stroke of genius. He was sixty-four years of age; he was tall and straight and his imperious bearing was intimidating to colleagues and subordinates alike. There was little doubt in the public mind, however, that he was the greatest soldier still on active service. Asquith's daughter wrote, many years later:

He was more than a national hero. He was a national institution. There was a feeling that Kitchener could not fail. The psychological effect of his appointment, the tonic to public confidence were instantaneous and overwhelming. And he at once gave, in his own right, a national status to the Government.¹⁰

This happy judgement appeared hollow within a matter of months, for the appointment was perhaps Asquith's worst of the War period. Kitchener had spent his entire adult life out of the country, and he was unfamiliar both with parliamentary institutions and with the structure of the Army which he had served for a lifetime. Aloof and accustomed to command, he was unable to delegate authority or tolerate criticism. He ruled the War Office in viceregal isolation, refusing to grant audiences to his military or political colleagues, save singularly, thereby avoiding confrontations with group opposition. His passion for secrecy bordered on mania, and even the Prime Minister was frequently kept in the dark about matters concerning the War for which he was ultimately responsible.¹¹

Once he had brought himself to accept Asquith's invitation to take the War Office, 'Lord K', as he was called by admirers and critics alike, interpreted his appointment as a mandate to save the nation. He sought obedience or quiet consent, and he was always prepared to bear down with dismissive remark and piercing look any who disagreed with him. On the occasions when this failed, well aware of the power his symbolic status gave him, he threatened resignation. In the first months of warfare, his overpowering personality held even statesmen in awe. When that magic wore thin, admiration frequently

gave way to mere tolerance, then frustration and, finally, contempt.

Without the formal ties of a firm military alliance, Britain, at least nominally, retained a free hand regarding her intervention in the War. The war council of statesmen and soldiers held on 5 August, then, had been called to decide exactly what was to be done next.¹² As we have seen, the 'new professionals' of the high command knew precisely what they wished to do, and they got their way at that meeting, and after. Curiously, neither of the two men who were to command the BEF in France were in total accord with the plan hammered out by the staff talks of the previous decade. Sir John French wished to hold British forces at Amiens or Antwerp to await developments; Sir Douglas Haig doubted that sending at once a force the size of the BEF was the best decision.¹³ However, the plans evolved through the staff talks to send the BEF to Maubeuge and link hands with the French, won the day. The most significant explanation of why that scheme was ratified is simply that there were no others.

Four infantry divisions and their cavalry complement were dispatched within days, and the remaining two divisions followed soon after, signifying the end of any concern for keeping Regulars at home to stave off invasion. It also insured that for many months there would be no real opposition to Kitchener at the War Office, for most of the strongest minds and wills in the General Staff proceeded to France with the BEF. The reality was that Kitchener *became* the General Staff, for that body simply ceased to function. There was to be no effective CIGS until Sir William Robertson took the post more than a year later, as the three incumbents who were to precede him were simply swept aside by the warlord in the making of strategy and the provision of men and equipment.

While the President of the Board of Education wrote knowingly to his wife at this time that even the dispatch of the BEF did not mean Britain would take a full share in the conflict,¹⁴ he and others like him would learn otherwise in a very short time. A. J. P. Taylor has written of this period:

By going to Maubeuge, the B. E. F. ceased to be an independent force; it became an auxiliary to the French Army, though as time went on an increasingly powerful one. In previous wars Great Britain had followed an independent strategy, based on sea power. In the first World war she lost this independence by accident, almost before fighting had started.¹⁵

III

At his first Cabinet meeting, on 7 August, Lord Kitchener remained silent while his new colleagues discussed the terrible responsibility which they bore. When his turn came to speak, he made clear that his vision was of a different kind of war than virtually all expected. The conflict would not be won at sea, nor could they expect to prevail without facing many bloody battles on the field where the great armies faced each other – in France and Belgium. The war would not be short, nor would it be cheap, in blood or treasure, nor would Britain's contribution be limited to her miniature Expeditionary Force.¹⁶

The Cabinet ministers heard him out in silence, and no doubt many, like Grey, found the prediction 'unlikely, if not incredible' ¹⁷ Kitchener offered no explanation to support his opinion – the reason is he had none. His prediction was, in the words of his most recent biographer, 'a calculated hunch' ¹⁸ At the memorial service honoring the warlord after his death in 1916, Lloyd George observed of him that his mind was like a lighthouse beacon: at times it illuminated things in a blinding clear light, and then it would turn away, leaving only 'inutterable darkness'.¹⁹ No one could be blamed for disbelieving his prediction in August 1914, but the development of the War proved him correct and reinforced his reputation for months to come.

In addition to his comments on the length and scope of the conflict, Kitchener also advised his colleagues to make ready to put into the field an Army of millions of men and to maintain them for several years. His first request was acceded to immediately, and on 7 August the announcement was made that Kitchener wanted 100 000 fresh recruits immediately. Before the month was out, that draft was superseded by another 100 000, and then another, until by January 1915 Kitchener had concluded that he needed virtually all fit men between the ages of 19 and 35 years.²⁰

With the stroke of a pen, the Secretary of State for War would raise entirely new armies, totalling millions, and he would do so without any inquiry into the recruiting apparatus of the War Office he governed. 'Did they remember when they went headlong into a war like this,' he later commented on the Cabinet, 'that they were without an army, and without any preparation to equip one?'²¹ His contempt for the statesmen and officers who had made military policy in the recent past was outdistanced only by his terrible determination to

raise new forces. These new armies would recompense the nation for the failures of those who had gone before him.

When the Norfolk Commission had examined the procedures of the War Office, they concluded that recruitment policies did not provide for rapid expansion of the Army. Many reforms had been imposed on Britain's military machinery, as we have seen, but recruiting procedures at the outset of the World War were little changed from those of the Victorian army of Cardwell's day.²² The Director of Recruiting and Organization, of the Adjutant-General's staff, appointed an officer responsible for recruitment in each of the twelve military districts of Britain and Ireland. Each city and town within the districts had a recruiting depot in the charge of a Recruiting Staff Officer who, in turn, commanded Recruiting Officers and Recruiters, responsible for the actual enlistment of men.²³

Recruiting Officers in all but the major cities were generally adjutants or quartermasters of local Special Reserve or Territorial units or recently retired officers. Recruiters were, more likely than not, pensioners – retired other ranks – who received a bounty of 3s.6d. for each recorded enlistment. Regulations governing the behavior of these men were strict, in order to avoid comparisons with the press gangs of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the years immediately preceding August 1914 this ill-equipped system had been consistently incapable of maintaining the Army at its full establishment. Whether due to the shortened terms of enlistment of the Cardwell and Haldane reforms – requiring a larger number of men to fill the ranks – or to the perennially tight budget of the Recruiting Department, the system was overwhelmed by the advent of the War.

The reasons are not difficult to discover: the declaration of hostilities saw many of the area Recruiting Officers join their Regular, Reserve or Territorial units, frequently leaving no full-time officer in charge of many localities. Second, the procedures for recruiting, after the order for mobilization had been given, consisted of two brief paragraphs in the regulations manual. Finally, farther up the chain of command, officers at the headquarters of the six Commands throughout the nation formerly responsible for recruitment duties were fully occupied with the many tasks involved in mobilization.²⁴ With such a skeletal and overstressed apparatus, and with virtually no established procedures for the task, Kitchener set out to raise his new forces. Even he, though he shared his doubts with

no one, sensed the unprecedented nature of the task. He noted almost two years later:

Armies, it had always been argued, could be expanded within limits, but could not be created in time of war. I felt, myself, that, though there might be some justice in this view, I had to take the risk and embark on what may be regarded as a gigantic experiment.²⁵

Lord Kitchener was without open opposition within the Government or the Army in the early months of the World War,²⁶ and, that being so, he was not prevented from diverging totally from the established military structure of the War Office in raising his new forces. He created the new expedient of Service Battalions, as they came officially to be known; they were universally called the Kitchener Armies, after their creator. Bypassing the Regular Army and the Special Reserve, he called into being new battalions and regiments, all with traditional territorial connections, numbered consecutively with the divisions of the Regular Army.²⁷ Recruitment responsibility he retained within the undermanned and soon to be overtaxed War Office Recruiting Department.

There existed already in the Territorial Force an ideal vehicle for raising non-Regular troops. Recruits for the New Armies enlisted for three years or for the duration of the War, rather than the regular term of seven years; and it became painfully evident early on that the ordinary enlistment machinery could not deal with the vast new numbers. The 'Terries', however, already possessed a decentralized recruiting apparatus in the Country Associations. Despite this advantage, Kitchener ignored the entire Territorial organization. His reasons were intuitive and impressionistic rather than studied, but he clung to them all the same. He mistook the 'Terries' for the French *Territoriaux*, whom he saw perform so badly in the 1870 war against Prussia. When confronted by Amery and Lord Lovat – the pre-War conscriptionists he pressed into service as recruiters – with the need to employ these reservists, he answered: 'Yes, I dare say we can make use of the Territorials later on. But what I must have now are more soldiers.'²⁸

Furthermore, the warlord conceived of the Territorials as amateurs, as playboys, resistant to true military discipline. Extremely sensitive on the subject and unable to tolerate even implied criticism of his decision, 'he invariably replaced officers, whom he suspected of disagreement with his policy, by others who were wholly amenable to his will'.²⁹

There was almost certainly another reason for his militarily questionable decision to reorganize the Army: the Great War called for great gestures, and he had been called against his will to win that war. He meant to bring victory with armies of his own creation, and he took pleasure in the fact that in the popular mind they bore only his name. His biographer has written:

Released miraculously like some eastern jinn from a bottle, and charged with the duty of saving his country, he responded in the spirit of the *Arabian Nights*. With a wave of his baton, he started to conjure new 'Kitchener Armies' out of the ground, formed in his own image instead of in that of Haldane, the clever lawyer, who had been bred in a different stable. The recruits who flocked in their hundreds of thousands to join the Kitchener Armies repaid the inspiration and leadership which Kitchener gave them by meeting a psychological need in his own nature.³⁰

Maj.-Gen. Sir Nevil Macready, then serving as Adjutant-General with the BEF in France, wrote of Kitchener's decision to raise the New Armies that it 'was, in the opinion of many experienced officers, a mistake, an opinion that was later justified by the difficulties in organization and administration, which increased as the war progressed'.³¹ Macready was a confirmed 'brass-hat' and was a stolid defender of the prerogatives of the generals in their battles with the 'frocks', the politicians; hence his criticism of the Field Marshal's decision carries additional weight because it is the judgement of an 'insider'. He continued:

The only argument I ever heard put forward for the creation of this new organization was that the glamour of Lord Kitchener's name would attract recruits, an argument which, if valid, would seem to be a reproach to the sense of patriotism of the manhood of the country. Personally, I am convinced that had the call gone forth to join the Territorial Force the numbers would have been equally large.

Despite all argument to the contrary, Kitchener had his way, and New Armies were to fight Britain's new war.

Rupert Brooke, who had thanked God, 'who has matched us with His hour', upon the declaration of hostilities, wrote to the daughter of the Prime Minister shortly before he sailed for the Dardanelles and his death: 'I had not imagined that fate could be so benign. . . But I'm filled with confident and glorious hopes.'³² This most promising of

the so-called Georgian poets did symbolize a brief period in the early months of the World War. Brooke rushed to war to avoid missing the heroic experience. Like him, thousands did the same, each with his own reason.

On 1 August the officer in charge of the principal recruiting station in London had enrolled only eight men. Monday, the 3rd, was a bank holiday and Tuesday was the day of the ultimatum to Germany. On that day it took him twenty minutes and the aid of twenty policemen to get through the crowds of would-be volunteers to his desk. Working with only minimal assistance from professional recruiters, he attested thousands in the days which followed.³³ This report was not unusual in August and September 1914. The weather was unusually mild, even for late summer; Lord Kitchener's call for recruits went forth on the 7th, and the response was overwhelming, in every sense of the word.

The effects on the recruiting machinery of the War Office of this incredible outpouring of volunteers were twofold. The pre-War shortage of professional recruiting officers, as we have seen, was rendered worse by the fact that many were summoned to their units upon mobilization. Kitchener called, then, on the Lord Lieutenants, and through them all local notables in all communities, to assist in raising his New Armies. Their response was just as frenzied as that of the masses of young men who wished to don khaki. Recruiting committees sprang up all over the nation. With or without official authorization, individuals and groups declared themselves recruiters, and lord mayors, factory owners, members of parliament and patrons of football and cricket clubs vied to raise 'soldiers for Lord Kitchener'. Not the least remarkable example, in the City of Manchester, is given by the historian of the 'recruiting movement', as it came to be called:

To ease the problem [of waiting for enlistment]. .the Lord Mayor of the city marched eight hundred men from the Town Hall to the City Drill Hall where, as a magistrate, he administered the oath of enlistment *en masse*, as 'a morale booster' None had passed any tests, examinations, or interviews, although by this act all had legally become soldiers.³⁴

The result of such examples of hyperbolic enthusiasm can, of course, be presumed. The War Office in the months of August and early September virtually lost control of recruiting efforts.

The second effect of the recruiting movement was the logical outgrowth of the first: the Regular Army had neither facilities nor equipment, nor did it have sufficient professional training officers to deal with the huge numbers of enlistees. The former – encampments and equipment – would take time; the latter – officers – were needed immediately. The Army, then, turned to the 'old dug-outs', half-pay officers and pensioner non-commissioned officers, to supplement the small number of experienced officers and NCOs already in place to aid the recently commissioned officers who knew little more of training than did the rawest recruit. Put most simply, the Army was overwhelmed by the chaotic enthusiasm of the nation to answer Kitchener's call. By the end of September 1914 more than 750 000 men had enlisted.³⁵

On 11 September, Lord Kitchener resorted to a practice which had been used frequently in the past to control the rate of induction: he ordered that both minimum height and chest standards be raised for acceptance into the Army. Leopold Amery was then serving as chief recruiter for the Midlands, and he recorded in his diary on the 12th:

K., without consulting Rawley [Lt-Gen. Sir Henry Rawlinson, Director of Recruiting] ordered all recruiting stations to raise the height and chest measurement standards over the week end, with the result that something like 10,000 men I believe were rejected in the next few days for being under size who have every reason to believe that they would have been accepted, men who meanwhile had thrown up their jobs. This killed recruiting entirely and it really never recovered.³⁶

Amery, with perhaps the justifiable anger of an immensely successful recruiter pressed into the role by Kitchener, was more right than wrong. Recruiting figures for the month of September were the highest of the entire War, with more than 462 000 men joining the Army. However, the peak was reached in the second week of the month. Even Kitchener's least critical biographer has written that the message of the decision to raise standards and turn away men helped to strengthen a belief 'that perhaps the country did not immediately need every willing recruit'.³⁷ The enlistment mania was all but past by mid-September, and Kitchener's actions had provided a suitable answer for men with marginal commitments to entering the Army. The enthusiastic disorganization of the earliest efforts of civilian-led recruiting had also run its course. The men most easy to recruit were,

for the most part, now already enlisted, and after mid-September both military and political leaders would have to concern themselves with the problem with which they were to wrestle until the Armistice of 1918.

IV

Shortly before Great Britain declared war, the Conservative Party was pledged by its Leader to give 'unhesitating support to the Government' in prosecuting the conflict most Britons anticipated would be brief and traditional. A party truce was hammered out by the chief whips of the two major parties late in August, and all was to be harmonious until 1 January 1915, or until the War was won, whichever came first.³⁸ One aspect of the truce was the formation, at about the same time, of the only semi-official body sanctioned by the War Office to aid in raising troops – the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee.³⁹

While the PRC seemed redundant in the first two months of war, by the close of September and the diminution of voluntarism it began to fill a vital role. Since the War Office lacked sufficient staff to carry out all the functions of recruiting on the new scale Lord Kitchener planned, it relied on the Committee to serve as its primary publicity agency during the entire voluntarist period.⁴⁰ The more difficult it became to raise volunteers, the more important became the PRC.

The Committee relied on three major devices to encourage voluntarism, and the first and best known of these was propaganda. The most famous example of their visual propaganda efforts remains well known today: the poster of Kitchener, in Field Marshal's uniform with stern eye and pointing finger, captioned: 'Your Country Needs You'. By the spring of 1915 more than two million of these and similar emotionally charged examples were displayed throughout the country. In addition to graphic art, the PRC distributed more than twenty million leaflets and pamphlets by March 1915.

Second only to printed propaganda among the efforts of the Committee was the use of public meetings, and hundreds were held in the autumn and winter of 1914 and 1915 in the hope of re-establishing the recruiting excitement of the initial two months of the War. While parliamentary leaders and high-ranking officers were the most favoured speakers at the hundreds of meetings organized by the PRC more than 6000 lecturers, many of them veterans of the civilian

recruiting movement and a large number paid professionals, were supplied under the authority of the Committee.

The growth of anxiety over diminishing enlistments, even in late 1914, was vividly demonstrated by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee's most ambitious recruiting vehicle, the Householders' Return. During November and December almost four and a half million of these elaborate questionnaires were distributed through the mail to the heads of British households. Requesting information about the number, age, occupation and willingness to enlist of males of military age in each residence, the Return elicited more than 200 000 promises to join the Forces.

No reliable method was conceived to calculate arithmetically the success of the survey or the reliability of the thousands of attestations received in return. The Householders' Return, however, appears to be a quantitative stroke of genius when compared with the unsystematic appeals of the self-appointed recruiters in the initial weeks of the War. The hard facts of recruitment that were available did little to cheer the PRC or the War Office: in August an average of 75 000 men per week enlisted, and in September the figure was 116 000. The remaining quarter of 1914 saw the average drop to only 35 000, despite the best efforts of the PRC.⁴¹ While the PRC continued in existence until the passage of the first conscription act, it was clear by the end of 1914 that such committees would not succeed in meeting the ever-growing need for manpower of Kitchener's armies.⁴²

Sir William Robertson Nicoll, editor of the *British Weekly* and a golfing crony of Lloyd George, wrote to his colleague, St Loe Strachey, editor of the *Spectator*, late in 1914:

I think we must recognise that for the present we have failed with the Government as to the matter of recruiting. The fact is that we have only 700,000 recruits – 300,000 short of the first million, and that recruiting through the country at present, at the actual rate, is not doing much more than fill the blanks of the Field Army.⁴³

The figures cited by Sir William came, of course, from the Chancellor of the Exchequer. They were not entirely accurate, but they were as close as could be expected, given the secrecy with which Lord Kitchener cloaked all War Office information.

The slow-down in recruiting was becoming known in Whitehall, and the dearth of information concerning this and most other war matters caused the party truce to become strained by the beginning of the new year. The Prime Minister's wife wrote to Lord Milner, the

uncrowned leader, since the death of Lord Roberts in November, of the muzzled conscription movement in Britain:

I don't think it's good business even from a party point of view pressing for recruit figures. If K were to tell Law how wonderful they were it wd. check recruiting. If he lied – said they were bad in hopes of getting more. .the conscription cry is raised wh. checks recruiting. So I'm sure about this, talking is really unpatriotic.⁴⁴

Mrs Asquith may have been sure, but Lord Milner and the Tories were considerably less so.

Shortly after Milner received this recommendation from his unwanted adviser, Bonar Law received two memoranda which were considerably more worrying than the gratuitous counsel of a notorious gadfly. One was written by Lord Curzon, who analysed the party truce in these terms:

The position seems to me to be this: We are expected to give mute and almost unquestioning support to everything done by the Government. In other words the Government are to have all the advantages while we have all the drawbacks of a coalition. They tell us nothing or next to nothing of their plans, and yet they pretend our Leaders share both their knowledge and their responsibility.⁴⁵

On the same day, the Conservative leader read similar sentiments expressed by Walter Long:

Here not only has there been no coalition – personally I do not favour it, and I gravely doubt its success – but the Government have persistently pursued those party aims which occupied them before the War.⁴⁶

On the same day that these memoranda were written, a small group of equally frustrated Tories gathered to form the Unionist Business Committee, an unofficial 'ginger' group which agreed to meet periodically and co-operate in Parliament to bring about what they considered a more active war policy. While Bonar Law was able to quieten his various angry colleagues, these examples of stifled discontent with the party truce, coupled with what we have seen of the decline of enlistments for the Army, were destined to lead to serious problems for the leaders of both of the major parties.

Several important and revealing issues resided only just below the surface of this seemingly disconnected series of events. Lord Curzon

and Walter Long spoke for many of the more influential men of their party when they expressed their unhappiness with the truce among parties, which seemed to them to offer only the disadvantages and none of the benefits of coalition Government. They opposed Asquith before the War and had grown contemptuous of him during it. They were well connected with the high command of the Army, where respect for the Prime Minister was also spare. In addition, their tempers would grow shorter still with the advent of the Dardanelles Campaign, begun in early 1915; they followed the lead of the generals and Admiral Lord Fisher – called from retirement to serve again as First Sea Lord – in vehement opposition.⁴⁷

Most of all, their frustration was generated by their feeling of powerlessness. Their party was much reduced in representation in the Houses of Parliament, as close to a hundred of their colleagues had taken commissions, and they felt the truce kept those who remained muzzled, uninformed and impotent. The recruiting campaign had given many of them, at least temporarily, the cause they sought, and no one pursued it more heartily than Lord Derby or Leopold Amery or Sir Edward Carson. When the enlistments tapered off, their anger at their political emasculation grew, and some began to turn to one of those threads of controversy which had united many of them before the War: mandatory military service.

V

By 20 August, the BEF – or at least the initial four divisions sent by a hesitant Government – took their place at Maubeuge, as the staff talks had decreed. Within two days the Battle of Mons was fought, as the small British Army ran directly into the path of the Army of General von Kluck, playing its part in the great wheeling motion of the Schlieffen Plan. The little force held, and retreat began only when the French Fifth Army, to their right, began to fall back on the 24th. Twelve days later, ‘Papa’ Joffre, the French commander, decreed a counter-attack; the British followed suit, and the two forces found no resistance when they struck their blow.

The reason was that a gap had opened between the armies of Kluck and Bülow, as a result of the maneuver to attempt an encirclement of the Allied forces. On 9 September it was the turn of the German armies to begin a general retreat, and these alternate empty thrusts and parries were the First Battle of the Marne.

By the middle of the month the first German trench was dug, as their armies were too exhausted to retreat further. A second followed the first, and soon the British and French followed the German example; this came to be dignified with the name 'the race to the sea'. The contest was not one of speed, as the name suggests, but rather one of position, as each army attempted to outflank the enemy trench for trench. Only one additional engagement in this phase of the War was to involve the BEF, as the movement described carried them into Flanders, and that was the First Battle of Ypres – 'Wipers' as it came to be called in the trenches. Fought from mid-October to mid-November, it marked the virtual end of movement in the conflict. After trench warfare began, British and German soldiers would continue to fight over essentially the same ground until November 1918.

The 'short war' delusion did not even last until Christmas 1914. By the close of November the trenches had appeared, the hopes of a war of maneuver were dashed and the BEF, after First Ypres, all but ceased to be. The losses were massive for so small a force: one-half of those who crossed the Channel became casualties; one in ten were dead, and the greatest losses, by percentage, were among junior officers. An army remained, of course, and grew larger day by day for two years, but it was not the same army. Enough officers and NCOs survived to train new and larger forces, who sustained new and ever larger casualties.

First Ypres and the digging of the trenches insured that Britain would have to raise huge armies and sustain enormous losses or bear responsibility for the loss of the War. In October and November, as these developments were unfolding, recruitment for the Forces was tapering off. This combination of factors played a significant role in causing certain public figures to consider conscription as a viable, and perhaps the only, method to fight this unprecedented kind of war.

As early as 26 August 1914, soon after the Battle of Mons was fought, the issue of conscription was raised in the Commons at question time by two Tory backbenchers, Alfred Hamersley and George Terrell, who inquired of Asquith whether the Government intended to bring in a conscription bill. The Prime Minister, showing no annoyance, assured them that no such measure was contemplated. It was the second time he had heard so rash a statement in as many days, for in Cabinet the previous day Winston Churchill had suggested the institution of conscription for unmarried men. J. A. Pease, the

President of the Board of Education, noted in his diary: 'We all sat and listened much bored. The P.M. took it with impatience.'⁴⁸ Apparently Asquith maintained his equanimity on this occasion as well, for Lord Emmott noted in his diary of the First Lord's argument: 'He was both stupid and boring. Asquith contemptuous at first, but did not bear him down.'⁴⁹

The Prime Minister did not think the incident important enough to mention in his regular letter to the King, nor did he even consider it worthy of note in his regular letters to his close friend and companion, Miss Venetia Stanley, from whom he kept no secrets.⁵⁰

While Churchill was the only statesman openly to recommend conscription to the Cabinet, the idea circulated freely through Whitehall before the close of 1914. Among the restive Opposition, we have already noticed that Lord Curzon and Walter Long forwarded evidence of their unhappiness to their Leader on 27 January, and in their memoranda each complained of the decreasing success of recruiting efforts. By the time these memoranda were sent, these men were already convinced that compulsory service was the only way in which sufficient numbers could be raised.⁵¹

There were others who agreed with them. Lord Milner, like Curzon and Long an active member of the National Service League in the pre-War period, came to a similar conclusion. He wrote to Leopold Amery in December: 'The right plan would be to start the system now. Then you would be ready when the moment comes, as it will.'⁵² John Baird, Bonar Law's Parliamentary Private Secretary, was equally convinced and wrote similarly to Sir Henry Wilson at the front: 'the country as a whole will accept compulsory military service quite easily'.⁵³ Finally, Austen Chamberlain, at least to Curzon's satisfaction, had become a 'convert' to national service before the close of October.⁵⁴

Among influential editors, those who endorsed the National Service League before August 1914 – Strachey, Maxse and Blumenfeld – had returned to that view as the masses of volunteers slackened off by October and November. Lord Northcliffe, though he had supported peacetime conscription for home defence, did not agree that mandatory service could be implemented without a political crisis. He wrote to Asquith in November, warning him that recruiting results had to be improved:

The public *cannot* be aroused by present methods, and I believe that unless the matter is taken in hand speedily you will be rapidly

forced to a measure of conscription that might possibly bring about a split in the national ranks.⁵⁵

Percy Illingworth, the Chief Liberal Whip, in the same month received virtually the same message from 'the Chief' ⁵⁶

In the years before the War, no amount of pressure from the national-service adherents within his party could move Bonar Law to endorse compulsion. In November and December 1914, however, he admitted to several fellow Conservatives that mandatory service must come if the voluntary system did not produce greater numbers in the near future.⁵⁷

Every one of these men of affairs agreed that there was one man who could effect the change from voluntarism to compulsion simply by stating the need openly – that man was, of course, Lord Kitchener. He chose not to do it, though he admitted in the Cabinet of 25 August, after Churchill's outburst, that such a policy was possible in future. He did remark once to Amery that Egyptian conscripts had not made good soldiers,⁵⁸ but even the unfathomable Kitchener had reasons which went beyond that curious analogy. Kitchener did not fail to endorse a measure of conscription for want of advice to that effect. Lord Milner knew and understood the warlord and realised that he could be very susceptible to outside influence regarding questions of which he knew little. He could not bear to be lectured to nor would he tolerate debate, even with Cabinet colleagues, hence, Milner wrote to Sir Henry Wilson:

The sole way of influencing [Kitchener] is by permeating the atmosphere he breathes with right ideas. He is quick, intuitive, in picking up a new idea from the air, as he is obtuse, not to say recalcitrant when it is presented to him in the form of an argument.⁵⁹

Milner and Amery tried to 'permeate the atmosphere' around the solitary Field Marshal with conscriptionist ideas, and failed. Kitchener could be influenced on many things, but he could not be persuaded by them to adopt compulsion.

Walter Long, 'the Squire' as he was called, was the very paradigm of the Victorian Tory – wealthy, landed, generous, patriotic and loyal – he was also intolerant, impatient and possessed of a bluff manner which endeared him to, yet frustrated, his colleagues. He attempted on more than one occasion the direct approach to

Kitchener on the issue, being too impatient for ‘permeation’ Long wrote to him in December 1914:

Why don't you go in for Compulsion? You have the chance which no man has ever had, due, in the first place, to the country's confidence in you, 2nd, to the circumstances of the moment. I believe that if you were to insist upon Compulsory Service. .you would be supported by every loyal man in the Country, and this means the vast majority.⁶⁰

This characteristically blunt approach worked no better for Long than did the scheming of Milner and his friends.

While it is not the province of the historian to deal in what did not happen, it does seem likely that Lord Kitchener did enjoy sufficient popular influence to implement mandatory service with little popular opposition.⁶¹ He chose not to, it appears equally likely, not because he did not understand the issue or because of some exaggerated ideological commitment to voluntarism, but because he had enormous confidence in his own ability to raise armies simply by calling for the men. In the initial months of the War, who could disagree?

His somber visage on the famous poster was the most powerful talisman Britain possessed in the recruiting campaigns of 1914 and 1915. His popularity never dimmed, and that prevented all but the most cursory public criticism of him. The New Armies bore his name in the public mind, and when the faith of his Cabinet colleagues in him crumbled, that image was all that remained. During the course of 1915, one by one his duties were to be taken from him, and raising manpower was the remaining task justifying his continuance in office.

There is another explanation which aids in understanding Kitchener's opposition to compulsory service – a system which had been accepted in principle during peacetime by most high-ranking British officers and for which most of them longed by the early months of 1915 – and it is that Kitchener was as unfamiliar with the British political system as the newest immigrant. Like Roberts before him, he entered the political sphere late in a life spent largely outside the country. He lived no more than a few weeks each year in his beloved country house, Broome Park. He was a conservative by inclination but had no real political connection and had probably never voted in a General Election. He could not bear the cool damp English climate without complaint and aroused the amusement of all who visited his room in the War Office because of the roaring fires which he required

to maintain the tropical temperature to which he had become accustomed.

For this reason he took Asquith as his political mentor. The Prime Minister seldom missed an opportunity to remind his pupil of the political controversy which conscription would raise, and the lessons were well learned. Sir Philip Magnus has written:

Kitchener gave no lead to the Cabinet, or to the country, on the subject of conscription, because he felt that he had lived too long abroad to be able to gauge its political implications. He was content, therefore, to be guided by Asquith, who told him that conscription would wreck the Government and shatter the Liberal Party.⁶²

Interesting also is the fact that he did not return to the viewpoint he expressed in late August, that conscription might be useful in time, if not then. Asquith was more than able to counterbalance the efforts of other statesmen who wished to induce him to endorse compulsory service.

Besides Lord Kitchener and the Conservatives, there is one other source of opinion which ought to be noted. Churchill's early plea for conscription elicited no support. There was, however, one other member of the Liberal Cabinet who came to agree with the First Lord, and that was Lloyd George. No Cabinet minister was closer to selected members of the press than the Chancellor, and it was with them that he discussed his feelings about recruiting. By November, Lloyd George was coming to the conclusion that some variant of national service was becoming necessary. He indicated to Sir William Robertson Nicoll that perhaps some form of quota based upon the suitable male population of each county might offer an answer.⁶³ At Lloyd George's behest, Nicoll passed along the information to St Loe Strachey. A few weeks later, Strachey wrote to Maj.-Gen. Sir Henry Sclater, the Adjutant-General, recommending a mild form of compulsion through registration of fit men of military age, with required numbers to be called up when needed, which he had discussed with 'a certain Cabinet Minister, who must be nameless'.⁶⁴ It was, of course, the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Lloyd George's closest crony among the press lords at this time was Sir George Riddell, proprietor of the *News of the World* and inveterate diarist of the war years. In December he recorded that the Chancellor, alarmed over the fall-off in recruitment, expressed the opinion that had his 1910 proposals been accepted the nation would

have had one and a half million men already trained and sufficient rifles to equip them.⁶⁵

Lloyd George did not openly champion conscription at this point in the War, despite indications that he was coming to regard it as a viable method of raising manpower for the Army. In the first place, the issue of munitions production came to dominate his interest and his energies. With this issue, he took up the complementary matter of organization of the nation's production capacity as a way to bring the War to a more rapid and successful conclusion. This was the path which led to his creation of the Ministry of Munitions and his implementation of the system of controls on capital, labour and management which came to be known as 'war socialism'. In February, despite his earlier statements, he concluded in a paper to the Cabinet that conscription would not be necessary so long as adequate steps toward more efficient national organization were taken.⁶⁶ Only after the new Ministry was safely created and operating did he again take up the conscription question.

Even Lloyd George, however, with his massive pre-War constituency and his growing popularity in the first year of the conflict as 'the man of push and go', feared the political ramifications of compulsory service. Only after he had successfully imposed upon the people the system of state controls which his munitions schemes required was he convinced that conscription would be politically viable, regardless of whether or not the imprimatur of 'Lord K' could be obtained.

As the second calendar year of war unfolded, Britain seemed little closer than she had ever been to throwing over the voluntarist system. The spring of 1915, however, witnessed a series of events which many were certain would bring compulsory military service in their wake. These developments brought to an end the last Liberal Government in British history. It was to be replaced by a coalition Cabinet which was to include a powerful minority dedicated to the passage into law of military conscription.

5 The Politics of Coalition

I

As we have seen, a political truce had been arranged between the two major parties on the eve of the British ultimatum to Germany. The first New Year's holiday of the War had not passed before discontent with the agreement began to surface among the Opposition. While the truce was actually an agreement to refrain only from fighting by-elections, in effect it morally committed the Conservatives to cease open criticism of Government policies. By the spring of 1915 the leaders of the Tory Party concluded that the only solution to circumstances then facing them was the formation of a formal coalition with the Liberals; Asquith agreed, and it was done. Certain conditions which brought about that compromise and others which resulted from it, ensured that the issue of military conscription would be before the Coalition during virtually its entire lifespan. Important and fractious though it was, however, it was not the sole divisive question which poisoned relations between the parties.

Andrew Bonar Law and his colleagues had assumed – incorrectly, as it turned out – that one result of the truce would be that the Government would withhold their plans of putting on the statute books two of the most controversial items of legislation which had divided the parties in the years before the War. The first was Irish Home Rule, a matter so volatile that some have suggested that August 1914 plunged Britain into foreign war and saved her from civil conflict; the second was the disestablishment of the Church of Wales.¹ The Conservatives were quite wrong; the bills, under the provisions of the Parliament Act, were allowed to complete their passage through Parliament, with the understanding that they would be suspended until the end of hostilities.

Bonar Law forwarded the feelings of his colleagues to Asquith on 7 August, as word of the Liberal plan reached the Opposition. He cited one Conservative Member who called attention to the mutual cessation of party meetings in the country: 'How is it possible to let political warfare run riot within the House of Commons and proclaim a truce of God elsewhere?'² Four days later, Lord Hugh Cecil, son of the former Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, was equally suspicious of

the truce: 'I do not the least believe that there is *now* any danger to the country of a row in Parliament.' Lord Hugh preferred 'a vigorous and relentless opposition'.³

Given the Liberal–Labour–Irish majority, Bonar Law and his Conservatives and Unionists could do nothing. On 15 September, as Asquith introduced the bill to postpone the implementation of the Home Rule Bill until the post-War, Bonar Law greeted the prospect with 'possibly the most bitter of all [his] speeches' and led his followers out of the House.⁴ Feelings appeared to be running so deep that Henry Chaplin wrote to Bonar Law as this dramatic gesture was in the offing: 'It is quite clear to me that we can not continue the recruiting campaign, on its present lines; and go on the same platform with members of a party, who are denounced in the breach of an honourable understanding.'⁵ The truce, though strained, held at this early stage of the War, and so did the co-operative recruiting effort. However, Bonar Law's commitment to avoid open debate of a partisan nature – hence his removal of his party from the Commons on 15 September – was to be tested again before he accepted the expedient of coalition.

The last two months of 1914, as has been noted, saw the end of the first excited outpouring of recruits for the Army and the beginning of what has come to be called the 'rally' period of recruiting.⁶ With little information available to them because of the secretive nature of Lord Kitchener, and the ill-feeling caused by the Home Rule and Welsh disestablishment bills somewhat healed – if not forgotten – Conservatives overlooked Chaplin's sentiments and threw themselves into the recruiting campaign. By the early weeks of 1915, however, with confidence weakening in the Government's conduct of the War, sentiments such as those expressed in Curzon's and Long's January memoranda came into the hands of Andrew Bonar Law. He would not be able to escape them and would, in time, find himself unable to disagree, regardless of his desire to maintain national unity and avoid partisan strife.

II

During the months of February and March 1915 the position of the Tories resolved itself into one of anxious waiting: there was agreement among the Shadow Cabinet, the influential editors and most backbenchers that coalition would not be advantageous – even if offered by the Government – and hence there was little chance of

their influencing policy from the inside. While Balfour continued to sit in the inner councils of Asquith and his colleagues on war matters, and though Bonar Law and Lansdowne were invited to attend a meeting of the War Council in early March, the truce at that time did not develop into anything more.⁷

However, while the conscription issue remained on the minds of many of Bonar Law's followers, though they were not suffered to bring it into the open, another controversial question arose in this period which claimed the attention of many of these men and of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. This was the matter of munitions production. Lloyd George, anxious to pursue a more energetic part in winning the War than the confines of the Treasury offered, came to identify the growing shortages of shells and guns as his cause in early 1915. On 22 February he submitted a paper outlining his criticisms of war production as it then existed:

The manufacturing resources at the disposal of the Allies are enormously greater than those which Germany and Austria can command. and the seas being free to them can more easily obtain material. I do not believe Great Britain has even yet done anything like what she can do in the matter if [*sic*] increasing her war equipment.⁸

He followed this striking memorandum with a speech in Bangor, days later, in which he again brought forth the munitions issue: 'We are more in need of equipment than we are of men. This is an engineers' war.'⁹

The Chancellor wished to see the creation of a 'strong executive' to take charge of armaments production, and he was thwarted by Kitchener's veto. However, after a 'truly royal row', in Asquith's words, there was a Cabinet committee appointed, 'with full authority to take all steps necessary for that purpose'¹⁰ This was the Treasury Committee, which took as its initial task negotiating with the munitions-related trade unions to lessen their work rules which hindered rapid and efficient production.

The significance of this episode to understanding the crises which followed it is considerable. In the first place, Lloyd George was convinced that increased production had to precede conscription and could, perhaps, preclude the need of it. Second, his energetic pursuit of the issue earned him the respect and admiration of many Conservatives, frustrated at what they considered to be the inaction both of the rest of the Government and of their own leaders. Third, it placed

before the public the question of a possible shortage of munitions weeks before the better-known 'Shells Scandal' of early May. Finally, it did much to drive Lloyd George and the Conservatives more closely together.

Professor W. A. S. Hewins, one of the founders and most outspoken leaders of the Unionist Business Committee, wrote in his diary at this time: 'Lloyd George has no prejudices and would be willing to act. He would therefore have to risk something with his party.'

Action could be taken if the Unionist leaders would co-operate and share responsibility.¹¹ While Hewins was not yet totally convinced that Lloyd George was his man, Sir Edward 'Paddy' Gouling indicated that there were Conservatives who were already leaning even farther in that direction – even so far as coalition. He wrote to Sir Max Aitken, the confidant of Bonar Law: 'L. G. has again been acting as a big man over this crisis with labour and the sooner Squiffy [the cognomen applied to the Prime Minister by the Tory Ultras] clears out and lets him take the head of a coalition the better.'¹²

On 8 April, Hewins drew up for the backbench committee a resolution to be presented to the House of Commons:

This House, while welcoming well-considered steps for increasing the mobility and efficiency of labour, is of opinion that it is urgently necessary that the resources of all firms capable of producing munitions of war should be enlisted under a unified administration in direct touch with the producing firms.¹³

The resolution was accepted by the Conservative parliamentary delegation at a meeting at the Carlton Club that same day with the acquiescence if not the enthusiastic support of Bonar Law, and it was put down for debate in the House on the 21st.

Well aware both of the censorious motion and of the damage it could do to his authority, Asquith chose to counter-attack on the day previous to the proposed munitions debate. His strategy was twofold. First, Lloyd George would state in the House on 20 April his opinion that conscription was not necessarily a superior policy for the conduct of the War – thus putting valuable distance between the Chancellor and the factious Tories. Such a statement was easy for Lloyd George, who at this stage was caught up with the munitions question and seems genuinely to have believed that the manufacture of sufficient quantities of armaments required solution first. He also was charged with a prominent role in the debate on the Hewins resolution. Second, Asquith chose to employ the occasion of a great speech

scheduled for Newcastle on the same day for his own assault on his enemies.

Armed with assurances from Kitchener that munitions supplies were adequate at the front, the Prime Minister offered a ringing defense of armaments production under his Government.¹⁴ 'His critics, Asquith's most recent biographer has noted, 'who had more reliable sources of information, were not persuaded.'¹⁵ More than merely unpersuaded, the Tory backbenchers and the right-wing press were furious. Their 'reliable sources', it is interesting to note, often drew their information from Sir John French, the Commander-in-Chief of the BEF. who was the source of the assurances supplied by Kitchener to Asquith. The debate on 21 April, while the critical motion failed, was no more a success than the Newcastle speech.

Angered not merely about munitions but over the refusal to implement conscription, over Lloyd George's by-then-defunct schemes for state purchase of the liquor trade and in regard to the general conduct of the War by the Government, the Conservative backbenchers verged by early May on open revolt against their leaders. While Bonar Law's policy continued to be supportive 'patriotic opposition', Professor Hewins noted in his diary on 6 May: 'I have never believed that this Government could carry the War through successfully. It is quite discredited and the sooner it is reconstituted the better.'¹⁶

Bonar Law's position as leader was passing from a troubled to a critical stage. On 14 May, at the suggestion of Lord Robert Cecil, a meeting of the Shadow Cabinet was held at Lansdowne House. The agenda of the assembly included the state of the War, the party truce and the nascent backbench revolt against themselves.¹⁷ It was decided that Bonar Law and Lansdowne should together draft a strong letter to the Prime Minister, indicating the desire of the Opposition to encourage a more vigorous prosecution of the War. The issue which all agreed should be singled out for the attention of the Government was neither munitions nor strategy, but conscription. No one was more aware than these men of the political controversy which still attached itself to any mention of compulsory service. Their desire was to force the hand of the Cabinet and yet offer full support for such a measure, thereby giving a non-party legitimacy to the policy. A draft of the memorandum to the Prime Minister was agreed upon by the two leaders the following day:

In our view, therefore, it is impossible to exclude the possibility that it may become necessary, and perhaps at a very early date, to

adopt some form of compulsory organization with the object of inducing men in some cases to join the Army, and in others, when they are specially qualified, to render not less valuable service in our factories and workshops.

We are without information and therefore we are not in as good a position as the Government to judge whether the time has come for an attempt to completely organise the nation for the purposes of the war; but we think it right to add that whenever the Government decide that such a step is necessary they can rely upon our support, and we believe, that they will also have the support of the nation.¹⁸

The letter was never sent, as events overtook these attempts on the part of the uneasy Conservative leadership to spur the Cabinet to greater action.

On the same day as the Lansdowne House meeting, there appeared in *The Times* a highly coloured description of the recent failure of the British Army to overcome the enemy at the Battle of Neuve Chappelle. Written by Lt.-Col. Repington, it was not merely a report by a war correspondent on the scene, it was the product of an intrigue between Field Marshal French, Repington and Northcliffe, as well as certain of the Tory die-hards, both to shift the blame for failures in the field from the shoulders of the generals to those of Lord Kitchener and the Government and to force the latter into a more energetic policy of active intervention in munitions production.

Lord Northcliffe had abandoned his fears that overly energetic Government action might foment strong negative public reaction. Losing patience with Asquith and Kitchener in regard to munitions production, he wrote to Sir John French on 1 May:

A short and very vigorous statement from you to a private correspondent (the usual way of making things public in England) would, I believe, render the Government's position impossible, and enable you to secure the publication of that which would tell the people the truth.¹⁹

The Field Marshal chose as the conduit to transfer his complaints not merely a 'private correspondent', but the military correspondent of *The Times*, Charles à Court Repington.

An old friend of French, Repington did not attract particular attention at GHQ – where, it may be added, journalists were normally barred – and on 12 May he dispatched to his editor,

Geoffrey Robinson, a cable describing the action at Neuve Chappelle and blaming 'the want of an unlimited supply of high explosive shells' for the failure. The dispatch was spuriously marked 'passed by censor', indicating the powerful influence of the Commander-in-Chief.²⁰ The article, under Repington's byline, was published on the 14th, fueling the flames at the Lansdowne House meeting. To ensure the success of his intervention, Field Marshal Sir John French sent two of his aides to London to seek out Bonar Law, Lloyd George and Balfour and press upon them memoranda containing detailed figures of his munitions demands, compared with actual deliveries from the War Office.²¹

The following day, 15 May, saw the drafting of the letter from the Tory leaders to Asquith, and it also witnessed the next maneuver of the Unionist Business Committee. Professor Hewins wrote to the Prime Minister expressing the dissatisfaction of his colleagues with the answers of the Government to their queries regarding munitions production. Therefore, he informed Asquith, he intended to raise a formal question in the House on the following Monday, noting in his diary, 'I intend to carry the matter right through.'²²

In fact, Hewins's plan went awry. It was Tuesday, 18 May, when the planned question was to be asked, and a hastily called meeting of the Unionist Business Committee with Bonar Law resulted in the projected assault on Asquith being shelved. The reason was, as their leader told them, that the Government was to be reconstructed.

There was another episode which holds an important place in this colourful chapter of wartime politics – the collapse of the Churchill-Fisher administration at the Admiralty. While less germane to the purpose of this essay than certain other questions examined above, it should be noted that the First Lord, Winston Churchill, was deeply distrusted by his former colleagues, the Conservatives.²³ In addition, since its beginning in February, he had become the greatest defender of the Dardanelles campaign, an effort already seen as futile by May. Finally, the growing tension between Lord Fisher, the First Sea Lord, and his nominal chief was growing close to the breaking point by this time: Fisher hated the Dardanelles effort and begrudged every man or ship diverted to it. Fisher was 'the darling of the Tories, in the House and in the country'²⁴ and, given the dangerous frame of mind of the Conservative backbenchers at that time, that quarrel became seminal to the future of the Government.

On 15 May, the day after the appearance of the Repington article and the day following Hewins's decision to 'carry through' with his Committee's efforts to bring the Government to task over the

munitions shortages, Fisher resigned in the most demonstrative manner of which his incurably melodramatic mind could conceive. Informing Asquith, Lloyd George and Churchill that he was adamant in his decision to go and was retiring into seclusion, he also cryptically informed Bonar Law of his decision.²⁵ The confluence of events was overwhelming, and the Tory leader's hand had at last been decisively forced. On the Monday morning following, he called on the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

After ascertaining that Fisher had in fact resigned, Bonar Law and Lloyd George discussed these events and their possible ramifications. The Chancellor recalled in his memoirs:

After some discussion we agreed that the only way to preserve a united front was to arrange for more complete cooperation between parties in the direction of the War.²⁶

It is unclear exactly who suggested coalition as a solution to their mutual problems; perhaps it does not really matter. What is clear is that a combining of the front benches had been in the mind of each previous to this time – Lloyd George as long ago as 1910, and Bonar Law, whose correspondence was full of the subject, seemingly since the outset of hostilities. In any event, apparently Lloyd George took the Conservative leader across the passage which connected his house with the Prime Minister's residence, left him to wait, and went in to Asquith to explain the latest development and the conclusion just reached. The result of that second very brief conversation is described, again, by the Chancellor: 'In less than a quarter of an hour we realised that the Liberal Government was at an end and that for it would be substituted a Coalition Government.'²⁷

Each agreed for his own reasons, of course, and it is clear that the expedient of coalition served each differently. Bonar Law was faced with the possibility of a genuine backbench revolt, led by the Unionist Business Committee spurred on by Professor Hewins. The news of the resignation of Lord Fisher, already leaking by Monday, could possibly have ignited that insurrection. For Bonar Law, who had become leader only because the party had rejected the leadership of Balfour, the prospect was of a coalition of the front benches against the back, of the calmer statesmen against the 'wildmen'.

While Lloyd George is often described as a romantic, driven by passions, in many ways this episode is proof of his capacity to play the part of the calculating realist. He had toyed with the notion of coalition in another time of crisis, and now a thorough reconstruction

of the Government would give him the opportunity to set up the munitions executive he wanted. Likewise, it would bring into the Cabinet men who might be more suitable to the energetic prosecution of the War which he knew was needed. Finally, it could do no harm to his personal influence, for the remarkable transformation of the former radical into the wartime innovator was already in train, and his credibility with the political Left was weakening while his stature with the Right was waxing. He retired the first night after these preliminary negotiations thinking he would have the War Office in succession to Kitchener and, therefore, begin to lay hold of overall control of the War, subject only to the authority of the Prime Minister.²⁸

And what of the pivotal figure in the drama, Herbert Henry Asquith? As few as five days before his meeting with Lloyd George and Bonar Law, he had denied on the floor of the House that he was contemplating any plan for an all-party Cabinet, and it seems from the evidence that he was speaking candidly. Like the other two coalition-makers, he reacted to circumstances; also like the others, he made the best of the situation. In the first place, he had nothing to gain and everything to lose from a bitter party struggle over munitions or the Fisher–Churchill quarrel. While their numbers were much smaller than the Hewins circle, there were those in his own party who chafed at his ponderous way of making war, and they might very well have joined forces with the other rebels and brought him down – as they in fact did in December 1916.²⁹

Furthermore, there were more concrete advantages than mere survival into the unknown. Lord Kitchener had become a liability for Asquith, and the May Coalition was discussed among the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Tory leader with the idea that the warlord would be shuttled aside for a better man.³⁰ This did not in the end come about because of Kitchener's immense personal popularity. This popular esteem had not outlived its usefulness as a shield, still valued by the harried Prime Minister.

There is one other side-light which has attracted the attention of historians of this crisis, and that involves the severance of Asquith's relations with Venetia Stanley. She wrote to him on 12 May, announcing that she had decided to marry Edwin Montagu, her only active suitor whom she had refused two years earlier.³¹ Like Churchill and Lloyd George, Asquith suffered from periodic bouts of depression and self-doubt. Also like those great contemporaries, he required adulation and 'jollyng' to be helped through them. Miss

Stanley, from whom the Prime Minister had no secrets, public or private, had served that purpose; she listened for hours on end to his conversation and received countless letters detailing his triumphs, problems and solutions. He wrote to her on 17 May: 'I am on the eve of the most astounding & world-shaking decisions It seems so strange & empty & unnatural: yet there is nowhere else that I can go, nor would I, if I could.'³²

He would rebound soon after, of course, and find other correspondents and bridge partners. At that particular moment, however, he was sunk in a deep depression, tired of the fight. Acquiescence to the easiest solution to the May crisis must have seemed more appealing than mere logic could make it.³³

After leaving Number 10 Downing Street, Bonar Law sought out Lord Lansdowne and Austen Chamberlain and, as he had agreed with Asquith and Lloyd George, the Conservative leaders prepared a letter in place of the draft of 15 May, which had not been sent. Calling attention to the resignation of Lord Fisher, they stated:

We think that the time has come when we ought to have a clear statement from you as to the policy which the Government intend to pursue. In our opinion things cannot go on as they are, and some change in the constitution of the Government seems to us inevitable if it is to retain a sufficient measure of public confidence to conduct the War to a successful conclusion.

The situation in Italy [which was close to announcing her entrance into the War on the Allied side] makes it particularly undesirable to have anything in the nature of a controversial discussion in the House of Commons at present, and if you are prepared to take the necessary steps to secure the object which I have indicated, and if Lord Fisher's resignation is in the meantime postponed, we shall be ready to keep our silence now. Otherwise I must to-day ask whether Lord Fisher has resigned, and press for a day to discuss the situation arising out of his resignation.³⁴

The letter served the purpose for which it was intended. Asquith circulated on the same day a memorandum to his Cabinet colleagues announcing his intention to reconstruct the Government.³⁵ With that, the last Liberal Government in British history passed out of existence.

III

The new Cabinet, one observer of this period has written, was 'a coalition device which was only a flustered evasion of the problem of organization for war'.³⁶ Upon examination, however, this argument appears to pay insufficient attention to the machinations of the Prime Minister. He said to Herbert Samuel that he sought 'balance' in the new combination; as Professor Stephen Koss has rightly asked: 'What exactly did this mean?'³⁷ What it meant was this: Asquith intended to retain control of the direction of the Government in his own hands – in so far as that was possible. Second, he wished to restrict the official horizons of his new Conservative colleagues sufficiently so that their own agenda of policies would remain unfulfilled, as during their days of 'patriotic opposition' They had favoured a more energetic munitions policy, and that was accepted. However, they also were declared conscriptionists – even though their leader was perhaps the least committed of the group on that question – and Asquith so placed them as to ensure that they would be unable to advance that controversial policy without his supervision.³⁸

There were twelve Liberals, eight Conservatives, one Labourite and one independent in the new Cabinet.³⁹ Of the new members, Bonar Law was made to be content with the Colonial Office; Sir Edward Carson, the Ulster leader, became Attorney-General; and Austen Chamberlain got the India Office. The others, Lansdowne (Minister without Portfolio), Curzon (Privy Seal) and Selborne (Board of Agriculture) received minor office, save for two: Balfour took Churchill's place at the Admiralty and Walter Long became President of the Local Government Board. The former was already tested on the conscription issue and had proven to Asquith that he was 'safe' The latter, Long, was the sole Conservative to receive what might be considered a sensitive post in regard to manpower questions. However, he had been the rival of Chamberlain and Bonar Law for the leadership of the party in 1911, and there was reason to hope that perhaps his loyalties could be swayed.⁴⁰ Furthermore, while his stolidness, good fellowship and popularity among both front- and backbench colleagues were among his assets, his cleverness did not equal that of Curzon or Chamberlain or even Bonar Law. Finally, Long possessed, like Churchill, a rather well-developed sense of gratitude to those who were generous to him. Asquith, no doubt, reasoned that into the bargain and gave him a post somewhat closer to his interests.

Among his own colleagues, Asquith's desired balance was also evident. Haldane, something of an annoyance to his own colleagues as well as anathema to the Tories, was cast aside. He had, as recently as 18 May, without consultation with the Prime Minister, alluded in the House of Lords to the Government's willingness to 'reconsider' an alternative to voluntarism if and when it was necessary, which may have made the decision easier for Asquith. In any case, Haldane, who had become something of a liability due to press attacks on his 'pro-German' statements, who was no longer needed as a support in the Lords and who could be counted on to go without protest, found his old place given to Lord Buckmaster.⁴¹ This sacrifice was greeted by approbation from the Tories, and the cost to the Prime Minister was modest.

Churchill, the stormiest of petrels among the Liberals, was forced to make do with the Duchy of Lancaster, where his concerns would be less liable to cause mischief. He was hated by Bonar Law's followers and was by no means uniformly admired by his own Liberal colleagues. He was, as we have seen, the only openly avowed conscriptionist minister on his side of the aisle, and he had come to be saddled with the blame for the Dardanelles failure.⁴² Within a matter of months he gave up even the modest plum of the Duchy and joined his regiment in France.

Grey remained at the Foreign Office, with failing eyesight and energies, despite a professed desire to retire when his friend Haldane was dismissed. Reginald McKenna took the vacated Exchequer, which might rightfully have been Bonar Law's had he pressed his claim; and Sir John Simon, the most staunchly anti-conscriptionist minister, filled the place of McKenna at the Home Office.

Other posts with any significance in regard to manpower questions remained in the same hands, with one exception: Lloyd George became the first Minister of Munitions. Asquith had reason to suspect his most important colleague's views on conscription, despite the latter's loyal public statements to the contrary. However, he also saw the advantages in giving him what he wanted: Lloyd George would be quietened for the time being, he would be kept very busy reorganizing armaments production, and his growing reputation as the most energetic Liberal minister would bolster the Government image. Furthermore, there was the obvious fact that the costs of denying him the new post might have been too high; there is no evidence that Lloyd George threatened resignation over the issue, but he did write to Asquith as the Ministry was being reconstructed

that he would no longer be responsible for the Cabinet munitions committee without greater powers.⁴³

The two ministers who were not representatives of the major parties were Kitchener and Arthur Henderson. The warlord, as we have noticed, was marked for retirement in Asquith's earliest musings about reconstruction. Lloyd George and Bonar Law – the two architects of the new Government – as well as the high command at the Front, all would have been more than willing to see Kitchener leave the war Office. In the end, of course, he proved to be sufficiently important to be immune to proofs of his own incompetence. The reason was that his popularity had soundly outdistanced reality, and the Prime Minister's dependence upon that popularity grew steadily in the year to come, as we shall see.

The other exception was Arthur Henderson, who, in taking the Board of Education – a post for which he cared little and which he was pleased to abandon in August 1916 – became the first Labour minister. He had paid a visit to the Tory Chairman, Steel Maitland, soon after Asquith's announcement of the coalition in the hope of gaining Bonar Law's support for his claim for a post closer to his interests.⁴⁴ His real responsibility, of course, was to represent the working classes and their organizations, and, of course, to lend that much more credibility to the Government. That being the case, the Board of Education was as logical a place for him as any other, and there he remained for more than a year.

By fashioning this unproven instrument, then, Herbert Henry Asquith staved off the collapse of his personal position without resort to an election or an open battle in Parliament. For the time being, he had settled the political crisis threatened by the Conservative die-hards of the Unionist Business Committee and he had created the munitions authority desired by them and by Lloyd George and his followers. He had distributed offices with an eye toward spiking the guns of those he considered potential troublemakers and casting aside some who were liabilities. By no means, however, had he been successful at insuring the longevity of his ministry – the *ad hoc* Cabinet would be as subject to tremors as the one which it replaced, and severe tests lay in its path.

The conscription issue was to become the major political controversy of the lifespan of the Asquith coalition. It would create turmoil within the Cabinet and the parties before the year 1915 was out, and the struggle was to continue into the next year. Once mandatory

service was written into law, the contention would shift to questions of how it was to be applied. Asquith knew his enemies, and he knew their chosen causes. He meant to use his powers in any way he could be impede their progress toward their goals.

IV

One of the most distinguished scholars of this period of British political history, Lord Blake, has written of the struggle over mandatory military service in these months:

The question of conscription would indeed be a tedious topic to pursue through all its ramifications. The endless discussions, the attitudes taken by public men at various times, the compromises, the disputes, constitute a chapter in English history to which no doubt in years to come dull history professors will direct their duller research students.⁴⁵

Even if this harsh judgement is accepted, it does not alter the fact that the conscription issue – always contentious and of the highest significance (regardless of the side taken by those interested) to small and influential groups of enthusiasts – became the most important question in British politics in the year which followed the formation of the Asquith Coalition.

As we have noticed, the issue had not gone unmentioned in Parliament before this time. As early as 8 January 1915, Lord Midleton had stimulated a debate in the Lords which saw Lord Selborne encourage the Government to begin studies of the possible implementation of national service, in case it became necessary to employ such a system. While indicating that the Cabinet had an 'open mind' on the use of conscription, Lord Haldane indicated that there was seen to be no need to prepare for the implementation of compulsory service at that time. As he did again on the eve of the May crisis, Haldane spoke from his own heart and not from an authorized Government position. There was no 'open mind' on the issue from Asquith's viewpoint in January 1915, and the issue did not again come up in the Lords until the rumours of coalition circulated in May. Similar isolated instances occurred in the Commons in the months before the formation of the new Government; afterwards, the issue was taken up regularly.⁴⁶

A similar story is found by examining the press. In the first months of war the issue of recruiting was a popular theme in the newspapers;

conscription, however, seldom was mentioned. As late as the month from mid-April to mid-May 1915, the Conservative Party organization was able to classify in the major metropolitan newspapers only 9 editorials and 4 letters relating to the subject. In the month following the formation of the new Government, 79 editorials and 105 letters to editors were clipped. Thereafter, the conscription controversy became the single major subject of such opinion, with *The Times*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Morning Post* typically on the side favouring the implementation of compulsory service, while the *Westminster Gazette*, the *Daily Chronicle*, and *The Star* could be depended upon to take the opposing view. The greatest radical newspaper in the nation, the *Manchester Guardian*, grew less antagonistic toward conscription as its influential editor and proprietor, C. P. Scott, came to see the temporary sacrifice of liberal principle as preferable to the prolongation of the War; in 1916 he came down on the side of compulsion.

One other point should be made at this stage in the emergence of compulsory service into the light of political controversy. The creation of the coalition was, for its chief, meant to stifle factiousness by muzzling the Tory leaders through the technique of Cabinet responsibility. The same event, however, was viewed by many who favoured the policy as a virtual guarantee that their view would triumph – and very quickly, indeed. Not the least of these were the politically minded soldiers, such as Sir Henry Wilson, who had long intrigued with civilian opinion-makers to bring about a compulsory service law. He wrote in his diary shortly after the events of May that 'with the new Government ought to come conscription'.⁴⁷ A similar expectation was expressed by Col. Thomas Bridges, who wrote to his friend, Bonar Law, on 18 May: 'The Army will expect that compulsory service will be a condition of your participation in the Government.'⁴⁸

Expectation in Whitehall that the time had come for open consideration of mandatory service was not confined to the new members of the Government. On 14 May, three days before the coalition was agreed upon, Sir Edward Grey prepared a memorandum for the Cabinet which, as it turned out, was never sent. In all discussions of the issue the patrician Foreign Secretary is never included among the enthusiasts of conscription, and yet there exists among his office papers a letter to Asquith announcing his intentions:

Unless you see objection I should like to circulate this to the Cabinet. It means a discussion in the Cabinet upon the need for

compulsory national service during the war. It is a formidable proposition, but unless the country will face it we may be beaten in the war.⁴⁹

Asquith did indeed 'see objection', and the negotiations leading to the coalition overtook Grey's plan, which he never again raised.

The expectation that conscription was now within reach because of the reconstruction of the Government was very real among many figures in public life. Lord Esher, for example, whose only qualms about the policy involved pre-War debates about 'Blue Water' defence planning now irrelevant in mid-1915, wrote to Lord Kitchener on 20 May, sharing his interpretation of the French viewpoint on recent events. Among his most interesting comments was the explanation that Britain's primary ally hoped she would adopt conscription immediately, not merely to raise troops but to employ as a device for the control of the domestic workforce.⁵⁰

Walter Long, of all Bonar Law's colleagues, most frequently addressed the conscription issue at this time. He was ill during the days of Cabinet making, but from his sickbed he barraged his leader with letters. He wrote on 20 May advising that: 'We must have compulsion for Army & Labour. I believe we ought to have Martial Law.'⁵¹ On the following day he wrote again, addressing the negotiations over offices for the new Government:

Surely if we consent to come to the aid of this miserable Gov. we can insist upon our own terms if we have to shoulder a most terrible burden we are entitled to make our own terms. This view is in my opinion sound & is widely held by our men.⁵²

He reiterated the first of these 'terms', noted the previous day; it was, of course, mandatory service.

Others besides Bonar Law received Long's angry scribbled letters at this time. On 25 May he wrote to Sir Edward Carson, who was also destined to join the coalition Cabinet: 'I would support the D-himself as P.M. with a Cabinet of his pet angels, if they would adopt compulsion all round and prosecute the war with vigour.'⁵³

Geoffrey Robinson, editor of *The Times*, confidently wrote to a friend at this same time: 'we have got a good movement going in the direction of National Service, the introduction of which is really the main justification of this change of Government'.⁵⁴ Like Walter Long, Robinson could imagine no condition the Conservatives would lay down before national service.

All who assumed that conscription was the hidden agenda of the coalition were not Tories – nor all men, for that matter – as Mrs Webb noted in her diary on 5 June 1915:

Rumours as to the meaning of this sudden and unexpected change fly hither and thither. Some say that it has been engineered by Lloyd George and Balfour; others declare that it is the only way round the administrative incompetence of Kitchener; others again hint that the Government is expecting a big disaster at the Dardanelles and the breakdown of the Russian defence and want to silence criticism; whilst the knowing ones whisper that it means compulsory military service.⁵⁵

Beatrice Webb was quite correct in her index of rumors, for each was bandied about during those tense weeks in late spring. However, her 'knowing ones' were incorrect in the short run, for the coalition did not 'mean' compulsory service in May 1915. Like Walter Long or Lord Esher or General Wilson, all of whom expected conscription to come with the change of Government, Mrs Webb's assumption was premature. Bonar Law did not lay down the policy as a condition of partnership in the new Cabinet. The reason appears to be the simplest of all: he did not choose to do so – despite the advice of Long or those who shared his views, despite Col. Bridge's claim to speak for 'the Army', and despite the meeting of the Shadow Cabinet on the eve of the crisis. He was not yet convinced that the need was great enough to require the taking of what he felt was still a great political risk. Only one man could have made him do so in May, and that was David Lloyd George, whose interests were totally taken up with the munitions question. Those circumstances were to change soon thereafter.

V

The central place in the next episode of the conscription controversy belonged to Lord Milner, the brooding and solitary proconsul who, as we have seen, was an important figure in the activities of the National Service League in the pre-War years. Milner considered himself *in* but not *of* partisan politics. Independent and, like Esher, proud of his place beyond the authority of party leaders, he had no role in the conditions leading to Tory participation in the Government. He, too, felt that compulsory service would proceed from the new partnership.

He had good reasons to feel this was so, for Austen Chamberlain, a friend and admirer who had laboured vainly to find a place in the new Government for Milner,⁵⁶ wrote to him on 20 May encouraging him in the belief that the views which he and others had forced on Bonar Law and Lansdowne at the party meeting on the 14th, now would become Cabinet business: 'We shall now, I presume,' the India Secretary-designate wrote, 'be able to enforce verbally what we had intended to write.'⁵⁷

Lord Milner was disappointed to see that this was not the case; no call for compulsion was 'enforced'. so he decided to act – as he usually did, without sanction or acknowledgement from any higher authority. Milner turned first to the press, in particular to *The Times*, edited by the former 'Milner Kindergarten'. Geoffrey Robinson. On 27 May there appeared a letter from him, under the heading 'Unfair Methods: Lord Milner's Call for Leadership':

The State ought not to be obliged to tout for fighting men. It ought to be in a position to call out the number it wants and to call them in the right order.

It is high time that the whole of our able-bodied man-hood should be enrolled except those who can render the most efficient aid in other ways. And the nation is ready to obey the order. It only needs the captain on the bridge to give the order.

The call particularly stimulated the National Service League.

The League had, since the outset of the War, remained silent. Its leader, Lord Roberts, died shortly after the outset of hostilities, and no great figure had taken his place. On 8 June 1915, Milner became president of the League and began immediately to lay plans for a campaign to drive the Government to adopt the policy of conscription. He addressed the annual meeting on the 16th and told the assembled faithful that State Control was the sole hope of winning the War. The British people, he indicated, had for years been victimized by appeals to individual freedoms and demonstrated 'a proneness to be led astray by clap-trap'. The salvation of the country was now in doubt and her only hope lay in 'universal service' – which seemed to include both civilian and military conscription.⁵⁸

Milner set immediately to work planning a propaganda campaign to convince the nation and, therefore, the Government of the desirability of their policy. As it turned out, Lord Northcliffe, who had thrown off any qualms he had felt earlier about conscription, was

preparing a similar agitation, forcing Milner's hand. The latter wrote to Lady Roberts, widow of the late Field Marshal:

It was decided that we could no longer sit still. The embargo on further propaganda was therefore taken off, and we shall do all we can to help, without trying to 'boss' the movement which had sprung up independently of us. It is unfortunate that it should have originated with Northcliffe – he incites justly or unjustly, so many animosities – but I think the feeling is now too strong and widespread for even this evil-godfathership to hamper it materially.

In a postscript marked 'Very Confidential' he added:

The real difficulty, of course, is Kitchener. If he would *hold up* his hand, the thing would be done without difficulty. Otherwise we might have a bitter fight, which is, of course, at a time like this, deplorable.⁵⁹

On 20 August, the day after this letter was sent, the League began its propaganda campaign, with the noisy support of the Northcliffe press, which caused its new president some discomfort. Milner had always found Roberts's emphasis on home defense objectionable. Now, with a very real continental war, with headquarters at the Front calling out constantly for more men and with new emphasis placed on the supply of munitions labour, he declared full-scale war on voluntarism. Milner wanted true universal service for all able-bodied men, with the way in which they would serve, at the Front or at home, directed by the State. In one form or another his campaign would not cease until he entered the Cabinet, more than a year later, at which time he simply took his determined views inside the Government.⁶⁰

As Lord Milner and his allies prepared campaigns to drive the Government in the direction of his schemes for national service, the mind of the new Minister of Munitions, David Lloyd George, was captured by the idea of a broad construct of universal service. His attempts to increase the supply of *materiel* to the Army through his two Cabinet committees had convinced him that inadequate production was due largely to the inability of the public and private munitions shops to secure adequate supplies of skilled labour.⁶¹ With the coalition he secured his munitions department and, with it, authority over labour supply for munitions works.

Without waiting for statutory authority – neither the bill creating the new ministry nor that which was to give it its broad powers was yet passed – he embarked in early June on a speaking tour of the industrial districts. In Manchester he addressed the questions of trade-union privileges and of state regulation in wartime: ‘whilst preferring to rely on persuasion,’ the *Manchester Guardian* observed, ‘Mr. Lloyd George more than hinted at the drastic powers which the Defence of the Realm Act gives the agents of the State.’⁶² He addressed the question of state control in the context of the national emergency and counter-attacked his critics who accused the former ‘people’s champion’ of ‘Prussianism’ ‘When the house is on fire, he thundered, questions of procedure and precedence, of etiquette and time and division of labour must disappear.’ Was it conscription? he rhetorically asked. ‘Not necessarily in any ordinary sense’, he ambiguously answered.

What turned the Minister of Munitions to consideration of such an extreme position, and what made more keen his interest in industrial rather than military compulsion, was his belief that the War, while fought on the battlefields, must be won in the factories. Skilled labour, he knew from the information he had wrung from the War Office, was insufficient; only in the first days of the coalition did he confirm his fears and find them, in fact, more serious than even he had thought.⁶³ As early as December 1914 the Admiralty had begun issuing official badges to workmen in Government and contractor’s shipyards in order to protect them from the pressures of recruiters. Soon, though with a much smaller program, the War Office gave permission for its contractors to follow suit.⁶⁴ The badging programs, and similar unauthorized efforts by Government contractors attempting to hold increasingly scarce skilled labour, were weak countermeasures against the enormous social pressure on men of military age to enlist. Only in July was the extent of the damage known, and the Munitions Office faced the terrible fact that the following percentages of the ‘total occupied male population employed in each trade’ were lost since the outbreak of the War:⁶⁵

Coal	21.8
Iron and steel	18.8
Engineering	19.5
Electrical engineering	23.7
Shipbuilding	16.5
Small arms	16.0
Chemicals and explosives	23.8

Other metals	20.8
Cycles	22.3
Wire-drawing	19.7
Woolen and Worsted	12.5

One of the founders of the Labour Department of the Ministry of Munitions, Humbert Wolfe, has written of this period:

The patriotic impulse was not cautious. It did not select its men, saying to the skilled man 'stay' and to the unskilled 'come'. It knew nothing of key industries or pivotal workers. It chose, if not all, the best of all ranks and grades of industry. It took the skilled man equally with the unskilled, it took the strong man in preference to the weak, and, above all, it took those to whom the struggle meant the most.⁶⁶

It was this desperate situation within the trades most important to the production of military stores which turned Lloyd George toward industrial compulsion, and during his period at the Munitions Office he was convinced that it was the proper policy for the discharge of his new responsibility. He shared his considerations with C. P. Scott of the *Manchester Guardian*, who recorded them rather uncritically in his diary on 16 June: 'Failing the enlistment voluntarily of a sufficient number of workers I gathered that Lloyd George's original scheme of universal compulsory service for home defence would take effect, such service to be in either a home defence army or in industrial service sanctioned by the State.'⁶⁷

The plan, however, was still-born. Dr Christopher Addison, the physician-social reformer who served Lloyd George so well in this period, admired the Minister of Munitions, but he did not fear him and did not hesitate to point out to him what he thought were errors in judgement. He wrote in his memoirs of this question:

Unfortunately, Lloyd George came back from his Lancashire visit rather infected with the idea that proposals for labour conscription were required [He] rather let himself go in his speech at Manchester and there was something of a storm about it in the House of Commons on Monday June 7. On the previous Saturday I had entered a vehement protest against the proposal The case against [industrial] compulsion was that, whilst there was undoubtedly slacking and short time in some quarters, it was certain that, even in a time of danger, the people would not tolerate a proposal that involved forced labour unless an overwhel-

ming case could be made in favour of it. No such case could be made out.⁶⁸

Lloyd George did get a strong Munitions of War Act, which gave him unprecedented powers to organize and direct resources, capital and labour important to the production of military stores.⁶⁹ He did not obtain Cabinet agreement in June 1915 on industrial conscription, and the idea was temporarily lost. He did not even elicit the full support of the strongest conscriptionists in the coalition, and the reason was that the anticipated costs – public opposition and the hard-and-fast resistance of the trade unions – were thought to be excessive. F. S. Oliver, who believed in both industrial and military conscription, analysed the case for his friend, Austen Chamberlain: ‘If you attempt to have compulsory *industrial* service – which nobody understands – without first setting up compulsory *military* service – which everybody understands – you will I think come somewhere near revolution.’⁷⁰

The Ministry of Munitions came to set regulations for labour in munitions shops, to control profits of shareholders of Government contractors and even revolutionize the system of costing their contracts. Lloyd George came to rely on state control as the only way he could organize the national war effort, in the shortest time possible and to the greatest output. While he could seldom be accused of taking the advice of the arch-Tory, F. S. Oliver, in effect he reached the same conclusion: universal service, in its broadest sense was politically impossible in 1915. Relying on other measures in the industrial sphere, he came, by late summer, to the conclusion that military conscription was necessary to supply and regulate manpower both for the Army and for industry. It had another appealing virtue: unlike industrial compulsion, he and a significant number of his colleagues came at last to see it as achievable.

6 Choosing Sides

I

In June 1915, David Lloyd George introduced into Parliament the first Munitions of War Act.¹ Frustrated by the inability of his two successive Cabinet committees to respond to the growing munitions shortage, he had demanded the creation of a new department of state, became its first minister,² and took responsibility for the production of military stores. This legislation gave the minister unprecedented powers to accomplish his tasks. One of his first decisions at Whitehall Gardens, headquarters of the Ministry, was to order the gathering of data through an industrial census of the workshops of the nation, and 65 000 forms were distributed inquiring about the staffs, contracts, machinery and output of factories throughout Great Britain. Unlike the Householders Return of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, completion of these forms was mandatory, and more than 45 000 were returned to the Ministry within a month.³

This was one of the initial steps in the creation of what turned out to be the greatest network of state-owned or regulated manufacturing facilities since the coming of the Industrial Revolution. Once the relevant information was gathered, the Minister and his staff began the forging of a system of controls upon men and women which were, perhaps, more significant even than the building of the new state factories.⁴ Walter Long, President of the Local Government Board and therefore an interested party in matters of manpower supply, both admired and feared Lloyd George's schemes. He wrote to Bonar Law in early June, including with his letter a draft paper for the Conservative members of the Cabinet. In it he addressed what he interpreted as 'a profound and widespread desire, not confined among our friends by any means, that the Nation as a whole be thoroughly organised, as is the case in France, Russia and Germany'.⁵ He then turned to the work of the Minister of Munitions:

Lloyd George's scheme, which seems to me on the whole a good one, will not only fail to do this, but the more completely it organises and equips the factories for making shells the more it will tend to dislocate other factories, and I am pretty confident that unless prompt and satisfactory action is taken in this direction there will be profound dissatisfaction in the country, which will find expression in the House of Commons.

Long was not so concerned about the organization of the workplaces of the nation as he was anxious that Lloyd George's enthusiastic approach to his new duties would blunt the attack of the conscriptionists in the new Cabinet. Long concluded his analysis by advising that his Tory colleagues aid the Minister of Munitions in his work but that they:

take care that he does not so 'dominate' the Cabinet as to exclude other considerations, or to bring about such a result as followed in the last Cabinet, and to produce a condition of things three months hence almost as unsatisfactory as that which we found when we joined the Government.

The 'other consideration' Walter Long had in mind was, of course, the imposition of conscription – which he felt might be imminent in mid-1915. The 'result' to which he referred was the combination of what he saw as inaction on the part of the Government and revolt in the Commons and in the press against this state of affairs. He desired that some action be taken, and his first suggestion had been circulated to the full Cabinet little more than a week before his letter to Bonar Law. Hoping that conscription would follow, but desirous of taking some action whether he could deliver compulsory service or not, he offered a plan to conduct a labour census, as the Munitions Office meant to carry out an industrial census.⁶ Long's scheme immediately became a sort of litmus test on conscription feeling within the Government and Parliament.

Asquith, who had given his permission for Long to draft such a bill, encouraged his Cabinet colleagues to report back to the full Cabinet their analyses of the labour registration idea. Virtually all who offered an opinion, public or private, sensed in the plan the possibility of compulsory service. Predictably, Walter Runciman, President of the Board of Trade and an orthodox Liberal, found it 'hard to see how the register will have any value at all commensurate with its cost'⁷ In the end, the bill had little practical value in his eyes, save as a preparatory exercise for the imposition of conscription. Lewis Harcourt, First Commissioner of Works and also a Liberal, echoed the sentiments of Runciman and argued that if the national temper favoured registration as much as Long suggested, voluntary registration might serve as well – or better – the ends desired without resort to compulsory registration.⁸

Perhaps the strongest advice in opposition to these Liberals came from Lord Curzon, who reasoned that if voluntarism could supply the

manpower for military and domestic purposes, then the proposed national register would enable the authorities to better determine who should serve at home and who should be accepted into the Army. 'If voluntary enlistment fails,' he continued, 'the register is the only possible basis upon which compulsion can be fairly or effectively brought into operation.'⁹ Curzon next analysed in this memorandum the conflict in chilling terms, touching what he considered to be the real essence of the conflict in France and Belgium:

The War seems to me to be resolving itself largely into a question of killing Germans. For this purpose, viewing the present method and instruments of war, one man seems to me about the equivalent of another, and one life taken to involve another life. If then two millions (or whatever figure) more of Germans have to be killed, at least a corresponding number of Allied soldiers will have to be sacrificed to effect that object. I am anxious that we should realise the probable dimensions and provide for [them] before it is too late.

In his support of the registration bill Curzon hoped to hasten the demise of voluntarism and the coming of compulsory service. A. J. Balfour, who also responded to the Prime Minister's request for views on Long's proposal, was far less certain that either registration or conscription was desirable at that time. Unlike Runciman or Harcourt, of course, Balfour was no Liberal or champion of what he termed 'the familiar commonplaces about the sacredness of personal liberty'. An amateur scientist and logician as well as a statesman, he considered himself a man without illusions. He revealed to his colleagues what he felt to be the supreme error both in Lloyd George's labour control measures and in Long's registration scheme:

It seems plainly impossible to survey the whole male population of the country and order each man to a task determined for him by some central authority. It is on this rock that, as most of us believe, Socialism would split, were it ever attempted, and that which would be impossible if we had time for quiet organization is surely doubly impossible now.

Noting that the greatest apparent needs for labour were in the fields of munitions manufacture and agriculture, Balfour revealed what was to him the greatest problem with the registration scheme as Long proposed it:

this means the Bill, though nominally of universal application, is in reality going to be applied mainly to a particular class; and it will be impossible to conceal the fact that this is its object and intention.¹⁰

As Curzon and Long argued the merits of national registration from the viewpoint that it was a step in the direction of conscription, Balfour argued its faults from the same perspective. As in the days of his ministry, he was unconvinced that the benefits of compulsory service outweighed the struggle he anticipated would be required to gain it.

Long counter-attacked against his critic's accusation that his plan was simply the advance guard which would prepare the way for compulsion:

I do not agree that compulsory registration means compulsory service, and I am strongly of opinion that the ultimate object in view can to a large extent be secured given compulsory registration, without resort to any further compulsion either for the army or for industrial purposes.¹¹

This argument was disingenuous: Long was not 'strongly of opinion' that voluntarism could somehow be made to supply the men needed for the Army and for domestic employment, even with compulsory registration. He came somewhat closer to the truth of the matter in his memoirs, written five years after the War:

Personally I was always in favour of conscription and, so far as I knew, my views were shared by many of my colleagues. However, it was obvious that much had to be done before we could justify its adoption. This bill, when introduced, was challenged in the House of Commons on the grounds that it was the first step towards compulsion – a view which was strongly resisted, and properly, by the Prime Minister. It was well known that some of us were in favour of conscription, but it was perfectly true that this measure, though in my opinion necessary before it could be proposed in Parliament, might also have shown it was neither necessary nor practicable. It was therefore incorrect to argue that registration must be inevitably followed by compulsory service.¹²

Only a short while before introducing the Registration Bill on 29 June, Long showed his truest colours when he wrote to Lord Curzon that registration was all they could get: 'I forgot for the moment that

we had so many “weak kneed” brethren present.’¹³ His exclamation to Sir Edward Carson, making reference to his possible membership in a Cabinet presided over by the Powers of Darkness, has already been cited. General Sir Henry Wilson, unrelenting as always in his criticism of statesmen who failed to give him what he wanted, put his own evaluation of the matter succinctly, if uncharitably: ‘Freddie Guest showed me a long letter he had received from Walter Long – poor devil – to the effect that no case had yet been made out for conscription &tc – Marvellous.’¹⁴

Asquith communicated to King George V on 23 June 1915 the decision of that day’s Cabinet regarding this debate over compulsory registration:

Diverse opinions were expressed as to the possible necessity of an ultimate resort to some form of compulsion, but it was agreed that the question is not in any way involved in the present Bill, the object of which is best described in Mr. Balfour’s words, as the ‘guiding of voluntary enlistment, military and industrial, into the channels least hurtful to national production and efficiency’

It was further agreed that women should be included in the proposed census, and that special machinery if possible be devised to meet the special conditions of Ireland.¹⁵

Opponents of the registration bill introduced by Long on 29 June did not share the Prime Minister’s opinion. In the debate of 5 July the Welsh radical Llewellyn Williams insisted over the loud protestations of Coalition supporters:

It is obvious from every speech in support of the Bill, from every article which has been published in the newspapers in support of this Bill, that there is an ulterior motive and object. We are introducing a Bill which can never be put into effective operation unless it is followed by a stringent measure of compulsion.

In the same debate, the Independent Labour Party’s fiery champion, Philip Snowden, echoed the judgements of the Liberal, Williams:

This Bill, when it becomes an Act of Parliament, will be absolutely useless, unless there is compulsion, and this is quite plain from the speeches of [its supporters].

Among the members of the Government who took a prominent place in the debate of 5 July was the sole Labour minister, Arthur

Henderson, who defended the measure in these terms, refuting Snowden and Williams:

I am of the opinion, and I do not mind saying that I am strongly of the opinion, that we can complete the war on the system upon which we began, but we will complete it all the better having the fullest and best knowledge at our disposal upon which to work.

We have been told that the Bill will be useless without compulsion, and that compulsion means conscription. I for one cannot accept that position.

Walter Long, the author of the bill, was again forced to restrain his pro-conscription enthusiasm and take a public position far milder than his true feelings. Speaking in the same debate, he said:

I have observed that one of the objections to the Bill is that it contains in some mysterious and concealed fashion the policy of conscription for the Army. I think that we may dismiss this theory of conscription as not being in any way connected with this Bill. This Bill leaves the question of compulsory service exactly where it is and where it has been; it does not affect it one way or the other.

Three days later the National Registration Act passed its third reading with only token opposition. Sunday 15 August was designated as Registration Day, and all citizens, male and female, between the ages of 15 and 65 were required under penalty of law to report to canvassers their names, occupations, current employ and skills useful to war work.¹⁶ The information gathered from male respondents between the ages of 18 and 41 was copied onto pink forms (white forms were used for females and blue denoted males not of military age or fitness), with those of men employed in necessary occupations marked with black stars. By the end of October, when the information gathered had been analysed, the Registrar General revealed that there were 5 158 211 names recorded on pink forms, with 1 519 432 starred. Further reducing the number available by the accepted average of 25 per cent for medical rejection, this left a manpower pool of approximately 2 700 000.¹⁷

This exercise in record-keeping taught several lessons. Lloyd George and his 'men of push and go' at the Munitions Office had concrete evidence that no more skilled men could be lost to enlistment without creating further difficulties in war production. They pushed ahead with their policy of 'diluting' the supply of skilled men

with unskilled workers: women and youths as well as men unfit for service. The proponents of military conscription in the Cabinet also found these figures enlightening: Curzon, Chamberlain, Churchill, Long and their conscriptionist colleagues concluded that no more time should be lost with further half-measures and compromises. They prepared to redouble their efforts to drive the Cabinet and its unwilling Prime Minister toward a measure of compulsory service.

There was an additional interpretation of the product of Registration Day as certain opponents of compulsory service, Reginald McKenna and Walter Runciman foremost among them, concluded that Britain was coming closer each day to the limits of her resources in trying to fight an uncharacteristic continental war. These men, like their opponents on the issue, prepared to engage in a decisive battle over the issue of compulsory service – a policy, to them, which would leave Britain bankrupt as well as defeated.

II

Walter Long, in his attempts to stave off the attacks of voluntarists, had pronounced that his Registration Act left the issue of compulsory service 'exactly where it was', and he was correct in the sense that it did not at all change the legal condition of the policy – the Army still depended on voluntary enlistment to raise troops. However, the overwhelming passage of the law signalled a renewed effort to gain the conscription bill he and others of like mind wanted. All were not Tories, as we have seen. Captain Frederick Guest, a Liberal and a serving officer who had grown close to Sir Henry Wilson, raised the issue in the adjournment debate of 28 July, much to the annoyance of his leader, Asquith:

To-night is a particularly good occasion on which to raise the subject [of conscription], as to-day we have already had two statements which, to my mind, point to the necessity for us turning it over in our minds. This afternoon the Prime Minister told us that we must consider that this war may turn itself into a contest of endurance. We have also heard from the Minister of Munitions that there are difficulties which may have to be faced in other directions.

Captain Guest was part of a small group of Liberals who were to become the nucleus of what came to be called the Liberal War Committee. Lloyd George was willing to hold back, awaiting the

results of his munitions campaign; Churchill's power to hasten the coming of conscription was lessened because his credibility was suspect, and he remained muzzled within the Government. Guest had no such liabilities. He wrote to F. S. Oliver shortly before the adjournment debate:

Do any [Conservatives] feel inclined to contemplate a campaign with me on the subject [of national service]? If no statement is made this week I feel myself relieved of any pledge to conventional methods and if assisted, feel inclined to start a tour of meetings.

Can you approach a few who carry weight and see if they would damn the Government and the consequences. I feel in my bones that it is the root of our disease and will bear no delay.¹⁸

As he so often seemed to do, Leopold Amery served as a link between these impatient Liberals and another camp, the Conservative backbenchers. These Tories, who had helped to make uneasy the final days of Asquith's Liberal Government, left the thrust of this attack on 28 July to Guest and his friends, Ellis Griffith, Leo Chiozza Money and Josiah Wedgwood. Only Amery joined their assault on the Prime Minister:

The one thing the nation is looking for today is guidance. This is not a time as which you can afford half-measures, and belated half-measures at that. It is not a time for waiting and seeing whether recruits or victories will turn up. You may very possibly find that we shall not get either.¹⁹

This debate did not strike a fatal blow against Asquith or the voluntarists who supported him. However, it served fair warning that a decisive struggle was on. Leopold Amery could topple neither Government nor policy alone, even with the help of his new allies. However, his activities at this time were not uninteresting. With his commission as Captain he had been seconded to the command of the Director of Military Operations, General Callwell, in late July, where he was installed in the Balkan Division of the Intelligence Department. In fact, his appointment was simply a cover for his real effort, which was the conducting of a covert campaign to hasten the implementation of compulsory service. Having found a community of interest over conscription, he bridged the partisan gulf between the Liberal 'ginger' group, the Milnerites and the National Service League they now controlled, the pro-conscription element among the

Cabinet Conservatives, and, of course, the Unionist Business Committee. He was aided with manpower information by the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Neville Chamberlain, the younger half-brother of the India Secretary.²⁰

As Amery waged his covert operation within the Department of the Director of Military Operations, Long and his pro-conscription allies in the Cabinet redoubled their efforts to force the issue while the House was in recess. He wrote to Curzon on 2 August:

I am glad to find that you propose taking action about Compulsory service. I am so convinced that we must adopt it at once that I have been engaged in preparing a memorandum for the Cabinet.²¹

Both Bonar Law and Lansdowne attempted to dissuade Long from circulating his conscription paper, the former telling him, 'my feeling is that to start the controversy just now would not help the end in view' ²² While temporarily convinced to hold back his thoughts, Long did circulate the memorandum shortly thereafter.²³

It seems to me that the Cabinet must come shortly to a definite decision upon the subject of compulsory service. A statement is likely to be required when Parliament reassembles in the autumn I suggest, therefore, that we should seize the opportunity of comparative leisure which is afforded by the Recess to arrive at a settled opinion; it is with this object that I venture to submit the following suggestions to my colleagues.²⁴

Long went on to elaborate on his 'suggestions': mandatory service was not a condemnation of voluntarism but, rather, a method of securing the 'right' men for military service, leaving those with the proper skills in their civilian employ. Such a policy, he continued, would relieve the perplexed citizen of his concern about what it was the state required of him. Finally, Long addressed the matter of the National Register, which he had defended in the House as an exercise unrelated to conscription: 'I think that the reception given to the National Register Act is evidence of the support, *since few people believe the Act stands by itself and is not, in fact, the essential preliminary to national service.*' Despite the fact that this thoroughly contradicted his public position, he left no doubt in the minds of his colleagues where he meant to take his stand:

I have in this memorandum definitely ranged myself on the side of National Service, with the consequence of compulsion, as I am

convinced of its necessity and of its powerful effect for good. I am prepared to submit a scheme for carrying out Compulsory National Service if the principle is accepted.

The memorandum was written the same day that Warsaw fell to the Germans and a day before a renewed attack in the Dardanelles failed completely. Walter Long was again, as Lord Lansdowne termed it, 'on the warpath'.

Tensions among pro- and anti-conscriptionists in the Government and the Houses of Parliament at this time were great, and so was the level of intrigue to gain or block the policy. The Cabinet voluntarists – all the Liberals save Churchill and Lloyd George – suspected that the latter was turning to conscription at this time. Among their anxieties was a fear that he was preparing to throw in his lot with the Tories in order to force national service – industrial and military – on Asquith. In fact, the pro-conscriptionists' wooing of the Minister of Munitions was more intense than ever.²⁵

On 9 August, F. E. Smith, the Solicitor-General, reported to Lloyd George the conclusions of an informal meeting of Tory ministers, called to discuss the possibility of conscription. The message was sent in a dispatch box accidentally marked 'the Chancellor of the Exchequer', which office belonged by this time to the staunch voluntarist, Reginald McKenna. The letter stated:

Dear L.G.

B.L. cannot come tonight but I am seeing him before Cabinet tomorrow. K plants himself simply upon the Registration Act and says if the results show a real reservoir of strength he will not hesitate to tell the Cabinet we must have compulsory service – not a bad augmentative position especially as he claims French as an ally.

Tell me if I can do anything.

F.E.

Two days later the letter came to Lloyd George accompanied by this brief note from McKenna: 'The enclosed was delivered to my house in a box. I opened it and have read it.'²⁶ Miss Stevenson noted the episode in her diary:

What had happened during those two days can only be surmised, but D. [Lloyd George] concludes that the note had been handed

about for inspection, as it presented rather a dirty appearance. D. was furious & wrote a biting letter to McKenna suggesting that the next time a letter came into his hands by mistake, he should put it back into the same box & send it on to the right person *at once* – after reading it, of course.²⁷

No proof exists as to who saw the letter and to what use it was put. There is preserved in the Kitchener Papers, however, a letter to the warlord from Walter Runciman, McKenna's close ally, written about the same time: 'This morning there fell into my hands by accident direct evidence of the political & personal objects underlying the subject we talked over last night. One of the ulterior objects *is* to smite Asquith.'²⁸

Was F. E. Smith's letter to Lloyd George the 'direct evidence' to which Runciman referred, and was compulsory service the 'subject we talked over last night'? There is no confirming documentation, but these episodes sufficiently illustrate the dire climate of opinion regarding the conscription question within the ranks of Britain's leaders at this time. No man was more acutely aware of this dangerous situation than Herbert Henry Asquith, who, no doubt, was among those who read the F. E. Smith note of 9 August. The Prime Minister had stood astride British politics for seven years; he was a master of compromise whose impact on political strife had the effect of a wet blanket thrown over sparks. Yet even Asquith's skills were to be tested by what faced him in these weeks.

The military situation was also not to be ignored in assessing the Prime Minister's burdens: in early July, at Calais, Kitchener pledged to the French that he would put into the field an army of 70 divisions – more than ten times the force with which Britain began the war and more than double the army she could field at that time.²⁹ Then, as we have seen, the first week of August witnessed a renewed assault in the Dardanelles Theater, including the immediately disastrous landing at Suvla Bay. After reading the reports sent back by Hankey, who had gone out to report on the maneuvers, Asquith uncharacteristically lost his temper: 'I have read enough to satisfy me,' he wrote to Kitchener on 20 August, 'that the generals and staff engaged in the Suvla part of the business ought to be court-martialled and dismissed from the Army.'³⁰

A few days before this letter was written, Kitchener again crossed the Channel to meet the British and French commanders.³¹ Marshal Joffre, always sanguine, always positive, now reminded the British Secretary of State of War that the French had quietly supported the

renewed Dardanelles campaign in return for Kitchener's aid in securing a new assault on the Western Front in the autumn. A. J. P. Taylor has written of this melancholy decision:

After Hamilton's failure [in the Dardanelles], Joffre presented his bill, and Kitchener honoured it. He told the Dardanelles committee [of the Cabinet]: 'We have to make war as we must and not as we should like to.' The French ministers, who had no faith in an offensive, agreed to it in order to please Kitchener; the British ministers agreed in order to please the French.³²

Asquith wrote to the King on 20 August:

Lord Kitchener while far from sanguine that any substantial military advantage will be achieved is strongly of the opinion that we cannot, without serious and perhaps fatal injury to the alliance, refuse the co-operation which General Joffre invites and expects. After much consideration the Cabinet adopted Lord Kitchener's view and the necessary steps will be taken.³³

The 'necessary steps' so far as Britain was concerned led to the Battle of Loos, fought in a cramped area of coal-pits and miners' cottages assigned to Field Marshal French by Joffre, with Kitchener's consent. Lasting from mid-September to mid-October, the results were disastrous: the Germans lost 20 000 men in the battle; British casualties totalled two and a half times as many. Sir John French blamed the failure on Sir Douglas Haig, who in turn blamed French for withholding reserves. In any event, Haig's star was rising and French's plummeting, and Loos was the final opportunity for one commander-in-chief and the beginning of many more for his successor.

III

Asquith's solution to the growing danger to his Government of the conscription question was one to which he had turned many times in the past – a Cabinet committee, appointed to examine manpower and resources and advise the Cabinet on the question: 'How large should be the Army which we endeavour to keep in the field during the year 1916? If the main facts can be established upon an agreed basis,' [the instructions continued], 'the Cabinet as a whole will be able to discuss the questions of policy which will then arise.'³⁴

As the list of names of the six-member committee was assembled, the Prime Minister failed to include that of the leader of the Conservative and Unionist Party. Even more annoying to Bonar Law than his omission was the fact that he had not been consulted regarding the names of his followers asked to serve, while Lord Curzon had been asked to review the list. On 12 August the Colonial Secretary remonstrated to Asquith about the slight; the Prime Minister responded the same day:³⁵

I, of course, included your name in the first list of the Committee which I showed to Curzon. We both thought it looked too long. So I left out you and Simon as being heavily occupied with departmental work. But I need not say that I shall be very delighted if you will serve on the Committee, and I have given instructions accordingly.

Bonar Law replied immediately:

I have your note but my object in writing to you was not to ask that I should be added to the Committee, and in the circumstances I prefer not to serve on it.

Asquith was no admirer of either the character or the ability of the Tory leader, and he meant once again to take advantage of his co-operation without the distasteful necessity of treating him as an equal, just as he had done in the creation of the coalition Cabinet. Bonar Law's sulky reply indicates that what he considered to be the 'most important Committee' set up under the coalition was not off to a good start – particularly in light of the fact that Asquith wished it to purchase both time and at least a measure of tranquillity within the Cabinet.

The membership of the War Policy Committee, as it came to be called, is certainly germane to a study of the conscription question. As chairman, Asquith appointed Lord Crewe; suspicious of mandatory service, he was the man whose judgement the premier always considered soundest in the Cabinet. Also serving were Churchill, Curzon, Chamberlain and Lord Selborne (President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries), each a committed conscriptionist; and Arthur Henderson, the Labourite President of the Board of Education. Henderson was officially a strong voluntarist, but he had shown his flexibility in regard to questions of state control by supporting both the Munitions of War and National Registration Acts.

The Committee could not avoid the issue of compulsory service and, assuming that Crewe and Henderson would oppose it at this point, it had a decided four-to-two pro-conscriptionist majority. Asquith, who created the body, knew the feelings of these men, and his motives in appointing these commissioners are worthy of note. He wrote in his memoirs many years later:

I had laid it down on behalf of the Government as a whole as far back as May 1915, that for the purpose of the War compulsoin was a pure question of practical expediency, and that from that point of view the sole limitation which I recognized was that, if compulsion were to be applied, it must be with something of the nature of general consent.

For a long time it appeared that there was no prospect of obtaining such 'general consent'.³⁶

Of this period, Professor Trevor Wilson has written: 'For the truth is that Asquith, although claiming to have an open mind on conscription, detested it – and believed that he represented his party in doing so.'³⁷ These events, however, and others we shall examine, seem to indicate that Asquith did not oppose conscription as did Simon, Runciman and McKenna of his own party (much less as did James Ramsay MacDonald or Philip Snowden among the Labourites), that is, with the single-minded surety that it would be a ruinous mistake. The appointment of the War Policy Committee with a clear majority of enthusiastic believers in compulsory service indicates another agenda. Asquith wished to win the War, as did all patriotic Britons; he wished also to remain Prime Minister and to ensure the future of a Liberal Party of much the same kind as that which he knew before the War. He was thoroughly apprised of the problems of the Western Front and in the Dardanelles, and he no doubt saw conscription as likely, if not inevitable.³⁸ He had no intention, however, of declaring for the policy unless the political waters were thoroughly tested first. In this regard it appears that the Prime Minister came somewhat closer in his memoirs to his true feelings of 1915 than Professor Wilson would allow.

The Committee would be both a stop-gap measure, to get his beleaguered Government through the immediate crisis, and a stalking horse, examining the ground for the issue of compulsory service in the light of public and parliamentary opinion. If the 'general consent' was unearthed, then Asquith would allow a compulsion bill;

if such was not the case, then he would not, and only those on the committee would suffer direct criticism. When the correct time came – if it ever did – then the Prime Minister would graciously bow both to need and to that ‘general consent’ which all democratic statesmen were bound to serve.

The Committee in its dozen sessions interviewed an impressive body of experts, among them Lloyd George, Long, McKenna and Runciman, as well as Lord Kitchener and a number of high-ranking Army officers. The Minister of Munitions was, along with Kitchener, the most important witness, testifying on 16 and 18 August.³⁹ Lloyd George, as we have seen, was sincerely considering the viability of industrial as well as military conscription, but he had yet to press his wishes on the Cabinet. When asked his views on compulsory service on 18 August, he told the Committee:⁴⁰

If you ask me personally whether it would help the efficient conduct of the war I say at once that it certainly would. I would say that every man and woman was bound to render the services that the State required of them, and which in the opinion of the State they could best render.

Lloyd George had advised only a few months before that he thought organization of labour in the munitions shops would be a sufficient measure of ‘control’ to win the War. He served notice to his colleagues that his views had changed:

I do not believe you will go through the war without it in the end; in fact, I am perfectly certain you will have to come to it

I do not think you will get through without some measure of military compulsion or compulsion for military service. I think the longer you delay it the nearer you will be to disaster. I am certain you cannot get through without it.

When asked what exactly he meant by compulsory military service, he replied: ‘I mean exactly what you have in France – that every man between certain ages shall be liable to serve in the Army.’ There was to be no mistaken opinion in this case.

On the following day the Committee interviewed the anti-conscriptionist, Walter Runciman, and the following exchange took place between the President of the Board of Trade and Lord Curzon:⁴¹

MR. RUNCIMAN: If I may sum up, I would say we could maintain an army of 2½ millions, and every man we go beyond

that will weaken us, because it would cut away the [economic] foundations on which we rest.

LORD CURZON: You mean 2½ millions outside of this country?

MR. RUNCIMAN: No; a total of 2½ millions – if you have more than 2½ millions under arms –

LORD CURZON: We have that now.

MR. RUNCIMAN: Well, anything beyond what we have now will tend to injure us so severely that we shall find ourselves unable to thoroughly equip and support that army.

By Runciman's calculations, no more than 850 000 men made up the pool from which the military could recruit – anything beyond that number, he predicted, would bring economic ruin to the nation.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Reginald McKenna, was next to face the Committee, which he did on 23 August. Like Runciman, he saw the absolute limit of Britain's ability to remove men from the domestic economy for military service as fast approaching.⁴² Likewise, he was disturbed about the nation's consumption of goods and services: 'If the nation is going to spend on its own consumption at the present rate, you cannot devote more labour for the use of the Army or for the purpose of supplying our Allies.'

When pressed by Lord Crewe to define the terrible results of policies then current or projected (particularly Kitchener's pledge to raise 70 divisions), and the possibility of risking bankruptcy in order to obtain victory, McKenna coolly replied: 'It is not bankruptcy I am thinking of; it is capacity. It is no use undertaking to do a thing which you physically cannot do.' Curzon picked up the issue and inquired if the Chancellor thought that even the returns then current under voluntarism – 20 000 men per month, about half what Kitchener wished – were excessive and, in the end, impossible to maintain. His answer: 'Yes.'

While his reputation among the public was still great, Lord Kitchener's stature among his Cabinet colleagues was sadly diminished. When first asked to appear before the War Policy Committee, he refused and threatened to resign if required to testify. However, the Prime Minister intervened, and the warlord met the Committee on the 24th. He was preceded in his appearance by three of his principal expert advisers: General R. A. Montgomery, Director of

Recruiting; General Archibald Murray, the Deputy CIGS; and General Charles Callwell, Director of Military Operations. Each was a keen conscriptionist; each also was a loyal subordinate and testified as Kitchener wished them to do – that voluntarism was sufficient to meet the manpower needs of the Army. Callwell, a close friend of Sir Henry Wilson and, after the War, the editor of his papers, wrote on 24 August to H. A. 'Taffy' Gwynne, editor the *Morning Post*:

In dealing with Cabinet Committees it is very difficult not to expose the business. I am not a good liar – the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak – and you cannot fool people like Curzon & Winston who know the business. Northcliffe may get hold of the facts because Repington somehow has very useful sources of information, and if he does he may make trouble much more effectually than he did on munitions. K trusts to bluffing them all; but he may not succeed.⁴³

Kitchener met the Committee on 24 August, and the discussion turned immediately to compulsory service.⁴⁴ When reminded that the electorate had an interest in the policy, Kitchener noted: 'I greatly regret that there has been this discussion in the country. I think it is very premature and can only have done harm, but I am quite willing to make a short statement about what my views are with regard to compulsory service.' While admitting that enlistments were at that time averaging something less than 20 000 men per week, Kitchener announced his plans for a 70 division force, requiring an intake of 35 000 men per week. While it may have been possible to increase the rate of voluntarism sufficiently to raise such a force, Kitchener could not assure the Committee that the expanded enlistment level could be continued to maintain such a force, much less achieve the 100-division Army he contemplated.

When pressed by Curzon and Selborne, the Secretary of State admitted that conscription had to be contemplated if recruitment figures fell even further, and that while he had every intention of waiting for an analysis of the results of the National Register it might be necessary to press for an act of parliament before the end of the year. Kitchener's compromise of his position on compulsory service was, however, more apparent than real. He made no effort in the direction of implementing a conscription act and, weeks later, proposed only the consideration of a return to a ballot scheme to be applied to counties in which enlistments were considered insufficient. 'The scheme,' the Minister of Munitions observed, 'was, however,

severely criticised as clumsy and unworkable, and it was not further proceeded with.⁴⁵

In the days between the taking of testimony and the presentation of their findings, the activities of the Crewe Committee and those of the best-known pro-conscriptionist organization in the nation crossed. The agents of this interaction were Lord Milner, President of the National Service League, and Lord Curzon. It will be recalled that on 20 August the League had begun agitating in the press and from the public platform for compulsory service. Four days later Curzon wrote to his friend Milner, telling him that he had been desperately trying to get in touch with him over the previous few days in order to gain his help to 'get something' on McKenna's and Runciman's anti-compulsionist economic arguments, given before the Committee. 'Come down, oh man,' the former Viceroy of India pleaded in mock supplication, 'from yonder mountain height.'⁴⁶ Milner was exhaustingly occupied in the national service campaign, but he was more than delighted to 'come down' to aid Curzon and, therefore, directly intercede with the Crewe Committee.

The two men came together on 26 August, and Curzon supplied Milner with copies of the testimony of the two Liberal ministers. Milner noted in his diary:

I was busily engaged in writing a memo. on these, for Curzon's information, all the evening I returned home & sat up working till 3 in the morning.⁴⁷

The former proconsul produced a paper which savaged the testimony of McKenna and Runciman and asserted that Britain's export trades and her general economy would not be ruined by the efforts required of 'all out' war and the application of conscription. Further, Milner suggested that Runciman's figure of only approximately 800 000 men that might be safely taken into uniform was both unproved and unprovable.⁴⁸ The arguments and statistics of Lord Milner's paper were directly translated by Lord Curzon into a 'Note' to the Crewe Committee, dated 28 August 1915.

Curzon was not the only important figure in British politics who considered the influence and the opinion of Lord Milner to be significant. He was invited by King George V to Windsor on the 28th, and the subject in which the Sovereign appeared to be most interested was the campaign for compulsory service. Milner wrote in his diary of the occasion:

After dinner the King took me aside & explained at length his views on National Service wh. amounted in short to a laudation of Asquith & Kitchener & a strong expression of opinion against the agitation for National Service.⁴⁹

Like Curzon, the King requested that Milner prepare a memorandum on the conscription question, and the former proconsul saw it as an opportunity to bring the powerful influence of the Sovereign over to the side of the pro-conscription forces. In it, he suggested that the agitation of the League was an unfortunate necessity, brought about at that time only by the propaganda campaign of the Northcliffe Press. The memorandum stressed Milner's certainty that the British people were more than willing to accept conscription as the price of victory: 'If there is ever any use advocating it,' he wrote, 'the time is now. Six or even three months hence will be too late.'⁵⁰ The King, however, retained his scrupulously constitutional outlook and continued to support his ministers and their voluntarist policies, much to the disappointment of Lord Milner.

During these days of late August 1915, when conscription was much in the thoughts both of supporters and opponents of the policy, and the Crewe Committee laboured over their report, interested parties all seemed to affix their hopes or their fears to Kitchener. The Prime Minister's wife, characteristically, took matters in hand and offered her advice to Lord Kitchener:

Let me warn you as I know *for a fact* what is happening. Northcliffe, George Curzon & Co. are running the campaign for conscription to put you in a hole. You must show pluck & beat them. It is for *you* to say to the Prime Minister *when* you want Conscription. If you are clever you will come & see Henry on Friday morning & say this to him[:]

'You must bring up Conscription in the Cabinet next weekend [and] say you are against it till necessity [should] arise – we have got the National Register & intend using it. This is enough for the moment.

If your Cabinet are in favour by a majority of Conscription I will threaten to resign.'⁵¹

Kitchener received totally different advice from Lord Selborne, who, as a member of the War Policy Committee, had attempted to push the reluctant Field Marshal in the direction of committing

himself to compulsory service. Selborne wrote to him shortly after Margot Asquith, advising that he should seek Milner's counsel and see Henderson and the leaders of the trade unions in order to advise the latter that neither military discipline in the factories nor peace-time military conscription was desired by him, though Milner's plans encompassed both. Selborne counselled that such an approach would cancel labour opposition to compulsory service:

You say that the thing has already gone too far: you are wrong, it hasn't – nothing that has been said or done by any anti-s or body of anti-s is of any importance compared with the decision of the Trades Union Congress.⁵²

While these two would-be advisers attempted to sway the Secretary of State, Sir Henry Wilson confided to his diary that perhaps Kitchener had at last been brought around: 'Charles Callwell writes, he noted that he thinks K is now safe for compulsion and had ordered him (C) to prepare a paper in favour of it for Monday's Cabinet. This is good.'⁵³ As it turned out, Callwell and Wilson were both premature.

Immune to influence from either side – from Milner or Margot Asquith or Selborne or his own generals – Kitchener stood on his oblique testimony before the Crewe Committee, not favouring but no longer totally against compulsory service. Geoffrey Robinson was quite correct when he wrote to Lord Esher on 27 August: '[Conscription] all depends on them [Asquith, Lloyd George and Kitchener] and most of all upon Kitchener, because Asquith could not stand against him.'⁵⁴ The Prime Minister could not have stood in the way of conscription if Kitchener publicly declared the need for such a policy, and in the end he probably would not have tried. That possibility, however, did not have to be faced as the first year of the Great War drew to a close. The report of the War Policy Committee, however, did have to be reckoned with, and that was the next challenge to voluntarism and to the Prime Minister.

IV

There were not one, but three reports of the War Policy Committee, and the conflicting advice of this curious triptych was to govern recruiting policy for the remainder of the year, until compulsion became politically inevitable. The official report of the Committee was circulated to the Cabinet on 8 September 1915, and its introduc-

tory remarks explained the self-imposed limits of their study defined by Crewe and his colleagues.⁵⁵

The Committee have thought it their duty, in the absence of any specific terms of reference, to enquire into the extent to which the existing resources of the country are being utilised or can be developed in order to bring the war to a successful issue at the earliest possible moment, and to ascertain how far new resources can be brought into play with the same object.

In fact, this report of the Committee, despite the convictions of the membership and the anticipation with which their recommendations were awaited, was so mild as to be innocuous. The document did not give a firm lead at all but, instead, enumerated the options open to the Government, 'for which a choice must be made at an early date. They were:

- (a) To maintain the Army under the present recruiting system at about its present strength, employing the men enlisted for the later units as drafts, and avoiding the creation of further new formations.
- (b) To endeavour to increase the supply of recruits on the voluntary basis by informing the public in this country of the main facts established by this enquiry, including the extent to which the French Government are entitled to expect us to contribute 70 divisions; and either (1) trust that the explanation will produce such an increase as is necessary, or (2) announce that, unless it is promptly forthcoming, some method of compulsory selection will be instituted at a given date in order to supply the balance
- (c) The institution as soon as possible of some form of compulsory service confined to the period of the war

The report, signed by all five members of the Committee, gave no lead at all; it was already quite well known among the Cabinet that the size of the Army had to be limited, voluntarism increased or compulsory service declared. The reason for this almost pointless exercise was that all members of the Committee, save Lord Crewe himself, submitted some form of minority report, setting forth their own views of the problem. Curzon, Chamberlain and Churchill, for example, produced their white paper on 3 September 1915, five days before publication of the official report. Their recommendations were anything but ambiguous.⁵⁶

- (a) It is necessary and feasible to place and maintain in the field an army of 70 British divisions.
- (b) The munitions will be forthcoming. It will be possible to arm, equip, and supply an army of this size by March 1916 onwards.
- (c) Sufficient numbers of men exist in the United Kingdom to form and maintain this army, but they cannot be obtained on a voluntary basis.
- (d) The numbers required can be spared from industry if, and only if, a proper system of selection is employed.
- (e) Financial arrangements can be made to maintain the 70-divisions army up to the end of 1916, and to fulfil all the other obligations that we have contracted.

A further supplementary report appeared a short time later, over the signature of Arthur Henderson. Like his colleagues on the Committee he had signed the non-committal official document, but also like them he chose to make more specific recommendations. Acknowledging that Britain's maximum war effort could not be made under a purely voluntarist system, he noted:⁵⁷

If we try to make the journey in one stage from voluntary enlistment for an undefined object to conscription for a defined object, without having taken the people into our confidence by giving them all the information and facts at our disposal, we shall meet with almost insuperable difficulties, accompanied with a divided Cabinet, a divided Parliament, and a divided nation.

Henderson did not exert a powerful force within the Cabinet on most issues, but the question of compulsory service for military or industrial purposes was an exception. As spokesman for the working classes, he held the attention of his colleagues in the Government at this point, for the success of any measure of conscription depended largely on the willingness of the governed to accept such a law. He pointed out that the TUC and the General Federation of Trade Unions had both recently passed resolutions against compulsion and that any national-service law passed at that time would be tarred with the brush of class discrimination – of a parliament of the comfortable, pressing conscription on the backs of the workers. He summarized his arguments in this way:

It is useless to ignore the fact that conscription has become to some extent a party question and the subject of serious controversy. As

such, it is gathering to itself other party questions on which the working-classes feel and think strongly. Party and class are coming to coincide as they did before the war. The unity of the nation is in danger. Our aim must be to handle the situation so that compulsion, if it comes, comes by the action of the people themselves. On the alternative of conscription or defeat they will be united again. But they cannot be brought to that alternative suddenly, or apart from the conviction that it is a military necessity. They must have time. And if the time is spent in a final endeavour, made after the most solemn appeal and on a full and reasoned statement of our obligations to our Allies, to meet those obligations voluntarily, I believe that one of two results will follow. Either conscription will be accepted without serious injury to the nation, or it will be proved to be unnecessary.

Lt.-Col. Hankey observed that the Committee's reports 'had put Asquith in a fix, as at that time any attempt on his part to force through compulsory service would have involved resignations, and the unity of the Coalition Cabinet would have been lost'⁵⁸ Hankey, 'the perfect secretary' as he has been called, appeared to be correct in his readings of the Prime Minister's troubles. There was plenty of evidence to suggest that the conscription issue was more divisive than ever among the Government for having been brought into the open by the testimony before Crewe and his colleagues. Furthermore, the prospect of a conscription bill was, as Henderson suggested, exceedingly unpopular among organized labour. The Trades Union Congress, for example, met in Bristol in early September and passed overwhelmingly a resolution condemning compulsory service. It stated:

We believe that all men necessary can, and will, be obtained through a voluntary system properly organized, and we will heartily support and will give every aid to the Government in their present efforts to secure the men necessary to prosecute the war to a successful issue.⁵⁹

The Conservative journalist, H. A. Gwynne, attended the Bristol TUC and reported to Lloyd George: 'Several influential delegates said in private that if the Cabinet solemnly declared with a united voice that the compulsory principle was essential, they would not oppose it.'⁶⁰ Only a 'united declaration of the Cabinet coupled with a presentation of the facts' would satisfy labour, he added.

More substance was added to the Prime Minister's burdens and to the growing political controversy by the projection into the public gaze of Lloyd George's pro-conscription views. On 13 September he released to the press the preface to a new collection of his wartime speeches, *Through Terror to Triumph*, which made no secret of his judgement that national service was coming – with his blessing. 'D's preface on Monday created a great stir,' Miss Stevenson wrote in her diary, 'being the first public hint he has given of his views on conscription.'⁶¹ Sir Henry Wilson noted in his own journal: 'L. George's preface to his book of speeches is the most outspoken thing so far.'⁶² All those who stood in the growing shadow of the Minister of Munitions were not pleased, of course, and J. H. Whitehouse wrote to him after the publication of the preface:

The question of conscription has suddenly become the paramount issue in Parliament.

I believe its adoption would mean the ruin of this country and I wish to do all in my power, as a member of Parliament, to resist it.

It would be inappropriate for me to take an active part in this controversy whilst holding the office of your Parliamentary private secretary and I think it my duty to place my resignation in your hands.⁶³

While the controversy over Lloyd George's views was carried on in public, Lord Curzon privately circulated to the War Policy Committee a plan for the implementation of compulsory service, with actual conscription to begin only when the War Office was ready to induct the men.⁶⁴ As his colleagues Lloyd George, Churchill, Selborne and Chamberlain received this paper, Parliament resumed sitting, and it appeared that Whitehouse's evaluation seemed quite accurate: conscription had become the paramount issue in British politics. Hankey's earlier assessment also appeared true: it seemed that Asquith was truly in a fix.

V

The Prime Minister was a master both of parliamentary strategy and tactics, but it was the latter – decision-making in the short term – which kept him at the top of the political world in 1915. One of his favourite tactical maneuvers was to reach out to a colleague for assistance at the time that such help would prove most effective – all

the while intimating that such aid was all that stood between the Government and the abyss. At this point he chose to call upon Arthur James Balfour for help in his struggles with the conscription issue.

Asquith had frequently exalted Balfour at the expense of the official leader of the Tory Party, Bonar Law, by retaining him on the Committee of Imperial Defence in the years before the War and by consulting him rather than the official leader of his party after August 1914. Balfour held the highest office of any Conservative in the Cabinet, and his position in Asquith's eyes was strengthened by the fact that he was the only Tory in the coalition who appeared to be a firm voluntarist. Asquith wrote to him at this time:

It has become quite clear that the question of 'compulsion' cannot and will not be discussed in Parliament & the country merely, or perhaps mainly, on its merits.

Further, it is now indisputable that any attempt at this moment to establish compulsion, either military or industrial, wd. encounter the practically united & passionately vehement opposition of organised labour [David] Shackleton who attended the Congress at Bristol & reported to me privately the results of his observations . said to me 'Believe me, it wd. mean revolt, if not revolution.'

Of the impact of compulsory service on his own party, Asquith wrote:

Some of my old friends are good enough to say & write that (such is their regard for me) if I came forward & declared that, in an honest & deliberate judgement, compulsion was the only way by which the war cd. be won, they might be brought with wry faces & sore hearts, to swallow their repugnance. But I sincerely believe that, great as is my personal authority (I can say so without undue vanity) if I were to announce myself tomorrow a reluctant but whole-hearted convert to compulsion, I should still have to face the hostility of some of the best, and in the country some of the most powerful, elements of the Liberal Party.

Finally, he reached the point of asking for the assistance of Balfour:

I should be glad to know how far [these assessments] commend themselves to your judgement. I have come to think that it is only

by our joint efforts that a bridge can be constructed over a yawning & perilous chasm.⁶⁵

There is no answer to this letter among Asquith's papers, but Balfour did submit a memorandum to the Cabinet a very few days after receiving this call for help, and it was a welcome response in the eyes of the Prime Minister. In a paper entitled 'Efficiency in War and Compulsion', the First Lord of the Admiralty discussed Britain's traditional way of making war, through the balanced use of fleets, money and, only thirdly, armies. Then he reached his point: in the World War 'there is a moral contribution which is of incalculable military value, because it adds so enormously to the efficiency of the other three – and this is National Unity'⁶⁶ The remainder of the four-page document left no doubt that, like Asquith, Balfour at this moment questioned whether this unity and compulsory service could coexist.

Balfour's meticulously studied arguments, however, would not be enough to stop what Asquith considered a premature assault on voluntarism. As we have seen, the month of September also witnessed the unsuccessful Loos offensive and the dangerous decline of recruiting figures, as well as the publication of the provisional results of the National Register. At this point in the War, Asquith was unprepared to advocate national service. He had allowed the pro-conscription majority of the Crewe Committee to offer their advice, but he preferred to listen more closely to the arguments of national unity offered by Henderson and reinforced by Balfour, which offered him a way out of his uncomfortable position.

However, as Lloyd George and the coalition Tories became more convinced that conscription was necessary, they became more dangerous to the Prime Minister's plans to maintain balance in the Government and in the nation – and, it may be added, to maintain Herbert Henry Asquith as premier. Hence, he made a supremely astute tactical decision. On 5 October he again reached out for help and announced the appointment of Lord Derby as Director of Recruiting. This was to be Asquith's way out of his difficulty, by sheltering himself behind the imposing figure of the Lancashire magnate and allowing the curious episode of the Derby Scheme to play itself out.

7 Lord Derby Shows the Way

I

Edward George Villiers Stanley, seventeenth Earl of Derby, was the very model of a great landed aristocrat. Immensely wealthy, the bearer of an ancient name and the undisputed master of Lancashire politics, he was a great man not primarily because of what he had done but because of what he was. He had lent his great prestige to the recruiting campaign, as we have seen, from the outset of the War; and no other man, save Kitchener himself, could equal him as a recruiter of armies. His reputation for amiability, generosity and bluff integrity endeared him to colleagues and opponents alike.

There existed, however, a harsher judgement of 'Eddie' Derby among the political professionals. Lord Beaverbrook wrote of him:

Whitehall does not deny all these qualities, but says that this imposing facade covers the weakness of a swithering viewpoint. Derby, it says, will agree in taking up a certain attitude but in the next ten minutes he will flop on to the other side if he meets an opposing influence.¹

A. J. P. Taylor has reported Sir Douglas Haig's less generous version of the same criticism: 'Haig said of him: "like the feather pillow he bears the mark of the last person who sat on him"'.² Yet it was to Derby, a Tory and a member of the National Service League, that Asquith turned in October 1915, to apply the last test to the voluntarist system.

On 22 September Lord Kitchener called his friend Derby to the War Office and asked him to accept overall responsibility for recruiting. Without giving a final answer the great nobleman retreated to his country house to consider the matter. On the following day he returned to town, only to be confronted by a group of conscriptionist ministers at the house of Lord Curzon. He told them he had decided to accept Kitchener's offer to become Director of Recruiting. 'The were perfectly furious about my appointment', he recorded in his diary:³

They said it had been done without any knowledge whatsoever of the Cabinet, and that as a matter of fact they had got Asquith in such a position that within the week he would have had to consent to compulsory service. They therefore begged me to withdraw my acceptance of the position. This I absolutely declined to do. I said, however, I would see Asquith again and get from him an assurance that in the event of my campaign proving unsuccessful he would introduce compulsory service. I went to see Asquith who signed a paper which I considered satisfactory, and took it back to the meeting. They were not satisfied. I told them as far as I was concerned the matter was over.

Declining either a salary or a military commission, Derby became titular head of the Recruiting Department, thereby causing considerable discomfort to his friends but at the same time seemingly striking a blow against his reputation for behaving as an indecisive 'feather pillow'.

The so-called Derby Scheme was his plan, approved both by the Prime Minister and by Kitchener, to influence men to enlist in the Army. Made public on 19 October, it was to function in the following manner: based upon the figures of the National Register, all males between the ages of 19 to 41 had their names put down into one or another of forty-six age classifications, twenty-three each for married and unmarried men. Each was to be circularized and asked either to enlist directly or to 'attest' their willingness to serve in the Army when called, in a kind of 'compulsory voluntarism'. No attempt was made to include Ireland in the scheme, as the hope of gaining additional volunteers there was thought slim.

The Recruiting Department of the War Office and the newly formed Joint Recruiting Committee – which had superseded the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, due to the incorporation of the Labour Recruiting Committee formed a few weeks before – stressed that workers in significant munitions-related or other trades of national importance would be attested but would not be called, so long as they remained in these trades.⁴ All males, regardless of skills, who attested received 2s. 6d. and a special armband signifying their new status. Skilled men in key trades received special armbands significant of their special contribution to the war effort. Each attestee was guaranteed a minimum of a fortnight's grace period before being called up.

In addition, taking a lesson from the working of the Munitions of War Act, the Government hastily created a series of local tribunals

and a central board in London to adjudicate disputes over exemption status and other disagreements arising out of the working of the Scheme.⁵

The most significant question the historian of this exercise must ask is not 'Did the Scheme fail?', for the answer to that is clear enough; rather, it is 'Was the Scheme meant to fail?' The choice of Derby, for example, was a curious one. He was an unabashed conscriptionist, close to many members of the Army establishment; he was not only a Tory but a representative of the right-wing landed element of the party. Furthermore, there was the certain fact that Asquith had little faith in the abilities of the new Director of Recruiting, illustrated by his confession to C. P. Scott a short while before the outset of the Scheme, that Derby 'unfortunately was short of brains'.⁶ Finally, there was the withering criticism of the noble Earl, illustrated above in the remarks of Lord Beaverbrook and of Sir Douglas Haig, regarding Derby's ability to remain true to one viewpoint. Surely this inspires doubt about his dedication to the task of being the man to give voluntarism its final throw.

Regarding this final question, one cannot help but wonder how sincere was the man who called upon Britain's young men to volunteer to do their 'bit'. For example, he spoke in Rossendale shortly after his appointment was announced and admitted to the assembled citizenry that he felt 'somewhat in a position of a receiver who was put in to wind up a bankrupt concern'.⁷ In a similar vein, he advised the Prime Minister, on the day following the official announcement of the Scheme in mid-October, to have a conscription bill in hand and ready for implementation if his efforts failed, though he added almost perfunctorily that he, of course, would not fail. Did Derby desire conscription to the degree that he considered his new responsibility a meaningless exercise, meant to pave the way for compulsory service? It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to offer a definitive answer. It does seem clear that he was pleased to be asked to be the saviour of voluntarism and worked hard at it. His candid remarks, however, indicate that he had little faith in the probability that the Scheme could raise adequate numbers of the right men.

Asquith created the atmosphere which spawned the Derby Scheme. He approved of Derby's appointment; he approved of the mechanics of the Scheme. As we shall see, he placed limitations on that to which the Scheme might lead if it did fail. The Prime Minister's feelings about the entire exercise are, therefore, more important to understanding this episode than perhaps even those of Derby himself. Put most simply, to Herbert Henry Asquith the

Scheme afforded the opportunity to purchase time, and thus to meet the criteria laid down in Arthur Henderson's minority report of the War Policy Committee.

Henderson, it will be recalled, had counselled that the working classes would accept compulsion rather than defeat, but only with certain conditions: 'They must have time', he wrote. 'And if the time is spent in a final [voluntarist] endeavour I believe that one of two results will follow. Either conscription will be accepted without serious injury to the nation, or it will be proved to be unnecessary.'⁸ Asquith saw the Scheme as a method to meet these conditions, and he intimated as much in a speech given on 16 October 1915; on the same day he drafted a 'Secret Note' to the Cabinet indicating his willingness to accept conscription – at some indefinite time in the future – if the Scheme failed to raise the requisite number of men.⁹ Also on the same day he wrote to Kitchener, who appeared to be coming to accept some form of compulsory service, that no conscription bill could be passed without the 'general assent' of the public, and if the Scheme proved openly that voluntarism could not raise enough troops, then such assent 'would be secured'.¹⁰

By mid-October, Asquith was preparing to acquiesce to the demands of the conscriptionists. As always, however, he meant to surrender on his own terms. Derby would fail to meet the letter of his charge – to raise and maintain Kitchener's 70-division Army – and the facts and figures necessary to make this crystal clear would be made public, employing the information gained from the National Register. While it would be incorrect to suggest that Asquith was enthusiastically looking forward to the imposition of mandatory service, he was prepared to accept it in order both to ensure a sufficient number of soldiers and to reinforce his hold on the premiership. Like Henderson, he was determined to give the public sufficient time to learn to accept the inevitable. He would not be driven toward that goal at a pace faster than that of his own choosing, and one more conscription crisis would not deter him.

II

Lord Kitchener made known to the Cabinet his plan for a kind of compulsory service on 8 October 1915, in a paper entitled 'Recruiting for the Army'.¹¹ He had, as we have seen in a previous chapter, received no shortage of advice from his friends and colleagues

previous to this time. He had been advised by Sir Douglas Haig that conscription was necessary and by Sir John French that it was not.¹² He had been warned in ominous terms by his friend, Lord Selborne:

the danger is that while you are considering the figures of the National Register and if meanwhile you keep silent, the situation, which was entirely within your control and which is largely within your control, should pass out of your control.¹³

Perhaps moved by this argument, perhaps motivated by the results of the Register and the steady decline in enlistments, Kitchener offered his recruiting scheme. He called for the division of the nation into recruiting districts, based upon 'county, city or borough', and he proposed to present each with a manpower quota. He elaborated:

Voluntary recruiting would continue, as at present, without limitations, but when, in any particular area, it failed to furnish the necessary number of recruits allotted, the local civil authorities would produce the men by calling them up from those eligible in the area. The War Office would decide the class to be called [based upon the National Register] for each area, and the men of the class would then ballot for their rotation in being called.

The plan seemed to be a combination of the Register, the Derby Scheme and the eighteenth-century militia ballot. However, it was Kitchener's first open endorsement of any step towards conscription, and its publication further stirred the already troubled waters of Cabinet controversy.

C. P. Scott motored to Walton Heath and the house of the Minister of Munitions on the afternoon of 14 October and confided to his diary what he learned:

As to the political crisis it was acute and might probably come to a head at the next day's Cabinet. Eight of them were determined to press the question of Compulsory Service to an issue. The names [Lloyd George] gave were: besides himself, Churchill, Curzon, Carson, Bonar Law, Long, Lansdowne and Kitchener – a formidable group if they really stood together.¹⁴

There was a Cabinet crisis over conscription, but Lloyd George either exaggerated the situation or spoke in the heat of the moment, for there were no resignations on the issue – only Carson resigned, but he had already decided to do so before this time and chose the

Balkan situation rather than conscription as his major reason.¹⁵ As we saw in the previous chapter, Lloyd George and his allies were contemptuous of Kitchener's plan, but they praised it as at least accepting the principle of conscription.¹⁶ Lord Curzon submitted a paper outlining an alternate scheme, and the Cabinets of 12 and 13 October were fully given over to discussion of the various possibilities and to the policy of compulsory service itself.¹⁷

On the 16th, Bonar Law informed Asquith that while he and his colleagues were prepared to support the Derby Scheme, its failure would have to be followed by another means of raising troops.¹⁸ No doubt seeing Lloyd George behind the actions of the Tory leader, Asquith confided to Hankey and Maurice Bonham Carter that he was certain that the Munitions Minister was determined to break up the Government.¹⁹ No one but Carson had openly discussed resignation, it is true, but the fear of a break-up of the Cabinet can be detected among certain members of the Cabinet who were not directly involved in the decision-making in mid-October, among them the President of the Local Government Board.

Walter Long had been among the most impatient in demanding conscription since early in the War. At this time, however, he became a moderating force, no doubt fearing the effect of a collapse of the Government on national morale and on the Coalition. He submitted a memorandum to the Cabinet on 16 October, calling for compromise among the contending sides in the interest of national unity.²⁰ To Bonar Law he wrote privately the following day insisting that the Derby Scheme had to be allowed to run its course; then conscription, he felt, could be imposed amidst an atmosphere of agreement. A Cabinet smash-up would be dangerous for the policy of conscription and for the Conservative Party as well:

I think the position is most critical and one which is fraught with danger not only for our party, as nobody will believe that we have not forced the question to the front, but what is much more important, for the cause of Compulsory Service, which I believe to be essential to the successful prosecution of the war. Asquith is the most adroit and skilful of advocates. There is a great deal to be said of course for those who object to Compulsion, and the cause we may be certain will not suffer in his hands.²¹

Long did not overestimate the powers of the Prime Minister. Asquith knew his Government was in deep water, and it was on 16 October, as we have seen, that he circulated his 'secret' paper to the

Cabinet intimating his acceptance of conscription as the price of the failure of the Derby Scheme. In addition, he again chose to turn to a key figure in the drama for assistance and support at a critical moment. Aware of the rumours that Kitchener would resign if his 'militia ballot' plan was not accepted,²² Asquith wrote to the beleaguered warlord to ensure that his loyalty to the political leadership of the Prime Minister would continue. Reminding him on 17 October of the intimacy and mutual confidence that had existed between them (though at that very moment Asquith was planning further reductions in the authority of the Secretary of State for War), he explained to Kitchener that the crisis was caused by 'Curzon & Lt. George & some others whose real objective is to oust you'.²³

To make sure that even the unsubtle mind of the old soldier caught the drift of his reasoning, Asquith bluntly identified their fates as totally intertwined:

You know that we should both of us be glad to be set free. But we cannot & ought not. So long as you & I stand together, we carry the whole country with us other wise [*sic*], the Deluge!

Having made the point, Asquith got on with business:

Cannot you say that, while you aim at & wd. like to obtain 70 divisions, the thing should be done gradually & with general consent, & that if you get under the voluntary system (say) 750,000 men by March 31st – without prejudice, should things point that way, to further accretions, you would be satisfied.

I do not appeal to personal consideration, but I am certain in the interests of the country & of the effective prosecution of the war, that it is essential that you and I should stand together, & that the intrigue which has for its main object both to divide & discredit us both, shd. be frustrated.

The matter is of such urgent importance that I am putting off the Cabinet to Monday afternoon, and should be glad to see you at 10 Downing Street not later than 12:30.

Kitchener again fell into step with the Prime Minister and all thought of resignation on the part of the Secretary of State for War – if any such thought existed – was forgotten, as was his plan for regional conscription by lot. The Cabinet did meet on Monday 18 October and, so armed, the Prime Minister dealt with the conscription crisis in a most cursory fashion. When the subject of conscription was raised he allowed the discussion to ebb and flow, quietly passed a

note to Lord Lansdowne informing him that he felt unwell and retired. It was to be his last official function for a week, as he took to his bed suffering the result, according to his wife, of 'overwork, hot rooms and no sort of exercise [which] has gripped his liver and driven bad blood all over him'.²⁴ Mrs Asquith continued her diagnosis in greater detail in a letter several days later to the Master of Elibank: 'Henry is not so ill physically but he is stale & *morally disgusted*. He read to me the chapter [in] the New Testament of Simon Peter's betrayal of our Lord he said "this might have been written by Lloyd George – Peter was a Celt."'²⁵ Bonar Law felt the indisposition was due simply to a combination of worry and a desire to sidestep the conscription issue.

Again there was no fatal blow to the coalition – and, once again, no final decision on compulsory service. The Derby Scheme held the field by default. As Lord Crewe, who deputized for the indisposed Prime Minister, wrote to the King:

Lord Crewe feels that nothing in the nature of a crisis [over conscription] can well occur. for some time if at all. For one thing it is not likely to be discussed in detail during the unfortunate absence of the Prime Minister; and even if it were, Lord Crewe trusts that the methods which Lord Derby's dept. desire to adopt will succeed in uniting men of different opinion about compulsion for a considerable time at any rate.²⁶

The first of Crewe's two reasons was perhaps more realistic than the second: Asquith had secured the adherence of Kitchener, and then he quit the field temporarily, leaving the Cabinet powerless to make binding decisions without its chief arbiter – himself.

The man who could most easily have upset Asquith's machinations was not the oft-suspected Lloyd George, but Bonar Law, whom he so frequently slighted. The Tory leader, if he heartily threw in his lot with the Cabinet and backbench Tory conscriptionists and the Liberals, Lloyd George and Churchill (the latter of these having resigned from the Cabinet on 29 October), might have been able to upset the Government at this time over the issue of compulsory service. Bonar Law sought advice from his Chief Whip, Lord Edmund Talbot, who explained that if Asquith's resignation were forced and a Lloyd George coalition put in place of the current Government – the only feasible change, given Bonar Law's lack of ambition for the premiership – the result would find a Liberal leading an essentially Tory Government. An election would have to be

carried out which, quite probably, would lead to a Tory majority elected on a conscriptionist platform: 'but at a cost of great bitterness,' Talbot wrote, 'with a strong & violent opposition in the new House, & the certainty of strikes in the labour world outside' ²⁷ The Chief Whip summarized his evaluation of the choices which faced the Tory leader in mid-October:

We are therefore in this position, that rather than wait 6 weeks & then have compulsion with the consent & approval of the labour leaders, it is desired [by the pro-conscriptionists] to force a decision now with the result of showing to our enemy as well as to our Allies & our Colonies, that we are in a state of bitter feud & chaos at home.

Rather than this, I suggest it is better to keep Asquith, with all his faults, where he is at present.

Bonar Law chose to follow the advice of Lord Edmund Talbot and, it seems arguable, also his own feelings that a break-up of the Government was unwise at this juncture, even given the shortages of manpower on the Western Front and in the munitions shops.

III

By early November the Prime Minister had purchased a new lease of life for his coalition, though the price was high and the duration uncertain. The issue of the Dardanelles Campaign was temporarily to split his antagonists, and before the end of the previous month both Carson and Churchill had resigned, in part over the state of affairs in the Mediterranean Theater of War. Kitchener was dispatched early in the month to report on conditions there, but it was not his views but his absence that Asquith wanted. While he was away, a new CIGS, Sir William Robertson, was appointed to breathe life into the moribund General Staff. One of the conditions of the appointment was that Sir William would become chief adviser to the Government on military affairs and act, as well, as conduit of decisions to the Commander-in-Chief in France.

The Derby Scheme lurched along toward its unhappy conclusions during the month of November, and one of the most important questions which hung over the exercise was the matter of exactly how its success or failure would be defined. Derby wrote to the Prime Minister while the latter was still incapacitated in late October:

You are also pressed to say what will be considered a success & to give numbers. I sincerely hope that you will not give the latter. Numbers will tell nothing unless they are so obviously small as to show the complete failure of the scheme. On the other hand the numbers may be extremely high & yet not be a success [if attesteas in starred occupations are included].

My definition of success wd. be this, that the no. of men who wish to enlist either for immediate or for future service shall show a very large percentage of those who under the Registration Act are known to be available; but even that wd. not be an unqualified success unless the proportions of unmarried men who so enlist is very high. If, therefore, I was actually asked to give a definition as to whether the campaign was a success or not, it would be somewhat as follows: After Nov. 30th when the actual no. of men enlisted is known, classification will be taken in hand wh. will take a few days. A statement can then be made to Parl. showing the relative proportion of men enlisted & men who can serve, & if the nos. are adequate & it can be stated at the same time that sufficient young men had enlisted to ensure the postponement of the calling up of married men for some considerable time, the campaign can be called a success.²⁸

In a private letter to R. D. Blumenfeld a few days later, Derby again addressed the question of the success of his program, asking the editor to assist in laying to rest 'any idea about that recruits are coming in so well that no further exertions are necessary. That is not so. The numbers are decidedly better than they were but nothing like what I shall require to make it a success.'²⁹

Lord Derby's concerns were made more worrisome because the response to his Scheme was weakest among the class of the population most desired by the Army: bachelors of military age and fitness. Considering themselves more likely than their married countrymen to be called up after attestation, they were not responding in numbers sufficient to satisfy Derby or the War Office. The anxiety of these men was not illogical, of course, for all European nations employing conscription had long relied on the custom of calling up unmarried men first – an 'absurd differentiation.' Lord Blake has written, 'founded neither on justice nor common sense'.³⁰ Derby was concerned enough to write to Asquith about the matter on 28 October:

Unless you make it perfectly clear that the young men have to come forward, preferably voluntarily but if necessary brought by

compulsory means before the older men who are asked to actually join the Colours, the scheme will be a failure. It is trembling in the balance at the present moment as the older men are hanging back until they have this assurance. Believe me you have only got to make the threat. I do not believe for one minute you would have to put it into execution.³¹

While perhaps neither sensible nor just, the prevalent custom made clear to bachelors that they would be taken before married men, and it created a chasm the Derby Scheme was unable to cross. Urged by Derby, and in a similar letter from Walter Long,³² to act, Asquith secured agreement from the Cabinet on 1 November to clarify the situation regarding marital status and attestation.³³ He spoke in the House the following day, quite ironically immediately following Sir Edward Carson, who castigated the Government in his resignation speech. In his characteristically circumlocutory fashion, the Prime Minister approached the subject of conscription:

My proposition, if I were to formulate one, would be this: not that I rule out compulsion as an impossible expedient, but that compulsion, if resorted to, ought only to be resorted to, and can only from a practical point of view be resorted to – or, in other words, be made a workable expedient for filling up the gap which you have to supply – with something in the nature of general consent.

After a rather weak reference to his confidence in the Derby Scheme, he addressed the question of how the success or failure of the Scheme would be measured:

you ought to aim at securing everybody of military age and capacity who is left after you have completely supplied the other national necessities to which I referred. I would much rather state the requirements of the Government and of the nation in those general terms than by reference to any particular set of figures.

He had, in expressing his confidence in these terms, virtually doomed the Scheme, given the results which were already known. He continued and expressed clearly for the first time his commitment to the Scheme as the last chance of voluntarism:

But if, when the whole of this machinery has been in operation and has achieved what it can, there should still be found a substantial number of men of military age not required for other

purposes, who, without excuse, hold back from the service of their country, I believe that the very same conditions which make compulsion impossible now, namely the absence of general consent, would force the country to the view that they must consent to supplement by some form of legal obligation the failure of the voluntary system. As far as I myself am concerned, I should be prepared to recommend them to take that course. *But I dismiss it as a contingency which I do not think ever likely to arise.*³⁴

He added, as if in answer to his critics who questioned his will to carry the nation to victory: 'I am determined – I stick at nothing – I am determined that we shall win this war.'

Finally, Asquith turned to the issue raised by Derby and amplified by Long, that of the effect of marital status on recruiting, the Derby Scheme and any future compulsion laws:

I am told by Lord Derby and others that there is some doubt among married men who are now being asked to enlist, whether, having enlisted, or promised to enlist, they may not be called upon to serve while younger and unmarried men are holding back, and not doing their duty. Let them at once disabuse themselves of that notion. So far as I am concerned I should certainly say the obligation of the married man to serve ought not to be enforced or held to be binding upon him until – I hope by voluntary effort, if it be needed in the last resort, as I have explained, by other means – the unmarried men are dealt with.

This guarantee, usually referred to as Asquith's 'pledge to the married men', turned out to be both a pledge to conscription and a mortgage on future policy-making. In the first place, the Derby Scheme was not going well – men were not attesting at a rate which would account for the numbers felt to be eligible for service as set out in the national register – and the Prime Minister had openly promised that a failure of the effort would lead to a conscription law. In the second place, it ensured that if and when such a bill became law, it could deal only with bachelors, due to the pledge made to married men.

Unlike Lloyd George or Churchill, Asquith did not appear to thrive on the atmosphere of crisis. Rather, he seemed almost oblivious to it; 'he is like morphia', Lady Churchill once wrote. However, it is also true that he – and his political career – prospered in such an atmosphere, and the early War years were no exception. In

peacetime he had survived the Irish struggle, the assaults of the suffragettes and the labour unrest, he had managed to juggle the Dreadnoughts crisis, the 'Radical Budget' conflict and battles with the House of Lords without losing stride. He had survived so long at the top of the 'greasy pole' for many reasons, not the least of which was that he remained a realist, true to his own ambition to retain that favoured position for as long as he could. Part of that talent, or perhaps it was a skill, was the ability to sense when a possibility became an inevitability. So it was, at last, with conscription.

As the Derby Scheme neared its climax, the Prime Minister prepared for the logical alternative, having cleared the path. He received a letter on 3 November from three members of the late War Policy Committee, Lords Curzon and Selborne, and Austen Chamberlain, pressing him to make a commitment to the 70-division Army as the goal of these recruiting efforts and to allow a contingency conscription plan to be prepared. He answered his Tory colleagues on the 7th: 'I think you have correctly apprehended the meaning of what I said in the House of Commons', he wrote. 'I shd. be glad,' he continued in the typically calm tone which belied the existence of any crisis, 'if Curzon would give instructions to the draughtsmen to prepare a Bill (for consideration) on the lines suggested by him.'³⁵ Thus, preliminary official work on a Bachelors' Bill began in mid-November.

The meaning of the pledge of 2 November still elicited debate within the Cabinet, however. With the permission of the Prime Minister, Derby stated to the press on 11 November that if unmarried men did not attest in sufficient numbers by 30 November, the terminal date of the Scheme, that the State would 'take the necessary steps to redeem the pledge made on November 2'.³⁶ Bonar Law then inquired of Asquith as to the real meaning of the pledge to unattested men:

The statement issued by Derby taken literally means that no married men would be called up until every unmarried man who has not got a good excuse has been called up. This is, I think, an impossibility as it would mean immediate compulsion for the unmarried & would break the pledge – that no change in our system would be made until Derby's scheme had had a fair chance.³⁷

Derby himself, at this same time, tried to clear the air over the issue once for all:

If these [unmarried] young men do not come forward you will either release the married men from their pledge or introduce a Bill into Parl. to compel the young men to serve, wh. if passed would mean that the married men wd. be held to their enlistment. If on the other hand Parl. did not pass such a Bill, the married men wd. be automatically released from their engagement to serve.³⁸

Asquith's answer to Derby was simple and seemed to resolve the issue: 'I have received your letter of today', he wrote, 'It correctly expresses the interpretation of the Government.'³⁹ There was no doubt, then, that Asquith was prepared to introduce compulsory service for unmarried men if the attestations under the Derby Scheme proved to be inadequate. It was already clear that those numbers were disappointing.

There is one further event in these last weeks of the Derby Scheme which served as a bellwether of the likelihood of conscription – which, no doubt, eased the anxiety of Asquith and others who feared public reaction to mandatory service. On 26 November 1915 the poll was announced in an important by-election held for the vacant seat at Merthyr Tydfil. The place had been held for fifteen years by James Keir Hardie, the Lanarkshire miner who had founded the Independent Labour Party and been the first true labour M.P. A pacifist and Christian socialist, Hardie was no friend either of the War effort or of conscription, and the seat his death made vacant in September was fought between an 'unofficial labour' man, C. B. Stanton, who espoused compulsory service to win the War, and J. Winston, the voluntarist candidate accredited by the Labour Party.

The Merthyr miners could hardly be considered jingoes, yet despite the appearances for his opponent of such Labour luminaries as Fred Jowett and J. H. Thomas, Stanton topped the poll by 4000 votes. Jowett, the Bradford labour leader, had declared openly: 'Conscription or no conscription is the vital issue in the contest.'⁴⁰ The results at the solidly working-class constituency were not lost on the conscriptionists of the Cabinet who argued that workers were 'read' to accept the policy. There was now little which could effectively stand in the way of compulsory service if the results of the Derby canvass were inadequate.

IV

The official close of the Derby Scheme was to have been 30 November, but that date was extended to 11 December.⁴¹ Three days after this, the Cabinet were provided with preliminary and incomplete figures of enlistments and attestations. The following day Asquith wrote to the King, announcing that the rough figures were not encouraging, and that 'a small Cabinet Committee should, without prejudice to the ultimate decision, consider in consultation with the draughtsman what form any amendment to the law in the direction of compulsion should take'.⁴² There was no question of prejudice, in fact, for even the preliminary estimates – actual figures would not be available for several days thereafter – pointed to the failure of the Scheme.

The Prime Minister's message to his Sovereign did not mention the fact that he had alerted Lord Curzon more than a month before to begin drafting a conscription bill, which the Lord Privy Seal had done with the assistance of L. S. Amery. The committee appointed on 14 December and announced in Asquith's letter to George V, consisted of Curzon and F. E. Smith, both enthusiastic pro-conscriptionists; Lord Crewe, who was quite willing to accept conscription so long as the public could be convinced of its necessity; and Sir John Simon, a committed voluntarist whose membership could be considered nothing more than a token representation. The chairman was Walter Long, who, as we have noticed, was one of the earliest champions of compulsory service but had come to play a more moderating influence among Conservative coalition ministers, lest the rush to mandatory service upset the Government. Like the War Policy Committee, it is quite clear that the members of the committee guaranteed what sort of conclusions would be reached – the majority were more than prepared to produce the strongest bill which they could get by Asquith's scrutiny.

At this point all eyes were on Lord Derby, whose report was finally ready on 20 December.⁴³ The Cabinet discussed it three days later. As if to ensure what the conclusion of that meeting would be and to prepare Parliament for the inevitable, the Prime Minister, on the 21st, called upon the House to authorize;

That an additional number of Land Forces, not exceeding 1,000,000, all ranks, be maintained for the Service of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland at Home and Abroad,

excluding His Majesty's Indian Possessions, in consequence of the war in Europe, for the year ending on the 31st of March, 1916.

It should be noted that when Asquith called for this increase, Parliament had yet to receive any official notification on the success or failure of the Derby Scheme and was digesting a massive and conflicting corpus of rumour and innuendo about the coming report. Furthermore, the Cabinet received a complete draft report only on the day the Prime Minister made his request to increase the establishment of the Forces. Asquith, who knew both that the Scheme had come to its predicted end and that the Army would have to have authorization for extended establishment if it hoped to achieve the 70-division standard, chose this time to call for the additional million to ensure that the coming conscription bill was greeted as a double necessity. He would give the pro-conscriptionists enough of a bill to meet the letter of his pledge; the anti-conscriptionists, many from his own party, would be presented with a *fait accompli*. It was a method which had worked well in the May crisis – resulting in the formation of a coalition – and he meant to make it work again and further prolong his power.

The Cabinet met the following day, 22 December, with the Derby figures before them. Asquith wrote to his friend Mrs Henley:

The moment that one emerges from one crisis one is engulfed in another. The Cabinet met to consider for the first time the Derby Report. The impression left upon me is profoundly disquieting. We seem to be on the brink of a precipice. The practical question is – shall I be able during the next ten days to devise and build a bridge?⁴⁴

The Prime Minister's words were overly melodramatic, for he had not the slightest doubt that he could build such a bridge. The building blocks for his construction were the figures of the Derby Scheme (see the table opposite).⁴⁵

After reducing these figures even further, through the subtraction from the total of all badged, unfit and otherwise unavailable men, Derby concluded that there were 318 533 single and 403 921 married men 'actually available' to the War Office.⁴⁶ He concluded:

I must again draw attention to the fact that the men in the married groups can only be available if the Prime Minister's pledge to them has been redeemed by the single men attesting in such numbers as to leave only a negligible quantity accounted for

	Single	Married
Men of military age	2 179 231	2 832 210
Number starred	690 138	915 491
Number of men inlisted*	103 000	112 431
Number of men attested	840 000	1 344 979
Number of men rejected*	207 000	221 853
Total	1 150 000	1 679 263
Men of military age	2 179 231	2 832 210
Number of men presenting themselves	1 150 000	1 679 263
Number remaining	1 029 231	1 152 947
Total number starred men attested	312 067	449 808
Number unstarred	527 933	895 171
Grand total of military age	5 011 441	
Total attested, enlisted, and rejected	2 829 263	
Total number remaining	2 182 178	

*Whilst total is based on actual records, the distribution as between single and married is only an estimate.

[The total of available unmarried men are] far from being a negligible quantity, and, under the circumstances, I am very distinctly of opinion that in order to redeem the pledge mentioned above it will not be possible to hold married men to their attestation unless and until the services of single men have been obtained by other means, the present system having failed to bring them to the colours.

Lord Derby's figures doomed voluntarism, and only the weakest protests were heard from the Cabinet Liberals who had championed that policy.⁴⁷ Lord Buckmaster, in a letter to Lord Crewe of 27 December, explained quite succinctly the snare into which the Parliamentary Liberal Party had wandered:

The present political position arises out of three prominent facts:

- (1) that the Prime Minister has pledged himself to take all necessary steps to compel the services of unmarried men, before married men are called up.
- (2) that an extra million of men has been voted for the Army without division in the House of Commons.

(3) that there is an apparent residue of 567,000 unmarried men, who, for one reason or another, have not attested.

Now it seems to me difficult that those who supported without protest the vote for an extra million men, can without inconsistency assert that they are not prepared to take the steps necessary for obtaining those men.⁴⁸

More active at this time was the Minister of Munitions, who on the day preceding the Cabinet had made perhaps his most powerful Wartime speech, calling on workmen and employers alike to support more enthusiastically the soldiers in the trenches, in order 'not to have "Too Late" inscribed upon the portals of their workshops!' On 22 December he travelled to Scotland to confront, courageously but none too successfully, the recalcitrant Glasgow shop stewards.

He returned to the capital on 27 December and immediately sent a message to the Prime Minister, lest momentum for the impending conscription bill be lost. Miss Stevenson recorded in her diary:

[Lloyd George] sent a message through Lord Reading (who was lunching at No. 10) to the P.M. saying that if the P.M. kept his promise to the compulsionists, he would stand by him through thick and thin; that if there were a general election, he would do all the dirty work up & down the country. If, however, the P. M. did not see his way to keep his promise, he would be obliged to send in his resignation.⁴⁹

On the same day, General Sir William Robertson, who had held his new position as CIGS less than a week, demanded of the Cabinet a supply of 'not less than 130,000 men' per month to fight the War which could be ended 'in our favour only be attrition or by breaking through the German line'.⁵⁰ If the wishes of the new Commander were to be met, and the authorization to increase the size of the Army was to have meaning, again conscription was the only solution.

Asquith appeared to be ready to make the leap of faith and acquiesce to the mass of evidence favouring compulsory service. Lloyd George described to Miss Stevenson the results of the Cabinet of 27 December:

when the Cabinet began, & everyone was waiting anxiously for the discussion of compulsion to begin, the P.M. raised the question instead of Helles. The discussion dragged on and on,

and when every member of the Cabinet had expressed his opinion at least twice upon the subject, the P.M. declared the meeting to be at a close, saying that it was now nearly five o'clock and that there was not time to raise the question of compulsion that day. Whereupon Lord Curzon lost his temper, and protested that the P.M. was simply wasting time deliberately, and in order to avoid giving a decision. In reality he (the P.M.) was endeavouring to gain time to reconsider his decision in light of [Lloyd George's] message.⁵¹

Miss Stevenson served Lloyd George as secretary, mistress, companion and, in his declining years, wife, and her final interpretation of the Cabinet meeting was coloured by her affection and her habit of reporting only his version of events in her journal. She was partly correct: the Prime Minister was delaying; but it was not Lloyd George and the other conscription enthusiasts whom he feared at this point but, rather, his other Liberal colleagues. Simon, McKenna, Runciman and Grey were all contemplating resignation at this juncture.

The most significant of these, perhaps, to Asquith's plan to hold together his coalition was McKenna, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. On Tuesday 29 December he received two letters in his morning post, before he went off to the Cabinet scheduled to settle the conscription issue. The first message was from Edwin Montagu, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in succession to Churchill, and a close associate of the Prime Minister. He wrote:

Couldn't you stay and assent to the bill on the distinct understanding that you were free to air your views about the size of the army and on the understanding with the P.M. that you had earned and claimed his support in obtaining a reduction.

I fear you can't argue about that in public without helping the Huns by telling them you feared we couldn't last.

But you could do it in the Cabinet.⁵²

It is unlikely that such a remarkable proposition – that McKenna continue his assaults on the policy of conscription within a Cabinet which had agreed to its passage – could have come from the pen of Montagu without the knowledge of his political mentor, the Prime Minister.

The second letter came to the Chancellor from Lt.-Col. Hankey, who admired Asquith's policy of balance within the Cabinet. He wrote:

I do not know the precise merits of the controversy, because I have not seen all the papers, but I do know that the country cannot afford to lose it's [*sic*] sanest element.

If you go the government will be handed over to the militarists and extremists, and worse still, I fear they will endeavour to misrepresent the grounds on which you are resigning, and to create a bad atmosphere, so that the reestablishment of a reign of sanity will be more difficult than ever.

Nevertheless, I cannot help feeling that it would be better for all if you could stick to the ship a little longer, and try another round on the basis of the size of the army, where I cannot help feeling that a still larger number of your colleagues would rally to your side.⁵³

As it turned out, McKenna chose to remain, both to continue to champion within the Cabinet a reduced – and less expensive – military commitment and to prevent the possibility of being cast in the role of maker of a Lloyd George–Bonar Law Government. Only Simon resigned, the claims of loyalty on the others being great enough to hold them, and Herbert Samuel became Home Secretary in his place.

At least one additional struggle was avoided, as any mention of applying compulsion to Ireland was absent. While the official reason given later to the House by the Irish Secretary, Augustine Birrell, was that the Derby Scheme had not encompassed Ireland, the true explanation was that the Government (the Unionist members, admittedly with less grace than their Liberal colleagues) had accepted the explanation of John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Party, that conscription in that island was 'impracticable, unworkable and impossible'.⁵⁴

The Cabinet met on 29 December and accepted the inevitable – the Derby Scheme ensured the passage of a so-called Bachelors' Bill. The somewhat revised Cabinet met again on New Year's Eve, with Samuel in Simon's place, and McKenna revealed that he had not really accepted the defeat of voluntarism at all. He demanded a re-evaluation of the 70-division standard, and, at the suggestion of Balfour, the Prime Minister acquiesced to the appointment of another committee to examine the entire question of resources and manpower in relation to the claims on Great Britain of what had become a war of attrition.⁵⁵ The more astute observers of Asquithian politics among the ministers present, no doubt saw that conscrip–

tion had carried the day but was far from having won the political war. Of Asquith's reasoning, his most recent biographer has written:

Asquith's motives were too transparent for his decision to carry conviction. Playing both ends against the middle, he maintained to his critics of the left that his policy was merely an extension of the Derby Scheme, while those on the right were allowed to infer the contrary.⁵⁶

It was impossible to conceive that these men would remain ensnared by the Prime Minister's wiles, and as the first conscription bill was being offered in Parliament, plans for the next phase of the controversy were being laid.

V

Asquith introduced the Bachelor's Bill on 5 January 1916, and the House was denied the high rhetorical performance of which he was capable. His speech was long and uninspiring and seemed keyed to strike as moderate and inoffensive a tone as possible. He made clear that the bill was the logical extension of the Derby Scheme, and no more:

I am of opinion that, in view of the results of Lord Derby's campaign, no case has been made for general compulsion. I, at any rate, would be no party to any measure which had that for its object. The Bill that I am about to ask leave to introduce is one, I think, which can be sincerely supported by those who, either on principle, or, as is my case, on grounds of expediency, are opposed to what is commonly described as conscription. This Bill is confined to a specific purpose – the redemption of a promise publicly given by me in this House in the early days of Lord Derby's campaign.⁵⁷

While the actual maneuvering of the bill through the House was left to Bonar Law and Long, Asquith had one remaining crisis to overcome before this episode could be considered closed. While Labour Party representatives gave token opposition to the first reading of the bill, if the TUC anti-conscription resolution of the previous autumn was any indication, there was more trouble to be expected from the representatives of the working classes. On 6 January a special Labour Conference was held at the Central Hall in

Westminster, to consider the previous day's parliamentary developments. Sweeping aside a more moderate resolution proposed by the Labour Party leadership, Albert Bellamy, President of the National Union of Railwaymen, passed a motion unequivocally condemning the new National Service Bill on the grounds that no acceptable case had been made for the necessity of such a policy instead of voluntarism, which Bellamy declared a more efficient method of raising troops.⁵⁸

Later that same day, in a joint meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Party's Executive Committee, it was decided that the three PLP members of the Government, under-secretaries William Brace and George Roberts, as well as Arthur Henderson, should resign.⁵⁹ Asquith, however, within the week received a deputation of Labour Party representatives and trade unionists and convinced them that the tribunals created under the Derby Scheme and absorbed into the new Military Service Act would prevent individual abuses and any attempts to employ the law to enforce industrial conscription. As a result of the Prime Minister's soothing words, Henderson and his colleagues were allowed to withdraw their resignations, and the Labour Party Annual Conference, held on 26–28 January, affirmed the compromise.⁶⁰

The last impediments to the bill, then, were removed, and the first British conscription law of modern times received the Royal Assent on 27 January. It consisted of four major sections and two supplementary schedules. The initial section of the statute set out that all male British subjects age 18 to 41, who were either unmarried or were widowers without dependent children, were 'deemed as from the appointed date [15 August 1915] to have been duly enlisted in His Majesty's regular forces for general service with the Colours or in the Reserve for the Period of the war, and have been forthwith transferred to the Reserve'

Section Two outlined the limits of exemption from service under the new law: employment on work of national importance, hardship due to family or business or ill health. Only after the resignation of Sir John Simon was a clause added providing for exemption due to conscientious objection to war. While Asquith and Bonar Law stood their ground bravely, arguing from principle as well as precedent, the insertion of the clause seems to have been largely a political rather than a moral question. To a degree, the ground had been cut from under the Simonite Liberals, Irish Nationalists and Labourites who wished to tar the bill with the brush of 'Prussianism'.⁶¹

Section Three was added at the behest of the Trade Unions and the Labour Party after Asquith's intercession with those groups, and it allowed to men who had lost their exempted status with their employment a two-month grace period in order to secure a similar post. The purpose, of course, was to prevent employers from taking advantage of workers by threatening withdrawal of exemption – and hence conscription into the Army – through discharge from a particular job.

Section Four set forth the official commencement of the new Act, which was, of course, immediate. The two Supplementary Schedules outlined, first, the specific occupations which exempted men from service, and, second, the working of the tribunal system, carried over from the Derby Scheme and modeled after the Munitions Tribunals of the Munitions of War Act.

It is almost too obvious to state that the passage of the Military Service Act was an event of enormous moment. Generations of voluntarist tradition were breached, and it must be recalled that no Briton living in 1916 had ever witnessed the raising of Regular Forces through compulsion. To the delight of proponents and the horror of critics of mandatory service, the issue which had come to dominate British political life had seemingly been resolved; after seventeen months of the most savage war in history, the nation finally adopted a military manpower system similar to that of every other Great Power. Though none could foresee it at the time, of course, the nation would never again fight a major conflict without national service.

All this being said, however, the reaction of interested parties on each side of the prolonged conflict revealed that the passage of the bill was not the climax but only another act in a continuing drama. The pro-conscription party acknowledged the victory as only a partial one, at best. Walter Long, for example, wrote to Bonar Law that the failure to apply the Act to Ireland was both a disappointment and a grave error.⁶² Leopold Amery noted in the House that the failure to include married men in the bill required Parliament and the nation 'to traverse the whole ground over again, and why should we have to have the same controversy over again, and the same irritating and exasperating delays?'⁶³ His rhetorical question, of course, was asked in regard to what he assumed was the inevitable struggle which lay ahead – to apply the act to married men.

The highest officials of the War Office offered little hope that the new bill would be a permanent solution. General Robertson remin-

ded the Government in early January that the Army requirement was for 'every man we can get'.⁶⁴ Lord Kitchener, having returned from his fact-finding trip to the East, made clear to the Prime Minister who had stripped him of his powers over military strategy that he had no intention of acting as a moderating force and tightening the reins on Robertson or Haig, who had recently replaced Sir John French as Commander-in-Chief. He wrote on 11 January:

The country as a whole is not feeling the pinch of the war and the 60 odd millions difference does not appear to me to be a sum that cannot be easily found. As regards men we have only to look at the streets and country to see masses of men who could serve without any material interference with trade.⁶⁵

Cabinet members who found the Bachelor's bill distasteful – foremost among them McKenna and Runciman – now wondered aloud if the new bill might not bankrupt the nation, if the War Office were allowed to have all the men they desired. McKenna had been persuaded to accept the bill on the provision that a committee be charged to look into this matter. When the Prime Minister appointed it, he demonstrated again that his choices of the membership for such bodies was always revealing. He named McKenna, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and an 'economist' in this struggle, and Austen Chamberlain, a former Chancellor and a pro-conscription and 'big army' man. Asquith took the chair himself, ensuring that the deciding vote in any report which went forward was his own.

In the first month of the new year, the conscription issue seemed little more settled than it had been before the Bachelor's Bill. The antagonists only temporarily turned to other pursuits: Lloyd George to the supersession of Kitchener, McKenna to gathering the sums which would prove conscription and the 'big army' view impossible, and the Prime Minister to his political fence-mending. It would not be long before the new Military-Finance Committee would attract the controversial attention of other committees which preceded it in the conscription controversy.

No one had gained what he wished out of this episode, but Asquith had got more than his colleagues: he had purchased a cushion of valuable time with the bill. He had administered the unpleasant prescription of partial compulsory service at the time he felt best, and he noted with satisfaction that the nation accepted it. Finally, he remained Prime Minister and leader of a creaky but surviving coalition.

Perhaps the last word on this phase of the controversy should lie with Sir John Simon, allotted the role of the last 'pure' Liberal and the only member of the Cabinet to resign office.⁶⁶ He said, in the debate of 5 January when the bill was introduced into the House, 'Does anyone really suppose that once the principle of compulsion has been conceded that you are going to stop here?' A great deal of the next half-year would be spent in settling that issue.

8 Does Anyone Suppose . . . You Are Going To Stop Here?

I

The vision of Lord Kitchener in August 1914, that Great Britain had entered a conflict to be fought by millions of men and which would take years to settle, was perhaps his most accurate contribution to understanding the Great War. He meant to field a huge army, greater than any force in British history. To this end, at the Calais Conference of Allied commanders on 7 July 1915, he committed the nation to raising a force of 70 divisions. While Kitchener's reputation among his colleagues did not survive the day-to-day familiarity of cabinet government, his pledge proved stronger than the attacks made upon it by those who felt it an impossible standard. His commitment of 70 divisions – unfulfilled by the close of 1915 – was an issue continually raised by the pro-conscriptionists in Parliament and in the country.

Another meeting of Allied generals was held at Chantilly on 6–8 December; it also proved to have an impact on manpower policy. Lt.-Col. Maurice Hankey wrote of the conclusions of this meeting:

The representatives of the Allied Armies had been unanimous *inter alia* that a decision could be won only on the Russian, Franco-British, or Italian fronts; that the decision must be sought by simultaneous offensives on these fronts; and that in the secondary theatres of war the minimum forces ought to be employed. So far, then, the War Committee were confronted with a rare and remarkable unanimity of military opinion. Whatever misgivings they might feel – and some felt them acutely – the civilian members of the War Committee had no alternative but to give their consent.¹

Misgivings or not, the War Committee – Asquith's 'inner Cabinet' for direction of the war – accepted these conclusions and committed Great Britain to a major offensive in France and Flanders in the campaign season of 1916. The day this decision was reached was 28

December, ironically the same day that the full Cabinet accepted the decision to bring in the so-called Bachelors' Bill.

These two meetings of high-ranking officers greatly influenced the policy of the Government in Whitehall. The first, Calais in July 1915, had set the 70-division standard which proved to be unreachable by voluntarist means and played a material role in bringing in partial conscription. The more recent Chantilly meeting, in December, resulted in conclusions which committed the Allies to an unalloyed war of attrition and increasingly greater offensives on the major fronts. This decision, along with the appointment in December of the dedicated 'Westerners', Robertson and Haig, created a climate of opinion which made it difficult to avoid an even more demanding compulsory service law. 'In these circumstances,' Roy Jenkins has written, 'the job of the politicians ceased to be that of looking for strategic alternatives and became concentrated upon supplying men and munitions for the slaughter.'² The great question which was raised by these decisions was this: Was it possible to abide by them? Could Great Britain raise enough men and produce enough munitions – and other necessary goods – and at the same time maintain in the field an army of such unprecedented size? During the month of January, a Cabinet committee examined precisely that matter.

II

The Cabinet Committee on the Co-ordination of Military and Financial Effort, it will be recalled, had been created by Asquith in order to mollify McKenna and his fellow 'economists' over the decision to bring in the National Service Act. Trapped by the commitment tying compulsory service to the failure of the Derby Scheme, they had turned to the argument that Britain had not the resources to field a great conscript army as well as maintain agriculture, munitions-making and other necessary industries. The committee held its first meeting on New Year's Day and met an additional dozen sessions before offering its report in early February.

The most significant witnesses appearing before the committee were Walter Runciman, President of the Board of Trade, and General Robertson. The former argued that the national economy – already dangerously short of labour – could not bear the burden of fielding an unlimited military force.³ Robertson, on the other hand, presented his case in the form of a question: Did the Government wish to win the War, or did it not? He wrote to the King's Equerry, Clive Wigram, on 12 January:

I have been attending a Cabinet Committee for the last week, with not quite satisfactory results. The attitude of some ministers is rather to find out what is the smallest amount of money and the smallest number of men with which we may hope, someday, to win the war, or rather not to lose it.

Despite his impatience with his political masters, the CIGS indicated to his friend that even he did not know what exactly was needed:

There is a desire to cut down some of our existing [proposed] Divisions – 67 plus 3 in India. No one can say what men we shall need except that we may need everyone.⁴

In the end, McKenna, Runciman and their circle, as well as Robertson and the supporters of maintaining the 70-division standard compromised on a 67-division force, with 62 divisions to be maintained in the field, with full reserves. This was the essence of the committee report, issued on 4 February 1916.⁵ The 'economists' had no choice, as they were a minority both in the Cabinet and in the House of Commons – Runciman wrote to McKenna on 23 January that he would accept a large army but refused to be convinced that it was right: 'I must decline to be swindled with my eyes open.'⁶

Robertson, on the other hand, as he indicated in his letter to Wigram, did not really know exactly how many men he would eventually need to achieve victory. A force of 62 divisions with reserves outnumbered the 54 without full reserves he had at the time, so he accepted the conclusions of the committee – for the moment. He confidently wrote to Sir Douglas Haig a few days after the publication of the committee report: 'We must take charge of the thing in politics in the same way we are gradually beginning to do in military affairs.'⁷ The CIGS and the Commander-in-Chief of the BEF were in agreement that they would not begin the planned offensive until summer; also, they had got more than half a loaf already. Planning to 'take charge of the thing' allowed them time for a renewed attack on the 'frocks', as Sir Henry Wilson referred to the politicians.

Lt.-Col. Maurice Hankey had added the secretaryship of the Military-Finance Committee to his many other duties. His gifts of diplomacy and his keen eye for compromise had played important parts in bringing the issue at least to temporary settlement. Usually content to remain quietly in the background of great events – though he never suffered from excessive immodesty regarding his contribu-

tion to high statecraft – Hankey was allowed to step forward in this event. He received both the French Legion of Honour and a KCB for his labours – as well as a silver cigarette case from Mrs Asquith and half a dozen pheasants from the King.⁸

Edwin Montagu, relieved that another conscription-related crisis seemed to be past, wrote to Asquith on 5 February:

All is well that ends well, and from day to day I learn how easily one can be disturbed by those who do not put all their cards upon the table. I shall never be able to discover what the exact motive in all this was. However I am delighted that it is all over & that you have been successful once again.⁹

As it turned out, Montagu seldom had been less correct. He trusted neither the soldiers nor the 'economists' – those who failed 'to put all their cards upon the table' – but he was certain that Asquith had again found a way to put off his troubles. Like others who may have accepted conscription as an unpleasant necessity, he presumed the Military Service Bill would function satisfactorily to supply enough troops to quieten the generals.

Lord Kitchener disabused Edwin Montagu and his Cabinet colleagues of these notions within a matter of days following the compromise committee report. He reported to the Cabinet:

In January we obtained for general service 30,158 out of the four groups we tapped, and 34,050 by direct enlistment. We required 259,000 and we [are] thus short by, roughly, 195,000. The requirements to the end of March are 473,000, and to meet this we estimate to get 284,000 out of the groups and classes now in process of being called up, 71,000 delayed by tribunals from those being dealt with and perhaps 24,000 by direct enlistment. This leaves a balance of 94,000 which will have to come from fresh groups and classes to be called up as soon as possible.¹⁰

A. J. P. Taylor has succinctly described the manpower climate of 1916, which Lord Kitchener had only begun to encounter:

The immediate effect of conscription was to stop voluntary recruiting, which ceased on 27 January 1916 – the day the first Military Service Act became law. Thereafter the compulsory system, far from bringing men into the army, kept them out of it.

When the Act was passed, it arranged 48,000 recruits [from among unattested bachelors] in its first six months of operation (about half the average number raised in a single month by the voluntary system). Its more important result was to produce 748,000 fresh claims to exemption, most of them valid.¹¹

The Military Service Law had only begun to function and was already showing itself incapable of dealing with the growing shortage of military manpower. The explanation is not difficult to understand: voluntary enlistment had, as noted above, virtually ceased. Married attestees, under the Derby Scheme, were not yet being called, and the combined figures of bachelor attestees and conscripts were insufficient to meet the needs of the Army, regardless of the decisions of the Military-Finance Committee. Furthermore, under the threat of compulsory service, more men than ever sought the protection of exemption through employment classification. This was increasingly possible because the ambitious production programmes of Lloyd George and the Munitions Ministry had only begun to bring to reality new contracting arrangements with non-traditional arms manufacturers and to build vast numbers of new state-operated factories. In brief, as the Army was authorized to raise even more divisions, the demand for men to serve in Britain in positions equally important to the military effort grew accordingly.

Charles à Court Repington met with Sir William Robertson before the end of February, as these dismal facts were becoming known. The journalist wrote:

I advised him to do certain things: first to get the Prime Minister to compel the Board of Trade to revise its lists of reserved occupations, which, in my opinion, were killing recruiting; second, to make Lloyd George reduce the number of men of military age engaged on munition work; third, to tell the Advisory Committees to beat up their starred men by using the pink cards of the Registration Act to find the names of employers; and fourth, to send a confidential letter to the Tribunals that every man was needed. He promised that he would take all these steps at 10 to-morrow morning, and I think he will.¹²

Repington tended to exaggerate his influence over the generals, but it is also true that in this case he was evangelizing to the converted. Robertson did not need the correspondent's encouragement to raise a renewed campaign behind the political scenes to provide more men

for the Army. The Bachelors' Bill was not meeting his expectations, and the Chantilly Conference had strengthened his hand and his resolve to win the War on the Western Front. In early March he wrote to Haig:

The conscription bill is proving a farce. Macready [the Adjutant-General] and I are attending to it, & will shortly go to the Government about it if matters do not improve.

The Commander of the Imperial General Staff continued in almost Cromwellian terms, illustrating both his frustration and the lengths to which he threatened to go to have his way:

I am writing this with the object of saying that practically anything may happen to our boasted British constitution before the war ends, & that the great asset is the army – whose value will be fixed largely to the extent by which we at the top stick together and stand firm.¹³

'Wully' Robertson's resolve was stiffened in the month of February. On the 21st began the terrible Franco-German Battle of Verdun, the first fruits of the universal commitment to a war of attrition – this demonstrated to him that the coming 'big push' in the summer largely would be a British exercise. He anticipated that the Germans would be much weakened, as would be the French; and if the men could be found, perhaps he and Haig could achieve the great breakthrough which was the constant goal of the 'Westerner' mentality. He required men in unprecedented numbers, and he meant to have them.

III

Lord Derby, constantly barraged by letters from Lord Northcliffe and frequently held up to harsh judgement in the newspapers of the great press lord as the parent of the Bachelors' Bill compromise, chose to defend himself by taking up the issue of the manpower shortage in the House of Lords. He did so on 2 March and virtually washed his hands of the entire recruiting policy of the Government. Though the Military Service Bill, the Prime Minister's pledge to the married men and the essential structure of recruiting at the time had grown from his Scheme. Derby denied any pride of authorship. He did not favour the limitation of compulsion to unmarried men, he

said, and he blamed the large number of exemptions from service for the shortages of manpower suffered by the Army.¹⁴

Like Robertson, Lord Derby had been 'prepped' by Repington, who saw him the day before his speech. 'There ought to be some fun if his speech comes up to his intentions', the military correspondent wrote in his diary.¹⁵ The humour in the speech was no doubt visible only to the opponents of the Government.

Walter Long also found himself in a difficult position in March in regard to the manpower issue. He was still a dyed-in-the-wool conscriptionist, yet he was also a member and committed champion of the Government. Furthermore, he chaired the Reserved Occupations Committee, which set guidelines regarding which trades were to be exempted from conscription. He wrote to the Prime Minister on the 12th:

I can't make out how many men even have actually been got in uniform, how many are fit for Foreign Service, how many are to be depended upon for Home Defence. The figures Kitchener gave French were apparently incorrect to the tune of 500,000 on the wrong side.

Robertson tells me recruits are not coming in: he and Macready are making fresh changes at the W.O. but they can't do everything. Some radical changes are wanted immediately or there will be serious trouble.¹⁶

A week later, Long presented a defense of his committee's recommendations to the Cabinet. Meant to shield the Reserved Occupations Committee from the wrath of Derby, Northcliffe and other critics, the memorandum served to bring to light the large number of exemptions which had been granted. There were few in the Cabinet who realized before this time that two and a quarter million men were unavailable for military service because their skills or their places of employment were necessary to the War effort or the functioning of national life – an increase of three-quarters of a million over the number given in the Derby Scheme report.¹⁷

Sir William Robertson chose to bring the issue to a head on 21 March. Late in the afternoon he strode into the War Office room of Leopold Amery, MP, and poured out his frustration and anger to the politician-soldier. Expecting that the CIGS might visit him only to deliver a rebuke for his covert political activities on behalf of compulsory service, Amery expressed his obviously pleasant surprise in a letter to his wife, written the same day:

On the contrary, it was to open his soul to me about the gravity of the present situation and the complete refusal of Squiff to face it. He is clearly anxious that we should do all we can to force the G-t to act.¹⁸

Robertson was furious because earlier in the day he had attended a meeting of the War Committee, called ostensibly to decide upon the advisability of an offensive in the coming campaign season.¹⁹ Tangible proof that he meant what he had written to Haig weeks earlier, where he boasted of seizing the leadership initiative away from the politicians, is offered by the memorandum he had placed before the War Committee. In his paper he virtually accused the Government of not abiding by the compromise reached by the Military-Finance Committee. Priding himself always on being a plain speaker, he wrote:

We cannot expect to secure a favourable peace without hard fighting, and that means heavy losses which we must be prepared to suffer and replace. Therefore, after the most careful thought, and speaking with the fullest sense of my responsibility as Chief of the Imperial General Staff, I desire to say that if it is the will of the nation that this war be brought to a successful conclusion immediate steps must be taken to meet the requirements of the Army in men as laid before the Cabinet [Military-Finance] Committee. We have reached a stage in the development of our resources when those requirements can only be met by putting the same strain upon the social and business life of the community as has long been borne in France.²⁰

Robertson's demands were not complex: he wanted the 67 divisions he felt the Army had been promised 'as soon as possible'; he wanted his understaffed divisions filled up with flesh-and-blood soldiers; he wanted an extended Prolongation of Service Act, in order to retain time-expired men; and he wanted statutory sanction to reconsider for service men who had been rejected as medically unfit. He wanted these conditions met immediately. Asquith's position again became precarious under these onslaughts, for the Conservative supporters of coalition were much less inclined to deny the demands of the generals than were his more familiar followers, the Liberals.

Also increasingly suspect in the eyes of the Prime Minister at this time was the Minister of Munitions, who openly favoured extended

conscription and was thought by some of Asquith's closest advisers to be covetous of the premiership. Asquith planned to leave for Paris and an inter-Allied conference on 26 March, and he was told as he prepared to go that a plot to dislodge him in his absence was about to be hatched by Lloyd George, Carson and Churchill. Two of the bearers of this unhappy news, Montagu and Maurice Bonham Carter, went so far as to implore Hankey to give up his place in the party to remain behind to foil the plotters. These paladins of Asquithian rule – the former of whom was destined to serve in a Lloyd George Government – convinced the Premier that no intrigue could succeed without the presence of the Minister of Munitions, so on the morning before embarkation the Welshman was called to accompany his chief to the continent. Hankey recorded in his diary of the episode: 'This will keep L.G. out of mischief for a day or two, if it be that he is mischief bent.'²¹

There was no coup planned – no 'mischief', in Hankey's words. All that was accomplished was that Lloyd George, a notoriously poor sailor, was taken away from his munitions work at Whitehall Gardens and forced to undergo a rough Channel passage. In fact, he was recalled to London three days later to intercede in a Clydeside labour dispute. Asquith had much about which to be concerned in the early spring of 1916, both in regard to the War and to the political climate at Whitehall, but it was not Lloyd George who should have been the immediate cause of his anxiety. On 28 March Sir Edward Carson, who had angrily left the Government in the previous November, returned to Parliament after a six-week illness; and with his re-emergence, opposition to Asquith's manpower policies was powerfully reinforced.

Carson, then 62 years of age and in less than robust health (though he was to live to be 81), had a genius for destruction – a gift for finding, exposing and exploiting the weaknesses in other men's works, which made him a feared and respected opponent. His great cause was Ulster Unionism, though he was a native Dubliner and represented Trinity College in the House of Commons for more than two decades. With that issue temporarily in abeyance, he turned his powerful advocacy to driving the Government toward what he thought an acceptable level of energy in the prosecution of the War. To Carson, that meant general conscription.

He was not without allies. In January there had been formed in the House of Commons two additional 'ginger groups', like the Unionist Business Committee but dissimilar in the sense that they were not

co-opted by the front benches. A small Liberal War Committee of about thirty members was organized under the chairmanship of Sir Frederick Cawley. More important, a Unionist War Committee of approximately 150 MPs was founded and looked to Carson for leadership. Now returned from his recuperation, the former Attorney-General meant to take up the cause of this powerful backbench group and force the Government to bring in a general compulsion bill.

On the evening of 28 March, 130 members of the UWC met with Sir Edward in the chair. An elated Sir Charles Hunter wrote to his friend, General Sir Henry Wilson:

Carson returned today and at once took supreme command. Having sent a unanimous resolution for complete compulsion both for married and unmarried, unless it is adopted within a reasonable time, we shall call on our men to come out of the Coalition and if they refuse then we shall *not* hesitate to vote against them. If they come out and Squiff decides to go on with his Radical Government let him – his own men will kill him in no time.²²

The Unionist Business Committee had failed to achieve its goals in mid-1915 largely because it did not have leaders sufficiently prestigious or reckless enough to stand against Bonar Law. The new War Committee, with Carson in the chair, did not have such a problem. The Ulster leader was a former Cabinet minister; he was absolutely fearless and commanded his own following in the House. At this time he was working closely with Lord Milner, who was the spokesman for the Unionist War Committee in the Lords. The two regularly joined like-thinking men in dinners they jocularly termed the 'Monday Night Cabal'. Regular diners were Geoffrey Robinson, editor of *The Times*; Leopold Amery; Waldorf Astor, proprietor of the *Observer*; and F. S. Oliver. Lloyd George attended from time to time, as did other luminaries, including General Wilson.

The Unionist War Committee, with such men to lead it, caused great concern to Bonar Law. The confidence growing among these impatient men that the coalition, and with it the hated 'Squiff', could soon be brought down is well illustrated by a letter sent in late March to the Tory leader by Sir Henry Wilson. A serving soldier in time of war, Sir Henry disregarded his constitutional responsibilities and demonstrated in an exchange of letters with the Colonial Secretary what a ruthless intriguer he was when playing the game of politics.²³

That old ramshackle of a coalition is, we all hope and trust, going to fall to pieces very soon. It has not been a success and the reason appears to me to be quite simple. We have at the head of it a man who has never gone to war, who has no intention, even now, of going to war, and who has no intention either of allowing anyone else to go to war.

The General offered Bonar Law something of a warning:

Now I am fond of you – many of us are – and I don't want to see you go under when the crash comes. You owe Squiff no loyalty, absolutely none. You saved him once when you joined him – and a bad day's work it was – whereas you owe the whole of your loyalty to your country, and you know as well as I do how shamefully, how disastrously, Squiff has tried to govern us.

Much annoyed by what he considered to be an impertinent letter, Bonar Law scolded Wilson for giving bad counsel and delivered a message he knew would be transferred immediately to Carson and his allies:

If we broke up the present Government, it is obvious that a new Government could not exist in the present House of Commons. There would therefore be the immediate need of a general election; it would be fought, in spite of the War, with almost the usual amount of party bitterness; and if our party succeeded in getting a majority we would be faced with an opposition of precisely the same nature as that at the time of Boer War. Do not suppose that I don't fully realize that the other – what I may call ruthless – method may be best, but that must be a matter of opinion and my judgement is against it.

Though his judgement, both as a statesman and as Leader of the Tory Party, was against forcing conscription at that moment, he had no choice but to deal with the resolution of the Unionist War Committee, passed on 28 March and bolstered by a similar general resolution passed the week before by the smaller Liberal War Committee.²⁴ Bonar Law's position became even more dangerous when Carson delivered the resolution with the proviso that the Government had one week in which to present an acceptable answer to the Committee. If no such answer was forthcoming at the end of that period, he meant to bring in a motion of censure. Geoffrey Robinson noted to Leopold Maxse with grim pleasure: 'Carson means to stick to this even if he is left in a minority of one.'²⁵

Bonar Law met with his pro-conscription Tory Cabinet colleagues on 30 March, and on the same afternoon a full Cabinet was held, presided over by Crewe in the absence of the Prime Minister. The conclusion of each meeting was similar: the Military-Finance Committee must be reassembled to reconsider the manpower problem. Lord Selborne wrote to Curzon, whose illness had prevented his attending either meeting: 'It was decided to reappoint Asquith, Austen, and McKenna, with the addition of Lansdowne. How pleased the PM will be! Meanwhile the Government may be turned out any day; if Townsend [*sic*] [the beleaguered commander at Kut-al-Amara] has to surrender, certainly will I should say.'

Bonar Law explained his own feelings on the growing crisis to J. P. Croal, editor of the *Scotsman*, on 1 March:²⁶

So far I have been against pressing the question of compulsion to the point of breaking up the Government for two reasons: one, that I believed that we were securing without [general] compulsion as many men as could be adequately dealt with by the War Office; and the other, that though compulsion was, in my opinion, the proper method of raising the forces required in such a war as this, yet I believed that the feeling against it was so deep-rooted that we would lose more by dissention at home than we would gain by increased military efficiency.

He continued, referring obliquely to the plan to recall the Military-Finance Committee again to study the matter:

If an examination shows that with the present system we cannot get the men which the country can afford, after taking into account the need of keeping up our financial strength, then I should not agree to continue in the Government unless the changes were made. I think also the hostility in the country to compulsion has largely disappeared, and that if the military demanded a change could be made, if the Prime Minister supported it, without serious internal trouble.

No doubt referring to the ultimatum of Carson's Unionist War Committee, Bonar Law added:

You probably realise, however, that apart from this definite question there is so much general discontent with the Government, and particularly with the Prime Minister, that the continuance of the present Government may for that reason alone become impossible.²⁷

The Leader of the Conservative Party had no unfulfilled personal ambitions, and only loyalty to Empire, party and colleagues kept him at his demanding task. He revealed to his friend, J. P. Croal, that he had scant faith in the future of the Government, but he also had no intention of throwing over those who depended upon him to lead. Carson wrote to him on 3 April,²⁸ demanding recruiting figures, and the Tory leader reminded the former Attorney-General that even if the views of the chairman of the UWC turned out to be representative of the party, a true leader could not allow himself to be stampeded into premature action by a 'ginger group' such as Carson's. The Prime Minister had not yet returned from the continent, and the renewed Military-Finance Committee required time to report. An additional week or more would be needed, and the UWC had to wait, Bonar Law advised, that much longer.²⁹ Carson accepted; his committee had no choice but to do the same.

Asquith and his party returned to London on 6 April, thus fulfilling one condition laid down by Bonar Law. The expanded Military-Finance Committee met four times during the second week of April and presented their report, drafted entirely by Austen Chamberlain, on the 13th. Addressing the military manpower shortage, they came immediately to the point:³⁰

For the solution to this problem a measure of general compulsion affords no remedy. The difficulty is not that the raw material is deficient, but that the machinery cannot turn it out quickly enough. There are, however, three matters, each involving some extension of the compulsory principle, which have a direct bearing on the immediate problem.

Their recommendations were these:

- (1) The immediately prospective shortage would be at once reduced by the compulsory extension of time-expired men.
- (2) Though total numbers would not actually be increased, the efficiency of the numbers of already secured would be greatly enhanced, and the existing shortage at the front reduced, by taking power to compel men enlisted for territorial battalions to serve in any unit where they are needed.
- (3) A large ultimate addition to the forces available would be ensured by bringing under the terms of the Military Service Act all

youths under 19 [years of age] on August 1915 last as they reach that age.

The report accomplished several ends for which it was not at all meant. In the first place it decided the course of the Unionist War Committee, causing Carson and his colleagues to put down a motion amounting virtually to a censure of the Government which they nominally supported; in the second place it drove Sir William Robertson to take an additional step toward, as he described it to Haig, 'controlling' the situation. Finally, it drove David Lloyd George to seize a leading place in the battle to bring in general compulsion. In the end, co-operation between these two unlikely allies, the Minister of Munitions and the Commander of the Imperial General Staff, helped to force the conscription issue toward solution.

IV

Miss Stevenson wrote of Lloyd George's renewed interest in the conscription crisis in mid-April: 'Things have come to a head over general compulsion. D. has for some time been very sick at the way the war was being tackled, but a favourable opportunity did not present itself for forcing an issue.'³¹ The Military-Finance Committee report, she indicated, had provided the opportunity.

The Minister of Munitions met with three friends on Thursday 13 April. To Lord Riddell, C. P. Scott and Sir William Robertson Nicoll – each an influential journalist – he poured out his concerns regarding the proper path to follow in the April crisis. The four agreed at first that he should resign, giving the insufficiency of enlistments and the displeasure of the Army Council to meet manpower quotas as the reasons, but leaving unmentioned his general dissatisfaction with Asquith's management of the War. In the end, however, the question of withdrawing from the Government was left unresolved. Lloyd George was ambitious, but he did not at that time have designs on the premiership. He was willing to continue in an Asquith Cabinet, providing that more energetic prosecution of the War could be secured. The four agreed that watchful waiting was called for, Lloyd George parted from the others advising them: 'Much depends on General Robertson. The question is whether he will stand to his guns.'³² They need not have worried.

The Army Council received the report of the Committee the following day, and Robertson dined that evening with Geoffrey Robinson, who inquired of the General's resolve. The editor of *The Times* recalled Sir William's answer in a letter to Lord Northcliffe:

He told me he thought there would be no weakening – in any case he had no intention of changing his own ground; and he hinted that any failure on the part of the Cabinet to deal with recruiting on a broad basis would lead to a further and serious memorandum. In other words the Army Council might have to refuse to be responsible any longer for the conduct of the war unless its needs in men were supplied.³³

On the morning of Saturday 15 April the military members of the Army Council met with the Military-Finance Committee, including the Prime Minister. Hankey advised Asquith that if the Army Council proved difficult, 'postpone a decision on some excuse or other' ³⁴ 'Wully' Robertson had been put off in the past, but he meant to 'stand to his guns' in this case. Despite the appeals of the civilians, the generals did not accept the report, but chose instead to meet privately to consider their next step.

Driven by Robertson to cut off any escape route available to Asquith and his colleagues, the generals produced a startling memorandum later that evening which was meant to forestall the compromise conclusions of the Military-Finance Committee. Largely written by the CIGS, it recognized the difficult position of the Government:

The Council quite appreciate the considerations which the [Military-Finance] Committee impressed on them as to the very great difficulty in passing further legislation to introduce such an extension of the present conditions as the adoption of compulsion of unattested married men of military age. They also realized the great drain on the financial resources of the nation made by the increasing demands of the Allies for assistance, and by the withdrawal from industries of the large numbers of men required for the Army. Further, they agree that no fresh steps which might be taken now would provide extra available men before the end of July.

Such considerations, however, did not deter them from demanding what they considered to be absolutely necessary:

But the Army Council have to look beyond that time, and from the figures supplied by the Registrar-General, it is clear that no appreciable intake of recruits will be available under the present system after the end of September. The Council then, still hold the opinion that it is absolutely necessary that every man of military age who is physically fit and can be spared from Naval service or industrial or other indispensable employment should be made available for service in the military forces. This represents the only maximum which the Council has ever contemplated. The Council therefore wish to point out that any such postponement of a decision as that contemplated by the Committee would involve serious consequences to the successful prosecution of the war.³⁵

The terms of the memorandum were strong and gave the impression that the military members of the Army Council would not continue in office without general conscription – it was exactly the impression Robertson intended should be left. Miss Stevenson indicated Lloyd George's state of mind on 17 April, the Monday following: 'Fortunately the Army Council took the same view as D., & they are making a firm stand. If Asquith will not accept compulsion whole-heartedly, then they will resign, & D. with them.'³⁶

Fearing just that eventuality – and the consequent collapse of the Government – Lord Reading, the Lord Chief Justice, rushed on the evening of the 15th to the King's secretary, Lord Stamfordham. A close crony of Lloyd George, Reading told the influential royal adviser that the Minister of Munitions meant to quit the Government over the issue of conscription.³⁷ Stamfordham, in turn, hurried on the morning after to Bonar Law. 'I said,' he later reported to the Sovereign, 'that the Chief Justice had last night told me that he knew as a fact that this was L.G.'s intention & things seemed to me very serious.' Bonar Law had little cheer to offer him:

He, B.L., attaches much more importance to the views of the military authorities than to those of L.G. though he does not agree with the former – If the Army Council adhere to what they put forward yesterday he may find it very difficult to separate himself from his party without abandoning his position of leader which would of course preclude him and any of his friends who followed his example from ever taking office in any administration which by force of circumstances the Unionists may be called upon to form.³⁸

Later the same day, Stamfordham went himself to confront the Minister of Munitions, who confirmed his resolve to resign unless general compulsory service was brought in:

He said the military authorities had submitted their views which he regarded as moderate, *viz*: that all available men within military age should be enlisted after deducting those required for the Navy & those indispensable for munitions & for necessary industries. The soldiers were the best judges & he accepted their figures. If the Government did not also, he would resign and state to the country his reasons.³⁹

Miss Stevenson noted in her diary that this was the greatest crisis 'since the Government was formed, and greater than that' ⁴⁰ The Carsonite forces agreed; while they realized that their chances of putting their man in the first place were slim, they sensed that they could upset the coalition or, perhaps, gain Lloyd George as a powerful ally among the unofficial opposition.⁴¹ Asquith had promised a statement to the House, and his enemies waited with the scent of blood in their nostrils.

Bonar Law, whose stock was very low at this point with his pro-conscriptionist followers, chose this moment to thrust himself into the fray. On the evening of 17 April, after meeting with his senior Tory Government colleagues, he sent to Asquith a seven-page typewritten letter, explaining his position:

I believe that a Coalition Government is not only the best in the interest of the nation, but that it would be a calamity if we had to revert to a partisan Government. I have therefore done my best to support your Administration and I desire to prevent its being broken up now.

The question of the adoption of general compulsion may not in itself be of sufficient military importance in the immediate future to justify the breaking up of the Government, but on its merits the arguments are all in favour of its adoption.

I think I am not exaggerating when I say that there is hardly a single Unionist Member who does not now believe that the needs of the war now demand [general] compulsion. In spite of my knowledge of their views I was prepared, and though we had come to no decision on the subject, I believe that my colleagues in the Cabinet were prepared to face our Party and declare that in the interest of national unity it would not be right to press this

question now. I thought that we could in the circumstances secure the support of the majority of the Party, though I felt sure that the discontent with the Government would be greatly strengthened; and that our position, and mine in particular, would become increasingly difficult.

Despite this being so, Bonar Law indicated, things had changed abruptly in recent days:

The attitude of the Army Council has however entirely altered the position. It may be that this is a question which the Government, and not the military authorities, should decide; but the fact that the Army Council, after full deliberation have expressed in terms so uncompromising their dissatisfaction with the proposals of the Government is of vital importance.

To ask the Unionist Members to oppose a motion of which on its merits they approve when that motion can be supported by the statement of the Army Council that: 'The Council therefore wish to point out that any such postponement of a decision as that contemplated by the [Military-Finance] Committee would involve serious consequences to the successful prosecution of the war,' would be to place an impossible strain upon the confidence in and loyalty to their leaders.

Bonar Law closed his letter with an ultimatum to the Prime Minister:

If I thought that their view was wrong, or if I thought that it was impossible for you to go farther than you propose, I should be ready to face the Party and lay upon them the responsibility of breaking up the Government. But I do not take that view. I think it is easier for you to carry your supporters in favour of [general] compulsion than it is for us to obtain the support of our Party against it.

In these circumstances, I feel that the attempt to carry our Party in favour of your proposals would fail, and that it would be impossible for me to acquiesce in those proposals.⁴²

In Bonar Law's correspondence there is a letter to the Tory leader, also dated 17 April, from the influential backbencher, William Bridgeman, MP for Shropshire (Oswestry). He advised Bonar Law in brutally plain terms: 'If you support the Government and have to admit that it is against the opinion of the Army Council, I do not think

a quarter of our party would go with you.⁴³ With such counsel, and knowing the determination of the Unionist War Committee, Bonar Law appeared to have little choice but to stand his ground against the Prime Minister.

The crisis was further postponed, however, as the Cabinet of 17 April succeeded only in recommending the formation of another *ad hoc* committee to seek a solution to the impasse. A Committee on the Size of the Army was hastily assembled, consisting of Asquith, Kitchener, Bonar Law, Lloyd George, Balfour, Crewe, Long, Henderson and General Robertson.⁴⁴ The purpose of the one meeting of the group, held the following day, was to find a way out of the difficulty in which the soldiers and statesmen found themselves: Asquith, Bonar Law, Lloyd George and Henderson, as well as Robertson, had all enunciated strong positions; however, it was not yet crystal clear if each had given up on the current Government. Miss Stevenson noted after the meeting:

The PM is only too glad to find something which he can adopt as an alternative and must avoid a smash, and the others are also willing to make a bargain. D. himself is most anxious to avoid a break, for he says that Asquith is the only man who can get [general] Compulsion through the *House of Commons* at present.⁴⁵

Bonar Law had no desire to force the resignation of the Government – and an election – if he could somehow satisfy both the Army Council and the angry backbench Tories another way. Likewise, Lloyd George wanted increased manpower, both for his munitions shops and for the military, rather than a smash-up of the Cabinet. Robertson simply wanted more men and cared little by whose hand they came to him. Asquith, of course, wished to find his way through this crisis, as he had done with others, and emerge with his rule intact. The question which faced these men was, of course, could an effective and workable compromise be found, now that each had stated his conditions to forgo resignation?

There were two possible solutions offered in the 18 April meeting of the Committee on the Size of the Army, each of which might have offered that desired way out. Lloyd George proposed that the State take powers to conscript unattested married men of military age, with the proviso that they would only be enforced if fewer than 50 000 men were enlisted each month.⁴⁶ Arthur Henderson, the true author of the Derby Scheme, had a different plan: he suggested that a six-week trial period be given the three-part plan of the Military-

Finance Committee. If the War Office was unsatisfied with the results – Robertson suggested that an intake of 60 000 men during the test period and regular enlistment of 15 000 men per week thereafter would be an acceptable standard – then general compulsion would be proven necessary to all parties.⁴⁷

Asquith was not sanguine about the proffered solutions. He wrote to the King's secretary: 'I am afraid that there is not a good chance of L.I. G. & the Unionist Ministers agreeing to No. 2, and I feel certain that the Labour Party will not agree to No. 1.'⁴⁸ To his frequent correspondent, Lady Scott, he was more poetic: 'Things look as black as Erebus this morning, and I was preparing to order my frock-coat to visit the Sovereign this afternoon.'⁴⁹

In the end, Henderson again had the last word, reporting to the Cabinet on 19 April the conclusions of the Executive Committee of the Labour Party, which had met the previous day. The Executive had decided that it could not 'with the information at present in its possession agree to any extension of the principle of compulsion'.⁵⁰ Furthermore, on the following day, a joint meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Executive resolved that 'the Government be recommended to arrange for a Secret Session of the House of Commons in order that the necessary facts of the situation should be communicated to Members prior to the introduction of any further extension of the Military Service Act'⁵¹ Both Lloyd George and Bonar Law had threatened resignation over the conscription issue, yet each backed down before the recommendation of the representatives of the working classes – who were, after all, the men who would be conscripted to the trenches and the men and women who made munitions. The two impatient ministers accepted the compromise plan put forth by Henderson. 'The matter is quite settled,' Miss Stevenson wrote on 20 April 1916, & D. is "satisfied" to use the expression he gave to the newspaper people.⁵²

Lloyd George and Bonar Law – and even Robertson, for that matter – may have been willing to accept Henderson's solution, but others were not. On 18 April, 125 members of the Unionist War Committee met, with Carson in the chair, and renewed their call for general conscription.⁵³ Informed of what was in the air, General Sir Henry Wilson wrote angrily to Lord Milner:

Twenty-one months of savage war – and the Cabinet not yet decided on the foundation of a policy.

A week's sham sickness, a week in Paris, a week in Italy and then the hope of tiding over Easter. If ever a man deserved to be

tried and shot that man is the PM. We hope that you and Carson and L.G., at last, have him by the throat. No mercy please.⁵⁴

The following day, Sir Henry unleashed an additional epistolary missile at the head of the Prime Minister: 'Have we got the sodden old brute by the throat at last?', he wrote to Leopold Maxse, 'Steady now; Thumbs down.'⁵⁵

Asquith, however, did not fear the General, nor at this point did he seem to fear the unprecedented Secret Session. By Thursday morning he was certain he had a workable compromise in hand, acceptable to Henderson and labour, on the one hand, and Lloyd George, Bonar Law and General Robertson, on the other. He wrote in a more sanguine frame of mind to Lord Stamfordham:

The King will be glad to hear that the Cabinet came to a complete agreement this morning, on the basis of the proposal by Henderson which is assented to by the Army Council. We also agreed in order that the case for the proposal may be fully put, that it should be submitted at a Secret Session of each House on Tuesday.⁵⁶

He added the following day: 'The happy agreement arrived at by the Cabinet yesterday was a triumph of patriotism and British good sense over every kind of sinister influence.'⁵⁷ The King responded in kind to the optimism of his Prime Minister:

It is with the greatest satisfaction that I learn from the letter to Bigge [Lord Stamfordham] of the happy agreement arrived at by the cabinet to-day. I do most heartily congratulate you on having by your patience and skill extricated the Country from a position the dangers of which it was impossible to over-estimate.

I do indeed trust that this solution will prove final and that your Coalition Government, once more united, will gain renewed strength and greater confidence of the Country, to enable you to prosecute with the fullest energy the continuance of the War to a victorious end.

thank God, we have 'weathered the storm'!⁵⁸

As events developed, it soon became clear that both the Sovereign and his first minister were premature in their joy – the storm was a good distance from being weathered.

V

Henderson's plan had much to recommend it to Asquith, Lloyd George and Bonar Law: it was based upon the report of the bi-partisan Military-Finance Committee, and its success or failure would be judged on figures supplied by the Commander of the Imperial General Staff. Furthermore, it made unnecessary the resignations either of individual ministers or the Government and, in the end, would almost certainly lead to general compulsion in any event. Henderson had, in the past, proven to be a wise counsellor regarding questions of making doses of conscription palatable to the people. Besides, no one had a better solution to offer.

Sir Maurice Hankey recorded in his diary that the decision to bring the compromise before the Secret Session cast a welcome calm over the Easter weekend, as all sides awaited the coming climax. Hankey, whose indispensability seldom allowed him the luxury of a private life in the War years, enjoyed Easter Sunday in his garden, writing speeches for Asquith and Lord Crewe. On the Monday he travelled to the Wharf, Asquith's country house in Oxfordshire, to 'coach' him for the debates the following day. It was undetermined whether the Prime Minister should return to the capital that evening or await the following morning. Hankey wrote in his diary:

Finally it was left to me to decide – in fact the whole party treated me as though I were a 'trainer' charged with the duty of bringing 'the bantam' into the ring in the pink of condition.

Hankey advised travelling that evening and noted of the journey:

He was very chatty and jolly and I thoroughly enjoyed the ride. We arrived at 12:30 a.m. and I went to spend the night at Bonham Carters'. I omitted to mention that on arrival in Town we got the first news of the Dublin outbreak. Asquith merely said 'well, that's something', and went off to bed.⁵⁹

It was 'something', indeed. Thinking he had again escaped the snares of the conscription enthusiasts, even the Easter Rebellion did not disturb the placidity of the Prime Minister. The Secret Session, which began the following afternoon, shocked him from his self-satisfaction, however.

The Prime Minister reviewed the situation for an attentive audience in the House of Commons, and Crewe did the same in the Lords.

Each detailed the Government's compromise plan: to extend the enlistments of time-expired men, to make Territorials subject to service abroad, to make youths liable to induction at age eighteen and, additional to the original recommendations of the Military-Finance Committee, to consider badged or otherwise protected workmen liable for conscription upon the expiration of their exemptions. The Henderson plan, to subject the current Military Service Act to the test of raising 60 000 men in six weeks, was also revealed. Lord Crewe and Asquith were savagely attacked from the outset of the debate by the opponents of compromise, with Milner leading the way in the Lords, and Carson and Amery foremost in the Commons. The latter expressed the frustration of his friends: 'Why must we always do things in the worst, the most huckstering way? Can we never rise to the dignity of a great occasion?' He laid his most severe criticisms at the feet of the Prime Minister:

The real source of all this indecision is the Prime Minister. What we need at the head of things is a single will, expressing the will of a nation; a thinking, foreseeing, planning mind; a purpose ardent, masterful, inflexible, an enthusiasm drawing inspiration from the inexhaustible well-spring of the nation's patriotism, kindling the nation's spirit to flame by the contagion of its own utterance and example. Without such leadership you cannot win. Will no one lift us out of this atmosphere of hesitation, of sluggish indecision, of ignoble and pettifogging compromise?⁶⁰

In all, it was a shocking experience for Asquith. Though years of parliamentary give-and-take had hardened him to most attacks, the severity of the assaults on his character and his conduct of the War left him shaken by the experience. Hankey met the Prime Minister upon leaving the House, early in the morning of 26 April, and 'noted that he was "very flushed" and "a trifle hesitating" about the effects of his speech'.⁶¹ The following day the Henderson plan was to be introduced into the House in the form of a bill, and Asquith's confidence in the compromise had waned considerably.

The premier's enemies knew they had wounded him, but they knew also that they had failed to drive him from office. Sir Henry Wilson noted angrily in his diary of the survival of Asquith coupled with the rebellion in Ireland: 'A marvellous state of affairs and I should think almost equal to the capture of Verdun from the Bosch point of view.'⁶² They received another chance the following day, only this time Walter Long was made to serve as a surrogate for the absent

Asquith. The Prime Minister pleaded that the Irish affair required his remaining at his desk.

Long's experience, like Asquith's the day before, was a harsh one, and he never forgot it. When he put before the Commons the compromise bill, he became the lightning rod which drew to him the destructive energy of the furious pro-conscription party, again led by the Chairman of the Unionist War Committee, Sir Edward Carson. Herbert Samuel, the Home Secretary, reported somberly to King George V:

Neither the matter of the Bill nor its presentation were acceptable to the House, and its proposals were received with an unbroken chorus of disapproval from men holding every variety of view. No member rose in any part of the House to support the motion for the introduction of the Bill, and in the circumstances, there was no course open but to withdraw it.⁶³

Leopold Amery witnessed the same event but saw it in an entirely different light. He wrote to his wife:

A great day. After all the gloom and sense of failure of the last few days today was sheer satisfaction and largely unrelieved comedy. Long came in and introduced a most absurd ramshackle bill composed of a string of clauses each one of which was the acceptance of something we had pressed for in the discussion of the Military Service Act. Then Carson got up and in twenty minutes polished off the absurdity and unfairness of these detailed measures without general compulsion. The Bill was dead right away and not a soul got up except to condemn it. Asquith was hurriedly recalled and put up both hands in surrender, and said the Bill would be dropped.

So here we are, the whole business in a stew again, and the Government face to face once more with the necessity for making up its mind on a new plan, its own plan having been laughed out of court incontinently.⁶⁴

The truth of the matter was that the assertion by Parliament of its will to have the conscription question settled, once and for all, extricated the Government from the 'stew' in which they had simmered for so long. Only Lord Robert Cecil saw the need to resign as a result of the rejection by the Commons of the compromise plan, though he was equally certain that it would inevitably lead to the recall of Asquith and the coalition. The Prime Minister resisted Lord

Robert's advice and called his colleagues together on Saturday 29 April. He explained the results of that Cabinet to the King:

After the latest intelligence from Ireland had been discussed, the Prime Minister called attention to the serious situation created by the action of the House of Commons on Thursday, and at the request of his colleagues stated at once his own view: namely, that in the circumstances the Government have no alternatives but to proceed at once with legislation for general compulsion, and to announce this course on Tuesday. This view met with the assent of the whole Cabinet.⁶⁵

Save for almost perfunctory warnings in the Saturday Cabinet by Henderson and Runciman that labour problems were sure to arise as a result of a new conscription bill, the voluntarists in the Government accepted the development with little struggle. Asquith himself announced the decision in the Commons on 2 May and introduced the Military Service Act (1916) the following day to a remarkably quiet House of Commons. The major provisions of the new bill, which received the Royal Assent on 25 May, were that it brought under the provisions of the existing Military Service Act all men – regardless of marital status – between the ages of 18 and 41, and empowered the War Office to extend for the duration of the War the service of time-expired men. It also allowed the re-examination of men rejected as physically unfit, shortened to two weeks the grace period after the expiration of conscription-exempt status, and rendered more specific regulations applicable to conscientious-objector status. Ireland, caught up in the tumultuous aftermath of the Easter Rising, was of course once again unmentioned in the bill. Lt.-Col. Hankey noted the scene in a frequently quoted passage from his diary:

I dropped into the House after lunching at the Club and heard the speech. It was not a very good one – not so good as the one I gave him. The House was astonishingly cold. The fact was that people who want compulsory service don't want Asquith, while those who want Asquith don't want compulsory service; so he fell between two stools! It is really an astonishing situation.⁶⁶

As it turned out, Hankey had summarized the political situation of May 1916 quite accurately. Those who did not want a compulsion bill for married men had lost the battle, and they had only the retention of Asquith to console them. Those who had fought for the policy now had a bill before them to make it the law of the land. The question

which had to be posed thereafter was this: How long would they be willing to tolerate Asquith? There was no doubt that the Prime Minister had emerged from the affair much weakened. Lloyd George and the Liberal War Committee, among his own party, and Bonar Law and the Tory coalitionists had got what they thought he alone could best provide – a compulsion bill without an election.

Generals Robertson and Haig also had got, at last, what they desired most from the Government. Conscription would soon be in place; the 'big push', long anticipated, could be carried out – for the Germans were believed to be exhausting themselves in the murderous siege of Verdun. The Imperial General Staff and General Headquarters, France, were preparing to launch the Battle of the Somme, which, because of its terrible destructiveness and enormous size, would virtually ensure that demands by the generals for greater and ever-greater numbers of men would not cease with the passage of the second compulsion bill.

Hankey hated the idea of conscription, perhaps more than Asquith, because he better understood the awful reality of this commitment to the warfare of attrition. Following his celebrated diary passage cited above is another, less well-known entry:

The curious thing is, though, that so far compulsory service has proved such a failure and produced so few men that trade has not yet suffered. Perhaps after all compulsory service will save the nation!⁶⁷

The political climate at Whitehall was about to undergo a remarkable change. The battle which had engaged participants such as Asquith and McKenna, Lloyd George and Bonar Law, and Carson and Milner, would soon shift from the positions and strategies of bringing in or keeping out conscription, to the new struggles to be waged over whether or not it could be made to work. While steeped in the private irony which he frequently employed in his private diary, Hankey's phrase was more correct than not: partial conscription had not been a success in raising manpower for the Army.

Robertson and Haig would soon hurl masses of men at their enemies on the Somme; a rebellious Ireland would have to be pacified; and the war in Mesopotamia had already taken a disastrous turn. The fields and workshops which produced raw materials as well as finished munitions, export goods and domestic necessities were alarmingly short of labour. All these required manpower. The State had seized unprecedented powers of regulation and management

over its citizens to meet these needs. The question which would occupy British statesmen after May 1916 had become: How could these powers be turned to fulfilling those needs and winning the War? This question was an administrative one. Its political reverse side was, of course, who was best suited to wield those powers?

9 The Search for a System

I

With the passage into law of general military conscription, a calm seemed to fall over the political scene in Whitehall in the late spring of 1916. 'For the moment,' A. J. P. Taylor has written, 'the life seemed to go out of political controversy.'

There were no more Independent candidates at by-elections, demanding a more energetic conduct of the war. Few members listened to Winston Churchill when he preached the doctrine of full War Socialism. Lloyd George now hoped to establish his fame by the simple expedient of winning the war.¹

For a brief time, other issues occupied the interests of Britain's masters. Lloyd George, so important a figure in the May crisis, was engaged through the rest of May and June in Irish affairs, charged by Asquith with turning the tragedy of the Easter Rebellion into an opportunity for constitutional settlement. He did so, bringing Carson, the Ulster spokesman, and John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Nationalists, to agreement that Home Rule should be immediately effected, with exclusion for the northern six counties for the duration of the War – or longer.² Controversial though it was, particularly in light of the Home Rule struggle in the immediate pre-War years, the compromise appeared to have every sign of success: Bonar Law, Carson, Redmond, as well as the Prime Minister were brought to accept Lloyd George's plan.

However, confronted with the intransigence of the Unionist ultras on the one hand, and the growing influence of the uncompromising *Sinn Féin* radicals on the other, Asquith gave way and withdrew the compact. There was no open clash over the plan, but neither was there a settlement, and Irish governance continued in essentially the same discredited form it had taken for many years. The place of the disgraced Irish Secretary, Asquith's close friend of many years, Augustine Birrell, was taken by the Tory, H. E. Duke, and any hope of a satisfactory achievement of Irish ambitions within the British Empire was forever lost.³

Another event which occupied the attention both of the public and their leaders in mid-1916, was the tragic death of Lord Kitchener. Virtually a cipher in the Government after the imposition upon him of the War Office rearrangements dictated by Sir William Robertson, he was ordered by the premier to conduct a fact-finding trip to Russia. The true purpose of the journey was, of course, to remove him from Asquith's sight while the Prime Minister decided his fate. An added irony is that Lloyd George and Hankey were scheduled to travel with him. In the end, the Minister of Munitions and the Secretary of the CID were required to change their plans at the final hour. On 5 June, Kitchener sailed on HMS *Hampshire* without them and drowned along with the entire ship's complement (save only a dozen men) when the vessel struck a mine within three hours of embarkation.⁴

Ironically, while Kitchener frequently had been criticized for refusing to share the secrets of military management with Parliament, only three days before his death he met with a large group of Members to answer queries and to explain his administration of the War Office. While his rhetoric changed few minds, he did bear himself with characteristic dignity and withdrew from this critical audience to the sound of their generous applause.⁵ His effect on even so discriminating a group as this one remained considerable, and it is no wonder that many Britons simply refused to believe that he was truly gone. Ridiculous rumours persisted until the end of the War that he had fallen into German hands or that he was on a secret mission for which the announcement of his death was only a sly cover.

The death of Lord Kitchener left the Prime Minister both with an opportunity and a terrible choice: he had, without doubt, the chance to choose a more effective war minister, but he had to do so without upsetting his already-strained coalition or further eroding his own position. Taking the office temporarily himself – his custom in time of crisis – Asquith contemplated the safe appointment of Lord Derby, who made clear to him that he had no desire for the post.⁶ It had to fall either to Bonar Law, who had been slighted all too often by the Prime Minister, or the increasingly dangerous Lloyd George. In the end, the choice was made for him, as the two claimants agreed privately that Lloyd George should have the post, with the restoration of the powers stripped away from Kitchener in favour of Sir William Robertson.⁷

Again, Asquith gave in. He surrendered the War Office to Lloyd George in early July, but only after the latter had let it be known that he contemplated resignation over the issue.⁸ While Lloyd George got the post, with Derby as Under-Secretary, he did not secure for himself the powers which had been delegated to the CIGS.⁹ Pleading that it would compromise the position of General Robertson, the Prime Minister was able to deny the new War Secretary the role of supreme voice in military matters. Lloyd George accepted anyway, perhaps hoping to undermine the contractual agreements which limited his new powers.

This solution, of course, left open the Munitions Office. Over this, Asquith meant to have his own way. To leave the Ministry in the hands of Lloyd George's candidate, Dr. Addison, was virtually to place the two major claimants for manpower in the hands of the same man – who was beginning to look more like a rival with each passing controversy. After a perfunctory offer of the post to Austen Chamberlain, he chose his own loyal Edwin Montagu, called 'the Assyrian' in the lexicon of pet-names favoured by the Asquith circle.¹⁰ Asquith had proved that he had not lost his knack for maintaining the political balance of his coalition – for at least a while longer.

One other series of events began at this time which came to have much bearing on manpower questions: on 1 July the British Army opened the Battle of the Somme. Thirteen divisions – composed of units of the Kitchener Armies, including virtually no conscripts – went 'over the top' along an eighteen-mile front. Preceded by five days and nights of artillery bombardment, these thousands rushed across the 'no man's land' between their own and the enemy entrenchments hoping to achieve the great 'breakthrough' which was the constant goal of their Commander-in-Chief.

The area had been chosen simply because the Picardy countryside encompassed the hinge between the major Allied armies, giving them the opportunity to fight side by side. At least that was the plan agreed on at the Chantilly conference, months before the vicious fighting at Verdun had temporarily rendered the French Army ineffective as a combat ally. The deep chalk beds which underlay the topsoil allowed the Germans to scoop their trenches as much as forty feet below the surface – to a point where even the most massive artillery barrages could not dislodge them. As it turned out, the attackers hurled themselves from their own protected positions directly into the machine gun fire of the Germans, and they continued to do so

through the summer months and until the autumn rains brought the murderous exercise to a close. Captain Liddell Hart has described the British way of war at the Somme:

Battalions attacked in four or eight waves, not more than a few hundred yards apart, the men in each almost shoulder to shoulder, in a symmetrical well-dressed alignment, and taught to advance steadily upright at a slow walk with their rifles held aslant in front of them, bayonets upwards – so as to catch the eye of the observant enemy. An excellent imitation of Frederick's infantry *automata*, with the difference that they were no longer advancing against muskets of an effective range of barely a hundred yards. It is hardly remarkable that by nightfall on July 1 many battalions were barely a hundred strong.¹¹

By the close of the first day of battle, Britain had sustained almost 60 000 casualties, with more than 19 000 dead – 'the greatest loss in a single day ever suffered by a British Army and the greatest suffered by any army in the first World war'¹² In the end, while some high ground was gained at German expense, it did not begin to justify the cost: enemy casualties were reckoned to be 465 000, French losses at 194 000, while the British Army suffered 420 000 casualties during the series of battles.¹³

The Allies were little closer to the goal of driving the Germans out of France and Flanders, and they had suffered devastating losses. Haig's comment to Joffre on 6 November 1916, in the final days of the Somme offensive, is telling:

A very considerable proportion of the personnel in my divisions consists now of almost untrained young officers and men, and to bring my units up to strength I have still to receive during the winter a large number of those with even less training. My armies will in fact consist of what I can only describe as raw material.¹⁴

The Commander-in-Chief was not in any way deterred from his goal of the great 'breakthrough', despite the Somme. However, as he noted, the losses were great, and those men had to be replaced for the next offensive in the campaign season of 1917. The struggles between soldiers and politicians over how large to fashion the new British Army were now largely a thing of the past. Haig, supported fully by Robertson, would now have his hands full replacing his casualties, so large were the numbers involved in – and lost during – the great attacks of 1916–18.

Two instalments of conscription had been passed into law, but even these unprecedented powers could not increase a finite national manpower pool by so much as one individual – even the most single-minded general was to learn that the quantity of human resources was limited. How best to deal with the rival claims for men of military and civil authorities was to become a major theme of manpower policy-making in the remainder of the War. Close to this matter was another related question: How far was the nation willing to carry its manpower sacrifices on the Western Front? There was another related issue, also unaddressed in July 1916: How could the compulsory system, not yet fully fashioned, be made to work well enough to gather together the right men the nation could afford to send into battle?

II

By the summer of 1916 the ‘first rush’ of recruiting must have seemed very distant. The days when, employers beaming proudly, workmen downed tools and office clerks abandoned their desks to rush to the recruiting depots were part of a dead past. The latter half of the War would be characterized by increasing and conflicting demands for men from all quarters. One historian has written:

The Ministry of Munitions, for example, found in June that there was a ‘large and continuous unsatisfied demand in the neighbourhood of 32,000’, and hoped that more men could be released from the Army. Naturally the Ministry was extremely suspicious of attempts by the War Office to ‘comb out’ munitions workers.¹⁵

Three months later, the Army calculated that the infantry alone in France had a deficit of 100 000 men, while needs for all divisions totalled approximately 350 000 men, with anticipated needs of an additional 650 000 over the coming year.¹⁶ Similar, if less expansive, complaints originated with the Admiralty, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, and the Board of Trade.

While strong military conscription measures had been passed, it was clear that legislation alone was not enough to meet the manpower appetite of the Army – especially in light of the huge ‘wastage’ on the Somme. The political struggles of the preceding two years had led to the decision to create a great Army and an unprecedented munitions department and programme, as well as to pass the National Service Acts. There had been little thought to creating a

system and an authority to regulate manpower usage and to set and enforce appropriate national policy. Until August 1916, ministers clashed in Cabinet and aligned their supporters in Parliament, under the presumption that a political victory alone could solve their manpower problems.

The transfer of Lloyd George from the Munitions Ministry to the War Office, needless to say did not ease these difficulties. He was as diligent in 1916 in raising men for the military as he had been in staffing the new munitions shops. Montagu, who replaced him at Whitehall Gardens, was no less inclined than his predecessor to battle to protect munitions workers from the recruiting sergeants. Badging policy, reserved-occupations classifications, and judgements of the munitions and national service tribunals all were fair game for attack by one or another Cabinet critic.

It did not require great insight to see that after two years of war the Government did not have a single comprehensive manpower policy – rather, it had several conflicting policies. To bring at least the beginnings of order to the situation, Lloyd George announced to his colleagues of the War Committee on 1 August that he favoured a ‘strong committee to examine the rival claims’;¹⁷ on the following day he circulated among them a paper prepared for him by the Adjutant-General:

It is proposed that a Board should be established independent alike of each of the Government Departments concerned. It is suggested that this Board should consist of a Chairman and two Members, and that one of the members should be a civilian with large experience in connection with engineering works, and that the other should be a civilian with large experience in finance.

He continued, outlining the duties of the proposed committee:

This Board should be empowered to decide all questions concerning man-power distribution, and to regulate the numbers of men retained in civil works, in munition factories, mines, &c., through Inspection Boards directly responsible to it.

In addition the Board would require to possess complete control over the questions of badging, reserved occupations, and would necessarily require to be consulted in connection with any large programme, for example, a programme for a big increase in the amount of artillery to accompany the Army in the field. In such a case, the Board would be able to express a reasoned

opinion as to the meaning of the programme in terms of manpower, and to decide whether that power was available or not.¹⁸

The War Office proposal called for nothing less than an executive authority to adjudicate disagreements over manpower usage; Lloyd George and Macready, however, wanted even more. They desired, in fact, a Board which could direct those of military age to industry or the military, wherever they happened most to be needed. Macready wrote confidentially to his Minister of his hopes for the new body: 'In the Man Power Board is the germ of the machine independent alike of competing government offices to administer the powers of universal conscription.'¹⁹ He made no secret of the fact that such conscription meant to him 'powers to compel all men to work for the nation where they are required' There is no doubt that the Adjutant-General presumed that the trenches would be filled before the workshops.

Montagu, however, who was not privy to this War Office exchange, was highly suspicious of any Government body which threatened the authority of the Munitions Office. Unlike Addison, his Under-Secretary, Montagu was not opposed to the implementation of true national service – that is, a mixed system of military and industrial conscription – but he neither saw this as an acceptable vehicle for its enforcement nor valued the creation of yet another rival for the increasingly scarce manpower needed by his department. Nor was he disinclined to make his disapproval known. Lewis Harcourt, temporarily in charge at the Board of Trade, also attacked the prospect of an over-strong Board. In the end, as we shall see, Lloyd George was forced to compromise in the face of this lack of support for a body with powers such as those envisioned by General Macready.²⁰ The Board was not to become a national service department.

A Manpower Distribution Board was created, however, with Austen Chamberlain in the chair and Lord Midleton, once War Secretary under Balfour, as his deputy.²¹ The terms of reference set by the War Committee charged the Board:

To determine all questions arising between Government Departments, relating to the allocation of economic utilisation of manpower for the purpose of the successful prosecution of the war, and in order to give effect to its determination, to direct the Government Departments concerned to create the machinery necessary to co-ordinate their activities in regard to the distribution or utilisation of men and women.

Further, a proposal put forward by any Government Department requiring any important demand for more man-power shall be referred to the Board, which will decide on the feasibility of the proposal from that standpoint.

The Board to have power to call for any evidence it thinks necessary, and to direct Departments to obtain such information as it may require.

The decisions of the Board to be final, unless appealed against to the Cabinet.²²

The Manpower Distribution Board served, at best, as a bridge between two antithetical conditions: that of no manpower authority, on the one hand, and of a strong executive on the other. One first-hand observer of the Board's struggles has written that much might have been expected of such a body:

But this Board was not destined to play a decisive part in the solution of the Recruiting problem. Who drives fat oxen must himself be fat, and who drives executive departments must himself be executive. The Man-Power Board were probably designed to be executive, but in fact fell just short of that position. Much time, that might have otherwise been devoted to studying the principles of debadging and exemption, was occupied with an attempt to define the Board's own position.²³

The Board was a failure and did not secure an answer to the manpower problem for a Government nearing the end of its lifespan. The reasons are not difficult to discover. In the first place, the Board suffered the hostility of the two departments most significant to its duty, the Ministry of Munitions and the War Office. Montagu distrusted the Board because he feared its interference with (or even worse, its supersession of) his local machinery, officers and tribunals, which were the eyes and ears of his Ministry. Lloyd George, who wanted an authority to 'compel all men to work where they are required', lost patience with it, frustrated with what he considered the muddling of Chamberlain and his colleagues. The new master of the War Office, we must remember, had hoped that the new creation would be a device to secure national service – military and civil conscription – and it disappointed him with its endless debates over protocol and differentiation of areas of responsibility.²⁴

The Board submitted two reports, one in late September and the second in mid-October, which demonstrate that the members had no

intention of seizing authority over manpower policy. Their recommendations resembled their chairman, Austen Chamberlain: they were cautious, grave and pessimistic. In their initial report they called upon the Ministry of Munitions to co-ordinate more closely its policy for ordering artillery with the office of the Adjutant-General and to cease planning further new armament factories. They advised the Government to make clear to Britain's Allies that she was at her maximum economic extension and that further requests for aid would be considered only if her military effort were to be scaled down. Finally, they inquired whether the ten divisions of troops then in the home islands were necessary for home defense. If they were not, the War Office should consider employing them at the Front.²⁵

The second report of the Board called upon the Munitions Office to observe a two-week moratorium on badging workmen, during which period the Board would prepare a comprehensive plan for 'combing-out' men from the munitions shops to make them available for military service.²⁶ The Cabinet accepted the plan and declared the fortnight's moratorium to begin on 23 October 1916.

Before the Manpower Distribution Board could circulate its third and final report, a stoppage among the skilled members of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers at the Vickers munitions factory in Sheffield intervened, both to delay War Committee consideration of the report and to provide the rationale for effecting yet another potential policy for the securing of men for the Forces. Put most briefly, the Sheffield strike broke out because one Leonard Hargreaves, a skilled artisan and ASE member, had been transferred from a non-government employer to the Vickers munitions facility. Entitled to a badge, he was unable to obtain such protection due to the fact that the aforementioned moratorium on badging was in effect. He was, then, immediately called up by the watchful local recruiting authorities, contrary to the spirit if not the letter of the National Service and Munitions of War Acts.²⁷

Claiming that the Government, not the men, had violated the various agreements between them, the strikers pointed to guarantees offered by the Prime Minister in late September. Twice on the same day, to a conference with trade unionists and also upon the floor of the House of Commons, Asquith had pledged in language which delighted his admirers and drove his enemies to despair:

skilled men (by whom I mean men who from natural ability, training, or a combination of both, have special aptitudes for

particular and indispensable kinds of national work, here at home) ought not to be recruited for general service.²⁸

Taking advice from Arthur Henderson and from representatives of the ASE and other skilled trade unions, the Cabinet agreed to allow the unions to decide which skilled men would serve the State, and where they would serve. The Trade Card Agreement, as it came to be called, was negotiated by Derby, Chamberlain and Montagu, with the union representatives on 16–18 November. Under its terms the unions were to issue exemption certificates (i.e. trade cards) to their members, symbolic of their established skills – to decide in essence who was to be exempted from military call-up. Second, they were to guarantee an adequate number of skilled men for ‘artificer’ corps in the Army. Finally, they were to ensure the enrolment into the Ministry of Munitions War Munitions Volunteers – mobile civilian labour corps – of their skilled members not employed on government work. The Agreement pointed out, as well, what failure of the experiment would bring: ‘If skilled men for the Army are not secured in this way, it is clearly understood that recourse must again be had to the statutory powers.’²⁹ Since the idea of the scheme had preceded the Sheffield Strike and the essence of its conditions had been accepted by the Manpower Distribution Board before the ratification by the Government of the trade unions, the Trade Card Agreement cannot be considered a break with the efforts of the Government to solve its manpower problems.

Humbert Wolfe, at the time an official of the Ministry of Munitions and an insightful critic of wartime labour policy, has written:

This Agreement had at least one result: it settled the strike. But from the point of view of provision of men for the Forces or for Munitions work, it was predestined to failure. The genuine anxiety of the Trade Union leaders to help was not open to question, but their power to do so was by no means clear. They were, by the scheme, given the power to decide whether a man should be retained in civil life or be taken for the Army. This may fairly be described as a terrible decision imposed upon men democratically appointed to the positions which they held, by the men whose fate they were thus required to decide. It was a desperate venture, both for the Government and for the Unions, and may perhaps best be described as the Derby Scheme of exemption. It was the last attempt to avoid the cold unswerving selection which must result from a scientific classification and selection.³⁰

The Trade Card Scheme, like the Manpower Distribution Board, failed, but for different reasons: the Chamberlain panel was unable to enunciate to the satisfaction of the War Committee a single policy for labour distribution. The Trade Card Scheme was not a success because the trade unions did not deliver the number of men needed by the Army, either in skilled labour corps or through withholding trade cards from men whose skills were questionable, thus releasing them for enlistment.

Delayed by the Sheffield strike, the War Committee did not discuss the final report of the Manpower Board until 21 November, and from the outset of the discussion it was quite clear that they did not accept Chamberlain's recommendations.³¹ The Manpower Board suggested the debadging of all protected men aged 26 and under, with the immediate enlistment of one-third of that number, hoping for a net gain to the Forces of 80 000 men. Montagu, fearing a net loss of skilled munitions workers, pointedly rejected the plan and called instead for the removal of protection from all certified men aged 30 and under, with compulsory enlistment only as skilled substitutes for them were identified by the unions under the Trade Card Scheme.³² The Minister of Munitions made clear to his colleagues that, in his mind, the Chamberlain plan offered either to supply troops for the Western Front or manpower for munitions manufacture, but not both.

Lord Derby, in this case acting as surrogate for his chief, Lloyd George, offered up an alternative which he hoped would satisfy the contenders; to him it appeared the only possible solution to the impasse. He suggested that the only hope of maintaining munitions and other necessary manufacture in light of the needs for manpower of the Forces was to secure the power to remove men from private work and direct them to where their labour was needed. Pledges and legislation stood in the way of such action, he acknowledged, but the situation was desperate and such promises could not be allowed to block taking the necessary steps to bring the War to a successful conclusion. These words were Derby's, but the thrust of the argument had been Lloyd George's for many months. The Secretary of State for War, of course, agreed; so did Montagu, seeing in the notion a procedure which only amplified the powers of the Munitions Office – and which were far superior to the need to negotiate constantly through the Manpower Board.

The Prime Minister was less sanguine about the meaning of Derby's remarks and announced that he:

would not like to commit himself until he had seen the pledges actually given. He remembered receiving a deputation who said that the Military Service Bill would go from military to industrial compulsion. They were reassured. It was perfectly open for them to say that they did not object to the Military Service Bill, because they understood that no industrial compulsion would follow and they gave their effective consent on that ground.³³

Bonar Law gave the Prime Minister little comfort:

The only means by which the [Military Service] Bill was got through was by a pledge of no industrial compulsion. Now, however, the national position was different and justified going to the House of Commons again.³⁴

The meeting adjourned, leaving the issue unsettled, with Asquith calling on the relevant departments to supply to him copies of all pledges made to labour regarding the conscription issue.

Derby's proposal, of course, called for unalloyed civil conscription, and it was the first time that such a proposal was given serious consideration under Asquith's leadership. The Prime Minister feared both the effect such a policy would have on organized labour and the resulting damage to his authority. In fact, Asquith had more to fear than even he realized. For it was at this juncture that the desire of several ministers to implement industrial conscription converged with the hope of a number of men in the political world to rid themselves of the leadership of Herbert Henry Asquith. It was to be his last important battle, and he lost it.

III

Lord Crewe wrote immediately after the December 1916 crisis:

It had for some time been becoming evident that strong currents of dissatisfaction were affecting the smooth flow of the Coalition Government, and this unrest found vent, as is usual with Cabinets, by the issue of several suggestive or warning memoranda. Possibly the veritable *causa causans* of the final breakup is to be traced to Lord Lansdowne's striking paper of November 13, 1916.³⁵

The great aristocrat, Lansdowne, sounded a bitter and even tragic note in his memorandum. After citing numerous reasons why the demands of total war were destroying ally and enemy alike, he

suggested that Britain simply could not continue for much longer, given the expenditures of life and treasure she was being regularly called upon to make. The recent arguments in Cabinet over manpower were simply the last straw. Could Britain win? he asked. Could she actually emerge victorious from this kind of war, given the kind of victory she sought?

Let our naval, military and economic advisers tell us frankly whether they are satisfied that the knock-out blow can and will be delivered. The Secretary of State's formula holds the field, and will do so until something else is put in its place. Whether it is to hold the field, and, if not, what that something else should be, ought surely to depend upon their answer, and that again upon the result of the careful stocktaking, domestic and international, which, I hope, is already taking place.³⁶

The memorandum, invited by the Prime Minister in light of American efforts to identify possible means of negotiating peace, came at a crucial time in the lifespan of the Asquith coalition. The manpower issue was unsettled, with the policies of the Chamberlain committee, the Minister of Munitions and the Under-Secretary of State for War all before the Government. With his suggestion that winning the War might not be worth the price, Lord Lansdowne had challenged directly the wisdom of continuing to follow the energetic path blazed by Lloyd George, 'whose formula [held] the field', regarding military and civilian national service. Lansdowne offered a rallying point for those who were unwilling to take every step and make every sacrifice to pursue victory. On the other hand, those who were so willing had also to make a stand for their own concept of how the War was to be carried out. This final struggle within the Asquith Government went beyond manpower policy, shell production and other such questions to the most basic matter of all: should the Cabinet remain together and continue to seek victory in the War?

The War Minister was furious at the Lansdowne memorandum, and at the gentle reception it received from the Prime Minister. Lloyd George solicited a counterblast from Sir William Robertson, advising the General 'not [to] be afraid to let yourself go'.³⁷ Sir William had no fear, telling the Cabinet:

There are amongst us, as in all countries, a certain number of cranks, cowards, and philosophers, some of whom are afraid of their own skins being hurt whilst others are capable of proving to

those sufficiently weak-minded to listen to them, that we stand to gain more by losing the war than by winning it.

In short, we need to have the same courage in London as have our leaders in the North Sea and in France. The whole art of making war may be summed up in three words – courage, action, and determination. In peace time half-and-half measures may not be very harmful. In war time they are deadly. My answer to the question is that I am ‘satisfied that the “knock-out” blow can be delivered’ if only we take the necessary measures to give us success, and take them in time.³⁸

General Robertson could not resist the urge to heap the final measure of shame on his political masters: ‘We shall win,’ he added, ‘if we deserve to win.’

One of the necessary measures, perhaps the most necessary at the moment, according to Robertson, appeared to be the imposition of national service. While the Cabinet and War Committee reeled from the unprecedented experience of the lecture they experienced at the hands of the CIGS, Lloyd George made clear to Bonar Law and Carson his plans to bring about civilian compulsory service and a more aggressive management of the War. The former, having seen the displeasure of his rank-and-file in the so-called Nigeria Debate of 8 November,³⁹ and sensitive to their feelings about national service, listened. The latter, who could not have agreed more nor been less frustrated than Robertson, simply wanted Asquith out – Lloyd George could be no worse.

Lloyd George revealed to the two Tory leaders that he had begun to think in terms of a small executive committee of the Cabinet created with plenary powers to conduct the War. The members, originally three, and in practice five, were to be relieved of departmental and political duties and allowed to conduct the military affairs of the nation without regard for the official Cabinet. It was also clear that Lloyd George had no intention of sharing membership with Asquith.⁴⁰ The plan was communicated to the Prime Minister on Saturday 25 November, and he rejected it the following day. On the Monday, Lloyd George had an interview with Asquith with the same result, and there was temporary deadlock.

On the following day an additional burden was added to Asquith’s shoulders, and it was prepared once again by Sir William Robertson and his colleagues on the Army Council.

On 28 November 1916, the military members of the Council met to consider the desperate situation of recruitment for the army. The

Somme Offensive had raged for four months without success. However, it had resulted in massive 'wastage', the military euphemism for casualties. Encouraged by the result their last such action brought, the generals prepared for the full Cabinet yet another memorandum.⁴¹ First, they recorded their impatience:

The necessity of providing more men for the Army has several times been under the consideration of the War Committee during the last few weeks, but up to the present time such measures as have been taken have proved to be inadequate. We, the military members of the Army Council, therefore request that the following statement of the case may be laid before His Majesty's Government.

Noting the 20 000-man monthly shortfall in recruitment, they cited the more than 95 000-man infantry deficit they feared at the close of the year. Furthermore, the generals called for 940 000 additional men in the coming year and noted that the Ministry of Munitions wanted 250 000–300 000 additional workers. Notice was also given to the manpower needs of the Navy and the dockyards. Having called attention to these circumstances, they reached the point of their communication:

The Army Council stated in April last that in their opinion 'the circumstances attending the war are such as to render it absolutely necessary that every man of military age who is physically fit, and can be spared from naval service, or industrial or other indispensable employment, should be made available for service in the military forces' We hold this opinion even more strongly to-day.

Anticipating the campaign of 1917, they offered a dire prediction:

The gravity of the situation is the more serious because from April next onwards, if not before, fighting of a heavy and perhaps decisive nature may occur, and unless steps are taken at once to provide more men, there will not be sufficient time to train them before April, and therefore, the armies must of necessity then begin to diminish in numbers. In our judgement such diminution, even if only temporary, will certainly postpone, and may prove fatal to, a successful termination of the war. In order to ensure success not only should the present armies be maintained at full strength, but every effort should be made to augment them.

The generals wanted industrial conscription – as Lord Derby had recently suggested – they wanted the age of liability for civil and military service raised to 55, and they wanted these unprecedented benefits immediately. Their prediction, were these measures not taken, was plain for all to see: defeat – laid at the feet of the ‘cranks, cowards, and philosophers’ in the Government who lacked ‘courage, action, and determination’.

The War Committee took up the memorandum two days later, on 30 November,⁴² and in a relatively brief discussion bowed again to the demands of the Army Council. The Minister of Munitions and the Secretary of State for War, while differing in detail over how it should be implemented, led the statesmen to the acceptance of the principle of industrial conscription – national service – in order to meet the needs of the Western Front, the munitions and shipbuilding industries, agriculture and the export trades. Questions of pledges made to the trade unions and reservations about the actual number of men who would be released for military service were dealt with cursorily.

In Hankey’s notes of the meeting there is a missing element: the Prime Minister took little part in the historic discussion. Lloyd George suggested a committee be appointed to prepare legislation; Bonar Law nominated Edwin Montagu as chairman. Walter Long advised that there was no special reason that the age should be limited to 55, for ‘in Germany it went up to 60’; Derby added, ‘let them make it up to 60’ The Prime Minister’s major contribution to the new policy was, like the able lawyer he once had been, to carry out the summing-up: he announced ‘what could be done, should be done at once. Legislation should be carried before Christmas.’

The War Committee, then, had decided that national service should be the policy of the Government. Asquith, McKenna, Grey, and the other opponents of the policy quietly acquiesced to it, accepting their defeat in the face of the determination of their colleagues, backed by the combined might of the generals. The Committee, under Montagu, charged with writing the new national service law, never reported to this council of war, nor did the capitulation of Asquith and his friends to the principle of compulsory civilian labour save them or their Government.

Lloyd George and Bonar Law persevered with the former’s idea for a small executive committee under his chairmanship and excluding the premier; on Sunday, 3 December, Asquith reversed his former position and accepted the outline plan. The reason was

simple: Bonar Law had met with his senior Tory colleagues who had decided to recommend to Asquith that he resign, challenging his critics to form a Government.⁴³ While they hoped at the time to see Lloyd George the loser in the struggle, Bonar Law did not. He forwarded the message, none the less, but in a manner ambiguous enough to obscure its exact meaning – the Prime Minister heard only the fateful word ‘resignation’ and doubtless wondered if he could survive the threat he thought aimed against himself.

By Monday, 4 December, Asquith had gained an insight into the true meaning of at least three of the most influential Tory ministers – Cecil, Curzon and Chamberlain; furthermore, he was implored by his Liberal colleagues to fight. He resolved to do so. Lloyd George resigned; Asquith resigned also. Certain that the Welshman was backed only by a few cronies in the Liberal Party, a minority of Tory extremists and Bonar Law, the Prime Minister was confident that Lloyd George would be driven from office forever.

On the Tuesday, the King called upon Bonar Law, the Leader of the Opposition, to form a Government; the Colonial Secretary asked for time, hoping to bring Asquith and Lloyd George and himself together into a new arrangement. To this end, a conference of the three, with Henderson, the Leader of the Labour Party, and Arthur James Balfour, the most recent former premier, was held at Buckingham Palace. Rather than appearing beaten, Asquith gave the impression of high spirits as he rejected the notion of serving in any capacity under any of those present. Lord Beaverbrook, both participant in and chronicler of these events, has written of the Prime Minister’s position on 6 December:

He quite misinterpreted the situation and misunderstood the reasons for holding the Conference at all. He knew of course that Bonar Law had been asked by the King the previous evening to form a Government without Asquith’s countenance and assistance. He looked, then, on the Conference not as an act of decent respect towards himself, based on a desire to preserve a complete appearance of national unity, but as an acknowledgement of weakness presaging ultimate failure. So they could not form a Ministry without him after all! Anyhow, he had taken up his fighting position and decided to play the game to the end.⁴⁴

Herbert Henry Asquith suffered from the ‘prime-ministerial disease’: he had come to see himself as indispensable. Surely, he believed, they could not make a Government without him as premier, as he

had been for more than eight years. He believed that the Liberal ministers would not join Lloyd George; he believed that the major Tory ministers would not join Bonar Law. In the end he was only half right: the Liberal leaders did, for the time being, refuse Lloyd George. The Unionists, once Balfour had shown the way and despite what they may have led Asquith to believe, did not in the end refuse to serve under Lloyd George's banner.⁴⁵

Austen Chamberlain, though not born to a Tory heritage, by education, philosophy and bearing seemed the very paradigm of a great Conservative statesman. He wrote to his sister Hilda in the week following the change of Government:

But I take no pleasure in a change which gives me a chief who, I profoundly distrust – no doubt a man of great energy, but quite untrustworthy Who does not run crooked because he wants to, but because he does not know how to run straight; who has tired out the patience of every man who has worked with him and most of those who have worked for him.⁴⁶

Despite his suspicions, Chamberlain – like Cecil, Curzon, Long and the rest of the Unionist veterans of the Asquith Coalition – came in. He wrote to Lord Curzon justifying what he had done, in face of how the two, with Cecil, had advised against a Lloyd George ministry:

I don't like my position – none of us do – but it was clearly my duty to take it and it is your presence in the small inner circle which alone made that possible.⁴⁷

Chamberlain, who admired Curzon and worked closely with him during the crisis, exaggerated both of their positions in his warm letter. He and his Tory colleagues joined Lloyd George because Lloyd George, not Asquith, had become the indispensable premier – at least for the moment. Their leader, Bonar Law, had no ambition to seize the first place, and Asquith, whose temperament appealed to many of them, had disappointed too many times. Carson was impossible, so was Henderson, and that left only Lloyd George, who clearly was the choice both of the electorate and the House of Commons as the best man to take control of the War. It was their 'duty', in Chamberlain's phrase, if they wished to continue to participate, to assist in winning the Great War.

Lloyd George did instal his small executive committee, which he called the War Cabinet, virtually demoting the vast majority of traditional Cabinet posts to sub-Cabinet rank. The final membership

was five: Lloyd George and Bonar Law – the latter as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House – were inevitable. In addition, Arthur Henderson was necessary as the voice of labour. Carson, while originally thought to be assured a seat, was given the Admiralty instead, and into the inner circle as the darling of the backbench Tory ginger groups came Lord Milner.

The former proconsul had the advantage of providing a powerful voice for the new small Cabinet in the Lords, but his primary role was to represent the permanent but outspoken minority of efficiency enthusiasts. He and Lloyd George, curiously enough, though they had seemed natural enemies for so long, proved again that the political continuum is circular and not linear. Each appeared, in the past, at the extremes of party politics, radical and Tory-ultra. They became close colleagues in the War Cabinet, and Milner's abilities came to be highly valued by Lloyd George.

Finally, there was Curzon, another peer. George Nathaniel Curzon was brought in not merely for his natural talents, which were great, but because he was the peace-offering to the Tory ministers originally hostile to Lloyd George. Chamberlain's words, cited above, to Curzon were not entirely empty praise – the noble lord's agreement to take the place did make it easier for the others to join; although, Chamberlain's sentiments aside, they probably would have accepted places in any event.

Bonar Law was treated by Lloyd George with *amour propre*, and the latter developed a genuine respect for the administrative abilities of Milner; Henderson would be cast out in 1917 (to be replaced with the more pliable Labourite George Barnes). It was Curzon who would come to suffer most at the hands of the impatient Prime Minister, for his rather grand manner and his reputation as a 'rat' would encourage Lloyd George's barbed sense of humour when he became impatient with the elegant peer. Curzon, however, despite it all, remained.

IV

The new Government, then, was in place by the second week of December, and Asquith's predictions, like his Cabinet, were irrevocably smashed. The new five-man executive held its first meeting on the morning of 9 December, and there was little time spent in self-congratulations. For the first time in history regular minutes of the proceedings of the Cabinet were taken; and the Sovereign was

forced, in another innovation, to accept them in place of the traditional holograph letter from His First Minister 'with the usual formula "The Prime Minister in his humble duty &c."' ⁴⁸ Lloyd George would have none of it, and the letters ceased.

National service had played its role in bringing down the last Government and putting this one in its place, so national service was accorded a high priority in the initial business of the War Cabinet.⁴⁹ There was already a suggested policy in the field, for Montagu's sub-committee of the War Committee had prepared a plan to effect the 30 November decision. While Montagu had refused to join the new Government – just then – his plan was carried over to the New War Cabinet. Dated 5 December 1916, the day following Asquith's resignation, the proposed solution called for the appointment of a Director of National Service, to:

regulate the supply of workers and men for all industries, occupations, and services (including the naval and military services) in such a manner as to secure the supply to each industry, occupation, and service of such number of persons as may be required for that industry, occupation, or service having regard to the needs of the country at the moment; and for that purpose he shall have power –

(a) to classify industries, occupations and services, having regard to their importance to the interests of the nation at the moment, and to regulate and distribute the supply of workers to those industries, occupations and services;

(b) to register volunteers as munition workers or as volunteers for any other industry, occupation or service of national importance;

(c) to distribute in industries, occupations and services of national importance men who are available but not required for naval or military service; and

(d) to set free from industries and occupations men who are available for naval or military service and are for the time being retained in industries and occupations ⁵⁰

Furthermore, the draft bill proposed by Montagu empowered the State to require:

any [male] persons in the United Kingdom, as from the completion of their sixteenth year to the completion of their sixtieth year, to be engaged in such national service (whether

industrial, professional, naval, military, or other service) as the Director of National Service may direct, and for substituting, so far as respects naval and military service, any requirement under those regulations for any requirement under the Military Service Acts, 1916, or any other Act, and for suspending so far as necessary any requirement under any such Act.

The War Cabinet, meeting in the absence of the Prime Minister, who was ill, agreed on 12 December to discuss the Montagu plan as a basis for implementing national service.⁵¹ Two days later, with Lloyd George still convalescing, they met again, agreeing that the draft bill was a satisfactory outline for achieving a viable policy of national service. They provisionally concluded that a Director of National Service should be placed in charge both of military and civilian compulsory service; that the military and civilian 'sides' of the Director's responsibilities should be kept separate; that some accommodation would be required between the incumbent of the new office and the recently appointed Minister of Labour, John Hodge (this diplomatic task was assigned to Arthur Henderson); and, finally, that a Director should be found before any formal demarcation of duties was decided or announced.⁵²

One final note of this meeting of the rump War Cabinet – for Bonar Law also was absent on 14 December – is germane: Montagu had placed brackets around the word 'male' in his draft bill, meaning that the word might well be included or omitted in the final text. Taking this meaning, Curzon, Milner and Henderson 'were inclined to favour the inclusion of women in the scheme. If this were finally decided, there should be a Woman's Advisory Board attached to the Directorate of National Service. All present agreed that Edwin Montagu was the ideal candidate for the new post, and there the discussion ended.

On 19 December, the War Cabinet met with the Prime Minister in the chair, and in the interval since the discussion five days earlier an old obstacle to the policy of national service again revealed itself as insurmountable. Arthur Henderson and Labour Minister John Hodge had met with a group of trade-union leaders. The evidence of the War Cabinet's sensitivity to labour opinion is revealed in Hankey's notes of the meeting:

Mr. Henderson having reported the result of his discussion with his [labour] colleagues, the Cabinet agreed that, having regard to the feeling of organised labour on the subject of industrial

compulsion, and the pledges given by the late Government, and to the volume of preliminary work necessary for the creation of an adequate and efficient machinery, local and central, it would be necessary to proceed, in the first instance, on the lines of voluntary enrolment and transference of labour without a Bill.⁵³

Put most simply, Henderson was told, labour would not accept civil conscription, with its implications both of quasi-military discipline on non-Government work and of the sacrifice of those trade-union privileges left intact by the Munitions of War Acts. Fearing the possibility of an open confrontation with the working classes over the issue, the War Cabinet simply backed down. Humbert Wolfe revealed the unyielding core of labour's resistance:

Neither the Trade Unions nor the working men themselves were opposed, when all else failed, to compulsion for strictly military purposes. But, though they might be willing to be conscribed to die for an idea, they were not willing to live (as it might be put) for private profits.⁵⁴

That left the new Government with a bold policy, with plans for a new executive department but with the disappointing prospect of superintending another Derby Scheme. There must have been a sense of *déjà vu* among both adherents and enemies of compulsory service in the Houses of Parliament when the Government's policy was made clear to them. The War Cabinet decided:

the Prime Minister and Lord Curzon [in announcing these conclusions to the two Houses] should make it clear that, if the voluntary effort failed, the Government would ask Parliament to release them from any pledges heretofore given on the subject of industrial compulsion, and to furnish them with adequate powers for rendering their proposals effective.

In the meantime, it would be the duty of the Director to set up, for voluntary enrolment and transference, machinery which might hereafter serve the purpose of compulsion, if compulsion became necessary.⁵⁵

The task came to Neville Chamberlain, the younger half-brother of the Secretary of State of India. Then Lord Mayor of Birmingham, the youngest son of the great tariff reformer was unknown to Lloyd George. 'I had never seen him [he wrote in his memoirs], and I accepted his qualifications for the post on the recommendations of

those who had heard of his business and municipal career.⁵⁶ The two would part as colleagues in the late summer of 1917; Chamberlain would never forget or forgive what he considered to be Lloyd George's brutal treatment of him in his first Cabinet office. The day was to come, in 1922, when he would have his revenge. The Prime Minister, on the other hand, simply regarded his new colleague as unequal to the task and, therefore, dispensable. He explained, years later:

Possibly the task would have been beyond any man's ability. It called for a great breadth and boldness of conception, a remorseless energy and thoroughness of execution, and for the exercise of supreme tact in dealing with other departments.

We needed, in short, a man of exceptional gifts. A man may possess very considerable ability without qualifying for that definition. Mr. Neville Chamberlain is a man of rigid competency. Such men have their uses in conventional times or in conventional positions, and are indispensable for filling subordinate posts at all times. But they are lost in an emergency or in creative tasks at any time.⁵⁷

Chamberlain surveyed his sacrifice in taking up an unknown task in place of what he considered his important work in Birmingham. He considered himself without adequate direction from the War Cabinet, and blamed them for the difficulty of his position. He pushed his plans doggedly until August, when he gave up. Lloyd George, however, read the signs differently: he saw a mediocre talent, armed with immense stubbornness. To the Prime Minister it was a fatal flaw to require any direction from above – it was not the earmark of the 'man of push and go'. The neophyte at Whitehall, while his day would come, could not have been aware how soundly the odds were against him. Lloyd George was not required to tolerate a minor minister who displeased him, at least not at this stage of his ministry. Bonar Law wrote to Walter Long late in the year, 'This is essentially Lloyd George's Government and my own intention like yours is to back him to the fullest extent I can. There is, I think, no alternative.'⁵⁸

Neville Chamberlain's task was to author yet another plan by which labour could be put to the most advantageous use, short of civil conscription. The implication was clear that if he failed, as Derby had in the case of military recruitment, a system of compulsory industrial

service would be implemented – if possible. His letter to his step-mother of 19 December 1916 revealed Chamberlain's pessimism:

I don't suppose there is a more miserable man in Birmingham than I.

At a moment's notice I have to give up all the work I was so interested in when it is but half finished in order to be pitchforked into a new job of which I know nothing except that it entails a horrible responsibility and is full of pitfalls.

I only heard of the thing at 2:30 just as I was stepping into the train to go back to Birmingham. I suppose it is that unlucky speech at the T.U. Congress that's done it.⁵⁹

The War Cabinet expected a coherent plan from the Director-General in as short a time as possible, and the disappointment which that powerful body encountered was the beginning of a terrible experience for Chamberlain. After several meetings with Lloyd George and with the new Director of Recruiting, Brigadier Auckland Geddes, and other interested parties, Chamberlain was called before the War Cabinet on 12 January. Although he complained that he had not been told in advance that he was to appear with his new scheme in hand, Chamberlain was ordered to prepare and submit his plan by the following day.⁶⁰ He did so, and it contained a remarkable series of provisions.

Chamberlain's report contained a lengthy series of recommendations on local organization for manpower management, many of which trod upon the toes of the departments which represented vested interests in labour matters: the Ministry of Munitions and the new Ministry of Labour, for example.⁶¹ Part I of the report, however, was the more interesting section, and the operative paragraph called for a total reversal of policy regarding exemption from service:

In order to meet the immediate and pressing demand of the Army, I recommend that a general order be issued to the effect that all exemptions held by men born in 1895, 1896, 1897, and 1898, and issued to them by or under the authority of Government Departments be forthwith cancelled.

Further, I recommend that an instrument be issued to tribunals to the effect that it is in the national interest that no man who was born in one or other of the years enumerated shall hold a Tribunal Certificate of Exemption unless his case be a most exceptional one

of individual hardship, or unless he be, for some peculiar reason, really indispensable to the nation in civil life.

Addison, Montagu's successor at the Munitions Office, led the attack on the proposals, and Chamberlain's plan was eviscerated – leaving him free only to remove exemptions in workplaces not involving munitions, heavy metals, shipbuilding, agriculture, and the like.⁶² While this age-based 'clean cut' policy appealed to the generals, it found little sympathy among those responsible for the production of warlike stores, necessary civilian goods and products for export.

General Sir William Robertson approved completely of the Chamberlain plan, and he wrote to General Haig at GHQ, France, in February 1917:

I enclose a copy of a Paper which explains itself and which we sent in with the object of bringing things to a head. *We sent in one in April last and got conscription. We sent in another in November and the result was a change in Government.* I am not so hopeful of the success of our third effort, although it is more or less a compilation of extracts from the first two, which were fully concurred in by the Prime Minister before he took up that position.

Neville Chamberlain has done well and has backed us up, but so far the Cabinet are afraid to do more than has hitherto been done.⁶³

The General's 'paper' and the Chamberlain policy of the 'clean cut' were in 1917 to come headlong into conflict with several competing forces: in the first place, the rival needs for manpower of munitions and food production and shipbuilding were at least as severe as those of the Army. In the second place, the Prime Minister, due to his support of their position while at the War Office, was thought by the generals to be a steadfast ally in their ever-increasing demands for men. The terrible results on the Somme, however – to be reinforced by the Passchendaele campaign of 1917 – had made him wary of the generals who called for still greater numbers of men for the war of attrition on the Western Front. Lloyd George believed no less in civil conscription, but he had no intention of allowing it to be used simply to supplement the 'wastage' of trench warfare. It was yet unclear whether these conflicts could be reconciled in order to allow the creation of a comprehensive system of manpower supply and control.

10 Passchendaele

I

After two and a half years of unprecedented warfare, Britain had gained a new leader, and few had made more drastic sacrifices to gain that high place. David Lloyd George had split his party, severed most of his oldest political alliances and blackened his reputation among the working classes, whose best champion he had been for many years. He led into 1917 what was termed a coalition but which was, in fact, a thoroughly Tory beast with an attenuated Liberal tail – and himself as its head. Certainly he was an ambitious man, but his drastic actions at the close of the previous year were driven largely by his frustration at the continuation of what he thought to be ineffective war leadership by Herbert Henry Asquith.

Lloyd George's commitment to winning the Great War in the shortest possible time, with the least possible losses, was absolute. He had, in this vein, championed both military and civil conscription. Walter Long and Lord Curzon had publicly taken up the cause earlier in the Asquith coalition, and Sir Edward Carson and Winston Churchill had pursued the idea with at least as much vigour as the Welshman. However, even these zealots had not been more effective in moving the nation closer to this radical change of manpower policy. In December he became the most powerful man in Britain, and even then he could not – even with the help of these other influential men – bring in full-scale national service. The interpretation by Arthur Henderson of the mood of the working classes, underscored by the bitter strikes resulting in the Trade Card Scheme, had caused the War Cabinet to fight shy of the policy. Neville Chamberlain's new National Service Department was thought to be the next best alternative, at least for the moment.

The Commander of the Imperial General Staff and his fellow members of the high command, as well as the Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal Haig (as he became in January), did not yet know their man. They were aware of his 'Easterne' tendencies but not of the surety of conviction which lay behind them. The new master of Whitehall favoured the path of least resistance, the attack on the lesser front. The generals learned much about the way of war of the new premier early in 1917.

At his first allied conference in Rome, in January, he had hoped to arrange to shift the military priorities of the combined armies to the Italian Front for the coming year. His goal was to head off any immediate further examples of the military optimism of his C-in-C such as that in the previous year at the Somme. Outmaneuvered by the British and French generals, and let down even by the Italian commander, Marshal Cadorna, who did not wish the honour of hosting the major 1917 campaign, Lloyd George turned to an alternative. In his return from Rome he was to meet, not in the least by chance, the newly appointed French Commander-in-Chief, General Robert Nivelle. A Protestant, a Republican and the child of a British mother and French father, Nivelle spoke English like a native – a quality which appealed to the British premier. Possessing the manners of an English gentleman and lavishing on Lloyd George the deference he seldom received from his own generals, Nivelle convinced the British leader that his plan for a primarily French offensive, with British secondary participation, was worthy of his support. Lloyd George was swayed, and the Nivelle Offensive was born.¹

The great attack on the Aisne came about in April, and it failed as other Western Front offensives before and after it failed, with a dreadful loss of life. This 'push' was different, however, as it came close to rendering the French Army a cipher. An armed force in sullen revolt against its officers is of little use, save to the enemy. The will to fight of Britain's main ally was temporarily broken; Nivelle was removed from command, and the cautious Philippe Petain replaced him. The tragedy on the Aisne would, however, in the cruel logic of trench warfare, prepare the way for the British-initiated affair variously called the Flanders Campaign of 1917, or the Third Battle of Ypres, but best known simply as Passchendaele. In his secondary capacity under Nivelle, Haig took virtually the sole piece of high ground in his sector, the Vimy Ridge, in a brilliant maneuver. When the time came to cast his own plans, he was not to recall the failure of the broader campaign, but only this relatively small success.

The generals and their political allies learned early on that the new Prime Minister had no intention simply of turning his enthusiasm for winning the War to ends dictated by them. This was the lesson of his willingness to tie the British Army to the ill-fated plans of General Nivelle, and it explains also his manpower policies. He favoured civil conscription, but not merely to meet the demands for troops of Field Marshal Haig. Lt-Col. Repington dined with the Prime Minister in

early February 1917, just after Sir William Robertson had presented another strong memorandum to the War Cabinet. Repington reported the conversation in his diary:

We went into the Man-Power question, and I was thoroughly alarmed by the P.M.'s attitude. He seemed to me to be influenced by sentiment and prejudice, rather than by a reasoned view of the military necessities of the case, and although he had been the head and front of the demand for men under the Asquith leadership, he now seemed to me to be adopting an attitude which threatened danger for the success of our arms. He said he was 'not prepared to accept the position of a butcher's boy driving cattle to the slaughter, and that he would not do it'.

The P. M. said that the country could not spare the men that the Army wanted, and that we could not denude the shipyards, the farms, and other essential national industries. Certain decisions, he said, had been conveyed to the Army Council, and it was their business to ascertain what the results in men would be.²

Lloyd George's viewpoint was this: the supply of men, in his estimation, had reached a level that made it impossible to satisfy all the desires of the military without threatening to beggar other necessary sectors of the economy; second, now that the stage of 'combing out' otherwise badged or protected men had been reached, he meant that the generals would have to account closely for their demands.

In early 1917 the design of a workable machine to allow the state to meet what military and civilian needs it could was the responsibility of Neville Chamberlain. Each competing element of government and society meant to have as many men as it could possibly get. Chamberlain's task was to try and ascertain exactly how many men were available and to budget that total so that the maximum allowable number were provided to each of those rival elements, subject to the scrutiny of an increasingly critical War Cabinet. His 'clean cut' theory, to which he doggedly clung, was to make implacable enemies of the new Minister of Munitions, Dr Addison, and the Minister of Labour, John Hodge, each of whom had his own agenda of priorities. Addison wrote in his diary at the close of 1916: 'Anything more feeble than Neville's attitude I have not witnessed for a long time. He leans up against me or anyone else who will help him, like a helpless man against a wall.'³ It was by no means clear how an acceptable and effective compromise would be achieved by the unyielding former Lord Mayor of Birmingham.

II

The War Cabinet were confronted on 5 February 1917 with an angry memorandum by the Army Council.⁴ Flushed with righteous indignation and confident that they could successfully drive the Government into proclaiming national service, the generals sternly reminded their civilian masters of their memorandum of November 1916:

Since the date of the above-mentioned memorandum certain measures have been introduced with a view to providing more men, but they have proved to be quite inadequate. The recruits fit for General Service raised in January were 50,000, whereas the minimum number required was 100,000 the requirement for February is 170,000 men. The requirement for March is 130,000, and for April 120,000 men.

The situation foreseen by the military members in November last has now arisen, and the Adjutant-General has informed the Army Council that if heavy fighting is renewed in April next, as it probably will be, the strength of the armies in the field cannot possibly be maintained that month no matter what steps are now taken.

Returning to a familiar theme, the number of exemptions from service honoured by the National Service Acts, the generals explained again their view of the military manpower shortage:

Various papers have been laid before the War Cabinet by the War Office showing that the shortage of recruits is not so much due to the lack of men of military age, as to the want of organization for utilizing the men and women of the country to the best advantage, and pointing out how defective are the provisions of the Military Service Acts, and how excessive are the powers to exempt men conferred by those Acts on Tribunals and Government Departments.

Indicating that it was not their place to 'specify the steps to be taken to remedy the grave situation now existing', the Military Members of the Army Council closed their communication with a grave warning:

Unless His Majesty's Government are satisfied that the present voluntary methods in regard to National Service can be relied upon to produce forthwith the men required, legal powers should immediately be taken to compel all men up to the age of 55 or 60

to engage in work of national importance where and when required. [Failure to do so] will mean, also, as stated by the military members in November last, a certain prolongation of the war, and it may even be fatal to a successful termination of it.

As on previous occasions, the Government were shocked by the horrible predictions of the generals; Neville Chamberlain, present at the War Cabinet to discuss the provision of manpower, was given permission to draft a bill based upon his 'clean cut' theory – this time predicated upon the cancellation of all forms of exemption from call-up for men aged 31 and below. However, the plan misfired as strong ministerial protestations dissuaded the War Cabinet from following through with the idea. Instead, a committee chaired by Lord Rhondda, the President of the Local Government Board, was appointed to inquire into the issue and recommend a policy to the Government.⁵

Sir William Robertson wrote to Field Marshal Haig the day following this meeting of the War Cabinet:

My efforts are now bearing fruit, and as usual when the politician begins to find himself in a corner with responsibility on his shoulders he becomes uncomfortable. I think if we proceed warily and keep the responsibility in the right place we shall get our own way. The method we should adopt is to be ready to accept full responsibility if we are allowed, within reason, to have our own plan, whereas if we are not so allowed then the responsibility must be on other shoulders.⁶

The CIGS meant 'our own plan' to include a British-led assault in the spring and the removal of all impediments to the recruiting of general service soldiers. He was to get only half of what he wished, and that resulted in the Passchendaele offensive. In another way, he received more than he wanted, for after that vast blood-letting in the summer of 1917, Lloyd George would not rest until 'Wully' Robertson had been dismissed from his high command.

Chamberlain, while the War Cabinet considered other ways to overcome the manpower shortage, set to work creating the National Service Volunteers, a body much like the War Munitions Volunteers originated by Lloyd George at the Munitions Ministry in 1915. Chamberlain's organization was to consist of men over age or physically unfit for service who were to make themselves available for service in munitions or other important work as substitutes for those

who could then be called up for general service. While by the late summer when the programme was wound up almost 375 000 men joined, less than 7000 were actually transferred because the overwhelming majority of Volunteers were already engaged in work of national importance. Clearly the Volunteer scheme was not destined to solve the manpower shortage.

A conference chaired by the Prime Minister and attended by the Secretary of State for War, the Adjutant-General, the CIGS, and General Launcelot Kiggell, Haig's Chief of Staff, took place at Number 10 Downing Street on 15 February, three days after the meeting of the War Cabinet. 'The Conference proceeded to discuss the recruiting situation generally', G. M. Young's notes recorded, and it was agreed that the War Office should proceed as quickly as possible with the preparation of a new Military Service Bill, that pledges given in Parliament as to re-examination of medically rejected men should be evaluated and that a report should be obtained as to the procedure and results of medical re-examination in France.⁸ It was clear that drastic steps were under consideration to avail the military of manpower – short of the policy of civilian national service, so hated by labour.

The Rhondda Committee presented the second and final draft of its report on 23 March, having been told three weeks earlier by the War Cabinet to continue deliberations with an eye toward recommending both legislation to amend the Military Service Acts and advice regarding protection from recruitment of men in important trades.⁹ The second report returned to the policy of general national service and recommended this strongly to the War Cabinet. Again rejecting what once four of the five members had strongly endorsed, the Cabinet refused the advice, 'having regard to the strong feeling existing in the country on the subject of industrial compulsion' In the eyes of Lloyd George and Bonar Law and their colleagues, the nation's workmen still would not accept conscription for the work place as they had accepted conscription for the Army. The advice of Henderson again prevailed over the combined counsel of the generals and, on that issue, of the Rhondda committee.

The committee's other recommendations were accepted, and several, as has been seen above, were prefigured in the Manpower Conference of 15 February: a bill was to be drafted to empower the War Office medically to re-examine men rejected as physically unfit for general service. Secondly, a 'comb-out' of men in protected trades was to begin with the establishment of a manpower quota for each of

the industries shielded from general recruitment.¹⁰ Finally, the Trade Card Scheme – wrenched from the Government only through the intimidation of a major strike – was to be cancelled, thereby returning to the State the power to specify individually who did and who did not deserve protection from recruitment among the most skilled trades.

The new policy came very close, in the eyes of workingmen, to an attempt to foist upon them the substance of civilian conscription without the form. The spring of 1917 witnessed a terrible battle of wills between the Government and the combined might of the official trade-union leaders and the unofficial shop stewards. These labour spokesmen meant to resist all attempts to re-examine rejected men, to call up those once medically discharged, and, most of all, to tamper with the delicate structure of exemptions from enlistment which had developed over more than three years of war. The crisis came in May.

Leading up to the explosion, in late March a new Military Service Bill was introduced, which called for the medical re-examination of those rejected for general service. ('We must get this bill through as quickly as possible' the Secretary of State for War wrote. 'I am sure by means of it we shall get a lot of men who otherwise escape our clutches.')

¹¹ Following on the heels of this controversial action a new Schedule of Protected Occupations was announced, even as the major trade-unions party to the Trade Card Scheme were being told of the revised Military Service Bill.¹² Then, virtually simultaneously, Dr Addison, the Minister of Munitions, introduced yet another bill to extend the dilution of labour to non-government work to facilitate the 'combing-out' of the remaining fit men from factories engaged on private work.¹³ The result demonstrated again that while workers would accept the authority of the State to direct a man to put his life at risk in the trenches, they would not accept similar authority over a man working for a private employer.

One official of the Ministry of Munitions observed in later years:

It is, of course, difficult accurately to diagnose the motives which produce a strike. It is, however, probable that the men in the country were prepared to accept the further encroachment upon their liberties dictated by the new schedule. They were not prepared to agree that the private employer should have the right to insist on the continuance of his private work at the expense of the sacrifice of Trade Unions privileges. Whatever the cause, as a

result of the strike, the provisions of the Bill dealing with dilution on private work were temporarily withdrawn, never to be reintroduced. The schedule of Protected Occupations, on the other hand, was firmly established, and held the field till the crisis of March 1918.¹⁴

The so-called 'May Strikes' against these policies were fierce and sudden, and, in a short time, became widespread. They had several results in addition to forcing the withdrawal of the dilution proposals. First, the Government moved swiftly to bring criminal actions against the leaders; and, to conciliate labour feeling, a Commission on Industrial Unrest, with George Barnes, MP, in the chair, was appointed to report on the causes of the disturbances.¹⁵

The reasons reported by Barnes and his colleagues were a mixed collection of local and national complaints – with the major causes, noted above, foremost but not exclusive. However, the alarming spirit of war weariness and resentment among the labouring classes was reason enough for much concern within the Government. Any call for civilian national service had to be delayed, at the very least, until the workers could be convinced of its necessity. There was no dissent from this decision among the War Cabinet.

The Director-General of National Service and the War Office were to weigh in again with powerful and desperate entries in the war of memoranda in June, but something interfered to prevent the War Cabinet from focusing their undivided attention on the manpower problems of these important departments. That something was, of course, the Flanders Offensive. Lloyd George in mid-June established yet another board, with the high-sounding title of the War Policy Committee, 'to direct and coordinate the entire British war effort on land and sea' Violently opposed to the plan of Haig and Robertson, the Prime Minister had a hidden agenda in creating the committee of himself, Curzon, Milner and the South African, General J. C. Smuts, hoping 'to offer a united front capable of bending the Army high command to its wishes'.¹⁶

On 19 June, the Committee, with Hankey once again acting as secretary, met with Haig and Robertson. Lloyd George laid out the manpower situation and implored the generals to consider the circumstances in which the Government found itself. Hankey recorded:

We are now reduced to the point where we have to scrape up men where we could. Every time we scraped any in there was trouble in the House of Commons or a strike. The last strike which had been due to calling up men from munitions works, had lasted three weeks and had put back the output of Sir Douglas Haig's guns. Then we had ordered a medical re-examination of rejected men. The result of this was that on Thursday in the House of Commons there would be the severest attack on the War Office that had yet been delivered. If we dip in one place for recruits they said: No, these are agricultural men; and so it was everywhere. There was no place from which we could take men in large quantities without facing serious trouble.¹⁷

Clearly the purpose of the meeting – of the Committee for that matter – was to dissuade the Field-Marshal-Commanding and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff from pressing their attack at that time. 'He quite understood Sir Douglas Haig's point of view,' Hankey explained of the Prime Minister, 'but the Committee had to consider whether it would be better to hold our hand until the French Army had been resuscitated by the intervention of America.'¹⁸ The United States had, in fact, emerged from her isolation two months before, enraged at Germany's unrestricted submarine war. However, with France still exhausted from the Nivelle campaign, and with America many months from becoming an effective factor on the Western Front, Britain was dangerously close to standing alone.

Unlike Churchill in the Second World War, Lloyd George never fully mastered his generals. Since he could not successfully command them, he was reduced to battling through argument and attrition. With Haig he could not debate, nor could he wear him down. The Scottish cavalry general was an undaunted optimist and a convinced Westerner, and he possessed a fierce Calvinist sense of his own destiny. His self-confidence was relentless; he believed he could not fail – no matter the data or the arguments which indicated otherwise.

Haig prevailed; the Prime Minister and his War Policy Committee relented. Lloyd George, confronted by the failure of the French under Nivelle (whom he had supported over his own generals) and the combined front of Robertson and Haig (seconded by General J. C. Smuts, whom he had consulted in hopes of finding an ally of his own), had to give in. On 22 July, 3100 guns commenced the greatest artillery bombardment in the history of land warfare. The great

Flanders Offensive was begun; and the arguments employed by Lloyd George to deter the Field Marshal from his plan would have more meaning than ever after the casualties – victims as much of the infamous Passchendaele mud and Haig's single-mindedness as of German arms – were totalled.¹⁹

III

A recent and enlightening study of the struggle over strategy waged by Lloyd George and his generals has captured the essence of the Welshman's views:

Although his Liberal colleagues in Asquith's Government thought him an extremist on compulsion, a common denominator of his strategic views was to limit British losses. He had lobbied for guns for Russia to allow the colossus of the East to wear down the Germans, intervention in the Balkans to involve Balkan soldiers in the anti-German coalition, attacks against the Turks, in which British casualties were often relatively light, and Nivelle's offensive, which assigned a secondary role to the British army.²⁰

To the high command of the Army, with their plans for the Third Battle of Ypres laid, the Prime Minister's wishes to conserve manpower 'wastage' were interpreted as simple obstructionism. The generals sought a confrontation. The War Office position was presented in a strong memorandum written by General Macready on 31 May, which illustrated their frustration.²¹ All of the efforts made by the generals to raise troops were detailed, including recent attempts to recruit volunteers from among men over-age for conscription. The Adjutant-General railed against the generosity with exemptions of the tribunals, what he termed the overly broad coverage of men within reserved and protected occupations and the 'regrettable inertness on the part of the Government Departments' to make men available. He thus summarized his case:

A close study of the whole question of Man-Power convinces me that there is no need to despair that the country is unable to keep its Armies in the Field up to adequate strength, and also to maintain civil activities but unless drastic changes are introduced into the present methods I greatly fear that labour trouble will be fostered, the manufacture of war necessities delayed, and the recruiting of men who can and should be made available for the Army effectively paralysed.²²

The remedies Macready sought were familiar ones, including the raising of the age of service to 45 or 50 years and the sharp curtailment of the powers of tribunals. Most of all, however, he wanted conscription call-up policy to be based on the 'clean cut', regardless of occupation: 'I have urged on numerous occasions' he wrote, 'that recruiting should be placed upon the simple basis that I can express in two words, "youngest first"'

More to the interest of the War Cabinet was the report of Neville Chamberlain, who was, after all, still responsible for solving the dilemma of manpower supply. His recommendation was brief and, like those of the War Office, familiar: he reiterated the recommendations of his first two reports, calling, first, for the removal of all restrictions against conscripting men aged 22 and below, and, in his second report, aged 31 and below. The recommendations had not been acted upon, he noted and continued:

Nevertheless, I wish to repeat my conviction that the policy which I have twice submitted to the Cabinet is the only one which will quickly and certainly provide the men required for the army, and that, further, it is one which would commend itself to the majority of the people of this country as, on a whole, the fairest all round.²³

The War Cabinet considered the two documents on 13 July but postponed a final decision.

On 18 July, Chamberlain and his War Office allies, joined by Lord Rhondda, Walter Long and William Hayes Fisher, President of the Local Government Board, presented a memorandum to the War Cabinet in an attempt to press the policy of the Director-General – it, too, failed to budge Lloyd George and his colleagues.²⁴ Accordingly, the frustrated Chamberlain poured out to the premier his indignation over what he felt to be the lack of support by the Government – a theme to which Chamberlain returned again and again in his private correspondence. Referring to the memorandum of the 18th, he held up his policy as the only possible answer to the challenge of providing troops to the Army. He wrote, on 19 July:

I said that short of adoption of such a policy I could see no justification for the continued existence of this Department. You will remember that when I saw you on Wednesday the 11th at Downing Street I said I could not remain in office unless the false position in which I found myself was promptly rectified. By

tomorrow the Report [of 22 June] will have been before the Cabinet exactly four weeks and unless the Cabinet are able to consider my Report tomorrow and to adopt the policy recommended therein, I must ask you to accept my resignation as from the 20th instant and to allow me to state publicly my reasons for resigning my office.²⁵

Lloyd George did not accept the proffered resignation but, instead, asked that Chamberlain reconsider at least until the Director of Recruiting, Brigadier Geddes, elaborated upon a brief memorandum he had submitted a few days before.²⁶ With marked impatience, Chamberlain agreed.²⁷

Auckland Campbell Geddes was the brother of Eric Geddes, one of Lloyd George's 'men of push and go' at the Ministry of Munitions who, only a few days before this juncture, became First Lord of the Admiralty with Sir Edward Carson's promotion to the War Cabinet.²⁸ A Scot, Auckland Geddes had been trained for medical research, though only his extremely poor vision had kept him from a career in the Army Medical Service, joining his love of medicine and his passion for things military. He was Professor of Anatomy at McGill University in Canada on the eve of the World War and, despite his poor eyesight, accepted a commission as a training officer with the 17th Northumberland Fusiliers. By 1916, he held the rank of brevet Colonel. His reputation for organizational genius made him known beyond his pioneer regiment. In 1916, when Lord Derby took the War Office and gave up his recruiting post, Geddes, now with the rank of Brigadier-General, became Director of Recruiting.²⁹

The War was to bring great honour to the Geddes brothers and see both of them attain cabinet rank and privy councillorships. Auckland, however, would have traded these high offices for the position he coveted most, the place which would have combined his greatest interests – soldiering and medicine. He wished to be Director-General of the Army Medical Service, and he actually had it promised him in July 1917. Only his memoranda on manpower for the Forces and his reputation for possessing in full measure what was coming to be considered the Geddes family gift for management kept it from him.

He prefaced his paper of 22 July, the elaboration referred to by Lloyd George in his correspondence with Chamberlain, with a characteristic passage:³⁰

The withdrawal of men from civil life for naval and military purposes must be based upon coherent theory if confusion and incompatible decisions are to be avoided.

It was this commitment to avoiding confusion, something which seemed to dog the path of Neville Chamberlain, which convinced the Prime Minister that he had found his man. Geddes continued:

For confusion breeds inequality of treatment; inequality of treatment a sense of injustice; a sense of injustice hatred; hatred of Government, revolt and revolution. In this country we have reached the stage of a rapid growth of revolutionary talk which has, as one of its more important sources, the apparent injustice of the present methods of taking men for the Army.

Rejecting Chamberlain's 'clean cut' based upon age, 'however suited so simple a theory may have been in the Napoleonic Era and earlier' as impossible in modern war, Geddes favoured another path:

There can be little doubt that in the complicated highly industrialised modern state all recruitment should proceed upon a basis of occupation conditioned by age and physical fitness. This may be termed the 'Occupation-Group Theory'

As only highly industrialised states can produce an adequate supply of the engines of war, recruitment on the Occupation-Group basis appears likely to supersede all other methods.

He explained the steps he felt were required to overcome Britain's manpower crisis, and he singled out for highest priority what he termed 'psychological difficulties'. The effect of three years of terrible war, the shock of the Russian Revolution upon labour, the shortages of ordinary goods, all made the complicated manpower problem more difficult for the population to comprehend. The nation needed to be made to understand why some men were needed at home, while others were not. Despite exhausting attempts to win the full co-operation of labour, Geddes was certain that more could be done to strengthen the partnership of government and workers.

In addition, Geddes explained his 'occupation-group theory' of withdrawing additional men from civilian life for the military. Men must be removed from factories and trade and farms based upon a carefully worked-out plan of 'combing out' – that is, the removal of able men, with advance planning for replacement by physically

impaired men or women or youths, from trades which could afford their replacement. Even the most skilled trades could afford some 'combing out', Geddes believed, if it were done with care. Quotas could be statistically established, with an eye not on numbers of hands but on output; once set down, they could be enforced with some degree of confidence that production would not falter. Geddes believed that the initial quotas established by Milner and Henderson a short time before this crisis were proper, and he encouraged their implementation.

Geddes also advised that exemption for youths of 18, the youngest (and traditionally unenforced) age of liability under the Military Service Acts, should be withdrawn. While exceptions based upon skills had to be provided for, in general he believed that the annual class of youths reaching that age had to be looked upon initially as reinforcement for the Army.

He concluded his advice with a discussion of the thorny matter of the allocation of manpower between the military and necessary civil industries and trades:

The provision of labour for certain industries is vital. It may conceivably be proved necessary to release a certain number of skilled men from the Army. But by far the most effective way of supplying labour to an industry is to open and to advertise an 'umbrella' All that is necessary to secure an immediate 'drift' of workers into an occupation is to announce that all of a certain age who are in it before a certain date will be regarded as being entitled to conditional exemption so long as they remain employed in it. In a few days' time, the drift begins and the pressure generated by the working of the recruiting machine will maintain the flow.

As has been seen, Lloyd George and the other members of the War Cabinet, once strong believers in industrial conscription, had concluded that such a policy was unenforceable because of labour opposition. Auckland Campbell Geddes, despite his training as a soldier in his youth and his long adherence to the idea of national service, by 1917 had come to a similar conclusion. He wrote of himself (in the third person) in his family history:

He was shocked by the mental reaction of the commanders in the field to the easy flow of recruits with which the machine he had done so much to create [as Director of Recruiting] was providing

them. Suddenly, so it seemed to him, they became profligate in the expenditure of men. They even talked of the drafts they were receiving as 'expendable stores' [He] had not forgotten Loos nor the incoherences in the Staff work which produced the heavy toll of 60,000 casualties – and nothing to show for it. Nor had he forgotten the slaughter on the Somme. And now the divisions were being 'fatted' for a new offensive.³¹

To Geddes, while civilian compulsion was clearly the most efficient system, the massive removal of men from important civilian employ, the huge losses on the Western Front, and, above all, the refusal of labour to countenance its enforcement, made national service a dead issue in mid-1917. He did not include it among his recommendations. He would do his duty, but, like the Prime Minister, he would not willingly be a 'butcher's boy'

Geddes's memoranda, despite Neville Chamberlain's insistence that the views of the Director of Recruiting were little different from his own,³² did spur the War Cabinet to action: on 1 August a committee of Milner, Barnes – now a member of that body in succession to Henderson – and Smuts were appointed to consider the question of authority and policy in regard to recruitment.³³ They reported one week later that greater centralization of authority was needed, and they specifically advised that military and industrial manpower policy ought to be in the hands of the same responsible minister.³⁴ Chamberlain, while his stock with the Prime Minister was very low, indeed was not without some hope of claiming that expanded responsibility. He rejected it, however, refusing to take on the military side of manpower provision. At the recommendation of Milner, he resigned office and returned to Birmingham.³⁵

On the day before these events, Geddes, still presuming he was bound for the Army Medical Service, was sent by Lloyd George to meet with Neville Chamberlain to explain his conception of manpower supply – the two had never met. Geddes recalled the curious conversation in his memoirs, and it is worth quoting at length. Chamberlain presumed that he was to be given a subordinate post in an expanded manpower department:

'Oh! I don't think that's quite the idea,' said Campbell [Geddes].

'You mean you won't serve under me?' His voice rose.

'I didn't know that any question had arisen of my coming to the Ministry of National Service.'

This seemed to throw Chamberlain into a rage. He stormed, while Campbell waited. At last he sat down.

'I don't think you quite understand,' said Campbell. 'I am now only nominally Director of Recruiting. I am in process of taking over the job of Director-General of the Army Medical Service – and the Prime Minister's idea was that I should explain to you exactly what machinery exists for your Ministry to take over, and what the problems are, as I see them.' Then came a bomb-shell.

'Lloyd George said this morning that if I could not do this job, you could, and that if I liked I could go back to Birmingham, so far as he was concerned there would be no opposition.'

On the morning of the day following his interview with Neville Chamberlain, Campbell was summoned once again to Downing Street. Once again the Prime Minister was alone; but this time he exuded charm.

'Ah, my dear Geddes, he said; 'Chamberlain's going back home, and I have decided to make you Minister of National Service. We'll easily find a seat for you in Parliament; and I'll get some really good fellows to help you in the early days to surmount all the little difficulties that you are bound to meet as you change from being a soldier – or should I say professor – to being a politician.'³⁶

Neville Chamberlain had failed in his first national office for several reasons: in the first place, he never succeeded in establishing co-operative working relationships with those other departments of state which, for better or worse, were his natural partners – Munitions, Labour and the Board of Trade – and he worked well only with the War Office. In the second place, he never succeeded in getting his new department sufficiently organized to begin to solve the problems cast his way by the impatient War Cabinet. Finally, he steadfastly refused to budge from his notion that the so-called 'clean cut' based on age was the sole manner in which the manpower shortage could be solved. While this endeared him to the generals, it made implacable enemies of the officials of the other departments charged with supplying manpower.

Unlike his father, who had once been the darling of the radical masses, Neville Chamberlain was uneasy around new acquaintances. He projected an image of schoolmasterly priggishness, of coolness and distance. There was, however, one element of his character in

which he was more like his sire than was his brother, the elegant and worldly Austen: he was a remarkable hater, a collector of injurious slights and cuts, who seldom forgave those who had caused him discomfort. His untiring hatred of Lloyd George, born in this period before Chamberlain became a major public figure, is remarkable. Geddes, a physician and a keen observer of men, offered this explanation of the origins of the antipathy of the younger man toward the elder:

In a flash Campbell realized that Neville Chamberlain had conceived that form of violent hatred which only a man with an inferiority complex can harbour against one who exposes him to ridicule. And it was the ridicule of returning to Birmingham labelled 'Not Wanted' that Chamberlain feared.³⁷

Chamberlain never fully made his peace with Lloyd George. In 1922, when the mantle of being The Man Who Won the War could no longer shield him from criticism, the Prime Minister was driven from power forever, partially due to the work among Tory backbenchers of Neville Chamberlain. Austen remained loyal to Lloyd George, and it pained Neville to trouble his brother when the elder Chamberlain was Leader of the Conservative Party and an ally of the Welshman. It did not, however, deter him. Despite the fact that Lloyd George gave him minor office again in the post-War period, Neville Chamberlain neither forgot nor forgave what was to him perhaps the most humiliating experience of his career.³⁸

IV

One historian of the campaigns of 1917 has illustrated the central problem which had become the responsibility of Auckland Geddes:

From now until the end of the campaign there was to be a constant tug-of-war between the civilians and generals concerning the release of troops for duty in Belgium. Recruitments had fallen almost to nil. Without volunteers, only draftees remained. But other than youngsters gradually attaining military age, who could any longer be drafted? The rock-bottom requirements of the civilian economy had to be met. Lloyd George refused to weaken industrial capacity by calling up any more essential workers. Sir Douglas [Haig] and Sir William [Robertson] would have none of this nonsense. They wanted all the men they had and

at least 85,000 more. It was, they insisted, the only way to keep up the pressure and thus ward off a knockout blow against France.³⁹

Humbert Wolfe considered the same desperate situation in evaluating the terms of reference of the new Ministry of National Service, successor to Chamberlain's Department: 'It was an admirable charter, but for complete success or even considerable success it arrived three years too late.

But, if late, the Ministry was not altogether too late.'⁴⁰ The point made by these two observers is this: nothing could undo the damage of three years of recruitment and trench warfare. Hundreds of thousands of men were dead or gravely wounded. The number of youths reaching military age would not supply the manpower needs of the Army, not if food was to be grown or munitions made or necessary civilian services provided. Geddes's task was somehow to utilize better – given the powers provided him by the State – what human resources were left to his care. It was a formidable task, particularly in light of the fact that the terrible Flanders campaign had another two months before its murderous course was run.

The Manpower Committee gave Geddes most of what he requested when they recommended to the War Cabinet the duties of his Ministry. He was to have control over National Service Tribunals of first instance (Appeal Tribunals were to remain with the Local Government Board), over the 'combing-out' of men from industry, and the assignment of reserved status to civilian employment. Furthermore, he was to be responsible:

Within numerical limits imposed by the War Cabinet, to obtain for the Army, Navy, and Air Service such men as can be withdrawn from civil life without detriment to the maintenance of essential public services and the due performance of the civil work necessary to maintain the Forces at sea, in the field, and in the air, and any nucleus of civil occupations and industries declared by the War Cabinet to be necessary.⁴¹

The new Minister of National Service presented his initial estimate of his field of responsibility in mid-October, in a paper to the War Cabinet. It remains a shocking document. Titled 'Recruiting Problems and Prospects', it offered a sobering litany of the former and little hope for the latter.⁴² He estimated that there remained in Great Britain approximately 8 million male adult civilians, of whom 3.6

million were of statutory military age. They were, however, not a promising lot: 'For over three years,' he wrote, 'a process of creaming off the population has proceeded. In result a relatively very low percentage of the men remaining are fit for Category A [suitable for service overseas].' Other problems received their due attention: the shortage of hands in shipbuilding and the steel trades, for example, or agriculture, required attention. Sections of the great trade unions – the South Wales Miners Federation, for example – were 'actively hostile' to increased recruiting, and a relatively small number of young men were to become liable to conscription to solve the shortages – and even many of them, having entered skilled trades as boys, were already contributing significantly to the munitions trades. Hence the number of available young men was even smaller than met the eye. Laid out clearly, the numbers must have chilled his readers:

Total males in civil life	8 000 000
Total males of military age	3 600 000
Total males 18–25 years of age	800 000
Total males 18–25 fit for Category A	270 000

Of the fourth category, totalling something over a quarter-million men, one-third were engaged in coal mines, slightly more in or around shipyards, marine engineering shops or munitions works, 70 000 worked in agriculture, transport or other skilled trades, with the remainder scattered throughout many other trades. Geddes estimated that only about 150 000 to 160 000 could be withdrawn, and then only if the youngest age groups were allowed to remain in civil employment until eight months beyond age 18. Furthermore, it was estimated that it would take at least eight months to get them. Of the 2.8 million older eligible men, only about 700 000 could possibly be considered Category A: 'these,' Geddes cautioned, 'are nearly all engaged in vital industries. In eight months it is estimated 120 000 may be recruited.'

There remained only two untapped sources of troops for the military: one consisted of the pool of men over age 41, until then untouched by the Military Service Acts. The other was Ireland, wherein the Minister of National Service estimated 150 000 men could be obtained in a twelve-month period, through the extension of the Acts to that country. Failing that, if the age of conscription were raised to 50, he estimated perhaps 150 000 additional fit men could be found in six months.

As for work substitutes for those to be taken for the Forces, he estimated that there were, again, only two sizeable untapped sources. Each group was largely made up of females: domestic servants and middle-class young women, numbering perhaps 50 000, beyond whom 'our reserves of human power are practically fully absorbed in national work. Only by universal economy in human power can we hope to meet the demands of the services without checking essential production in civil life.' A Cabinet Committee, including the Minister of National Service, the First Lord of the Admiralty (Geddes' elder brother, Eric), the Secretary of State for War and General Smuts, was charged two days later to 'draw up a balance sheet on manpower [and] recruiting prospects in each Allied and enemy country, with forecasts for 1918.'⁴³ Clearly, Geddes, with his statistical methods and his severe presentation of 'inevitables' made a far deeper impression on his masters than had his predecessor.

The task of the National Service Ministry was to meet the demands of the War Office and the necessary civil pursuits for manpower – or, as the case increasingly was, womanpower – subject to the will of the War Cabinet. By the close of the month of November, when Geddes brought forth a draft bill to effect the plans outlined above, several developments were unfolding which were to weigh heavily against Geddes's attempts to supply these demands.

In the first place, the Flanders Offensive of 1917 ended. The cost to Britain in blood and treasure of this four-month-long blood-bath fought in the mud of the Ypres Salient will never be known. In the words of the Official History, 'the clerkpower to investigate the exact losses was not available. If this was so in 1948, when these words were written, it is still so even today. The British Army doubtless suffered losses of at least 300 000 men, while the enemy sustained casualties, perhaps, of something under a quarter-million soldiers. It was an unparalleled horror, without equal in modern times. Certainly the Somme, in 1916, had been worse; but the Somme, or Loos, or any of the other great bloodlettings had occurred when the manpower pool was that much larger. The campaign of 1918, whatever form it took, would have to make do with alarmingly fewer men.'⁴⁴

The second development was that Lloyd George and the other members of the War Cabinet finally rebelled against the tyranny of numbers of the Western Front. At last the sense of priorities of the responsible leaders of Great Britain began fully to turn against the limitless manpower appetite of the Western Front, in favour of other claimants.

Perhaps this is not entirely just: Lloyd George, who had forever turned his political coat because of his ambitious belief that only he could win the Great War, had, before Passchendaele, already seriously questioned the price of Haig's plan for victory. He could, as we have seen, do nothing about it. He could attempt to go around or over or under the generals, but he could not brush them aside. So he gave in, though not without the thought that he was acquiescing to a kind of ritual manslaughter. Now, he would act. He could not force his Easterner strategy on the General Staff; nor could he, in the end, break Field Marshal Haig, but he could alter the scheme of priorities which sent men first to France and to Flanders. He could prevent Haig from getting enough men to mount a major attack and thereby force him to wait for the American Expeditionary Force, which the Prime Minister believed would become an overpowering factor in the campaign of 1918.

V

The autumn of 1917 was a sobering period in the conflict for additional reasons. The Italians, under Cadorna, had been routed at Caporetto in late October. The Prime Minister was present in Italy soon after, having come to the continent for an Allied conference, to see for himself the aftermath of tragic casualties and demoralized leaders. More devastating still – for what it meant to the apportionment of German armies – was the seizure of power in Russia in early November by the Bolsheviks. Since the spring of 1917, Russia had become even less of a factor in the War than she had been the year before. But even the quixotic Brusilov Offensive in June, ordered by the Provisional Premier, Kerensky, had indicated that Russia was not out of the War. V. I. Lenin, however, promised peace, land, and bread, and the easiest of those pledges on which to deliver was the first: Russia was on her way out of the World War, only to pass into a brutal conflict which would outlive the struggle on the Western Front.

In the absence of Lloyd George, who had crossed to France to take part in the first Allied Supreme War Council, the War Cabinet met on 29 November 1917, and indicated that the Prime Minister and Auckland Geddes were not alone in seeking a new manpower policy. The subject of the immense losses in Flanders, while not on the agenda of that meeting, was much on the minds of Bonar Law, who took the chair, and his colleagues. The discussion turned to the

mutually held anxiety that the collapse of an ally would perhaps end the War – all expected Russia to fall at any time. Survival, to these statesmen, appeared to be the first priority; survival through the winter and until the Americans arrived in force. To them, survival depended upon shipping, and, logically, they agreed that shipbuilding should receive the highest priority for manpower, ‘even over the fighting forces’.⁴⁵

The attenuated War Cabinet, however, feared the reactions of Parliament and public to Geddes’s proposed manpower policies as laid out in his memorandum of 13 October. ‘The following views,’ they recorded, ‘were generally agreed to’: it was felt that Parliament would allow neither the lowering nor raising of the ages of liability under the Military Service Acts. ‘It is possible that Parliament might consent to raise the age to 45, but it is doubtful.’ Furthermore, they had no confidence that ‘the country would accept a general “comb-out” of workers in munitions works and other essential trades’

Finally, they turned to the most controversial of Geddes’s recommendations: ‘The application of Conscription to Ireland, though eminently desirable, would be extremely difficult to carry out at the present time. It might involve an increase in the military garrison out of proportion to the advantage to be obtained. In the end, they thought it inadvisable at the time, fearing also the effect compulsion might have upon continued efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement in the unhappy island.

No soldiers were called to this meeting of the War Cabinet. There was a message, however, for the generals in these deliberations: there were few men left to be had for the Army, and hence there would be no great offensives in the immediate future. It was thought ‘desirable’ that the General Staff and Field Marshal Haig keep these considerations in mind in planning their future policy, and doing so seemed to preclude anything but defensive operations for the foreseeable future. The War Cabinet, it appeared, wished Haig to play the role of Petain.

On 3 and 6 December the War Cabinet – still in the absence of Lloyd George – met again to consider the question of manpower policy.⁴⁶ At the latter meeting they had before them an additional paper requested of Geddes, in which he ‘endeavoured to estimate as nearly as possible the number of Category A recruits over 18 years 8 months who can be made available before the 30th June 1918’.⁴⁷ The Minister of National Service included three sets of figures: those available if Government production programmes were maintained

and all pledges to labour were kept; second, if programmes were maintained but pledges cancelled; and, third, if programmes other than shipbuilding were reduced and all pledges cancelled.

In light of the fact that Lord Derby had communicated to the War Cabinet three days before that Sir Douglas Haig wished an additional 600 000 men over the next twelve months to maintain his armies, Geddes's figures were startling: from the munitions trades the maximum number of fit men even under the draconian measures of the third alternative – pledges dropped and production programmes reduced – was only 108 000. The coal mines would, under the same conditions, yield only approximately 150 000 men, even if the Army released a 'very large number' of men classified below Category A, and if coal production were reduced 16.5 per cent. Agriculture, the most completely protected of all industries, would yield only perhaps 50 000 men under alternative three, 'if the agricultural programme is to be largely curtailed'. Other major areas of endeavour would give far less. The largest number Geddes estimated which could be drawn, even under the most severe 'comb-out', was probably to total less than 300 000 men – far fewer than that demanded by the War Office. Even such a reduced number would be difficult to extract and would be obtainable only by the cancellation of exemptions promised to the trade unions, and by further decreases of the civilian standard of living. It was a sobering prospect indeed.

Lord Curzon and the Secretary to the War Cabinet, M. P. A. Hankey, reminded the Cabinet that when equally grave decisions had arisen over the past two years, 'the only practical method of dealing with the matter was found to be a small Cabinet Committee whose duty it was to see all Heads of Departments concerned in order that a definite scheme might be laid before the Cabinet for acceptance or rejection'. Hankey's notes record:

Lord Curzon suggested that a similar Committee should be appointed at this critical juncture, whose duty it should be to produce a scheme which the Government should present to Parliament as a whole, and upon which the Government should stake its existence.

Subject to the Prime Minister's concurrence, the War Cabinet decided that –

The Prime Minister should appoint a Committee as suggested by Lord Curzon, which should report to the Cabinet at the earliest possible date; and that meanwhile the Minister of Munitions, the

First Lord of the Admiralty, and the Secretary of State for War should at once prepare full detailed statements for submission to the Committee.⁴⁸

Lloyd George had returned from his meetings on the continent with statistics regarding manpower on the Western Front, supplied by the British representative-designate at Allied Supreme Headquarters, General Sir Henry Wilson, who was then intriguing to improve his own position at the expense of Robertson and Haig. Like his friend and mentor, Lord Milner, Wilson had made his peace with the leadership of the Welshman. The General had nothing but contempt for Lloyd George's 'Easterner' plans, but he also hated Haig's Flanders Offensive, the 'mud campaign' as he called it. Hence, he threw in his lot with the Prime Minister, feeding him information harmful to the CIGS and the Field-Marshal-Commanding on the Western Front.

The Prime Minister told the War Cabinet on 10 December that his information confirmed that the British and French together had 1 200 000 more men than the Germans in the field in France and Flanders. Hankey reported:

Even if the Germans were to transfer all their serviceable divisions from the Eastern front to the West, which amounted to some thirty-two divisions out of seventy-nine, or an approximate total of 300,000 rifles, they would still be in a minority on the Western front. In these circumstances the Prime Minister was unable to understand the rather alarmist tone as to the situation which has recently been exhibited.⁴⁹

Lord Lansdowne, on 29 November, had published his famous peace letter, which was essentially his Cabinet memorandum of one year before. Widely praised in pacifist and radical circles, the manifesto calling for peace as a response to what the former Tory Leader in the Lords saw as the suicidal nature of the War, was much on the Prime Minister's mind at this time. No doubt it made him increasingly short-tempered with the generals for their dire forecasts. 'He pointed out [in the 10 December Cabinet] that the public were considerably disturbed over this matter, quite unnecessarily, as he thought, having regard to the actual facts, and it is highly desirable that they should receive some official reassurance.'

Lloyd George did appoint such a committee as Curzon had earlier suggested. Taking the chair himself, he included Curzon, Sir Edward

Carson, General Smuts and George Barnes. The already overstressed Hankey, of course, served as secretary.⁵⁰ Called the Cabinet Committee on Manpower, the small group was charged with producing a solution to the contending claims for men – by this time a familiar problem made more crucial than ever as needs grew more acute and resources dwindled. To prepare the Committee for its task, Lt.-Col. Hankey wrote a brief paper outlining the most significant decisions regarding manpower provision to the Forces, made over the previous three years. As though Geddes's views were not sobering enough, Hankey's review of the immense losses on the Western Front and in the other theatres of the War, of the shrinking manpower pool at home, of the economic dislocations of three years of total warfare and of the coming German offensive in the spring – which virtually all informed opinion expected – must have seemed chilling. He concluded:

The Cabinet Committee has to face a situation which differs in two very important particulars from that which confronted previous Cabinet Committees on the same subject. These are, first: that the economic crisis, instead of being a danger to be guarded against, is actually present; and, second, that the seriousness of the military man-power crisis is not merely that we shall not smash the enemy if the men are not forthcoming, but that the enemy may smash us.

The problem that confronts the Committee, therefore, is to avert a military catastrophe without plunging us into an economic catastrophe equally fatal to the cause of the Allies.⁵¹

The Secretary to the War Cabinet was close to the mark in his analysis. Years later he wrote in perhaps even more trenchant language: 'It has to be borne in mind . . . that we were getting very near the bottom of the man-power bag.'⁵²

The deliberations of the Manpower Committee occupied much of the month of December, which, given the rank and responsibilities of those who served on it, indicates the terrible importance of its task.⁵³ Their recommendations to the War Cabinet were based on several assumptions. In the first place, the Government would tolerate no repetitions of the Flanders campaign in the near future. In particular, Lloyd George attacked the War Office estimates of wastage – casualties – for the coming year, 1918. L. S. Amery wrote to Sir Henry Wilson, after meeting with the Prime Minister and Lord Milner, of a meeting of the Committee attended by the Adjutant-

General: 'L. G. let himself go at Macready about the basis of calculation of future wastage to the effect that he was not going to have the old butchery basis.'⁵⁴ Much as it irritated Robertson and Haig and their allies, plans for the 1918 campaign would have to be defensive.

In the second place, all efforts to facilitate American assistance were to be made, and this generally resolved itself into a campaign to increase shipping. U. S. estimates of marine production were wildly optimistic, and Britain needed raw materials, warlike stores and, most of all, men from her new ally. In this last general war before modern air transport, this required marine shipping. Hence, shipbuilding and the provision of naval protection for convoys also were destined to receive high priority.

Agriculture, timber and steel production all required greater attention than they had received in the recent past, due to the desire to reduce the need of imports – freeing shipping for other military-related purposes. Coal, of course, the very basis of world industry, was at least as important as it had been since the very first days of the conversion to war production.

None of these assumptions pleased the War Office, nor were they well received at British Headquarters in France. They were, however, welcome to the Prime Minister, who had chaired the Committee and who clearly wished to deny the generals a sizeable number of the men they demanded.⁵⁵ The conclusions of the Manpower Committee, then, were these: Naval and merchant marine requirements were considered most pressing. The complaint of the Army that the shortage of men would bring about a reduction of the number of divisions at the Front was to be met by reducing the number of battalions per division from twelve to nine – following the example both of the French and German governments – in order to increase the total number of divisions, thereby increasing the reserve. The cavalry, that romantic but anachronistic branch which had produced both French and Haig, were to be reduced, as their ranks were distributed among tank corps, Royal Air Force and other more modern units. Home Defence forces were reduced from eight to four divisions. Finally, the methods and results of calculating casualties, as an exercise for formulating manpower demands, were to be overhauled in order to achieve a greater degree of accuracy.

The priority system recommended by the Committee was a terrible blow to the Army and their political champions, particularly Lord Derby, the Secretary of State for War. Men were to be provided by

the Minister of National Service in the following order: to the Navy and Royal Air Force first, next to shipbuilding, airplane and tank manufacture, and to the food production, timber production and food storage industries. The Army, after these other claims were met, would then receive its allotment of the men Sir Auckland Geddes could extract from the civilian male population of Great Britain.

Such a policy would make it impossible for the Army to acquire anything save a small percentage of their manpower demands. The statistical allocation recommended by the Manpower Committee was as follows:⁵⁶

	<i>Demand</i>	<i>Recommendation</i>
Navy	90 000	50 000
Army (including RAF)		
Category A men	600 000	100 000
Men at lower categories	320 000	100 000
18-year-olds (for home defence)	240 000	120 000
Total	1 250 000	370 000

The deficit of demand over supply indicated by these recommendations for the Army was a half-million men in Category A alone, and a total of more than 850 000 men of all categories; to the Navy, placed first in the recommended distribution, 40 000 fewer men were allotted than demanded.

The Army Council had no intention of accepting such accounting, and the Military Members took up the challenge with a chilling memorandum to the War Cabinet on 7 January 1918.⁵⁷ The generals rejected each of the recommendations, and they made no secret of their contempt for the thinking which had produced them. They wrote:

There is every prospect of heavy fighting on the Western front from February onwards, and the result may well be that even if the divisions successfully withstand the shock of the earlier attacks they may well become so exhausted and attenuated as to be incapable of continuing the struggle until the Americans can effectively intervene.

As they had so often suggested in the past, any failure to produce the manpower demanded by the Army was condemned out of hand as courting disaster:

In short the Council would regard the acceptance of the recommendations in the draft Report without further effort to provide the men they consider necessary for the maintenance of the forces in the field during 1918 as taking an unnecessarily grave risk of losing the war and sacrificing to no purpose the British Army on the Western front.

The Prime Minister was himself capable of showing his contempt, and, like his generals, his temper grew short. He wrote of this crisis, years later: 'The generals could not be expected to judge the issue dispassionately. Their reckless wastage of the man power so lavishly placed at their disposal also vitiated their judgement.'⁵⁸ Like his great contemporary, Clemenceau, Lloyd George was more certain than ever that war was too important to be left to the generals. He had come to distrust their figures, which seemed to him to boast of a surplus of men and arms when they wished to attack – and warn of a critical shortage of each at all other times.

The War Cabinet met to settle the issue on 7 January, the same day on which the Army Council memorandum was written.⁵⁹ Sir Douglas Haig was on leave in the capital and, along with Sir William Robertson and Lord Derby, was called to present the case for the Army. The Field Marshal, despite the discomfiture of the CIGS, responded loquaciously to queries about the possibility of a German assault in the foreseeable future with a qualified negative. Robertson recalled the remarks: 'if the Germans were wise, they would think twice before making the attempt, because if they failed their position would be critical'.⁶⁰ Lloyd George seized upon the point of view to encourage the optimistic tone of Sir Douglas, who sensed the opportunity to stress the losses of the enemy and minimize the cost to his own forces of the recent attacks. It was clearly a strategic error.

On the following day, Haig was to submit a written appreciation of the situation of his command. Derby, like Robertson, perceived that Sir Douglas had not helped their case in the manpower sphere, and the Secretary of State for War asked Sir William to write to Haig in order to stress the importance of choosing his words carefully. Robertson did write, advising Sir Douglas, both in the paper he would submit and in an anticipated interview with Prime Minister, to alter the impression he had created. 'Of course,' he advised his field commander, 'you do not understand these people as well as I do.'⁶¹ General Sir William Robertson, the first soldier to rise to his station through the ranks, was a man of many talents; but he overestimated

his knowledge of 'these people'. Haig's paper, submitted as called for, and his audience with Lloyd George, did no good, while his indiscreet optimism the previous day gave the Prime Minister a weapon to use against the Army demands. The War Cabinet followed his lead. The recommendations of the Manpower Committee were accepted and became the policy of the Government.

Several days following the crucial 7 January Cabinet, Lloyd George poured out his frustration to his confidant, Lord Riddell. When he requested of Sir William Robertson an analysis of British hopes for victory on the Western Front, he told the press lord, 'Their only proposal was more men and still more men.'⁶² He had once laboured hard and long to meet the demands of the generals for men and arms, and hereafter he chose to subject such demands to painstaking scrutiny. Like Hankey, he saw that national survival hung in the balance not merely on the field of battle but in the allocation of the nation's dwindling manpower resources. With the work of the Manpower Committee completed, then, the responsibility for securing men both for the Forces and for industry fell to Auckland Campbell Geddes. The plan of the Minister of National Service to exercise his authority to identify and channel men, using their skills and occupations as the most significant criteria for judgement, was to take the field. The policy of the 'comb-out' was to be given its chance. The most significant question at this juncture was this: Were there enough men left for this plan to work?

11 The Bottom of the Barrel

I

The question of how best to apportion available manpower in Britain had turned a significant corner by early 1918. The War Cabinet having lost patience with the generals, had concluded that it had become impossible to accede to War Office requests for large numbers of additional troops. The concrete evidence of this new rigidity of feeling was the report of the Manpower Committee, which had placed the Army last in the new priority standard for the distribution of available men. All other policies of the past, thereafter, were shouldered aside by a new plan with its new priorities and, with them, the new blueprint for implementation – Auckland Geddes's 'comb-out' procedure.

Lloyd George and his War Cabinet colleagues had come to this conclusion because Great Britain's leaders no longer possessed the luxury of debating the validity of military arguments for more and still more men. The undeniable truth was that whatever the situation in 1915 or 1916 there were simply not enough men left to do all the things for which contending needs claimed priority. Terrifying as that situation was, it was not the full reality. Not only did men have to be taken from the shrinking manpower pool for military service, but the war-weary nation – and especially the trade unions – had to be convinced that men long thought indispensable might now be taken for general service.

Lloyd George recalled in his memoirs the anxieties of planning for manpower allocation in January 1918:

Thus in reckoning the maximum limit of further levies which might be made upon 'A' men still in civilian callings we had to take care not only to avoid crippling essential services, but also to preserve peace on the home front.

In weighing the question of what further fit men we could withdraw from civilian services for the Army and Navy we had on the one hand to examine what number could be taken without causing a material disorganisation or breakdown of essential industries, and on the other, how far we could revive press gang

tactics by pouncing on eligible individuals here and there without provoking a psychological reaction that would create more disastrous trouble than the number of men obtained would be worth. Government is in part a science but it is more of an art. To be a success there must be not only regulation but understanding.¹

To achieve success, even in the desperate atmosphere of wartime, a government must frequently turn to pleading its case to the governed. In this sphere Lloyd George had much experience, and he was master of all the requisite skills. To prepare the way for the difficult negotiations which would accompany the 'comb-out', the Prime Minister addressed a great conference of trade-union representatives on 5 January. He was acutely aware that the hold of the official leadership over the rank-and-file was growing weaker. Accordingly he chose to speak about the war aims of His Majesty's Government, and his text was not arguably contrary to a similar document passed by the Inter-Allied Labour Conference called by the Labour Party in the previous December and written by, of all people, James Ramsay MacDonald.²

Count Czernin had issued for the Central Powers a paper outlining their version of suitably democratic war aims on Christmas Day 1917, and President Woodrow Wilson would take the field with his Fourteen Points on 8 January, three days after Lloyd George's speech. However, while these events weighed on the mind of the Prime Minister, the importance of soothing labour opinion and preventing further unrest among the trade unions was a far more important reason for his stressing the apparent agreement between the war aims of the Government and those of the Union for Democratic Control, the Labour Party or Ramsay MacDonald.³

There had been much strife among the munitions trades in recent weeks over wage rates, and the unofficial left-leaning and pacifist leadership – particularly on Clydeside – was stirring up trouble among already war-weary factory men. Geddes, however, who would have to convince the trade unions to support a drastic 'comb-out', emphasized the importance of an appropriate statement of war aims to the coming negotiations he would conduct.⁴ Once the battle was joined with the trade unions, however, no statement of war aims, regardless of whose philosophy it espoused, made much difference.

Auckland Geddes had begun to prepare the ground with the trade unionists at a general meeting on 3 January and had encountered

difficulties almost immediately. The Amalgamated Society of Engineers had angrily withdrawn their representatives from that initial session and were not present two days later when the Prime Minister appeared to make his war aims speech. The quarrel with the engineers presented a serious balk to Geddes's hopes of success. His plan to meet even the limited manpower commitment to the military was to remove from industry – from shops in which the skilled unions were powerful – classes of men working in certain selected trades and within suitable age and fitness categories.

Humbert Wolfe has written that Geddes:

proposed the complete withdrawal of exemptions from occupations, thus avoiding the long delays and heavy wastage resultant upon the Appeal Tribunal procedure. Coupled with this was the proposal that only men whose medical category was Grade 1 (old Category A) should be taken out of certified occupations.⁵

This method came to be called 'bulk release', and the instrument which the Minister of National Service was to employ to call up men in this way was termed a 'withdrawal order'

The ASE remained the most important union in the munitions trades and hence enjoyed the greatest number of exemptions. It had been since August 1914 the most difficult of the unions with which the Government had had to deal. When the engineers had been made to give up the Trade Card Scheme, the arrangement was replaced with a Schedule of Protected Occupations drawn up initially as an agreement between the Government and the ASE and then extended to other unions. Claiming that the State now wished unilaterally to violate that agreement, the ASE refused to continue to participate in meetings of the various trade unions with the Minister of National Service until bilateral negotiations between the Government and their leaders were held.⁶

Despite this crisis, Geddes introduced on 14 January a new Military Service Bill, which empowered him to cancel exemptions from service on the basis of occupation and to abolish the two-months grace period allowed to workers in the case of withdrawal of exemptions. Though the ASE lodged strong objections, Geddes persisted with the bill, which received the Royal Assent three weeks later. Accordingly the National Service Department revised the Schedule of Protected Occupations and eliminated many exemptions for men of military age and suitable physical fitness. A confrontation seemed inevitable.

While there were a small number of local strikes, there was no immediate industry-wide stoppage in the metal trades, though the Government did take the precaution of appointing a Cabinet committee to examine the possibilities open to the State in 'the event of serious industrial trouble'.⁷ As if to give even greater reason for such precautions, the Miners' Federation at the end of January referred the question of compliance with the new policy to their district associations, and most reported back their demand that no members should be called up until all male dilutees were taken. The Delegate Meeting of the ASE announced on 20 February the results of a ballot of the membership of the union which overwhelmingly rejected the proposals of the Government and demanded direct negotiations.⁸

Despite its determination to proceed with the new policy, the Government acceded to the demands of the ASE and opened a separate conference with the union on 28 February. Similar negotiations were conducted with the miners. The results of another round of balloting were inconclusive and failed to demonstrate a deep commitment among the membership of either trade union to challenge the Government. Neither, however, did they presage that Geddes's task would be an easy one. By mid-March 1918, the new Military Service Act, while part of the law of the land, remained in a kind of unenforced limbo.⁹

II

The Act of February 1918, the questionable powers it provided to the Minister of National Service, and the crisis which had brought them about, all ceased to occupy the attention of the Government on 21 March 1918. At 4.30 a.m. more than 4000 German guns prepared the way for a massive assault of 63 divisions against a 43-mile front in the Somme division of the trench line.¹⁰

By nightfall a German flood had inundated forty miles of the British front; a week later it had reached a depth of nearly forty miles, and was almost lapping the outskirts of Amiens; and in the ensuing weeks the Allied cause itself almost submerged.¹¹

Having moved 52 divisions from the Eastern Front after the military collapse of Russia, this was Ludendorff's last desperate throw. The manpower debates of the previous two months faded before the force of the great Kaiser Offensive.¹² If a source of anxiety before the attack, the question of military manpower – once again foremost – thereafter appeared positively bleak.

On 23 March the War Cabinet once again took up the question of raising troops for the Army.¹³ The movement by the Germans of manpower from the Eastern Front, the Director of Military Operations reported, had virtually balanced the forces which faced each other from the trenches of France and Flanders. The priorities laid down by the Cabinet only two months earlier, like the recent Military Service Act, became a cipher as Haig's forces fell back. The Navy lost its superior position, for example, in military manpower, and even the Royal Dockyards and Admiralty contractors were immediately required to give up 13 500 men to Army recruiters.

Clearly the Manpower Committee Report, the criticisms of Lloyd George and Milner, and other reservations which stood in the way of providing more men to Haig and his generals, were suspended for the moment as the Minister of National Service was charged with increasing the total number of men available to the BEF. He was ordered to provide plans to speed up recruiting from extant sources, and to somehow overcome 'the many obstacles that stand in the way of the full mobilisation of our man-power'. Furthermore, he was to tap 'such new sources as still remain'.

The final charge to Geddes appears curious in light of the fact that only weeks before the Government had seemingly concluded that there were no untapped sources of military manpower. However, some light is thrown on this apparent inconsistency by the advice offered to him by the War Cabinet:

The Minister of National Service was asked to bear in mind that the present military situation might afford an exceptional opportunity for overcoming difficulties that had hitherto proved insurmountable.

The reference was to Geddes's October manpower assessment which contained two controversial possibilities, each of which appeared to raise difficulties previously thought to be insurmountable.¹⁴ They were, first, the raising of the maximum and lowering of the minimum ages of liability under the Military Service Acts, and, second, the extension of the Military Service Acts to Ireland. While Geddes did not attend the meeting of 23 March, word reached him immediately after. He certainly had no doubt as to what the phrase referred.

The War Cabinet met again two days later, with the National Service Minister present.¹⁵ He held out the possibility of obtaining an additional 50 000 men for the Army by raising the age of liability to 45, and 60 000 beyond that if the maximum age were raised an additional five years. He cautioned, however, that the price would be

high, for fit men in these age divisions frequently held skilled and responsible positions in factories and farms and in trade. Any change in the maximum age for conscription, as well as the manner in which such a change was to be carried out, required careful planning, 'so that the resources of the country should be crippled as little as possible'

The discussion then turned to Ireland, or, more properly, to Irish manpower. Present at the meeting was Field Marshal Viscount French, the former Commander-in-Chief of the BEF and, since 1916, both a peer and Commander of the Home Forces. French had been resuscitated from the dreariness of his home army of youths, Grade B conscripts and old soldiers by the Prime Minister during the controversy with Haig and Robertson preceding the Flanders Offensive.¹⁶ Lloyd George called upon French not because he admired his opinions but because the Field Marshal could be depended on to air a viewpoint contrary to that of Haig and Robertson.

The troublesome 'Wully' had himself recently been maneuvered out of the General Staff by Lloyd George and replaced by Sir Henry Wilson. The new CIGS owed his access to the Prime Minister – and his new rank – to being an available alternative to an irritating incumbent. While certainly no unqualified admirer of Lloyd George, no other premier had offered Wilson the high post he now held. Hence a suitable arrangement was struck, and each of the two men benefited. This, as in the case of French, offered enough for the Prime Minister.¹⁷

Viscount French fancied himself as something of an expert on Ireland – quite incorrectly as he was to prove. He had recently completed a tour of the island and had reported to Lloyd George that the Irish people were ready to accept the inevitability of conscription like 'frightened children who dread being thrashed'.¹⁸ While the Easter Rising in reality had been only the catalyst of a determined separatist movement, the Field Marshal judged its effects as already spent. Ever the rigid Unionist, he saw what he termed 'law and order' as easily restorable, when, in fact, the wave had yet fully to break over the only nominally 'United' Kingdom.

While in France the retreat of General Gough's Fifth Army degenerated into disordered flight and the railway hub of Amiens appeared to be in danger of falling into the hands of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, Viscount French counselled that the depth of revolutionary feeling in Ireland was exaggerated. Irish conscription was not only within the realm of possibility, he promised, it could be carried

out 'with a slight augmentation of the existing troops to maintain order'.¹⁹ French's welcome advice appeared, in that time of terrible crisis, to be too good to be true. In fact, that is exactly what it was.

None the less, the War Cabinet were willing to accept the raising of the age of liability to conscription as well as its application to Ireland. What else, they felt, could they do? Their conclusions were recorded by Hankey:

The War Cabinet considered the question of summoning Parliament with a view to passing new legislation in regard to recruiting, and it was felt that it was imperative that advantage should be taken of the present situation to obtain from Parliament powers to extend the Military Service Act to Ireland, and to increase the age up to 50 or 55.²⁰

Geddes was requested 'to prepare, at the earliest possible moment, a short Bill for the consideration of the War Cabinet, covering these two questions'. In addition, ministers of religion were also to be added to the list of eligible conscripts to the Forces.²¹

The Minister of National Service wasted no time in preparing a draft bill, which he distributed the following day.²² It contained three operative clauses. In the first place, he called for the lowering of the minimum age of liability to 17 years and the raising of the maximum to 55. Second, he sought to include not only Ireland, but the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man as well under the new law.

The third clause called for the abolition of the tribunal system. Geddes, coming late to his responsibility as manpower arbiter, chafed under the requirement of submitting to the decisions of the tribunals. Believing that only occupation and fitness were useful classifications for raising troops after three years of terrible losses, the tribunals were sources of delay and frustration to him. A man once exempted from call-up had the right, whatever his reasons, to plead his case first before the local and then before the appeal tribunal and, hence, avoid reporting for service for many days. To Geddes, the primary issue behind this delay was not justice; rather, it was the more immediate issue of national survival. He demanded, therefore, the suspension of the entire tribunal system throughout Britain.

Ireland had no conscription, so, of course, she had no tribunals. Applying the Military Service Acts to the other island gave him the opening he needed to call for an end to these informal courts in Great

Britain. In the interest of 'fairness', Britons should not be allowed a broad loophole denied their Irish brethren, Geddes argued – ignoring the converse side of the issue, which would have championed the establishment of a similar system in Ireland. He proposed to replace the extant boards with county advisory committees, appointed by himself. Exemptions would be abolished, and the new committees would be empowered only to postpone induction of individuals. Once free of the need to work through the requirements both of the exemption and tribunal systems, the Minister of National Service would be able to retain in each occupation only the minimum number of men he judged necessary to meet the needs of the military and of civilian production. All remaining fit men would be available for conscription. Geddes knew that the trade unions would find these policies unpalatable, but the possibility of ridding himself of the entitlement character of the exemption and tribunal systems – which made hard bargaining a part of each 'comb-out' – was irresistible.

As Geddes prepared his draft bill, Lloyd George interviewed the Chief Secretary for Ireland, H. E. Duke; the General-Officer-Commanding in Ireland, General Sir Bryan Mahon; and the Chief of the Royal Irish Constabulary, Brigadier Sir Joseph Byrne. Duke, the Prime Minister told his colleagues in the War Cabinet the following day, expressed 'grave doubts' about the possibility of Irish conscription. General Byrne anticipated that passage of such a bill 'would be a mistake'. General Mahon, Lloyd George reported, 'on the whole, was in favour of the proposal'.²³

Sir Bryan's written report, which the War Cabinet had before them, was hardly optimistic: 'Conscription can be enforced, but with the *greatest* difficulty.'²⁴ He went on to describe the bitter opposition which could be anticipated from the Roman Catholic clergy and the Nationalists, and the organized strike movement which he considered inevitable. Furthermore, the General raised the question of how many troops would be required to enforce both conscription and the martial law which surely would be required. However, he did hold out the possibility that 'some' of the men enlisted, 'when got', would make good soldiers. This pessimistic view the Prime Minister introduced, with a rhetorical arabesque worthy of one called the Wizard of Wales, as an opinion 'on the whole' *favourable* to the proposition.²⁵

As British and French troops continued to be forced back from their positions, and as the Allied high command was at last unified in an attempt to find leadership which could prevent the continued

onslaughts of Ludendorff's attacking divisions, even the conscripting of thousands of unwilling Irishmen would have to be dared. Over the objections of H. E. Duke, Dr Addison and George Barnes, the War Cabinet approved Geddes's draft bill on the following day. Irish conscription, along with the change in age limits, became Government policy.²⁶

III

Once decided, the policy then had to be submitted for approval to Parliament, and then the difficulties of enforcement lay ahead. As plans for these steps were being made, the matter became inextricably intertwined with the unresolved question of Irish Home Rule. Lloyd George himself raised the issue at the close of the discussion: would the British or the Irish (and he might have added the American) people accept one without the other? He wrote later, in his memoirs:

It is almost impossible to depict the complexities in which this issue of Irish conscription was wrapped. At that time the Irish Convention was still sitting, and we were hoping that it would yield us some measure of agreement upon which we could proceed to frame and carry a Home Rule measure. For such a measure we could not hope for support from the Unionists unless they at least secured the *quid pro quo* of Irish conscription; yet we were warned that if we announced our intention of proposing such conscription, the Convention would break up at once.²⁷

Even this does not tell the full story. The Irish Convention, suggested by John Redmond (who did not survive to see its conclusion) and representing both Northern and Southern opinion, had been sitting for nine months. Its purpose was to settle the terms for Home Rule and to reach a suitable conclusion to the matter of Ulster exclusion.²⁸ Coming as it did soon after American entry into the War, it was also meant to soothe American opinion, always sensitive to Irish affairs. What made it so imperfect an instrument was that the Irish exclusionists, and especially the secret *Sinn Féin* organization, totally rejected the Convention as a legitimate voice of Irish opinion. Rejecting the British Parliament with equal vehemence, they would accept only a Dublin parliament and a united independent Ireland – without, needless to say, liability to conscription in the British Army. The day of the Redmondite Nationalists was over, and these

younger and less parliamentary-minded men were rapidly becoming the strongest political organization in the unhappy island.

Lloyd George's Government remained afloat on a sea of Tory votes, and the majority of those men were as uncompromising as any *Sinn Féiner*: they were determined that if Britain were to make even greater sacrifices, then Ireland must be made to accept conscription. Home Rule was unpalatable to them in any event, but without conscription it was unthinkable.

The Convention was not expected to report until early April, and in the meantime the Prime Minister was to cross to France for a conference at Beauvais, meant to settle the yet-unresolved question of Allied co-operation.²⁹ In the hope that a way round the Irish impasse could be found, or perhaps simply to purchase time, Lloyd George, on 29 March, appointed a Cabinet committee to consider yet another Military Service Bill. With Sir George Cave, the Home Secretary, in the chair, the committee included H. E. Duke and Auckland Geddes, with Lord Milner representing the War Cabinet.³⁰

Lloyd George again crossed the Channel on 2 April, returning two days later. He afterwards told his colleagues that he had gained no insight into the debacle in France; however, he had reinforced his opinion that almost any general would be an improvement over Haig. Foch's powers of 'co-ordination' were increased, and within a fortnight he became Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies.

This step did nothing, however, to solve the manpower problems which plagued the Government. On 5 April, with the Cave Committee's amended draft before them, the War Cabinet met to decide upon a suitable bill and to formulate a policy in response to the twin problems of Irish conscription and Home Rule.³¹ While the lower age limit was not changed, the upper limit was raised to 50 years (with power to raise it to 55 by Order-in-Council); Geddes's plan to dissolve the tribunal system was overruled, and it was decided to assume power to dissolve all certificates of exemption – without reference to tribunals – through Order-in-Council in time of national emergency. Unhappily for Geddes, application of the bill to Ireland required the creation of a similar tribunal system there, and that was provided for in the bill.

The question of application of the bill to Ireland was complicated, the premier pointed out, by the pledge of the Government to the Convention to grant Home Rule in a form based upon 'substantial agreement' among all parties in Ireland, and by an undertaking with

the Ulster Protestants not to coerce them into any such arrangement.³² Lloyd George's stated intention was to introduce both the new Military Service Bill – including Irish conscription – and a Home Rule Bill based on the anticipated findings of the Convention 'at the same time'. If this was not possible, the Prime Minister preferred to continue with the conscription bill, deferring the clauses applicable to Ireland until a new Home Rule Bill could be passed. On that note, they postponed further consideration until the following day.

The War Cabinet met again early on the morning of 6 April, and at 11.30 a.m. the full Cabinet were called to Downing Street to discuss the conclusions of Lloyd George's inner circle.³³ After reviewing the sobering results of his inquiries in France, the Prime Minister turned to the subject of extending conscription to Ireland. The report of the Convention had just been received from Dublin, where it had passed by a vote of 44 to 29. George Dangerfield has written:

He did not say that the report was little more than a narrative of proceedings, that it had been accompanied by two minority reports and five dissenting 'notes' and that in the minority there stood in unbending opposition all the Ulster Unionists. He called the result a 'remarkable result', the report a 'moderate report', and he drew upon his imagination to add that *Sinn Féin*, which was not present, would have accepted it, if only Ireland had been conceded complete fiscal autonomy.³⁴

None the less, Lloyd George thought an acceptable bill could be brought in, that Ulster would accept it conditional to safeguards against coercion, and that moderate Nationalist opinion would outweigh separatism among the Catholic majority. Admitting that the Convention might not have provided an easy way out, he announced the conclusions of the War Cabinet: 'Our proposal is to bring in a Conscription Bill which will include Ireland, but which will provide for the application of conscription to Ireland by Order in Council. He elaborated on the subject of just how such legislation could be enforced:

We propose to bring in simultaneously our Home Rule Bill, put it through Parliament, and then immediately apply the Military Service Act. If you do not introduce conscription until the Home Rule Bill is through, then the Irish will resist Home Rule. We must not give them that incentive to reject Home Rule. It will take time to put conscription into force in Ireland. We have not

the machinery; we shall have to improvise a register, with the aid of the police. There is no reason why the preparation of the necessary machinery should be delayed.

(In reply to Lord Robert Cecil.) We will not undertake to postpone the application of conscription until the Home Rule Bill is through.³⁵

The most significant point, perhaps, was raised by H. A. L. Fisher, the scholar-turned-politician and President of the Board of Education, when he asked if the military advantage to be gained outweighed the difficulty inherent in getting the men from the disturbed island. Lloyd George's answer apparently served the moment, for the meeting closed minutes later. Upon reflection, however, it seems to summarize his difficulty:

That is the one consideration which chiefly worried me. Is it worth while, in a military sense? You will get 50,000, at any rate, at a minimum, who will fight. These five divisions will be made up of excellent material, of young men up to 25, at a time when we are taking old men.

Were there 50 000 in Ireland who could be made to fight? Would the costs of getting them, once paid, cause ministers to agree with Churchill's parting question: The policy was 'a battlefield decision, but [was it] a wise one'?³⁶ Would the Irish find it, as Hankey thought, 'gilding the conscription pill with the Home Rule Bill'?³⁷ The wait for answers to these queries would be a brief one.

The Military Service Amendment Bill was introduced by the Prime Minister on 9 April in a speech judged by most observers to be a poor one; the Irish Party vented their fury on him.³⁸ 'Dillon ejaculated, "You'll not get a man from Ireland"', Lord Stamfordham recorded.³⁹ Concerned by the criticism of the policy which ran deep among his former Liberal colleagues, Lloyd George wrote to Bonar Law, stressing the importance of staying the course. If the conscription bill were allowed to wait until an Irish Parliament was functioning, he argued, the Government's case based on the urgency of the need for the bill fell to pieces: 'It is either an urgent need or not at all We must press these proposals through the House with all the support at our command, on the ground that the military need is overwhelming.'⁴⁰

On the following day the public learned something of the desperate condition of the army at just the moment the news broke that

Ludendorff's forces had begun the second assault of their great offensive. Save for the Irish, who walked out of the Commons in protest, the news from the Front silenced most open criticism of the new bill. The following day, Field Marshal Haig delivered what must surely be his most famous order: 'Every position must be held to the last man: there must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must fight on to the end.'⁴¹ Haig's rhetorical flourishes traditionally fell on the side of optimism, which lends an ironic note to the fact that this simple and courageous statement is his only remembered epigram. Equally ironic, perhaps, is the fact that three days later Marshal Foch's powers as Allied Commander-in-Chief were further extended.⁴²

Given these events, nothing could stop the Military Service Bill, which passed its Third Reading on 16 April. Irish assent was a different matter. Unswayed by the appointment on the previous day of a Cabinet committee to draft a Home Rule Bill, Irish Nationalists and *Sinn Féin* men, constitutionalists and revolutionaries joined hands to resist the new Act. The anxious Chief Secretary also informed the Cabinet that the Roman Catholic Church, until this moment aloof from direct challenges to the Government, joined the fray as a convocation of bishops ordered a provocative resistance pledge read from all the Catholic pulpits in Ireland.⁴³ The collection of contributions to support the newly united movement was also authorized. The Irish Trades Union Congress weighed in by calling a general strike in protest which, in fact, did bring the island to a virtual dead halt on the 23rd.

Three days before the conscription bill passed its final reading, the Chief Secretary warned the Cabinet that revolution loomed.⁴⁴ H. E. Duke reinforced his message – which Lloyd George considered wanting in 'steady counsel' – with a memorandum begging the War Cabinet to abandon Irish conscription, and the Prime Minister to accept his resignation.⁴⁵ Duke's latter wish was granted within a matter of weeks. Returning with him was the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Wimborne, whose resignation was accepted even before he was told to offer it. Replacing them were a strangely mismatched team. Edward Shortt, a Liberal who had opposed the original passage of conscription, became Chief Secretary.⁴⁶ Viscount French, ever the apostle of the 'firm hand', replaced Wimborne. It was a season of changes: also in mid-April, Derby was shuttled off to the Paris Embassy while Milner took the War Office.⁴⁷ Austen Chamberlain, in turn, took Milner's place in the War Cabinet.

Lord French was given the task of restoring 'law and order'. which, after early May, the Government claimed were potentially endangered by a German–Irish plot. The co-conspirators were thought to be the *Sinn Féin* organization and the German secret service. In mid-May, as many Irish separatist leaders as could be found – *Sinn Féin* or not – were rounded up and deported to England.⁴⁸ Accompanying the proclamation of the emergency and the justification of the arrests, was a call for volunteers for the British Army and the clear promise that conscription could be avoided if enlistments were sufficient. It was nothing less than a retreat from the purpose of the Military Service Act, at least so far as Irish compulsion was concerned. The issue never came within the realm of possibility again.

The form of the policy endured, if the substance faded. A kind of Derby Scheme of enlistment was announced on 15 May, calling for 50 000 men by August – later reduced to 20 000 – though no more than 9000 actually enlisted by the end of the War.⁴⁹ Lord French periodically barraged both King and Government with letters advocating a policy of coercion and enforcement of the full powers of the Military Service Acts. Like the Field Marshal himself, however, the days when Irish conscription was given serious consideration were past.

The new policy of the War Cabinet was settled on 19 June 1918.⁵⁰ On that day the Cabinet committee charged with producing a Home Rule Bill offered up its report. The committee, chaired by Walter Long, found the task virtually impossible and was able to produce only a tepid rehash of the 1914 Act, which had itself been placed in abeyance with the coming of the War. Still fascinated by the possibility of a German–Irish uprising, the War Cabinet agreed, in essence, to do nothing. French was left to rule Ireland as best he could, Irish conscription remained a policy *de jure*, while the hopeless attempts at coercing voluntarism remained a policy *de facto*. If challenged in Parliament, Government defenders continued to claim 'that the dual policy [of conscription and Home Rule] had not been abandoned, although the Government must be the judge of the time and method of its application' What the House would not hear was the Prime Minister's ironic explanation that an attempt to carry out either scheme would be 'a political Passchendaele'.⁵¹ When Long again raised the issue of his draft bill ten days later, Lloyd George ruled that circumstances had not changed. That was the last serious discussion of the 'dual policy'

On 27 May, Ludendorff's final great assault began and again threatened the much-feared breakthrough. By 3 June, German troops were again on the Marne, and Paris was but fifty-six miles away. The Prime Minister rushed to France to meet with Clemenceau and the generals; it was, in Hankey's words, the 'high tide of [the German] military successes'. Within a week, however, Ludendorff 'pushed in new forces which ground to a halt as Foch at last moved his reserves. Once more the Germans had marched into a sack; they had not broken the French front.'⁵²

IV

The attempt to bring conscription to Ireland, with or without an accompanying Home Rule Bill, proved to be simply impossible. In his *The Damnable Question*, George Dangerfield has suggested, however, that Lloyd George knew exactly what he was doing:

We can now be fairly sure, judging by his maneuvers from this time on, that Lloyd George intended to solve this dilemma by offering Home Rule as a *quid pro quo* for conscription, and then seeing to it that both were indefinitely postponed. This was not a policy, it was improvisation of a masterly kind. To his way of thinking, the manpower problem, while desperate, was not quite so desperate as Irish conscription.⁵³

This may be the superior explanation. Despite the fact that the Prime Minister identified the 'dual policy' as his own from the outset, and though he told the Unionists they could not tighten the bonds of conscription on Ireland without Home Rule, and the Irish that there would be no Home Rule without conscription, his actions spoke more softly than his words. He appointed French as Lord Lieutenant, it is true, but he yoked him to Shortt, an Asquithian Liberal Home Ruler. He proscribed *Sinn Féin* and encouraged French's bellicosity, yet he never considered supplying the Field Marshal with men or money to conduct a campaign such as that of the 'Black and Tans' waged in his name two years later. He passed the conscription bill in April, defending the Irish provisions with the promise of Home Rule. When a committee was appointed to write the latter bill, however, he placed at its head the Unionist squire, Walter Long. The list of inconsistencies is a long one.

Another alternative solution, no doubt attractive to those who would see in this period the prefigurement of the tragic 'Black and Tan' policy of the 'Troubles' of 1919 and 1920, is that the Prime Minister simply failed to coerce the Irish into conscription. Certainly it is difficult to accept that the Government believed the rumours of a new German-inspired rising in 1918. Perhaps, this argument would run, belief had nothing to do with it, and the stern measures of internment and the appointment to Dublin Castle of the authoritarian Viscount French were the real goals all along. However, no evidence has been brought to light that would support the belief that Lloyd George had as his intent the sincere desire to subdue an Ireland ready to resist conscription.

The formulation of the Government's policy on Irish conscription – slipshod though it appeared to be – did not occur in isolation from larger events. The pressures and fears at work on these men were intense, and the initially successful Kaiser Offensive was truly terrifying to soldier and statesman alike. The most likely explanation of the ill-fated attempt at Irish conscription is that, in the first place, it might have worked – there was, after all, no shortage of would-be Cassandras who had predicted in 1916 that compulsion would never be accepted in Britain. In the second place, the dual policy might have settled the Home Rule issue and cut the ground from beneath the separatist movement. In the end, it did neither of these things; it was not accepted by Ireland and it did not promote a peaceful Home Rule settlement.

When was the sterility of the policy clear? It seems quite obvious that once the Roman Catholic hierarchy threw in its lot with the combined opposition to conscription, the dual policy was dead; and that was in mid-April. When Cardinal Logue, who shuddered at the idea of revolution, received the leaders of the resistance and approved the collection of funds for them in the churches of Ireland, the policy, no matter how 'gilded', was finished.

Why, then, the next question must be, did Lloyd George continue to pursue it? It bought time, admittedly at considerable price. It also struck the proper atmosphere at home for the defusing, through the internment of its leaders, of the explosive Irish revolutionary movement. All the while it allowed the Prime Minister to strike a posture of extreme reasonableness by emphasizing his *quid pro quo* argument. Furthermore it put on the lawbooks another form of conscription which, if the War continued into 1919 or even 1920, might truly have to be risked – the CIGS characteristically, continued to press

for the policy as late as October.⁵⁴ Finally, the dual policy addressed the particular interests of Britain's major Allies: the conscription component told the French that all possible men would be got, and the Home Rule portion addressed Irish-American feeling and the national-determinist leanings of President Wilson.⁵⁵

There is one further point which might be made. Lloyd George had several great contemporaries who fit no mould – Churchill and Northcliffe, for example – yet no colleague or opponent ever surpassed him in his ability to manipulate a crisis in order to ensure that any of several possible results served his needs. No other politician equalled him at fostering a situation where all options seemed to advantage him. In the days of the struggle over the 'People's Budget' of 1909, if his enemies in the Lords passed his bill he would have had the funds to work his fiscal and social reforms; if they allowed themselves to be stampeded into denying the Budget – as they did – they laid themselves open to accusation of violating the constitution. In so doing, they forever weakened the massive power their class had wielded for centuries.

The Irish conscription issue was somewhat similar: had the dual policy worked, he would have gained desperately needed manpower and settled the Home Rule issue for years to come. When it failed, while the advantages were not nearly so satisfying as in the case of the Budget, there were at least those advantages suggested above to be had. He returned to such bird-in-the-hand techniques, it will be recalled, during the 'Troubles' after the War, pursuing the policy of coercion with the 'Black and Tans' while opening up lines of communication to the revolutionary leaders themselves, eventually signing the Free State Treaty which actually delivered Home Rule.

The Military Service Act of April 1918, it will be recalled, was not confined to Irish matters. Under the strengthened provisions of the new Act, fit young men were taken from munitions shops, Admiralty contractors, coal mines and farms. Auckland Geddes had favoured the abolition of occupational exemptions and tribunals at the time of the passage of the Act and had been forced to accept the compromise plan of employing an Order-in-Council in case of emergency. He employed that authority four days after the Act passed through Parliament.⁵⁶ With these powers, he eliminated large numbers of exemptions. The War Cabinet then threw over the priority system conceived the previous autumn by authorizing a limited 'clean cut' system granting powers for the withdrawal of men up to the age of 23,

regardless of occupation. As Geddes (who had no intention of extracting men from industry and agriculture purely on the basis of age) feared when the 'clean cut' theory was argued in the previous summer, the repercussions of even the suggestion of such a policy in the industries affected were felt soon after. Had the War continued, the National Service Minister would have had to return by the autumn to the policy, which had been in place to one degree or another since 1915, of retrieving men from the Army for the factories, mines and farms.⁵⁷

In order to make the best use of what skilled labour remained in the factories as these stringent 'comb-outs' took place, the Government at the same time announced a plan to require skilled men to enroll as War Munitions Volunteers. As such, unless their skills were maximized at their place of employ, they were subject to relocation in other shops by the Minister of National Service.⁵⁸ The plan clearly amounted to industrial conscription in all but name. The Trade Union Advisory Committee refused to endorse the scheme, while at the same time admitting the need for improving the mobility of skilled labour. A compromise to avoid a breach between the trade unions and the Government was reached when it was agreed that a joint recruiting effort for the Volunteers would be waged by the Government and the Advisory Committee. Industrial compulsion was again avoided – for the last time.⁵⁹

One final crisis remains to be explained. As the extension of the War Munitions Volunteers scheme was decided, hand in hand with it went a plan to employ the Defence of the Realm Acts further to restrict labour 'hoarding', that is to restrain employers who were somehow able to retain more skilled men than were deemed by the Minister of National Service to be absolutely necessary. Admiralty contractors, for example, were never subject to the dilution rules laid down by the Ministry of Munitions. Hence, cases existed of men gravitating to such contractors where protection against conscription could be found.⁶⁰

The most graphic product of the so-called 'labour embargo' regulations against such practices was a brief but worrisome strike action which broke out in Coventry and spread to Birmingham, in late July 1918, involving more than 20 000 men. Issues involving wages, recognition of the unofficial Shop Stewards and simple war weariness were perhaps as important to the strikers as the 'embargo' orders. Supported by the Trade Union Advisory Board, and the Minister of Labour, G. H. Roberts, all of whom had an interest in the

suppression of the Shop Stewards and the upholding of the official leadership, the War Cabinet resolved to fight.

Lloyd George had no desire to engage in a drawn-out battle with the trade unions – with official or unofficial leadership – but he made clear to his colleagues that the State could not shrink from confrontation at that moment.⁶¹ H. A. L. Fisher noted in his diary his recollection of the words of the Minister of Munitions, Churchill: 'If the men won't work, they ought to fight.'⁶² The Prime Minister issued a statement on 26 July calling upon the men to return to work within three days or face a call to the colours.⁶³ It was not in the end necessary to make good on the threat, and the men returned to work. A week later, Haig's armies, supported by 456 tanks, began their counter-attack. Ludendorff would remember it as 'the black day of the German Army'

On 1 September, not long after he explained in a letter to Leopold Amery that the prospects of victory in 1919 were 'fair'.⁶⁴ Sir Henry Wilson wrote to Field Marshal Haig explaining that a 'great battle' was heating up within the Government over the withdrawal of 50 000 miners from the army.⁶⁵ Two days previous to these exchanges, Lloyd George responded to Clemenceau's call for more soldiers on the British line by explaining that such a thing was possible only if the Allies were willing to do without the shipping, coal and steel which they received from Britain.⁶⁶ These exchanges illustrate the realities of the supply of British manpower compared with the situation on the Western Front. While the War might have continued into 1919 – Haig had already laid his plans – Britain was at the outermost edge of her ability to respond with large numbers of men. Had hostilities continued, systematic removal of large numbers of men from the Forces would have proved necessary to maintain minimal war production and civilian services. Lloyd George wrote in his memoirs:

Our final Military Service Act did not achieve any very striking increase in the numbers of recruits; apart from Ireland, no such increase was possible, for in spite of its critics the Government were doing all that wisely could be done to supply our military effort with man power.⁶⁷

The great breakthrough – at least as dreamed of by the 'Westerners' – never actually came, for as the Battle of the Meuse–Argonne was occurring the new German leadership was already suing for peace. The final battles, then, were fought, and the peacemakers

were called to their work immediately. There was no glorious rolling up of the enemy line, no final campaign of movement to Berlin and the East. The Allies had survived longer in the crucible than did their enemies, it is true. When the end came, however, it came none too soon for those who had grappled for more than four years with the problems of the management of human resources in wartime and who had experienced a sobering glimpse, in 1918, of the bottom of the manpower barrel.

12 Epilogomena

I

The First World War, in fact if not in law, ended with the signing of the Armistice on 11 November 1918. The ultimate cost of the conflict in lives and money can only be approximated.¹ It is neither exaggerated nor particularly original to suggest that the greatest casualty of all was the European-dominated society for which most of the warriors had fought – forever romantically colouring the pre-War years with an exaggerated nobility. The great imperial monarchies of the Central Powers disappeared, their dynasties ruined and their vast holdings divided. New ideologies vied with ancient traditions as Russia fell into a murderous civil conflict which would last for several more years. Of the major victors, Britain and France were exhausted and Italy was bankrupt both in money and in spirit. Only distant America was strengthened as a result of her brief participation in a conflict she temporarily believed would make the world safe for democracy.

The populations both of victorious and defeated powers alike were to discover in the years after 1918 that the world they had known was irretrievably lost. Economic, social and moral values could never be the same after the experience of what was universally termed the Great War. Perhaps the most immediate major change to European life was the fundamental alteration of the population itself. Reasonable (if such a word is permissible) estimates of the manpower losses of military personnel are startling: Germany suffered 6.6 million casualties, France 2.8 million and Russia an incredible 9 million. The British Empire sustained casualties of more than 3 million men, of whom 2.6 million were citizens of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.²

An additional British casualty was the Parliament which had sat since the December 1910 election. Declaring that the ruling coalition had to be prolonged in order to ensure a just peace and suitable reconstruction arrangements, the leaders of the Conservative Party and the Lloyd George Liberals faced the election united against the Labourites, who refused to remain as coalition partners, and the Asquithian (or 'Wee Free') Liberals. The result of the so-called

Coupon Election was an overwhelming majority for the coalition – or, more properly, for The Man Who Won the War, David Lloyd George.³ The political solar system, for a few years at least, revolved only around him. A great contemporary wrote of this time:

The war was over. Lloyd George was now the most powerful man in Europe. His fame would endure for ever. He was admired and praised in all countries.

He had beaten his enemies in the war. He had scattered and destroyed his British enemies at the polls in the course of a General Election which disclosed an overwhelming popular judgement in his favour. Hardly any political opponent escaped. They had fallen like autumn leaves.⁴

After promising to British voters a land ‘fit for heroes to live in’, the Prime Minister actually gave little time to domestic policy in the year following the Armistice. Rather, he spent most of his energies in negotiation with the American President, Woodrow Wilson, the French Premier, Georges Clemenceau, and the Italian Prime Minister, Vittorio Orlando, in bringing to life the new world order outlined in the Peace of Paris. It was not to be, of course, as the ambitious reconstruction programmes of Dr Addison were emasculated by the economic realities of the post-War ‘slump’.⁵ A similar unhappy fate awaited the brave new world of the peacemakers – by 1922 they would all cease to hold high office. A year later, Mussolini, the first Fascist, strode onto the world stage as a harbinger of an altogether different future.

One issue of domestic policy would not tolerate being overlooked by Lloyd George, the preoccupied world statesman, and that was the matter of demobilization. The nation was understandably war-weary, as it had every right to be. Those who had opposed conscription or had accepted it reluctantly made the policy an issue of the December 1918 election. With the strong support of the trade unions, the Labour Party called for ‘the destruction of all war-time measures in restraint of civil or industrial liberty, [including] the repeal of the Defence of the Realm Act [and] the complete abolition of conscription’.⁶ Accused by Labourites during the campaign of harbouring a desire to maintain compulsory service as the primary method of raising troops in peacetime, Lloyd George denied any such plan. In his own constituency, election posters boldly declared: ‘Vote for the Prime Minister and No Conscription’.⁷

With the election victory safely in hand, the coalition Cabinet met Parliament to hear the Address from the Throne on 11 February 1919, and it contained the following phrase which troubled volunteers:

In order to reap the full fruits of victory and to safeguard the peace of the world an adequate Army must be maintained in the field, and proposals which will be necessary to secure the forces required submitted to you in due course.

The Government maintained a discreet silence on the meaning of the phrase, despite pressure from the Opposition benches both by Liberals and Labourites, until early March. On the 6th, the Chief Coalition Liberal Whip, Captain Frederick Guest, laid before the House a new Naval, Military and Air Force Service Bill, meant to prolong the military service both of conscripts and volunteers beyond the time of the signing of peace treaties with the Central Powers. Under no circumstances, the bill provided, should this extend beyond 30 April 1920. The major defender of the bill, Churchill, made it clear that the measure was no more than a stop-gap, as men in the Forces were entitled to a speedy demobilization beginning immediately after the conclusion of peace. The massive coalition majority ensured the passage of the bill in both Houses, and it received the Royal Assent on 16 April 1919, three months before the peace terms were laid before Parliament.

As it turned out, the Government was as good as its word on the questions of prolonged service and conscription. The stop-gap service bill was allowed to expire on 30 April 1920, as promised, and men conscripted under the various Military Service Acts were demobilized without the necessity of a measure repealing the acts. By 1920, voluntary enlistment was thought to be sufficient to ensure Britain's defense. Even the remnants of the No-Conscription Fellowship, that doughty group of religious and philosophical pacifists who – at remarkable personal sacrifice – opposed every detail of conscription policy and law, saw the fight as over. Professor Thomas Kennedy has written:

The anticonscription committee decided in March 1920 that the danger of conscription was so slight that, for the time being at least, no further anticonscription society was needed.⁸

The battle was over. Despite a few isolated attempts to popularize again the plan of Lord Roberts to initiate mandatory training – not

the least of these by Field Marshal Haig, by this time Commander-in-Chief of the Home Forces – all pro-conscription arguments fell on stony ground for many years thereafter. It is only fair that the final word at this point belong to the first historian of the conscription movement, Denis Hayes:

So military conscription was abolished in Britain. For years to come the nation trusted again to free enlistment. But the conflict had been largely won by the conscriptionists for, under great stress, the modern principle of conscription had been accepted, and a return to voluntarism was not to mean that the whole controversy was to be repeated. For only an emergency of sufficient gravity was required to raise the new as from the ashes of the old.⁹

The sufficiently grave emergency arose in April 1939, as war again hung over Europe. In a remarkable irony, the Prime Minister who was to compel British subjects again to serve in the Forces was Neville Chamberlain, once the first Director-General of National Service. The overwhelming majority of the nation – political parties, trade unions and electorate – accepted the policy as a logical step in preparation for the possibility of another major war. The explanation of why there was no reprise of the earlier story of conscription and politics is that the nation – and the world – had become a different place with different values and fears and options.

Conscription was impossible in the years before the Great War because Britons customarily relied upon the Royal Navy for protection; because the political parties (the only realistic engines for change in national policy-making) either genuinely doubted its value or feared the unpopularity of the idea; and because the financial and social costs were thought excessive for the questionable possible benefits. In a nation with a long developmental tradition of representative government and an equally ancient aversion toward standing armies, no political argument could convince the electorate or their leaders to move toward mandatory service. Yet the change came between 1914 and 1916, as these things slowly ceased to matter. The Fleet could not win the War, and the long tradition of voluntarism could not raise the troops needed for the war of attrition in France and Flanders. The turning to compulsory service – and the continual tightening of the grip of the Government on eligible men – became the new precedent. When another great conflict seemed imminent, Britain, like America, turned back to conscription because it seemed the natural, the logical path to follow.

Perhaps the greatest triumph of Lord Roberts and George F. Shee, of Lord Milner and General Sir Henry Wilson and their fellow compulsory-service zealots of the early years of the century, did not come until the appeasement policy of Neville Chamberlain collapsed and the nation quietly accepted a new national service law: conscription was not unEnglish after all.

II

In early 1938, as many in Europe – and elsewhere – debated the probability of a second world war, Sir Auckland Geddes addressed the subject of compulsory service in a letter to *The Times*. In it he wrote this brief valedictory of his work in the Lloyd George Cabinet:

With perhaps more knowledge than most of the working of conscription in this country, and as the only man now alive who has been responsible to Parliament for the day-to-day administration of compulsory military recruiting, I hold the fully matured opinion that on balance the imposition of military conscription added little if anything to the effective sum of our war effort.¹⁰

It is little wonder that this is a favourite quotation, frequently cited by those who opposed the imposition of conscription in 1916.¹¹ The weight of Geddes's words should not be minimized, of course, but there is more to this story. Two points should be made here. In the first place, the former Minister of National Service had been a pre-War supporter of the National Service League; and after November 1918 he simply returned to the policy of mandatory training expounded by Lord Roberts. He had, as we have seen, a great respect for the ability of civilian groups, in particular the trade unions, to make difficult the imposition of call-ups of conscripts. Geddes thought, as late as the end of 1938, that the NSL policy of compulsory training of so many years earlier, would accomplish the ends both of teaching military skills and inculcating the proper 'spirit' in British manhood.¹²

The second point is perhaps more significant: Geddes's experience both at the War Office and the National Service Ministry had been frustrating because of the drain on the national labour pool caused by unregulated recruiting during the initial year of warfare. Vast numbers of men had been accepted for service who were, in effect, the wrong men. While herculean efforts were made by the Ministry of Munitions and other departments to get them back into the skilled

trades where they were needed, the harm was never undone. In another letter to *The Times*, never cited in conjunction with its celebrated predecessor, Geddes indicated this view:

There would seem to be a fundamental misunderstanding. The primary function of a Ministry of National Service, if war come, [sic] will be to prevent the militant and pugnacious young men of the country flocking in excessive numbers into the fighting services to the detriment of essential civilian activities.¹³

Geddes's experience, then, was this: Mandatory service came too late to be of maximum use to him as the responsible arbiter of claims against the manpower pool. Too many of the most useful men had already joined the colours, and the years 1916 to 1918 were spent trying to mend what was irreparable damage. Geddes preferred, if another war came, to combine preparation through mandatory training with firm control over enlistment.

Evaluating manpower policy in the First World War is a daunting task, for there was, at least until late in the War, no single policy – there were many. The 'rally' enlistment period of the initial days of War was followed by localized attempts to retain skilled men in the factories through propaganda, encouragement and a kind of regulated voluntarism; this led to random badging which, in turn, was itself systematized by the work of the Ministry of Munitions. In the last year of the Asquith Government the nation finally turned to the two Military Service Acts, combined with attempts to stiffen exemption restrictions. Only in the last days of 1916 did two different Cabinets decide in favour of complete manpower control, including industrial compulsion. The latter of these two Governments, Lloyd George's unprecedented War Cabinet, was left to retreat from the policy before the uncompromising resistance of the angered trade unions. As has been illustrated above, statesmen and soldiers alike never gave up calling for the imposition of full national service, but the anxiety caused by labour's rejection of the policy was always strong enough to prevent its imposition. Pressure by the military authorities for more and still more men never relented.

Only in 1917, a year after military conscription had become law, was a responsible department of state created to formulate and enforce a comprehensive manpower program. The plan of its first executive officer, Neville Chamberlain, failed for want of the managerial and diplomatic skills required to catalyze labour, military and

political co-operation. Chamberlain sought the all-encompassing answer in the 'clean-cut', the calling-up of 'classes' of men based solely on age. Faced with the rigidity of the trade unions and the hostility of other Government departments, and clearly lacking the Prime Minister's confidence, Chamberlain resigned.

With the advent of the new Ministry of National Service, in August 1917, the most satisfactory plan for military-industrial manpower supply during the War period was formulated. Authority over all labour recruiting was finally vested in one office, and Geddes sought to enforce a statistically devised blueprint for the removal from civilian employ of all dispensable men, for service with the Forces. By the early spring of 1918, however, and the massive Kaiser Offensive, this plan also was virtually cast aside as even the most necessary civilian trades were stripped of men to stem the German assault. There was no greater proof of the desperation of the moment than the willingness on the part of the Government to consider conscription of a hostile and sullen Ireland.

One further point might be made. Geddes's comment in 1938, that conscription added 'little if anything' to the winning of the War, was the arguably hyperbolic remark of one who wished to emphasize the need for peacetime mandatory training on the old NSL model. What he wished for was a system which created a large pool of trained men. In the event of war, then, those who were needed could be called upon to serve. The statistics seem, at first glance at least, to lean toward supporting the argument that compulsion simply was not as successful as voluntarism. From August 1914 until June 1917 (including attestees under the Derby Scheme) 3 249 964 men voluntarily enlisted in the Forces. Under the various National Service Acts, 2 295 753 men were called up.¹⁴ Clearly, voluntarism raised more men than compulsion.

It is equally true, however, that voluntary enlistment entailed two severe flaws. In the first place, the rate of voluntary enlistment dropped drastically after January 1915, and no amount of propaganda or implied threats could resuscitate the moribund system. By the close of that year it is undeniable that Britain could not maintain her armies so long as she relied on voluntary recruiting. Perhaps even more important was the fact that the system of unregulated voluntarism had witnessed an Army hungry for soldiers capturing in its nets many of the absolutely wrong men. Turners and fitters, metalsmiths and miners were enlisted, trained and packed off to France before

Government policy was adjusted to prevent this suicidal drain. It is no exaggeration to suggest that the Recruiting Department of the War Office had taken vast numbers of the wrong men.

By the time military conscription became law, it was virtually too late for the imposition of a comprehensive and statistically balanced manpower policy; and munitions shops, farms and mines competed openly with the military for the services of the men who remained. Conscription was necessary even then if the War was to be continued, for the demonstrated reason that sufficient numbers of men were not being raised through voluntarism. However, it is clear that the policy was adopted well past the time when it might have enabled the Government to organize British manpower for maximum wartime efficiency. That sober functionalism would be left to the second general conflict of the century, another lesson learned from the Great War.

Notes and References

Preface and Acknowledgements

1. See Michael Powicke, *Military Obligations in Medieval England* (Oxford, 1962); Stephen J. Stearns, 'Conscription and English Society in the 1620s', the *Journal of British Studies*, May 1972; and J. R. Western, *The English Militia in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1965).

1 Victorian Legacy

1. The latest interpretation of the South African conflict is Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London, 1979). See also Maj.-Gen. Sir Frederick Maurice and M. H. Grant, *History of the War in South Africa, 1899-1902*, 4 vols (London, 1906-10); and L. S. Amery (ed.), *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, 6 vols (London, 1900-9).
2. G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency* (Oxford, 1971) p. 37.
3. *The Times*, 4 January 1902.
4. Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, 1968) p. 21.
5. The best study of British invasion literature remains I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War, 1763-1984* (Oxford, 1966).
6. Hynes, *Edwardian Turn of Mind*, pp. 40-41. See also H. R. Moon, 'The Invasion of the United Kingdom: Public Controversy and Official Planning, 1888-1918', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1968.
7. Zara S. Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War* (London, 1977) p. 156.
8. See John Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883-1940* (London, 1977).
9. The tie to 'muscular Christianity' was not broken, however, as the secularized drill associations maintained an inoffensive but suitably 'manly' Protestant outlook. See *ibid.*, p. 58. Lord Meath, an advocate of compulsory military service, merged his Lads' Drill Association with the National Service League in 1906. Haldane, it should be added, found the boys' drill organizations so useful that he tried to absorb them into his Territorial Force scheme. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
10. See William Hillcourt and Lady Baden-Powell, *Baden-Powell* (London, 1964) p. 302.
11. Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society*, p. 57.
12. *Report of the Inter-Department Committee on Physical Deterioration*, Cd 2175 (1904), cited in Anne Summers, 'Militarism in Great Britain Before the Great War', *History Workshop Journal*, 2 (August 1976) p. 111. See also the article, 'The Deteriorization of the National Physique' by George F. Shee, one of the principal founders of the National Service League, in *The Nineteenth Century and After*, vol. 53 (1903) pp. 797-805.
13. See Arthur Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era*, vol. I (London, 1961), which remains the best work on the *Dreadnought* programme.

14. Pakenham, *Boer War*, pp. 607-8.
15. *Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, Cd 1789-1792 (1903).
16. Elie Halevy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. VI, *The Rule of Democracy, 1905-1914* (London, 1961 ed.) p. 165.
17. Balfour revealed this information to Parliament on 16 May 1901: 94 H.C. Deb., 4 s. col. 382-3. See also Lowell J. Satre, 'The Unionists and Army Reform, 1900-1903: The Abortive Proposals of St. John Brodrick', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1968, pp. 25-6.
18. See *The Report of the Royal Commission on the Militia and Volunteers*, Cd 2061-2063 (1904).
19. Ibid. Two members of the commission, Col. Satherwaite and Col. Dalmahoy, submitted a minority report recording their opposition to this section of the report - though neither opposed compulsory service, they refused to accede to any reference to conscription on the continental model. See Denis Hayes, *Conscription Conflict* (London, 1949) p. 31. Wilkinson claimed that he was the only commissioner who did not favour conscription, though he did sign the majority report. See Hugh Cunningham, *The Volunteer Force: A Social and Political History, 1859-1908* (London, 1975) p. 132.
20. Cd 2061-2063 (1904).
21. See 'Remarks on Report by the RC on Militia and Volunteers', 30 May 1904, CAB 37/71/73. See also Col. J. K. Dunlop, *The Development of The British Army, 1899-1914* (London, 1938) p. 176; and Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*, p. 33.
22. Esher was the prototype of the political 'insider'; he wielded great influence without the necessity of assuming responsible office, and did so not because of who he was or what he did, but because of who he knew. See Oliver Viscount Esher (ed.), *The Captains and the Kings Depart: Journals and Letters of Reginald Viscount Esher* (New York, 1938), a fascinating, though massive, collection of memorabilia of a man who literally knew everyone worth knowing. See also the excellent modern biography, Peter Fraser, *Lord Esher* (London, 1973).
23. *Report of the War Office Reconstitution Committee*, Cd 1932 (1904). See also John Gooch, *The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy c. 1900-1916* (London, 1974) ch. 2, 'The Triumph of Lord Esher'.
24. See Lowell Satre, 'St. John Brodrick and Army Reform, 1901-1903', the *Journal of British Studies*, vol. XV, no. 2 (Spring 1976).
25. See Dunlop, *Development of the British Army*, ch. 9, 'Mr. Arnold-Forster Takes Office, October 6, 1903'; and Albert Tucker, 'The Issue of Army Reform in the Unionist Government, 1903-5', the *Historical Journal*, vol. IX (1966).
26. See *The Times*, 27 February 1902. See also: Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*, pp. 36-7; L. S. Amery, *My Political Life*, vol. I (London, 1953) pp. 215-16; and J. E. B. Seeley, *Adventure* (London, 1930) p. 92.
27. The National Service League was not the first such organization of its kind. It is probable that the founders of the NSL were inspired by the success of the Navy League, which preceded it by ten years and which

- gave birth, in turn, to the Imperial Maritime League. In 1906, Lt.-Col. Charles à Court Repington founded the National Defense Association, also presided over by Lord Roberts, which sought essentially the same goals as the NSL. See Admiral C. C. Penrose-Fitzgerald, 'The Unrest of Insecurity', the *Nineteenth Century and After*, July 1908, pp. 162-3.
28. Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*, p. 37.
 29. See *National Service Journal*, March 1904.
 30. *The Times*, 8 May 1914, where the figure 270 000 is given. It is, no doubt, inflated. However, there is no question that the League had grown enormously from the small band of founders in 1905.
 31. The *Nineteenth Century and After*, LVII (January 1905) pp. 1-26.
 32. See David James, *Lord Roberts* (London, 1959) pp. 414-15.
 33. *The Times*, 2 August 1905.
 34. Both Balfour and Arnold-Forster desired Roberts's retirement from the CID, but the Prime Minister lamented to his War Secretary, 'Of course, we cannot get rid of the old man.' Fraser, *Lord Esher*, p. 159.
 35. 3 November 1905, CAB 38/78.
 36. F. S. Oliver, *Ordeal by Battle* (London, 1916, abridged version) p. x.
 37. See Gooch, *Plans of War*, pp. 278-9.
 38. James, *Lord Roberts*, p. 456.
 39. *Draft Report on the Possibility of Serious Invasion: Home Defence*, 11 November 1903, CAB 3/1/18A.
 40. 146 H.C. Deb., 4 s, col. 118.
 41. Halevy, *History of the English People*, vol. VI, p. 159.

2 Conscription Controversy

1. See Peter Fraser, *Lord Esher* (London, 1973) p. 159. Lord Roberts, during his term as Commander-in-Chief, had seen first-hand the force of public opinion and the censure of the press over the Kinloch affair, a scandal created by revelations of 'hazing' among junior officers of the Grenadier Guards. The public, however, overwhelmingly supported his position at the time. See Thomas C. Kennedy, 'Airing the Dirty Linen of an Unreformed Army: The Kinloch Affair, 1902-1903', *Military Affairs*, April 1979.
2. Rt. Hon. H. H. Asquith (The Earl of Oxford and Asquith), *Genesis of the War* (London, 1923) p. 139.
3. Caroline Playne, *The Pre-War Mind in Britain: An Historical Review* (London, 1928) p. 147.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
5. See *The Times*, 29 June 1910, and the *Spectator*, 8 August 1914, p. 187.
6. L. S. Amery, *My Political Life*, vol. I, p. 214.
7. See A. M. Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics: A Study of Lord Milner in Opposition and in Power* (London, 1964) p. 189.
8. Leo Amery attempted to convince Milner to accept the presidency of the Tariff Reform League after Joseph Chamberlain's retirement from

public life. The plan foundered, however, when funds proved insufficient for Milner's ambitious plans. See *ibid*, p. 114.

9. See Robert J. Scally, *Origins of the Lloyd George Coalition* (Princeton, 1975) p. 130.
10. For the Coefficients Club see *ibid*, p. 79 ff, and G. R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency* (Oxford, 1971) pp. 150–52.
11. See Amery, *My Political Life*, vol. I, pp. 264–5.
12. *Ibid*, p. 53.
13. Halevy, *History of the English People*, vol. VI, p. 155.
14. Scally, *Origins of the Lloyd George Coalition*, p. 130.
15. 26 February 1907, Maxse Papers, 457.
16. *The Spectator*, 27 April 1907.
17. I am grateful for having had the opportunity to read the unpublished paper of Professor Thomas C. Kennedy, 'The Endangered Empire and the Nation in Arms: The National Service League in Edwardian England'. See also Anne Summers, 'Militarism in Britain Before the Great War', *History Workshop Journal*, no. 2 (August 1976) p. 113.
18. See Lord Roberts's letter to *The Times* of 9 October 1911, for example, in which he wrote:

The conditions amid which millions of our people are living appear to me to make it natural that they should not care a straw under what rule they may be called upon to dwell and I quite understand their want of patriotism.

See also Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960) p. 220.

19. Blatchford published his autobiography many years after these events, *My Eighty Years* (London, 1931). The sole biographical study of his long career is Laurence Thompson, *Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman* (London, 1951).
20. *Ibid*, p. 215.
21. 25 June 1908, Maxse Papers, 458. Harry Quelch, Hyndman's ally in the Social Democratic Federation, was editor of *Justice* and co-founder of the Labour Representation Committee. Thorne, a Labour MP and leader of the Gasworkers, proposed on several different occasions grafting conscription on to the Territorial scheme, to further 'democratize' it. It was not a popular plan among his fellow Labour parliamentarians or trade unionists. See the *Labour Leader*, 7 June 1907, and 8 September 1911, cited in Kennedy, 'National Service League'.
22. The *Annual Reports* of the Trade Union Congress evidence the same feeling; see, for example, that of 1909, when a 'citizen army' proposal was voted down 933 to 102.
23. *The Nation*, 19 October 1912.
24. 19 July 1912, Maxse Papers, 466.
25. 16 March 1913, Bonar Law Papers, 29/2/25.
26. See *The Times*, 29 June 1911.
27. Summers, 'Militarism in Britain', p. 113.
28. 6 July 1912, Bonar Law Papers, 26/5/11.

29. Allan Ramsay Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home: The Recruitment and Terms and Conditions of the British Regulars, 1859-1899* (London, 1976) p. 265. Brodrick had said in the House in March 1901:

I do not doubt that man for man a voluntary army is better than a conscription army, but man for man a trained army is better than an incompletely trained army of volunteers and especially if it happens to outnumber them. Therefore, my adhesion to the voluntary system is strictly limited by our ability to obtain under it a force with which our military authorities can satisfy the Government that they have sufficient force to resist invasion and can maintain it to their satisfaction. (90 H.C. Deb., 4 s., col. 1060)

In regard to the matter of consideration given to mandatory service during the Boer War and Brodrick's role in raising the issue, see Satre, 'Unionists and Army Reform', pp. 59-63 and 114-28.

30. See Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment* (London, 1972) p. 23.
31. For the Stanhope Memorandum, see Gooch, *Plans of War*, p. 12.
32. Nicholas d'Ombrain, *War Machinery and High Policy: Defence Administration in Peacetime Britain, 1902-1914* (Oxford, 1973) p. 141.
33. The standard life of Wilson has been Maj.-Gen. Sir C. E. Callwell, *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: His Life and Diaries*, 2 vols (London, 1927). A more recent and far more critical study is Bernard Ash, *The Lost Dictator* (London, 1968). Repington has no biographer but there is the excellent essay on him by Jay Luvaas: *The Education of an Army: British Military Thought, 1815-1940* (Chicago, 1964) ch. 9. See also the brief essay by W. Michael Ryan, 'The Invasion Controversy of 1906-1908: Lieutenant Charles à Court Repington and British Perceptions of the German Menace', *Military Affairs*, February 1980, in which it is indicated the author is preparing a life of Repington.
34. Lord Roberts's country house, Englemere, was only a short distance from Camberley, allowing Wilson easy access to the President of the National Service League.
35. Luvaas, *Education of an Army*, p. 297.
36. See Ryan, 'Invasion Controversy of 1906-1908', and Ash, *The Lost Dictator*, p. 70.
37. Arnold-Forster Diary, entry of 5 August 1904, Arnold-Forster Papers, Add. MSS. 50339, cited in d'Ombrain, *War Machinery and High Policy*, p. 148.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
39. Hamilton to Lady Roberts, 18 December 1910, Hamilton Papers.
40. Nicholas J. d'Ombrain, 'The Imperial General staff and the Military Policy of a "Continental Strategy" during the 1911 International Crisis', *Military Affairs*, October 1970, p. 90. In regard to the evolution of a 'continental strategy' into a 'continental commitment', between the years 1905 and 1911, see also d'Ombrain, *War Machinery and High Policy*, chs 1-2; Howard, *Continental Commitment*, chs 1-2 and Samuel Williamson, *The Politics of Grand Strategy: Britain and France Prepare for War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969) chs. 3-4 and 7.

41. See J. E. Tyler, *The British Army and the Continent, 1904–1914* (London, 1938) ch. 2.
42. Williamson, *Politics of Grand Strategy*, pp. 70–71.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
44. Regarding the 'new professionals' and the Entente, it has been noted: '[unable to force conscription] they accepted entry into Europe on the basis of the handful of soldiers who comprised the British Army rather than abandon the independent role that was the *raison d'être* of their professionalism'. D'Ombraïn, *War Machinery and High Policy*, p. 148.
45. Richard Burdon Haldane, *An Autobiography* (London, 1929) p. 182. In the same vein, J. A. Spender reported "‘Serve him right,’ a friend of the Prime Minister exclaimed when the word of Haldane's appointment went round Whitehall." *The Life of the Right Honourable Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman* (London, 1923) vol. II p. 198. Haldane's innocent pre-War statement that Germany was his 'spiritual home', along with his famous love of German culture made him a favoured target of hysterical anti-Germanism in the early years of the First World War.
46. Edward M. Spiers, *Haldane: An Army Reformer* (Edinburgh, 1980) p. 47. This book is the most useful study of the Haldane army reforms.
47. See Ian Worthington, 'Socialization, Militarization and Officer Recruiting: The Development of the Officers Training Corps', *Military Affairs*, April 1979.
48. See Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform*, p. 109.
49. Spender Papers, Add. MSS. 46390, F. 152. See Stephen Koss, *Haldane, Scapegoat for Liberalism* (New York, 1969) p. 51.
50. *The Times*, 11 February 1909.
51. Gen. Sir Horace Smith-Dorien, *Memoir of Forty-Eight Years Service* (London, 1925) p. 352.
52. For the General Staff study, which he mistakenly dates as 'about 1910', see Haldane, *Autobiography*, p. 196. See also Spiers, *An Army Reformer*, pp. 23–4. In April 1913, Sir John French and Lt.-Gen. Launcelot Kiggell would join Maj-Gen. Henry Wilson in submission of a paper stating the preference of the General Staff for some form of conscription. Diary entry of 12 April 1913, Wilson Papers.
53. M. J. Allison, 'The National Service Issue, 1899–1914', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1975, p. 284.
54. On 3 April 1907 the League wrote to the major London newspapers announcing their qualified approval of the Haldane plan in essentially these terms. Roberts spoke in Birmingham the following day offering the outline of these criticisms, which remained unchanged for the remainder of the pre-War period. See also Austen Chamberlain, *Politics from Inside* (London, 1936) p. 55.
55. Koss, *Haldane*, p. 52.
56. Spiers, *An Army Reformer*, p. 183.

3 The Invasion Debate

1. Always the most vehement in its criticism of the Haldane plan was the *National Review* of Leopold Maxse. The *Daily Express*, the *Morning*

- Post* and the Northcliffe newspapers were highly critical; the *Evening Standard* delivered perhaps the unkindest cut of all by suggesting in 1908 that Haldane be replaced by the Radical pacifist, John Burns. See Spiers, *An Army Reformer*, p. 168.
2. The bill was overwhelmingly defeated on its first reading. The National Service League's official publication observed in 1908 that history taught that this frequently occurred 'in respect to the first Bill in which any reform has been embodied'. Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*, pp. 88-9.
 3. The Earl had attempted a similar maneuver in July 1904. The Ballot Act remained on the law books, though it was annually suspended.
 4. See Ryan, 'The Invasion Controversy of 1906-1908'.
 5. Ibid. See also James, *Lord Roberts*, p. 425.
 6. For Beresford's role in this episode, see Gooch, *The Plans of War*, p. 284.
 7. CAB 1/7/740. Copies of this letter are preserved in the Roberts Papers and the Balfour Papers, and substantial portions are printed in James, *Lord Roberts*, pp. 426-30.
 8. CAB 16/3A, *Report and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee of Imperial Defence, Appointed by the Prime Minister to Reconsider the Question of Oversea Attack*.
 9. M. V. Brett, *Journals and Letters of Reginald, Viscount Esher* (London, 1935) vol. II, p. 263.
 10. *The National Review*, December 1907, p. 579.
 11. CAB 16/3A. See also Lord Hankey, *The Supreme Command, 1914-18* (London, 1961) vol. I, pp. 68-9.
 12. CAB 16/3B.
 13. *The Times*, 21 August 1908, protested the lengths to which the spy mania had gone by this time. See also Halevy, *History of the English People*, vol. VI, p. 395.
 14. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War*, p. 149.
 15. Howard, *Continental Commitment*, p. 38.
 16. Koss, *Asquith*, p. 109.
 17. The *National Service (Training and Home Defence) Bill* is printed in General Sir Ian Hamilton, *Compulsory Service*, 2nd edn, (London, 1911).
 18. *National Review*, April 1908, p. 315.
 19. Koss, *Haldane*, p. 101.
 20. Spiers, *An Army Reformer*, p. 171.
 21. See Gooch, *The Plans of War*, p. 285, and Moon, 'The Invasion of the United Kingdom', pp. 350-74.
 22. Spiers, *An Army Reformer*, pp. 171-2.
 23. James, *Lord Roberts*, p. 439. Landsdowne had also introduced a still-borne Militia Ballot Bill in 1899, explaining in this latter debate that he wished merely to update what was, after all, the law of the land. See Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*, p. 34.
 24. The single most important work on this subject remains George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (New York, 1935). Also very useful is Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, chs 1 and 2.
 25. See *The Times*, 29 June 1911.
 26. 6 February 1909, p. 167.

27. See John D. Fair, *British Interparty Conferences: A Study of the Procedure of Conciliation in British Politics, 1867-1921* (Oxford, 1980) ch. 4. For Garvin's role in bringing about the conference, see A. M. Gollin, *The Observer and J. L. Garvin, 1908-1914: A Study in a Great Editorship* (London, 1960) ch. 6.
28. John Grigg, *Lloyd George: The People's Champion, 1902-1911* (London, 1978) p. 264.
29. The memorandum, dated 17 August 1910, is preserved in the Lloyd George Papers, C/6/5/9. It is printed as an Appendix to Grigg, *People's Champion*, and in Scally, *Origins of the Lloyd George Coalition*, which also includes, in Appendix B, the supplementary memorandum of 29 October 1910. The assumption of Lloyd George's philosophical pacifism is made all the more curious by the fact that he served in the Volunteer Force as a young man.
30. *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George* (London, 1936) vol. I, p. 36.
31. See General Sir Ian Hamilton to Field Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood, 7 January 1911, preserved in the Hamilton Papers, in which the author explains the origins of the lengthy paper published as *Compulsory Service*.
32. R. B. Haldane to General Sir Ian Hamilton, 26 November 1910, Hamilton Papers.
33. James, *Lord Roberts*, p. 449. In this regard, see also Lady Nora Roberts to R. B. Haldane, 5 December 1910, Hamilton Papers, in which Lady Roberts plainly indicates that she blamed Hamilton and not the War Secretary for the book. She enclosed this letter when writing to Hamilton four days later and lectured her husband's former pupil for 'disloyalty to your old commander'. Roberts was incapable of bearing a grudge, and Hamilton and his wife were invited to their customary places as guests of Lord and Lady Roberts during Ascot weekend. See Koss, *Haldane*, p. 103.
34. Admiral Lord Charles Beresford published *The Betrayal* (London, 1911) attacking his colleagues for their co-operation with the War Office and Admiralty politicians at the sacrifice of national defence. Beresford, it will be recalled, supplied information to Roberts and the National Service League both before and after the 1908 invasion inquiry. See Gooch, *Plans of War*, p. 284, and Spiers, *An Army Reformer*, pp. 179-81.
35. *National Review*, January 1912, p. 1006. In regard to the cooling of relations between the League and the Haldane War Office, see Williamson, *Politics of Grand Strategy*, pp. 304-5.
36. Lord Roberts to R. D. Blumenfeld, 22 September 1912, Blumenfeld Papers. Four years earlier, the recipient of this letter had written to a fellow journalist, the editor of the *Standard*, lamenting that he had been unable to get Lord Roberts to take a more aggressive line on mandatory service (and presumably against Haldane) in the *Daily Express*. R. D. Blumenfeld to H. A. Gwynne, 6 October 1908, Blumenfeld Papers.
37. In regard to the conscriptionists' attempts to bring influential politicians to the point of publicly endorsing national service, see the exchange of letters of 21-23 January 1912 between Roberts and Winston Churchill,

- then First Lord of the Admiralty, in which the latter admits to being 'disposed differently toward' compulsory service than earlier in his career. This correspondence is preserved in the Roberts papers, and portions are printed in James, *Lord Roberts*, pp. 451-4.
38. James, *Lord Roberts*, p. 457. For the reaction to the address, see Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*, ch. 9.
 39. Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*, p. 111.
 40. For the 1913 inquiry, see Williamson, *Politics of Grand Strategy*, p. 306.
 41. CAB 38/26/13.
 42. For the National Service (Territorial Force) Bill of March 1913, see Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*, pp. 128-32.
 43. The diehard peer, in March 1914, proposed that public school and university graduates and those entering the 'higher professions such as the Bar, the Services, Medicine, Surgery, Dentistry, Banking or the Exchange, or enjoy an income of £400 a year' should submit to mandatory training. The bill failed on its second reading. See Maxse's expression of support for the plan in the *National Review*, May 1914, p. 429. The National Service League did not endorse this unusual bill, though the mover was a member, and Lord Newton put down an amendment which, had the bill come to a second reading, would have killed it. The fear of Roberts and his colleagues was, of course, in being associated with the class differentiation embodied in the bill. See Lord Newton to Lord Willoughby de Broke, 7 March 1914, Willoughby de Broke Papers.
 44. See *The Times*, 25 November 1913. The Voluntary Service Committee issued in early 1914 *The Case for Voluntary Service*, a comprehensive handbook of arguments for voluntarists, intended to counter the campaign of the National Service League. See also Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*, ch. 11.

4 The Lamps Go Out

1. See Joachim Remak, *Serajevo, The Story of a Political Murder* (New York, 1959), and Vladimir Dedijer, *The Road to Serajevo* (New York, 1966), for the place of the assassination in the coming of the World War.
2. The Earl of Oxford and Asquith, *Memories and Reflections, 1852-1927*, (London, 1928) vol. II, pp. 10, 12 and 25-6.
3. Paul Hayes, *The Twentieth Century, 1880-1939* (London, 1970) p. 169.
4. See Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York, 1967).
5. Lord Beauchamp and Sir John Simon also resigned but were convinced to remain in the Cabinet.
6. Regarding Lloyd George's position on the eve of British intervention, see Cameron Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War, July 1914 to May 1915: A Prologue to the Triumph of Lloyd George* (London, 1971) ch. 5.
7. *War Memoirs*, vol. I, p. 70.

8. Sir Philip Magnus, *Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist* (London, 1959) pp. 276–7. See also George H. Casser, *Kitchener: Architect of Victory* (London, 1977) pp. 170–77.
9. The task was not financially unprofitable to Kitchener, as he continued to receive his military salary, in addition to which was added his salary as Secretary of State and a special allowance of £1140 per year. Anticipating a successful end to his leadership, he presumed there would be a Parliamentary grant as reward for his winning of the War. See Magnus, *Kitchener*, p. 278.
10. Lady Violet Bonham Carter, *Winston Churchill As I Knew Him* (London 1959) p. 257.
11. See Gooch, *Plans of War*, pp. 304–5.
12. 5 August, 1914, CAB 43/1/3.
13. For French's position, see Gooch, *Plans of War*, p. 301; see also Sir Douglas Haig to General Philip Howell, n.d. (c. 5 August 1914), Howell Papers, IV/C/2/39.
14. J. A. Pease to his wife, 7 August 1914, Gainford Papers.
15. A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914–1945* (London, 1965) p. 8.
16. Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1914–1918*, vol. I (London, 1923) p. 253.
17. Viscount Grey of Fallodon, *Twenty-Five Years, 1892–1916*, vol. II (London, 1925) p. 68.
18. Casser, *Kitchener*, p. 196.
19. Duncan Crow, *A Man of Push and Go: The Life of George Macauley Booth* (London, 1965) p. 137.
20. 27 January 1915, CAB 42/1/25.
21. Sir George Arthur, *The Life of Lord Kitchener*, vol. III (London, 1920) p. 265.
22. See John Morton Osborne, *The Voluntary Recruiting Movement in Britain, 1914–1916* (New York, 1982) ch. 1.
23. See the War Office *Regulations for Recruiting for the Regular Army and the Special Reserve* (London, 1912).
24. Osborne, *Voluntary Recruiting Movement*, p. 7.
25. Casser, *Kitchener*, p. 202.
26. General Sir Henry Wilson opposed him within the Army in regard to the deployment of the BEF, the raising of the New Armies and the use to which each would be put in the War, though his opposition was always covert. In August and September, Wilson was certain the war would be over before the New Armies could have any effect. See Wilson to Leopold Maxse, 22 September 1914, and Maxse to Wilson, 26 September 1914, condemning the raising of the New Armies and declaring their use as anything except reserves for the BEF as disaster. Wilson Papers.
27. The Kitchener Divisions were numbered 9 to 26, and 30 to 41. Twenty-two of these served their entire wartime duty on the Western Front. See Howard Green, *The British Army in the First World War* (London, 1968) p. 63.
28. Amery, *My Political Life*, vol. II, p. 24.
29. Magnus, *Kitchener*, p. 290.
30. *Ibid*, p. 291.

31. Gen. The Rt Hon. Sir Nevil Macready, *Annals of an Active Life* (London, 1925) vol. I, p. 245. The sole defence among contemporary historians of Kitchener's decision to raise the New Armies independently is found in Casser, *Kitchener*, pp. 199–201.
32. Cited in Dangerfield, *Strange Death of Liberal England*, p. 440.
33. Basil W. Williams, *Raising and Training the New Armies* (London, 1918) p. 6.
34. Osborne, *Recruiting Movement*, p. 22.
35. A. B. Dearle, *The Labour Cost of the World War to Great Britain, 1914–1918* (London, 1922) p. 8.
36. Diary entry, 12 September 1914, Amery Papers. In fact, these are *aides-mémoire*, rather than an orthodox diary, presumably filled in after the day in question and the resolution of the issue noted.
37. See Arthur, *Kitchener*, vol. III, p. 312.
38. Bonar Law's letter to the Prime Minister of 2 August 1914 is printed in its entirety in Lord Blake, *The Unknown Prime Minister: The Life and Times of Andrew Bonar Law, 1858–1923* (London, 1955) p. 222. The truce agreement negotiated by the three party whips, Percy Illingworth (Liberal), Lord Edmund Talbot (Conservative) and Arthur Henderson (Labour), was signed 28 August 1914, Asquith Papers, 26/13.
39. The minutes of the various meetings of the main and sub-committees of the PRC are preserved in the British Library, Add. MSS. 54192. See Roy Douglas, 'Voluntary Enlistment in the First World War and the Work of the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee', *Journal of Modern History*, December 1970.
40. For the pioneering role of advertising professionals in the recruitment campaigns both before and during the War, see Eric Field, *Advertising: The Forgotten Years* (London, 1959) pp. 27–30. All reactions to the publicity campaign of those who supported enthusiastic pursuit of the War were not positive. See Oliver, *Ordeal by Battle*, pp. 256–8.
41. Dearle, *Labour Cost of the War*, p. 8.
42. The Parliamentary Labour Party formed its own recruiting committee, which merged with the PRC in October 1915. Perhaps the most colourful recruiter was Horatio Bottomley, editor and proprietor of the jingoistic *John Bull* and, for a time, an independent MP. He was the darling of the patriotic working class for most of the War period, and his rallies invariably raised large sums in contributions 'for the lads' – which frequently never left Bottomley's pockets. He later was tried, convicted and imprisoned for fraud. See J. Symons, *Horatio Bottomley* (London, 1955).
43. Sir William Robertson Nicoll to St Loe Strachey, 18 November 1914, Strachey Papers.
44. Margot Asquith to Lord Milner, 12 January 1915, Milner Papers.
45. A copy of this letter of 27 January 1915 may be found in the Balfour Papers, Add. MSS. 49693/197–199.
46. A copy of this letter of 27 January 1915 may also be found in the Balfour Papers, Add. MSS. 49693/190–196.
47. Prince Louis of Battenberg, First Sea Lord at the outset of the War, was

driven from his post by the anti-German hysteria which characterized that period of the War.

48. Diary entry of 25 August 1914, quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill* (London, 1973) companion vol. III, part 2, p. 54. Charles Hobhouse noted in his diary on the same day:

I said a proposal of F.E. Smith to explain, through M.P.'s, the reasons for . . . the war should be accepted and put into force now. If it caught on K. would get a second 100,000 voluntarily and *then* we could fall back on conscription. However, the P.M. was determined that only his eloquence and that of Grey could rouse the country to a sense of duty and peril, and that neither could spare time for speeches.

Edward David (ed.), *Inside Asquith's Cabinet: From the Diaries of Charles Hobhouse* (London, 1977) pp. 184-5.

49. Diary entry of 25 August 1914, quoted in Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War*, p. 301. Lord Emmot, then Alfred Emmott, had defeated Churchill when the latter contested the Oldham by-election as a Conservative in 1899.
50. The Prime Minister's correspondence with Miss Stanley is revealing both about him and those whom he knew. He kept virtually nothing back from her, and she was a loyal guardian of his secrets. His letters to her have recently been published: see Michael and Eleanor Brock (eds) *H. H. Asquith: Letters to Venetia Stanley* (Oxford, 1983).
51. See Lord Curzon to Austen Chamberlain, 27 October 1914, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 13/3/22, and Walter Long to Lord Kitchener, 2 December 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/73/16.
52. Lord Milner to Leopold Amery, 14 December 1914, Amery Papers.
53. John Baird to 'My dear General', 5 December 1914, Wilson Papers.
54. Lord Curzon to Austen Chamberlain, 27 October 1914, Austen Chamberlain papers, AC 13/3/22.
55. Lord Northcliffe to H. H. Asquith, 3 November 1914, Northcliffe Papers.
56. Lord Northcliffe to Percy H. Illingworth, MP, 26 November 1914, Northcliffe Papers.
57. Andrew Bonar Law to F. S. Oliver, 18 December 1914, Bonar Law Papers, 37/4/39, and Andrew Bonar Law to Lord Hugh Cecil, 10 November 1914, 37/4/27.
58. Amery, *My Political Life*, vol. II. p. 71.
59. Lord Milner to General Sir Henry Wilson, 25 September 1914, Wilson Papers.
60. Walter Long to Lord Kitchener, 2 December 1914, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/73/16.
61. See Casser, *Kitchener*, ch. 21, for a defense of Kitchener's position regarding conscription.
62. Magnus, *Kitchener*, p. 332.
63. Sir William Robertson Nicoll to St Loe Strachey, 11 November 1914, Strachey Papers.
64. St Loe Strachey to General Sir Henry Sclater, 8 December 1914, Strachey Papers.
65. *Lord Riddell's War Diary, 1914-1918* (London, 1933) p. 46.
66. 22 February 1915, CAB 42/1/38.

5 The Politics of Coalition

1. See Blake, *Unknown Prime Minister*, pp. 227–30.
2. Andrew Bonar Law to Herbert Henry Asquith, 7 August 1914, Bonar Law Papers, 34/6/16.
3. Lord Hugh Cecil to Andrew Bonar Law, 11 August 1914, Bonar Law Papers, 34/6/37.
4. Blake, *Unknown Prime Minister*, p. 229.
5. Henry Chaplin to Andrew Bonar Law, 14 September 1914, Bonar Law Papers, 34/6/66.
6. The term was first applied to this period of intense recruiting by Basil Williams. See *Raising and Training the New Armies*, ch. 2.
7. Bonar Law and Lansdowne were offered access to papers presented to the War Council; few, however, were produced before the coming of the coalition. Correspondence among the Conservative leaders at this time was almost uniformly against coalition, though Chief Whip Lord Edmund Talbot did forward to Bonar Law on 2 September 1914 a letter he received the previous day from J. F. Hope, suggesting reconsideration of this policy. Lord Edmund advised against Hope's wishes. Bonar Law Papers, 34/5/6.
8. CAB 42/1/39.
9. *The Times*, 1 March 1915.
10. See R. J. Q. Adams, *Arms and the Wizard* (London, 1978) ch. 2, for this committee stage of recognition of the munitions shortage.
11. W. A. S. Hewins, *The Apologia of an Imperialist: Forty Years of Empire Policy* (London, 1929) vol. II, p. 21.
12. 21 March 1915, Beaverbrook Papers, C/318.
13. Hewins, *Apologia of an Imperialist*, vol. II, p. 25.
14. Sir John French was playing a double game at this point: assuring Kitchener that shell supplies were adequate, thus gaining permission to carry out his programmes, while conducting a covert campaign to force a greater munitions production policy out of the Government. See Adams, *Arms and the Wizard*, p. 195, n. 10.
15. Koss, *Asquith*, p. 181.
16. Hewins, *Apologia of an Imperialist*, vol. II, p. 29.
17. See the excerpts 'copied from an old diary' of Austen Chamberlain, entry of 14 May 1915, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 12/37. See also Sir Charles Petrie, *The Life and Letters of the Right Honourable Sir Austen Chamberlain, K.G., P.C., M.P.* (London, 1940) vol. II, p. 20.
18. Quotations are from the second draft of the proposed letter and contain Bonar Law's emendations – the final paragraph having been added by him – to Lansdowne's original effort. Bonar Law Papers, 117/1/19.
19. Reginald Pound and Geoffrey Harmsworth, *Northcliffe* (London, 1959) p. 475.
20. See *The History of the Times* (London, 1952) vol. IV, part 1, p. 274; Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics*, pp. 255–66; and Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War*, ch. 6.
21. This memorandum is printed in Viscount French, *1914* (London, 1919) pp. 358–61.
22. Hewins, *Apologia of an Imperialist*, pp. 30–31.
23. See Blake, *Unknown Prime Minister*, pp. 241–3.

24. Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics*, p. 258.
25. Fisher, having addressed the envelope in his unmistakable hand, mailed an old cutting from the *Pall Mall Gazette* to Bonar Law stating that 'Lord Fisher was received in audience of the King and remained there about half an hour' which the latter received on Saturday 15 May. Lord Beaverbrook, *Politicians and the War* (London, 1960) pp. 105-6.
26. *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, vol. I, p. 201.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Lloyd George: A Diary by Frances Stevenson*, ed. by A. J. P. Taylor (London, 1971) entry of 18 May 1915, p. 51.
29. In this regard, see Gerald Henry Starbuck Jordan, 'The Politics of Conscription in Britain, 1905-1916', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1974, pp. 85-6; and Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War*, pp. 265-6.
30. Austen Chamberlain prepared a lengthy *aide-mémoire* of his own knowledge of the formation of the coalition, largely gained through conversation with Bonar Law. Dated 17 May 1915, it is preserved in the Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 2/2/25.
31. Jenkins, *Asquith*, pp. 364-6.
32. Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: The Challenge of War, 1914-1916*, vol. III (London, 1971) p. 447.
33. For the significance of the Venetia Stanley affair, see Koss, *Asquith*, pp. 186-7; Jenkins, *Asquith*, pp. 364-6; and Brock and Brock (eds), *Letters to Venetia Stanley*, part IV *passim*. Dr Cameron Hazlehurst has judged the loss to Asquith of the companionship of Miss Stanley greater than have these other authorities or the current author. See *Politicians at War*, pp. 262-3.
34. *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, vol. I, p. 203.
35. Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/76/16.
36. Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War*, p. 263.
37. Koss, *Asquith*, p. 187.
38. Regarding this question, see Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics*, ch. II, part 4, and Koss, *Asquith*, pp. 194-8, who convincingly support this view; see also Hazlehurst, *Politicians at War*, part III, chs 6 and 8, and Barry McGill, 'Asquith's Predicament, 1914-1918', *Journal of Modern History*, September 1967, for alternative views.
39. Lord Robert Cecil entered the Cabinet in July as Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
40. Asquith's rather ungenerous evaluation of Long's strengths can be seen in the fact that he gave him this important office even after H. J. Tennant had pleaded with the Unionist Business Committee on 17 May not to go through with its planned uprising. Long was titular Chairman of the Committee, yet the Prime Minister, Tennant's brother-in-law, gave him the Local Government Board. It appears the only possible explanations are that Asquith feared Long and the Committee, or found their chairman to be no danger; and the latter, given subsequent events, seems the far more reasonable. See Hewins, *Apologia of an Imperialist*, vol. II, pp. 30-31, for the Committee's encounter with Tennant.
41. Lord Haldane to Elizabeth Haldane, 18 May 1914, Haldane Papers 6018/98.

42. Margot Asquith wrote to Haldane on 18 May 1915: 'Our wonderful Cabinet *gone!!!* smashed! by whom? Practically by the man whom I always said *would* smash it – Winston.' Haldane papers, 5911/39. Mrs Asquith's opinion were always extreme and widely broadcast, and they were usually wildly off the mark. However, she must have reflected on this occasion a certain amount of her husband's annoyance. Stephen Koss has written of the former First Lord's survival, despite demotion, in the cabinet: 'Haldane did not fit comfortably in Asquith's projected "balance". Neither did Churchill; but he, unlike Haldane, had plenty of nuisance value.' *Asquith*, p. 192.
43. 19 May 1915, Lloyd George Papers, C/6/11/40. See Adams, *Arms and the Wizard*, pp. 36–7.
44. Arthur Steel Maitland to Andrew Bonar Law, 26 May 1915, Bonar Law Papers, 50/3/25.
45. Blake, *Unknown Prime Minister*, p. 282.
46. For a compilation of all references to conscription on the floor of the House of Commons, 1914–16, see *The Parliamentary History of Conscription in Great Britain*, preface by Richard C. Lambert, MP (London, 1917).
47. Diary entry of 18 May 1915, Wilson Papers.
48. Col. Thomas Bridges to Andrew Bonar Law, 18 May 1915, Bonar Law Papers, 37/2/39.
49. FO 800/100.
50. Lord Esher to Lord Kitchener, 20 May 1915, Kitchener Papers, 30/57/59/43.
51. Walter Long to Andrew Bonar Law, 20 May 1915, Bonar Law Papers, 117/1/12.
52. Walter Long to Andrew Bonar Law, 21 May 1915, Bonar Law Papers, 117/1/14.
53. Ian Colvin, *Sir Edward Carson* (London, 1933) vol. III, p. 51.
54. Paul Guinn, *British Strategy and Politics, 1914 to 1918* (Oxford, 1965) p. 85.
55. *Beatrice Webb's Diaries, 1912–1924*, ed. Margaret I. Cole (London, 1952) pp. 37–8.
56. Austen Chamberlain to Andrew Bonar Law, 21 May 1915, Bonar Law Papers, 50/3/9.
57. Austen Chamberlain to Lord Milner, 20 May 1915, Milner Papers.
58. *The Times*, 17 June 1915.
59. Lord Milner to Lady Roberts, 19 August 1915, Milner Papers.
60. For Milner's activities, see Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics*, ch. II.
61. In this regard, see C. J. Wrigley, *David Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement, Peace and War* (Hassocks, Sussex, 1976) ch. 8, and Adams, *Arms and the Wizard*, chs 6 and 7.
62. *Manchester Guardian*, 4 June 1915; a cutting of this report is preserved in the Lloyd George papers, D/27/2/4.
63. Lloyd George had already become interested in the release from the army of skilled men who had enlisted. See, for example, his 'instructions' on the subject to Lord Derby in preparation for the latter's visit to Sir John French's headquarters, Lloyd George Papers, D/16/12/2.
64. See Adams, *Arms and the Wizard*, pp. 76–7.

65. Board of Trade, *Report of the State of Employment in the United Kingdom, 1916*.
66. Humbert Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation* (London, 1923) p. 15.
67. Trevor Wilson, *The Political Diaries of C. P. Scott, 1911–1928* (London, 1970) p. 128.
68. The Rt Hon. Christopher Addison, *Politics from Within* (London, 1924) vol. I, p. 86.
69. For the Munitions of War Act, 1915, see Adams, *Arms and the Wizard*, pp. 82–9.
70. F. S. Oliver to Austen Chamberlain, 10 June 1915, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 14/6/20. Both Walter Long and Austen Chamberlain opposed Lloyd George's interests in industrial conscription at this time. See, for example, Chamberlain's Cabinet paper of 16 June 1915, CAB 37/130/9G.

6 Choosing Sides

1. The text of the Munitions of War Act, 1915 (as amended) is printed as Appendix B to G. D. H. Cole, *Trade Unionism and Munitions* (Oxford, 1923).
2. Lloyd George was, in fact, the first Cabinet member to be officially titled Minister.
3. MUN 5/199/1700/4.
4. In regard to the making of the Ministry of Munitions and the forging of its policies, see Adams, *Arms and the Wizard*, chs 4–7.
5. Walter Long to Andrew Bonar Law, 13 June 1915, Bonar Law Papers 50/4/27. A copy of the memorandum is included in the Cabinet Papers, CAB 37/130/1, apparently from the papers of Austen Chamberlain but was not seen by the full cabinet.
6. 3 June 1915, CAB 37/129/8.
7. 7 June 1915, CAB 37/129/17.
8. 8 June 1915, CAB 13/129/24.
9. 21 June 1915, CAB 37/130/19.
10. 9 June 1915, CAB 37/129/30.
11. 11 June 1915, CAB 37/129/35.
12. Viscount Long of Wraxall, *Memories* (London, 1923) pp. 221–2.
13. Walter Long to Lord Curzon, 23 June 1915, Curzon Papers.
14. Diary entry of 27 June 1915, Wilson Papers.
15. CAB 37/130/24. No 'special machinery' to apply the National Registration Act to Ireland was ever developed.
16. For the registration canvass, see Adams, *Arms and the Wizard*, pp. 101–2, and Jordan, 'Politics of Conscription', pp. 127–9.
17. 11 October 1915, PRO 30/57/74/69, Kitchener Papers.
18. Frederick Guest to F. S. Oliver, 23 July 1915, enclosed with F. S. Oliver to Austen Chamberlain, 26 July 1915, Chamberlain Papers, AC 14/6/35. See also Guest to Lord Curzon, 19 July 1915, Curzon Papers.
19. Amery, *My Political Life*, vol. II, pp. 67–8.
20. Ibid. In this regard, see also F. S. Oliver to Leopold Amery, 27 July 1915, and Lord Milner to Amery, 1 August 1915, Amery Papers,

illustrating Amery's role as a 'link' between these various groups. See also the *Quarterly Review*, April 1916, p. 578, regarding the Liberal 'ginger' group in July–August 1915.

21. Walter Long to Lord Curzon, 2 August 1915, Curzon Papers.
22. 6 August 1915, Bonar Law Papers, 53/6/37.
23. Walter Long wrote to Lord Curzon, 8 August 1915, saying he would withdraw the memorandum, but a printed copy did circulate, dated 5 August 1915, Curzon Papers.
24. 5 August 1915, CAB 37/132/6, emphasis added.
25. See Lord Curzon to David Lloyd George, 5 August 1915, D/16/144, Lloyd George Papers; a copy of this was sent to Long on 6 August 1915, Curzon Papers.
26. Both letters may be found in the Lloyd George Papers, D/17/12/1.
27. Taylor, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, entry for 2 September 1915, p. 56.
28. Walter Runciman to Lord Kitchener, 12 August 1915, PRO 30/57/80/16.
29. Kitchener chose the figure of seventy divisions without consultation with the General Staff, thinking it a reasonable equivalent, based on population, of the French effort.
30. Magnus, *Kitchener*, p. 347.
31. General Haig, since mid-July, had been secretly sending his evaluations of the War directly to Kitchener and to the King, at their request. George V told Haig: "If anyone acted like that, and told tales out of school, he would, at school, be called a sneak." K's reply was that we are beyond the schoolboy's age! Magnus, *Kitchener*, pp. 347–8.
32. Taylor, *English History*, p. 45.
33. H. H. Asquith to King George V, Asquith Papers. Much of this letter is published in Jenkins, *Asquith*, p. 372.
34. Gilbert, *Churchill*, companion volume III, part 2, p. 1132.
35. These letters are printed in Blake, *Unknown Prime Minister*, p. 263.
36. Asquith, *Memoirs and Reflections*, vol. II, p. 147.
37. Trevor Wilson, *The Downfall of the Liberal Party, 1914–1935* (London, 1966) p. 73.
38. In this regard, see Koss, *Asquith*, pp. 202–3.
39. For the most recent interpretation of this little-known episode, see Casser, *Kitchener*, pp. 446–7, and Michael William Haskett, 'Battlefield and Factory: British Manpower and the First World War', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1976, pp. 170–81.
40. Report of the Proceedings of the War Policy Committee, 18 August 1915, CAB 37/132/28.
41. 19 August 1915, CAB 37/133/1.
42. 23 August 1915, CAB 37/133/9.
43. Gilbert, *Churchill*, companion volume III, part 2, pp. 1155–6.
44. 24 August 1915, CAB 37/133/10.
45. *War Memoirs of David Lloyd George*, vol. II, p. 169. For the Kitchener proposal, see ch. 7, part 2.
46. 24 August 1915, Milner Papers.
47. Milner Papers.

48. A copy of this memorandum, dated 27 August 1915, may be found in the Milner Papers.
49. Milner Papers.
50. Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics*, pp. 283–4.
51. Margot Asquith to Lord Kitchener, 18 August 1915, PRO 30/57/106/5, Kitchener Papers.
52. 27 August 1915, PRO 30/57/80/4, Kitchener Papers.
53. Diary entry of 28 August 1915, Wilson Papers.
54. Geoffrey Robinson to Lord Esher, 27 August 1915, Royal Archives, RA GV Q724.
55. CAB 37/134/9.
56. CAB 37/134/3.
57. CAB 37/134/5.
58. Hankey, *Supreme Command*, vol. I, p. 427.
59. *Annual Report of the Trades Union Congress, 1915*, p. 317. See also Jordan, 'Politics of Conscription', p. 150.
60. 17 September 1915, Lloyd George Papers, D/16/19/5.
61. Taylor, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, p. 59.
62. Diary entry of 15 September 1915, Wilson Papers.
63. 16 September 1915, Lloyd George Papers, D/1/12/20. Whitehouse would have been even more upset had he known that, two days earlier, the Minister of Munitions had dined with Lord Curzon and Winston Churchill; Miss Stevenson noted in her diary: 'D [Lloyd George] & Winston will throw in their lot with Curzon and his followers, for D says he cannot possibly be a party any longer to the shameful mismanagement and slackness.' Taylor, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, p. 59. Later in the month, Lloyd George dined secretly with Lord Milner, President of the National Service League (the arrangements made by Geoffrey Robinson) in the first step toward a co-operation which would become very significant indeed. See Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics*, p. 295.
64. A copy of the scheme, dated 15 September 1915, with comments by Austen Chamberlain is preserved in the Curzon Papers.
65. 18 September 1915, Balfour Papers, Add. MSS. 49692.
66. 19 September 1915, CAB 37/134/25.

7 Lord Derby Shows the Way

1. Beaverbrook, *Politicians and the War*, p. 252.
2. Taylor, *English History, 1914–1945*, p. 53, n. 3.
3. Randolph Churchill, *Lord Derby, King of Lancashire* (London, 1959) pp. 192–3.
4. The Labour Recruiting Committee was formed in late September through the efforts of the Labour Party, the General Federation of Trade Unions and the Trades Union Congress. Lord Kitchener met with a deputation of leaders of the organizations and called upon them to mount an intensive recruiting campaign. See Lord Selborne to Lord Curzon, 4 October 1915, Curzon Papers. For the LRC and its merging with the Parliamentary Committee, see Douglas, 'Voluntary Enlistment in the First World War'

5. In this regard, see Jordan, 'The Politics of Conscription in Britain', pp. 203–4.
6. Diary entry, 5 September 1915, Scott Papers, Add. MSS. 50902.
7. *The Star*, 6 October 1915.
8. CAB 37/134/5. See Chapter 6 of present volume, pp., 114–15.
9. Asquith Papers, vol. 28, 179–180.
10. H. H. Asquith to Lord Kitchener, 16 October 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/73.
11. CAB 37/135/15.
12. See Sir John French to Lord Kitchener, 19 August 1915, Curzon Papers. For Haig's pro-conscription feelings, see Lord Blake, *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig* (London, 1952) p. 101. General French changed his mind regarding the value of compulsory service in October 1915, after suffering heavy casualties at the Battle of Loos, fought in September and early October. See Col. Brinsley Fitzgerald, French's aide-de-camp, to Lord Curzon, 19 October 1915, Curzon Papers.
13. Lord Selborne to Lord Kitchener, 21 September 1915, Selborne Papers. Portions of this letter are printed in Casser, *Kitchener*, p. 449.
14. Diary entry of 14 October 1915, Scott Papers, Add. MSS. 50902.
15. Sir Edward Carson resigned on 12 October 1915, outraged over the failure of the Government actively to support Serbia, which had sustained a German attack four days before. See Colvin, *Carson*, p. 96. Winston Churchill resigned on 29 October 1915, primarily because Asquith had excluded him from the newly organized War Committee, which replaced the Dardanelles Committee as the 'inner circle' giving strategic advice to the Prime Minister. See Churchill to H. H. Asquith, 29 October 1915, printed in Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill*, companion volume III, part 2, p. 1244.
16. Taylor, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, p. 68.
17. See Asquith's letter to King George V, 12 October 1915, CAB 37/135/22.
18. This letter reported, according to Bonar Law, 'the views of Lord Lansdowne, Lord Curzon, Lord Selborne, Mr Chamberlain, Mr Long, Sir Edward Carson, Mr Bonar Law and Mr Lloyd George and Mr Churchill'. Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/73/36.
19. Roskill, *Hankey*, vol. I, p. 227.
20. CAB 37/136/10.
21. 17 October 1915, Bonar Law Papers, 51/4/18.
22. Riddell, *War Diary*, p. 120.
23. Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/76/25.
24. Jenkins, *Asquith*, p. 376.
25. 30 October 1915, Elibank Papers, EM3.
26. 19 October 1915, Asquith Papers, 8/105–109.
27. 16 October 1915, Bonar Law Papers, 51/4/16.
28. 23 October 1915, Asquith Papers, 15/56–59.
29. 28 October 1915, Blumenfeld Papers.
30. Blake, *Unknown Prime Minister*, p. 283.
31. Asquith Papers, 15/62–63.
32. Walter Long to Maurice Bonham Carter, 1 November 1915, Asquith Papers, 15/86–88.

33. See Wilson, *Political Diaries of C. P. Scott*, p. 155.
34. Emphasis added.
35. H. H. Asquith to Austen Chamberlain, 7 November 1915, Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 19/1/7. Asquith was aware that Curzon had begun drafting such a bill in September, a copy of which, with emendations by Austen Chamberlain, is preserved in the Curzon Papers. A copy may also be found in the Lloyd George Papers, 15 September 1915, D/16/10/5. Curzon's first draft was essentially the bill which became law in January 1916.
36. *The Times*, 12 November 1915.
37. 18 November 1915, Asquith Papers, 15/150–150c.
38. Lord Derby to H. H. Asquith, 19 November 1915, Asquith Papers, 15/155–156.
39. 19 November 1915, Asquith Papers, 15/156.
40. *Daily Mail*, 27 November 1915.
41. See Derby's cabinet memorandum of 13 December 1915, CAB 37/139/26.
42. H. H. Asquith to King George V, 15 December 1915, CAB 37/139/27.
43. Asquith had received a General Staff memorandum dated 16 December 1915, calling upon the Government and the nation to accept that 'The ruling principle must be to place every possible division – fully manned and equipped in all respects – in France next Spring.' CAB 22/80.
44. Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, vol. II, pp. 135–6.
45. CAB 37/139/41.
46. These numbers were later revised slightly upward to 343,386 and 538,171. See CAB 37/139/51 and CAB 37/140/1.
47. See Sir John Simon's memorandum of 24 December 1915, CAB 37/139/53.
48. Crewe Papers, C/3. Buckmaster cited figures from a later report by Derby, of which there were several.
49. Taylor, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, p. 89. Dr Addison also recorded the resignation threat in his diary, *Four and a Half Years* (London, 1934) vol. I, p. 156.
50. WO 106/368. A copy of this paper may also be found in the Lloyd George Papers, D/24/10/27.
51. Taylor, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, p. 89.
52. McKenna Papers, 5/9.
53. McKenna papers, 5/9. The Chancellor also received a message from Mrs. Asquith, who pleaded with him not to 'desert' her husband. She wrote: 'He is not young – he is deeply emotional. Will you strike him to the foundation – never.' 28 December 1915, McKenna Papers, 5/9.
54. See George Dangerfield, *The Damnable Question: A Study of Anglo-Irish Relations* (New York, 1976) p. 162, and Stephen Gwynn, *John Redmond's Last Years* (London, 1919) p. 210–11. Redmond's party voted against the First Reading of the bill and, thereafter, abstained.
55. See H. H. Asquith to King George V, 31 December 1915, Asquith Papers, 8/129–132. See also CAB 38/139/70.
56. Koss, *Asquith*, p. 203. In this regard see also the present author's 'Asquith's Choice: the May Coalition and the Coming of Conscription,' *the Journal of British Studies*, vol. 25, no. 3 (July 1986).

57. An excellent discussion of the passage of the bill may be found in Jordan, 'the Politics of Conscription in Britain', pp. 228 ff. A thorough explanation of the workings of this act, as well as the amending acts passed in 1916-18, is William Grist Hawtin, *The Law and Practice of Military Conscription under the Military Service Acts*. 2 vols (London, 1917-18).
58. See Henderson's Cabinet memorandum dated 10 January 1915, CAB 37/140/17. See also Cole, *Beatrice Webb's Diaries*, pp. 53-4.
59. *Minutes of the Labour Party Executive Committee*, 6 January 1915. See also Arthur Henderson's letter to the Prime Minister, 10 January 1915, Asquith Papers, 16/8-9.
60. *Annual Report of the Labour Party, 1916*.
61. See Thomas C. Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience: A History of the No-Conscription Fellowship, 1914-1919* (Fayetteville, Arkansas, 1981) pp. 82-3.
62. 19 December 1915, Bonar Law Papers, 52/1/44.
63. See Amery's speech in the House, 78 H.C. Deb., 5 s., col. 194.
64. See General William Robertson to General Douglas Haig, 4 January 1916, Robertson Papers, I/22.
65. 11 January 1915, Kitchener Papers, PRO 30/57/76/35.
66. Simon, many years later, recanted his opposition to conscription. Seldom noted is the fact that in 1917, in opposition to the famous Lansdowne peace letter, he accepted an Army commission and served on the staff of General Hugh Trenchard, the commander of the Royal Flying Corps. See Chapter 12, note 11, of the present volume.

8 Does Anyone Suppose You are Going to Stop Here?

1. Hankey, *Supreme Command*, vol. II, pp. 468-9.
2. Jenkins, *Asquith*, p. 387.
3. 31 January 1916, CAB 37/141/38.
4. Robertson Papers, I/12/30.
5. CAB 37/42/11.
6. McKenna Papers, 5/9.
7. 17 February 1916, Robertson Papers, I/22/22.
8. See Hankey, *Supreme Command*, vol. II, pp. 473-4.
9. Asquith Papers, 16/48-50.
10. CAB 17/159.
11. Taylor, 'Politics in Wartime', pp. 23-4.
12. Charles à Court Repington, *The First World War 1914-1918* (London, 1920) vol. I, p. 135.
13. 8 March 1916, Robertson Papers, I/22/30.
14. See, for example, the exchange of letters between Derby and Northcliffe of 24 and 25 February 1916. Northcliffe Papers, 586.
15. Repington, *First World War*, vol. I, p. 135. See also Sir Charles Hunter to General Sir Henry Wilson, 15 March 1916, Wilson Papers.
16. Asquith Papers. 16/87-88.
17. 20 March 1916, CAB 37/144/47.
18. Amery Papers.

19. CAB 42/11/6.
20. CAB 22/80.
21. Roskill, *Hankey*, vol. I, p. 258. See also Taylor, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, entry of 27 March 1916, p. 104.
22. 28 March 1916, Wilson Papers.
23. Wilson to Bonar Law, 24 March 1916, Bonar Law Papers, 52/4/29; Bonar Law to Wilson, 31 March 1916, Wilson Papers. While Wilson's letter to Bonar Law was quite mild, he noted in his diary of the exchange: 'A letter from Bonar Law tonight in answer to mine. A most miserable production. The man is absolutely unfit to lead.' Diary entry of 2 April 1916, Wilson Papers. Wilson and Bonar Law, as well as Balfour, were lawn tennis enthusiasts, and Wilson reserved his unkindest cut for a letter to Leopold Maxse: 'The fact is that B.L. is no earthly good. It is even a waste of time to play tennis with him!' 6 April 1916, Maxse Papers, 472.
24. See *The Times*, 22 and 29 March 1916.
25. 3 March 1916, Maxse Papers, 472. As a condition of an inheritance, in 1917, Geoffrey Robinson changed his surname to Dawson.
26. 30 March 1916, Curzon Papers. On 29 April 1916, Maj.-Gen. Charles Townshend, commanding the 6th (Indian) Division, surrendered Kut-al-Amara to the Turks.
27. Bonar Law Papers, 53/6/69.
28. Bonar Law Papers, 53/1/1.
29. 4 April 1916, Bonar Law Papers, 53/6/70. See also, Blake, *Unknown Prime Minister*, pp. 283-4.
30. CAB 37/145/35. See also Roskill, *Hankey*, vol. I, pp. 263 ff.
31. Taylor, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, entry of 17 April 1916, p. 105.
32. Riddell, *War Diary*, p. 172.
33. Robinson [Dawson] Papers.
34. Roskill, *Hankey*, vol. I, p. 264.
35. CAB 17/159.
36. Taylor, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, entry of 17 April 1916, p. 105.
37. Memorandum of Lord Stamfordham, 15-16 April 1916, Royal Archives, RA GV K951.
38. Harold Nicolson, *King George V: His Life and Reign* (London, 1953) p. 273.
39. Royal Archives, RA GV K951/4.
40. Taylor, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, entry of 17 April 1915, p. 105.
41. See Geoffrey Locker-Lampson to Gen. Sir Henry Wilson, 'Tuesday, 5:30 P.M.' (18 April 1916), Wilson Papers. See also Gen. Sir Henry Rawlinson to Wilson, 17 April 1916, Wilson Papers.
42. Bonar Law Papers, 53/6/73.
43. William C. Bridgeman to Bonar Law, 17 April 1916, Bonar Law Papers, 53/1/14.
44. CAB 27/3.
45. Taylor, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, entry of 18 April 1916, pp. 106-7, italics in original.
46. Scott diary, entry of 13-20 April 1916, Scott Papers, Add. MSS. 50902.

47. CAB 27/3.
48. Asquith to Lord Stamfordham, 18 April 1916, Royal Archives, RA GV K951/6.
49. Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, vol. II, p. 148.
50. *Minutes of the Executive of the Labour Party*, 19 April 1916.
51. Ibid.
52. Taylor, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, entry of 20 April 1916, p. 108.
53. *Daily Mail*, 19 April 1916.
54. 20 April 1916, Milner Papers. Portions of this incontinent letter are printed in Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics*, p. 342, where the spirit and the phraseology of the missive are appropriately termed 'a characteristic note'.
55. Maxse Papers, 472.
56. Royal Archives, RA GV K951/9.
57. Royal Archives, RA GV K951/12.
58. Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, vol. II, p. 150.
59. Diary entry of 24 April 1916, Hankey Papers. Portions of this entry are printed in *Supreme Command*, vol. II, p. 475.
60. Amery, *My Political Life*, vol. II, p. 73.
61. Roskill, *Hankey*, vol. I, p. 265.
62. Entry of 26 April 1916, Wilson Papers.
63. *Daily Report to the King of Proceedings of Parliament*, 27 April 1916, Lord Samuel Papers.
64. 27 April 1916, Amery Papers.
65. 29 April 1916, Asquith Papers, 8/161-164.
66. Diary entry of 2 May 1916, Hankey Papers.
67. Ibid.

9 The Search for a System

1. Taylor, 'Politics in the First World War', p. 28.
2. The best discussion of the Irish negotiations may be found in Dangerfield, *Damnable Question*.
3. Birrell, nicknamed quite inappropriately 'the playboy of the western world', went gracefully, and Asquith told the House he had felt no loss 'more acutely'. Professor Koss, also a biographer of the great Secretary of State for War, has remarked wryly, 'So much for Haldane.' *Asquith*, p. 210. For the significance of Irish affairs at this time, see Chapter 11 of present volume.
4. See Magnus, *Kitchener*, pp. 378-9.
5. See Casser, *Kitchener*, pp. 475-6.
6. See Blake, *Unknown Prime Minister*, pp. 288-90.
7. Beaverbrook, *Politicians and the War*, pp. 208-10.
8. On 17 June, Lloyd George prepared a lengthy memorandum to be sent to the Prime Minister outlining his disenchantment with the conduct of the War, his assumption that the Munitions Ministry had become a going concern, and his desire to retire from the Government. This is to be found in the Lloyd George Papers, D/18/2/19, and is printed in his *War*

- Memoirs*, vol. II, pp. 204–8. It was, however, never sent. Lloyd George also discussed resignation at this time with Lord Riddell, *War Diary*, pp. 189 ff.
9. See Lord Stamfordham's memorandum, probably prepared for King George V, 17 June 1916, Royal Archives, RA GV K951/13. Reginald McKenna detailed the episode in a letter to Walter Runciman, who was ill and away from Whitehall, 19 June 1916, Runciman Papers.
 10. See Chamberlain's irate letter to Curzon regarding Asquith's offer, dated 3 July 1916, Curzon Papers. For this episode, see Petrie, *Austen Chamberlain*, vol. II, pp. 50–53. Curiously, the Manpower Distribution Board is not mentioned in this study.
 11. Captain B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Real War, 1914–1918* (London, 1964 edn) p. 234.
 12. Taylor, *English History*, p. 61.
 13. Ibid.
 14. Sir Llewellyn Woodward, *Great Britain and the War of 1914–1918* (London, 1970) p. 151.
 15. Wrigley, *Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement*, p. 168.
 16. Repington, *First World War*, vol. I, p. 361.
 17. CAB 42/17/1. Addison credits General Macready with proposing the Board on 2 August – *Four and a Half Years*, vol. I, p. 235; while the General claims in his memoirs to have suggested it in May – *Annals of a Active Life*, vol. II, p. 253.
 18. CAB 17/156.
 19. 8 September 1916, WO 162/29.
 20. Ibid, and CAB 22/40.
 21. Midleton was the initial nominee of Lloyd George and Derby, but opposition to him and the desire to secure the chair for a Cabinet member resulted in Grey's suggestion of Chamberlain winning out. See CAB 22/43. The final membership of the Board was not complete until 12 September. In addition to Chamberlain and Midleton, nominees included Arthur Balfour, JP, of Sheffield, and two Labour MPs, George Barnes and Stephen Walsh. CAB 22/48.
 22. CAB 17/156. The Manpower Distribution Board is seldom discussed in the historical literature of this period. The most detailed examination may be found in Heskett, 'Battlefield and Factory', pp. 280–92. See also Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation*, pp. 40–41, and Wrigley, *Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement*, pp. 168–72.
 23. Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation*, p. 40.
 24. See, for example, the minutes of the War Committee meeting of 12 September 1916, CAB 22/48.
 25. 30 September 1916, CAB 42/21/2.
 26. 17 October 1916, CAB 42/21/7.
 27. For the Sheffield strike, see *History of the Ministry of Munitions*, vol. VI, part 1. C. J. Wrigley has also pointed out the efforts of the Munitions Office to deal with and therefore exalt the official leaders of the craft unions at the expense of the shop stewards, *Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement*, pp. 170–74.
 28. MUN 5/57/320/16. Essentially the same pledge was given in the House, 86 H.C. Deb., 5s., col. 387.

29. MUN 5/77/326/101.
30. Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation*, p. 45.
31. CAB 22/71.
32. Ibid. See also the memoranda relevant to the issue placed before the War Committee by Edwin Montagu, CAB 37/159/39 and 37/159/40.
33. CAB 22/71.
34. Ibid.
35. Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, vol. II, p. 152.
36. CAB 37/159/32. The Lansdowne Memorandum of 13 November 1916 is printed in Asquith, *Memories and Reflections*, vol. II, pp. 165–75.
37. Guinn, *British Strategy and Politics*, p. 175.
38. CAB 37/160/15. Robertson sent a copy of the memorandum to Sir Douglas Haig, Robertson Papers, I/22/91. The CIGS rather disingenuously denied to Lansdowne that he had the peer in mind when writing the strong language of the memorandum. Robertson Papers I/21. Gen. Macready noted that he had ‘always thought that Mr. Lloyd George found the memorandum . . . a not unuseful weapon to fight his way into a position where, to use his own words, “he could get on with the war”’. *Annals of an Active Life*, vol. II, p. 254.
39. For the significance of the Nigerian Debate in Bonar Law’s thinking, see Blake, *Unknown Prime Minister*, pp. 298–9.
40. See Miss Stevenson’s diary entries of 22, 23, 25 and 27 November 1916, Taylor, *Lloyd George: A Diary*, pp. 126–9.
41. CAB 37/160/25. See also Guinn, *British Strategy and Politics*, pp. 176–7.
42. See CAB 42/26/4.
43. See Beaverbrook, *Politicians and the War*, pp. 410–24.
44. Ibid, p. 496.
45. Lloyd George met with Bonar Law, Curzon, Chamberlain, Lord Robert Cecil and Long on the evening of 7 December and negotiated their entry into his Government. Balfour had agreed to come in on the previous day. See Curzon’s *aide mémoire* of that date in the Austen Chamberlain Papers, AC 15/3/6.
46. 14 December 1916, Austen Chamberlain papers, AC 5/1/3.
47. 8 December 1916, Curzon Papers.
48. Roskill, *Hankey*, vol. I, p. 341. Hankey, virtually inevitably, became Secretary to the War Cabinet.
49. Derby, who became Secretary of State for War in the new Government, wrote reassuringly to Sir Douglas Haig on 13 December 1916: ‘I quite agree with you that the question of manpower is the most difficult problem to solve . . . the new [War Cabinet] is taking up the question at once.’ Derby Papers.
50. CAB 17/159.
51. CAB 37/161/18.
52. CAB 37/161/26.
53. CAB 37/161/42.
54. Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Control*, p. 42.
55. CAB 37/161/42.
56. *War Memoirs*, vol. III, p. 277. See also Austen Chamberlain’s letter to Lord Milner suggesting his brother for the post, 18 December 1916,

- Milner Papers. Lord Derby preferred the Labourite, Stephen Walsh. See Derby to Bonar Law, 21 December 1916, Bonar Law Papers, 81/1/64. The Leader of the Conservative Party, also less than enthusiastic about the Chamberlain appointment, responded that while the appointment of Walsh would have pleased him, it was 'impossible'. Bonar Law to Derby, 22 December 1916, Bonar Law Papers, 84/6/19.
57. *War Memoirs*, vol. III, p. 284.
 58. 27 December 1916, Bonar Law Papers, 84/6/23.
 59. Neville Chamberlain to Mary Chamberlain, 19 December 1916. Neville Chamberlain Papers, NC 1/20/1/107. The same spirit pervades Chamberlain's letter to his favourite nephew, Norman Chamberlain, of 7 January 1917. Neville Chamberlain Papers, NC 1/18/2/10.
 60. Neville Chamberlain Papers, NC 8/5/4/1. In this regard see also Addison, *Four and A Half Years*, vol. II, p. 317, in which the Minister of Munitions noted that he worked closely with Lord Derby in urging Lloyd George to put pressure on Chamberlain to 'get a move on'.
 61. CAB 1/22/16. A copy is also preserved in the Neville Chamberlain Papers, NC 8/5/4/12.
 62. CAB 23/1/39. See also Addison, *Four and A Half Years*, vol. I, p. 317.
 63. General Sir William Robertson to General Sir Douglas Haig, 7 February 1917, Robertson Papers, I/23/4, emphasis added.

10 Passchendaele

1. See David R. Woodward, *Lloyd George and the Generals* (Newark, Del., 1983) ch. 7.
2. Repington, *First World War*, vol. I, p. 455.
3. Cited in Heskett, 'Battlefield and Factory', p. 316, wherein an excellent discussion of the internecine battles among departments may be found pp. 316–19.
4. CAB 23/1/55.
5. CAB 23/2/64.
6. 14 February 1917, Robertson Papers, I/23/7.
7. Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation*, p. 211.
8. CAB 21/23. Then serving as one of Hankey's assistants, Young would himself later gain fame as an historian and as the biographer of Stanley Baldwin.
9. 21 March 1917, CAB 24/8. The notes of the War Cabinet in which the Report was discussed may be found in CAB 23/2/103.
10. Lord Milner and Arthur Henderson were appointed to establish the quotas under which even the most crucial trades were to make available men for general service. CAB 23/2/103.
11. Lord Derby to David Lloyd George, 24 March 1917, Derby Papers.
12. For the negotiations with the trade unions, see MUN 5/62
13. Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation*, pp. 48–9, and chs 8–9, *passim*.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
15. The report of the Barnes Commission is preserved among the Ministry of Munitions papers, MUN 5/49.

16. Leon Wolff, *In Flanders Fields: the 1917 Campaign* (New York, 1963 edn) p. 161.
17. CAB 27/14.
18. Ibid.
19. For the background of the Passchendaele campaign, see John Terraine, *The Road to Passchendaele: The Flanders Campaign of 1917, A Study in Inevitability* (London, 1977), a 'documentation' which contains many useful source materials on the offensive. See also Wolff, *In Flanders Fields*. An excellent discussion of the maneuvering between the 'brass hats' and the 'frock coats' may be found in Woodward, *Lloyd George and the Generals*, ch. 8.
20. Woodward, *Lloyd George and the Generals*, pp. 173-4.
21. WO 162/29. The tribunals were constantly cited by the generals as culprits in denying the army the men it needed; they were also subjected to regular criticism by anti-conscriptionists. In *The Hound of Conscience*, Thomas C. Kennedy has written:

Thus, the tribunals are historical losers. Characterized as prejudiced, ignorant, insensitive, and unjust – their standing is poor even when compared to that of generals who could not win battles, politicians who failed in their jobs, and conscientious objectors who refused to come to the aid of their stricken country. (p. 104).
22. Lord Derby wrote to the Prime Minister on 18 June 1917: 'I am convinced that the only satisfactory way of dealing with the matter is to begin at the age of 19 and take the whole of the men of that age, irrespective of their employment, and so gradually work up.' On 6 July he repeated the same advice, striving to press the 'clean cut' based on age. Derby Papers.
23. CAB 24/17/176. A copy of this report is also preserved in the Neville Chamberlain Papers, NC 8/5/4/12.
24. CAB 24/20/1445. A copy of this paper is also preserved in the Neville Chamberlain Papers, NC 8/5/4/1.
25. Neville Chamberlain Papers, NC 8/5/2/27. A copy of this letter is also preserved in the Lloyd George Papers, F/7/1/11.
26. David Lloyd George to Neville Chamberlain, 20 July 1917, Lloyd George Papers, F/7/1/12.
27. 'Should General Geddes' proposals offer a reasonable prospect of success,' Chamberlain wrote to Lloyd George on 21 July 1917, 'I am still of opinion that my Department cannot continue under existing conditions.' Neville Chamberlain Papers, NC 8/5/2/29.
28. Roskill, *Hankey*, vol. I, p. 409.
29. The Right Honourable Auckland Campbell, Baron Geddes, GCMG, KCB (Mil.), MD, *The Forging of a Family* (London, 1952) pp. 304-5. Geddes and Dr Addison were the first two trained physicians to enter the British Cabinet, and each had preceded his political career by serving as a professor of anatomy. Unlike Addison, Geddes returned for a time to academic medicine.
30. CAB 24/20/148.
31. Geddes, *Forging of a Family*, p. 308.

32. See Neville Chamberlain to David Lloyd George, 27 July 1917, Neville Chamberlain Papers, NC 8/5/2/30.
33. CAB 24/4/201. Henderson left the War Cabinet after Lloyd George had refused to allow him to travel to Stockholm to attend an international convention of socialist societies.
34. CAB 24/22/1647.
35. See Chamberlain's *aide-mémoire* of these events, Neville Chamberlain Papers, NC 8/5/2/31, and his letter of resignation, dated 8 August 1917, NC 8/5/4/17.
36. Geddes, *Forging of a Family*, pp. 310–11.
37. *Ibid.*
38. Chamberlain wrote to Leopold Amery on 12 August 1917: 'The failure of National Service is due to several causes but one stands out among all the rest – the P.M. . . . Probably the initial errors would have been sufficient to damn the thing but if the P.M. had been anything like reasonable perhaps even if he had the instincts of a gentleman it would have been possible gradually to have evolved a practical scheme. . . . I am convinced that L.I.G. is an impossible man to work with and that his Government cannot last.' Amery Papers. An insight into the difference between the two brothers perhaps may be seen by comparing this with Austen Chamberlain's letter to Lord Curzon of 30 August 1917: 'My only quarrel with Lloyd George is as to his treatment of my brother. . . . I am sore about this and as I think it rather characteristic of the P.M. it does not increase my regard for or confidence in him. But we must back him as he is "with all faults and errors of description" as the auctioneers say, as he is still the biggest public force we have.' Curzon Papers.
39. Wolff, *In Flanders Fields*, pp. 252–3.
40. Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation*, p. 52.
41. CAB 24/26/2001. See also *War Cabinet Report of the Year 1917*, Cd. 9005 (1917). Geddes requested but did not receive the power to absorb the Employment Exchanges into his new ministry.
42. CAB 24/28/2295.
43. CAB 23/4/249.
44. The statistics for British losses in the Flanders offensive were given in the official *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War* as 324 000, those of the Germans as 202 000. In the *British Official History of the War: Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1917*, volume II, not published until 1948, General Edmunds presented those figures as 244 897 and 400 000, respectively, A. J. P. Taylor writes of this curious discrepancy, 'The "revision" is more easily understood if it is remembered that Lloyd George had meanwhile attacked Haig in his *War Memoirs*. A polemic against the greatest prime minister of the century was thus conducted in an official history, published under the authority of the Cabinet office.' *English History*, p. 87, n. 1. For the controversy, see Sir Basil Liddell-Hart, 'The Basic Truths of Passchendaele', *Royal United Services Institute Journal*, November 1959. For a differing view, see Terraine, *The Road to Passchendaele*, pp. 343–7.
45. CAB 23/13/282a.
46. See CAB 23/4/289 and CAB 23/4/293.

47. CAB 23/34/2850.
48. CAB 23/4/293.
49. CAB 23/4/295.
50. See Roskill, *Hankey*, vol. I, p. 470.
51. Hankey, *Supreme Command*, vol. II, p. 740.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 743.
53. See the *Report of the Cabinet Committee on Man-Power*, CAB 27/14, which contains the full deliberations of the Committee as well as its draft report. Hankey, who seemed to serve as secretary to virtually every cabinet committee of significance in this period, usually managed to apportion his time accordingly. Even he, however, found the work of this committee trying. He wrote to Sir Henry Wilson in mid-December: 'I am absolutely up to the eyes in a Cabinet Committee on Man Power, working at terrific pressure.' Hankey to Wilson, 17 December 1917, Wilson Papers.
54. 15 December 1917, Wilson Papers.
55. CAB 27/14. In this regard, see Hankey, *Supreme Command*, vol. II, pp. 741–2. One of the most revealing portions of Lloyd George's memoirs deals with the Manpower Committee and requirements laid down by the War Office. While certainly not a dispassionate description of events, it is essentially accurate. See *War Memoirs*, vol V, ch. 4.
56. See Hankey, *Supreme Command*, vol. II, p. 740.
57. CAB 24/38/3265.
58. *War Memoirs*, vol. V, p. 143.
59. CAB 23/5/318.
60. Field Marshal Sir William Robertson, *Soldiers and Statesmen, 1914–1918* (London, 1926) vol. II, p. 320.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 324. See also CAB 24/38/3268, Haig's memorandum which failed to undo the damage described by Sir William Robertson.
62. Riddell, *War Diary*, p. 307. Robertson, at the Prime Minister's request, submitted a paper on 3 January 1918, outlining his plans to win the War. CAB 24/37/3191. It was written one day after the War Office received a copy of the Manpower Committee draft report. The Army, it predicted, would become 'weaker month by month and not stronger, unless more men are provided than those foreshadowed by the recent draft Report of the Cabinet Committee'

11 The Bottom of the Barrel

1. *War Memoirs*, vol. V, pp. 174–5.
2. The text of the speech is reproduced in *ibid.*, vol. V, ch. 2, appendix B. See also Marvin Swartz, *The Union for Democratic Control in British Politics During the First World War* (Oxford, 1971) ch. 9, 'The Reaction of the War Cabinet'.
3. As early as 13 December 1917, the TUC called upon the Government to enunciate its war aims and announced the intention to adopt the aims statement, which it did, along with the other labour bodies, on 28 December. Lloyd George met with a deputation of labour leaders

- following the conference and expressed his pleasure at the statement adopted. See the minutes of the War Cabinet of 31 December 1917, CAB 23/4/282. In this regard see Wrigley, *Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement*, pp. 222–3.
4. CAB 23/5/11.
 5. Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation*, p. 54.
 6. See G. D. H. Cole, *Trade Unionism and Munitions* (Oxford, 1923) pp. 138–9.
 7. CAB 23/5/86
 8. Cole, *Trade Unionism and Munitions*, p. 139.
 9. Wrigley, *Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement*, pp. 225–6.
 10. Haig's unflappability was legendary, and even the great March Offensive did not shatter his outward confidence. When writing to Henry Wilson on the day of the attack, he indicated that the strike came 'on the wide front we expected'. Wilson Papers.
 11. Liddell Hart, *The Real War, 1914–1918*, p. 387.
 12. Final resistance of the miners to the February Military Service Act crumbled on 22 March. On the previous day, Lloyd George's secretary had written to the CIGS requesting details of the German attack 'so as to impress upon them the necessity for the release of the 50 000 men from the mines'. J. T. Davies to General Sir Henry Wilson, 21 March 1918, Wilson Papers.
 13. CAB 23/5/371.
 14. See present volume, chapter 10, part V.
 15. CAB 23/5/372.
 16. For the re-emergence of Field Marshal French, see Guinn, *British Strategy and Politics*, pp. 261–2, and Woodward, *Lloyd George and the Generals*, pp. 207–11.
 17. For Lloyd George's successful campaign against Robertson, see Taylor, *English History*, pp. 98–100. A. J. P. Taylor's comment on the subject is: '[Robertson] was given the command in eastern England – a good joke at the expense of an uncompromising "westerner"'. A short time thereafter, General Macready followed his former master into seemingly retirement when he was appointed Superintendent of the Metropolitan Police. Lloyd George found himself engaged in only one further major political battle with the generals: in the so-called 'Maurice Affair', the Prime Minister skilfully (if disingenuously) defended himself against accusations by the former Director of Military Operations, Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice, that he had lied to the House regarding the number of troops available to Haig in 1918. Most of the contending views may be found in Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. VI, ch. 2, 'The Maurice Debate'; Nancy Maurice (ed.), *The Maurice Case from the Papers of Major-General Sir Frederick Maurice* (London, 1972), *passim*; and John Gooch, 'The Maurice Debate, 1918', *Journal of Modern History*, October 1968, pp. 211–28. An excellent summary and analysis may be found in Woodward, *Lloyd George and the Generals*, ch. 12.
 18. 5 March 1918, Lloyd George Papers, F/48/6/5. The Field Marshal had resigned his post as CIGS over the Curragh affair in mid-1914. In regard to the entire question of the attempt to apply conscription to Ireland, see

Dangerfield, *Damnable Question*, ch. 18. In addition to this excellent study, see also Robert Kee, *The Green Flag: The Turbulent History of the Irish National Movement* (London, 1972) part 5, ch. 3, and Dorothy Macardle, *The Irish Republic* (London, 1968 edn) pp. 232–48.

19. CAB 23/5/372.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. CAB 24/46/4036.
23. CAB 23/5/374.
24. CAB 24/46/4049.
25. CAB 23/5/374, 27 March 1918.
26. Viscount French, in spite of predictions by H. E. Duke that Irish conscripts would be as useful as conscripted Germans, suggested to the War Cabinet on 27 March that by training them in France, 'where extreme penalties could be inflicted for serious breaches of discipline, these men could be made into soldiers'. CAB 23/5/375.
27. *War Memoirs*, vol. V, p. 190.
28. For the origins and course of the Convention, see Robert B. McDowell, *The Irish Convention, 1917-1918* (London, 1970) *passim*.
29. While Lloyd George indicated to Clemenceau that it was 'impossible' to appoint a French general Commander-in-Chief at this meeting, it was exactly what he wished to do – and did on the 14th, when Foch assumed that title. See Guinn, *British Strategy and Politics*, pp. 302–3.
30. CAB 23/5/377. Included also were Robert Munro, the Scottish Secretary; William Hayes Fisher, President of the Local Government Board; and George Roberts, who had replaced Hodge as Minister of Labour in August 1917. Thomas Jones served as secretary.
31. CAB 23/6/383. The deliberations of the Committee are recorded as CAB 24/47/4070, 4076, 4091, 4093, 4113, 4117 and 4126. The draft bill which they forwarded to the War Cabinet may be found as CAB 24/47/4124.
32. See Dangerfield, *Damnable Question*, p. 267.
33. CAB 23/6/385.
34. Dangerfield, *Damnable Question*, pp. 275–6.
35. CAB 23/6/385.
36. Ibid. Churchill returned to the Cabinet in July 1917 as Minister of Munitions, and Dr Addison, who had become something of a liability in the eyes of labour, became Minister of Reconstruction.
37. Hankey's phrase appears in his diary, entry of 6 April 1918, printed in Roskill, *Hankey*, vol. I, p. 521.
38. H. A. L. Fisher diary, entry of 9 April 1918, Fisher Papers, box 8. See also, Roskill, *Hankey*, vol. I, p. 522.
39. Memorandum by Lord Stamfordham, 9 April 1918, Royal Archives, RA GV K1290/1.
40. 10 April 1918, Bonar Law Papers, 83/2/11.
41. Duff Cooper, *Haig* (London, 1936) vol. II, p. 273.
42. See Guinn, *British Strategy and Politics*, p. 302.
43. CAB 24/49/4302. See Dangerfield, *Damnable Question*, p. 280, and Kee, *Green Flag*, p. 619.
44. CAB 24/48/4128.

45. H. E. Duke to War Cabinet, 16 April 1918, Lloyd George Papers, F/37/4/51. Portions of this memorandum are printed in Dangerfield, *Damnably Question*, p. 284.
46. H. A. L. Fisher was approached about the possibility of replacing Duke and demurred. Clearly Lloyd George wished to put a mainstream Liberal in the place. Diary entry of 16 April 1918, Fisher Papers, box 8.
47. In regard to Milner's taking the War Office, see Gollin, *Proconsul in Politics*, ch. 19. This period was perhaps the high point of the co-operation of Lloyd George and Milner. However, the major point in the transfer of ministers was the removal of Derby and not the appointment of Milner. Hankey was also a candidate for the office, though he made clear that he would not accept under any circumstances. See Roskill, *Hankey*, vol. I, pp. 525–6.
48. See Dangerfield, *Damnably Question*, p. 290, and Macardle, *Irish Republic*, pp. 236–7.
49. CAB 23/7/412.
50. CAB 23/7/433. Hankey recorded in his diary on 21 May, a month earlier: 'L.G. practically admitted to me that he was done with Home Rule, Roskill, *Hankey*, vol. I, p. 554.
51. H. A. L. Fisher diary, entry of 19 June 1918, Fisher Papers, box 8.
52. A. J. P. Taylor, *A History of the First World War* (New York, 1963) p. 148.
53. Dangerfield, *Damnably Question*, p. 273.
54. Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol. V, pp. 192–3.
55. Dangerfield, *Damnably Question*, pp. 283–4.
56. CAB 23/6/395. See also Cole, *Trade Unionism and Munitions*, pp. 140–41.
57. Wrigley, *Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement*, p. 227.
58. MUN 5/77/326/9.
59. Cole, *Trade Unionism and Munitions*, 140–41.
60. Wrigley, *Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement*, p. 228.
61. CAB 23/7/451.
62. Diary entry of 24 June 1918, Fisher Papers, box 8.
63. See Wolfe, *Labour Supply and Regulation*, pp. 142–7, for the Coventry strike and the inquiry which followed it. Given the facts that Wolfe was an official of the Ministry of Munitions and that this book continues to be an irreplaceable source for these questions, it is curious that he gives the date of the strike as November.
64. Amery, writing to Wilson on 1 August 1918, saw the possibility of the conflict going on even longer: 'My fear is not that 1920 is too late a date for the western climax, but that it is putting the date too early.' His view was based upon the German Army retreating to defensible positions and forcing the Allies to dislodge them. Amery Papers.
65. This correspondence is preserved in the Wilson Papers. On the same day, Haig wrote to Wilson regarding concerns about manpower and casualties expressed by the Government: 'What a wretched lot! And how well they mean to support me!! What confidence!' Though himself a 'Westerner' and a 'brass hat', Wilson lectured the Field Marshal as Lloyd George did Clemenceau: 'No, it isn't want of confidence in you, it is much more the

constant – and growing – embarrassment about Man Power that makes the Cabinet uneasy.’ 2 September 1918, Wilson Papers.

66. Wrigley, *Lloyd George and the British Labour Movement*, p. 231.
67. *War Memoirs*, vol. V, p. 193.

12 Epilogomena

1. William L. Langer, in his *Encyclopedia of World History* (New York, 1974) p. 976, reports estimates of direct costs of \$180 500 000 000 and indirect costs of \$151 612 000 000.
2. C. R. M. F. Cruttwell, *A History of the Great War* (London, 1964 edn) pp. 630–32. Similar, though slightly differing, figures of casualties are reported in Langer, *Encyclopedia of World History*.
3. For the celebrated coupon election, see Wilson, *Downfall of the Liberal Party*, part II, ‘The Coupon Election, November–December 1918’. An alternate view of the effects of the celebrated election and of Lloyd George’s part in post-War politics may be found in Michael Kinnear, *The Fall of Lloyd George: The Political Crisis of 1922* (Toronto, 1971).
4. Lord Beaverbrook, *Men and Power, 1917–1918* (London, 1956) p. 324.
5. See Paul Barton Johnson, *Land Fit for Heroes* (Chicago, 1968) *passim*; and Kenneth Morgan and Jane Morgan, *Portrait of a Progressive: The Political Career of Christopher, Viscount Addison* (Oxford, 1980) ch. 4.
6. *The Times*, 28 October 1918.
7. Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*, p. 318.
8. Kennedy, *Hound of Conscience*, p. 281.
9. Hayes, *Conscription Conflict*, p. 330.
10. *The Times*, 29 March 1938.
11. See Taylor, ‘Politics in Wartime’, p. 23. The most frequently cited source for the Geddes quotation is Viscount Simon, *Retrospect: The Memoirs of the Rt Hon. Viscount Simon* (London, 1952) p. 107, which is the source identified by A. J. P. Taylor in his celebrated essay. Seldom quoted, however, is a passage on the same page in Simon’s memoir:

I have long since realised that my opposition was a mistake. . . . But where I was wrong was in failing to appreciate the psychological effect, alike on our allies and on the men in the field, who were hard pressed, and their anxious relatives at home, of this demonstration that we would stick at nothing.

12. See, for example, Geddes’s letter to *The Times* of 16 November 1938.
13. *The Times*, 8 November 1938.
14. Dearle, *Labour Cost of the War*, p. 8.

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