This case study shows the limitations of laws in protecting citizens’ rights. Governments do not always ensure that rights in law are applied in the right way. Conscientious objectors during World War 1 (1914-18) suffered hardship and discrimination even though there was a law in place to protect them.

World War 1 caused the death of many soldiers. A UK law was passed in 1916, requiring all men aged 19 - 41 to be conscripted to join the war. This forced them to fight even if they didn’t want to.

Fighting in war and killing others went against the religion or beliefs of some people. However, there was a law which said men could object to conscription on genuine ‘religious or moral convictions’. This meant there was a legal way that people could be exempt from military service. Despite this, many conscientious objectors were treated badly because of their beliefs. Some were sent to prison and their families suffered hardship and discrimination.

In the UK, military service and conscription ended in 1960. The stories of conscientious objectors give us examples of bravery and survival of persecution.