Conscripts And Volunteers: Military Requirements, Social Justice, And The All-volunteer Force

Robert K. Fullinwider

Conscript forces became true ‘nations in arms’ in 1914-18. 55% of male Italians and Bulgarians aged 18 to 50 were called to military service. Elsewhere the proportions were even higher: 63% of military-aged men in Serbia, 78% in Austro-Hungary and 81% of military-aged men in France and Germany served. While conscript armies proved indispensable, and even the British in 1916 and the Americans in 1917 began to draft men, significant numbers of volunteers also served in the First World War. Most famously, in Britain 2,675,149 men volunteered, the vast majority in the first half of hostilities. Volunteers were not subject to the legal sanctions faced by conscripts who disobeyed drafting orders but they might be exposed to considerable social pressure to enlist.