

CANADA IN WORLD WAR 1. THE WAR IN EUROPE DREW IN MANY CANADIAN VOLUNTEERS, WITH TIES TO BRITAIN AND THE IDEA OF THE EMPIRE AND COMMONWEALTH STILL BEING STRONG.



BUT BY 1916 VOLUNTEER LEVELS WERE NOT ENOUGH AND THE GOVERNMENT, LED BY PRIME MINISTER ROBERT BORDEN, DECIDED TO BRING IN CONSCRIPTION.



DESPITE EARLIER PROMISES THAT IT WOULD NOT BE NECESSARY AND KNOWING IT WOULD BE A VERY CONTENTIOUS PLAN.

THE TERRIBLE EXPERIENCE OF TRENCH WARFARE AND THE HORRENDOUSLY HIGH CASUALTIES OF BATTLES IN THE SOMME, YPRES AND OTHER PLACES HAD BECOME WIDELY KNOWN BY THEN.



QUITE UNDERSTANDABLY MANY YOUNG MEN IN CANADA WERE NOT KEEN TO BE THROWN INTO THAT HELL, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEIR OWN COUNTRY WAS NOT DIRECTLY UNDER ATTACK.



OOH, I DON'T LIKE THE LOOK OF THAT, JOE. HOPE YOU DON'T HAVE TO GO THERE.



ME TOO, MUM, ME TOO!

IN MONTREAL IT WAS ESTIMATED THAT 25% OF PEOPLE REFUSED TO REPORT WHEN CALLED UP BY THE CONSCRIPTION BOARD, AND IN WINNIPEG IT WAS 20%.



WINNIPEG CENTER'S MLA (MEMBER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY) AT THE TIME WAS FRED DIXON, ONE OF THE AREA'S MOST IMPORTANT PROGRESSIVE POLITICIANS. IN 1917 HE BECAME A KEY SPOKESPERSON FOR THE RESISTANCE TO CONSCRIPTION, SAYING:

WE SAY THAT OUR MEN SHOULD ONLY BE CONSCRIPTED IF THE SONS OF THE WEALTHY ARE TOO.

WHY SHOULD THEY EVADE THE CALL, WHEN WORKING MEN ARE THROWN INTO THE TRENCHES?

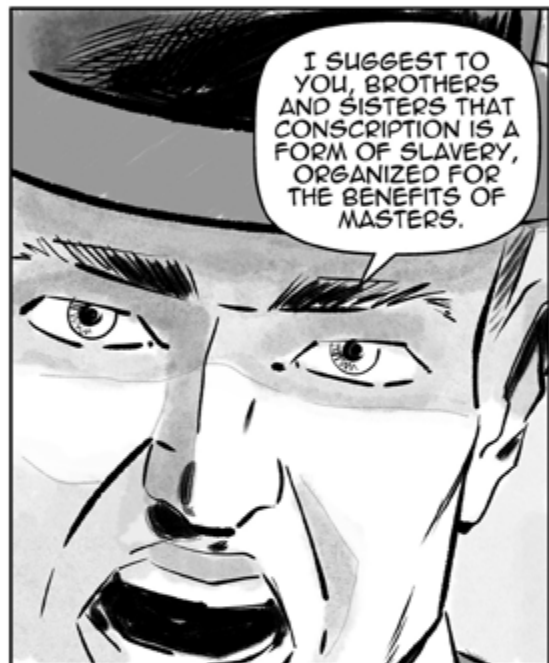
FRED'S FAMILY HAD BEEN HIT HARD ALREADY. HIS BROTHER, GEORGE, HAD BEEN KILLED FIGHTING IN FRANCE THE YEAR BEFORE.



LEAVING A WIFE AND TWO CHILDREN TO MOURN HIM.



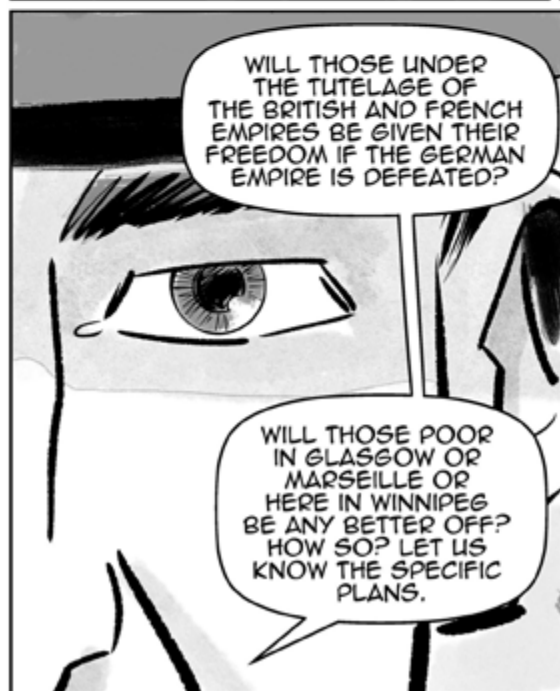
DIXON MADE SIMILAR ARGUMENTS AS THE BRITISH SOCIALISTS OF THE LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURIES. PEOPLE LIKE KIER HARDY WHO WERE FIGHTING FOR THE VOICE OF UNIONS AND WORKING PEOPLE IN HOW SOCIETY WAS RUN, AND WHO QUESTIONED WHAT THE WAR WAS REALLY ABOUT.



I SUGGEST TO YOU, BROTHERS AND SISTERS THAT CONSCRIPTION IS A FORM OF SLAVERY, ORGANIZED FOR THE BENEFITS OF MASTERS.



IS THE WAR REALLY BEING FOUGHT TO PRESERVE FREEDOM, AS THEY TELL US? IF SO THEN PROVE IT. SHOW US HOW IT IS SO, IN CLEAR WAYS.



WILL THOSE UNDER THE TUTELAGE OF THE BRITISH AND FRENCH EMPIRES BE GIVEN THEIR FREEDOM IF THE GERMAN EMPIRE IS DEFEATED?

WILL THOSE POOR IN GLASGOW OR MARSEILLE OR HERE IN WINNIPEG BE ANY BETTER OFF? HOW SO? LET US KNOW THE SPECIFIC PLANS.

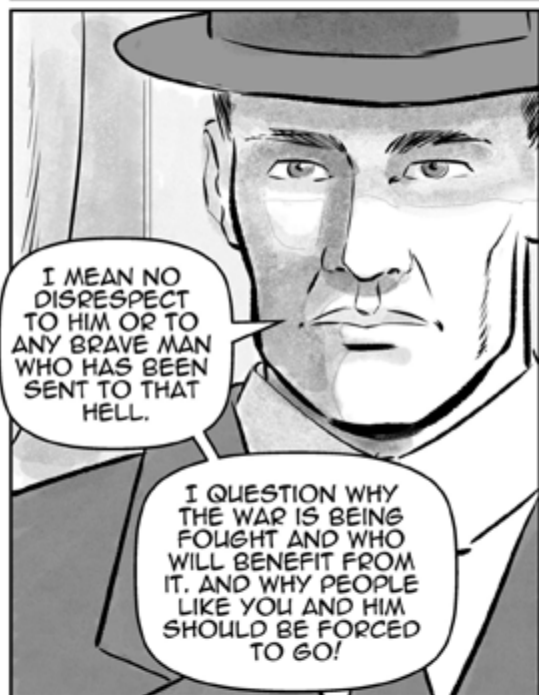


OTHERWISE WHY SHOULD WE DIE FOR MYTH? WHY SHOULD A YOUNG FELLOW FROM MONTREAL KILL ANOTHER FROM MUNICH - ALL FOR A MYTH?

HIS APPROACH WAS THAT OF A PACIFIST, BUT ONE INSPIRED MORE BY HUMANIST THOUGHT RATHER THAN RELIGIOUS TEACHINGS. IN THE OVERHEATED ATMOSPHERE OF WARTIME, DIXON'S SPEECHES WERE UNPOPULAR WITH MANY PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY SOLDIERS WHO HAD RETURNED WITH WOUNDS AND DISABILITIES.

YOU BLOODY TRAITOR!

MY BROTHER DIED LAST MONTH IN FRANCE. HOW DARE YOU?



I MEAN NO DISRESPECT TO HIM OR TO ANY BRAVE MAN WHO HAS BEEN SENT TO THAT HELL.

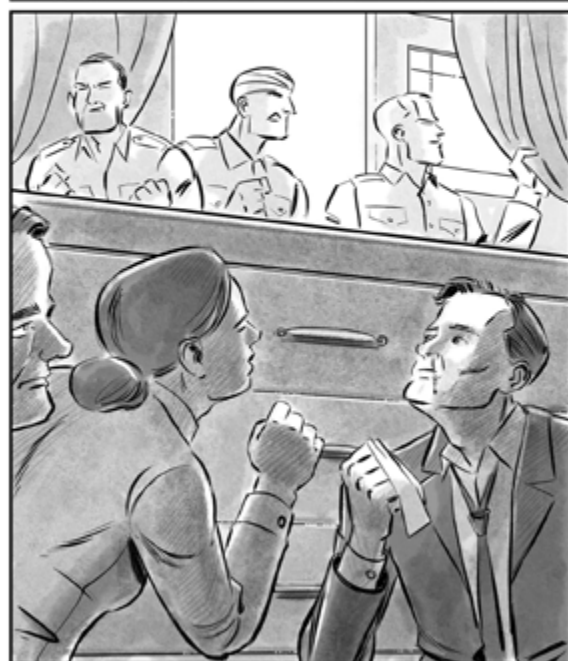
I QUESTION WHY THE WAR IS BEING FOUGHT AND WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM IT. AND WHY PEOPLE LIKE YOU AND HIM SHOULD BE FORCED TO GO!

THEY'RE FIGHTING THE HUN! DO YOU WANT HIM TO OVERRUN EUROPE?

SHUT UP, LET THE MAN SPEAK!









WHILE ADDRESSING A MEETING IN BRANDON IN JANUARY 1917, DIXON WAS INTERRUPTED BY HECKLERS.



BOOO!

GOD SAVE  
THE KING!

GOD SAVE  
THE PEOPLE!



A GROUP TRIED TO HAVE DIXON EXPELLED FROM HIS SEAT IN THE LEGISLATURE AND CIRCULATED A PETITION IN HIS WINNIPEG CENTRE CONSTITUENCY CALLING FOR HIS EXPULSION.



BUT DIXON WAS POPULAR AND USUALLY WON WITH A LARGE MAJORITY.





LET'S BACK TRACK A LITTLE. FREDERICK JOHN DIXON WAS BORN IN THE ENGLEFIELD NEAR THE TOWN OF READING IN SOUTHERN ENGLAND IN JANUARY 1881, DURING THE HEIGHT OF BRITISH POWER AND EMPIRE.



BUT DESPITE THAT POWER MANY WORKING PEOPLE IN BRITAIN ITSELF LIVED SPARTAN LIVES. THE WEALTH OF EMPIRE DID NOT HELP THEM MUCH.



HIS PARENTS, AND HANNAH AND THOMAS, COULD NOT AFFORD TO GIVE HIM MUCH FORMAL EDUCATION, SO HE ONLY COMPLETED ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN THE VILLAGE SCHOOL.

AT THAT TIME, MOST WORKING PEOPLE HAD TO RELY ON SCHOLARSHIPS IN ORDER TO PROCEED TO HIGH SCHOOL OR GO ONTO UNIVERSITY.



THE LOCAL RECTOR CONTROLLED THE ENDOWMENTS IN THAT AREA AND SEEING FRED'S INTELLIGENCE, WAS KEEN ON ARRANGING ONE FOR HIM. WHEN FRED WAS 13 THE RECTOR CAME TO SPEAK TO THE FAMILY.

SO, WHAT SAY YOU? AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY, YES?

HOW ABOUT IT, LAO?

NO, THANKS ALL THE SAME, RECTOR. I'M 13 NOW AND I DON'T WANT TO SPEND MY LIFE INSIDE A SCHOOL ROOM.



YOU HEARD THE BOY MAKE HIS DECISION.

NOW WE'LL HEAR NO MORE ABOUT IT!

