

## Walter Ayles



*Walter was Bristol's most prominent opponent of World War 1. He was the local organiser for the Independent Labour Party and was elected to Bristol City Council for Easton ward in 1912. He was married to women's suffrage campaigner Bertha Batt. This photograph shows them in 1912.*

When war was declared in 1914 Walter became a founder member of the No-Conscription Fellowship and was the only member of Bristol City Council to vote against a motion offering “whole hearted support” for the war. When conscription was introduced in 1916, he was fined for publishing a Repeal the Act flyer and then imprisoned for 61 days for refusing to pay the fine.

In June 1916 Walter appeared before the Bristol Military Service Tribunal and declared “*If I believed in the efficacy of slaughter to remedy evils, I would long ago have advocated the killing of those who, year after year, have been responsible for the sweated, the starved and the slummed. I know, however in my heart of hearts, that slaughter being wrong is no remedy.*” In June 2016 Remembering The Real World War 1 re-enacted his tribunal – [this video about Walter shows part of the event](#).

The Tribunal instructed Walter to take non-combatant service but he refused and continued to address anti-conscription meetings around the country. He was arrested in Glasgow in November 1916 and spent the rest of the war in prisons and detention barracks, He was eventually released in April 1919 and was immediately re-elected as the councillor for Easton. In 1924 he was elected as the Labour MP for Bristol North and continued to campaign against war.

In April 2016 a [blue plaque was unveiled](#) at Walter and Bertha's house in Station Road, Ashley Down.

The photograph above is available [here](#) (with the permission of and with thanks to Mark Arthurs).

See also the pdfs on this website relating to *The No-Conscription Fellowship* and *COs in Prison*.