**A new kind of war**

World War One was like no other war before in history. The main theatre of war, the Western Front, was deadlocked from a few months after the war's start in 1914 until a few months before its end in 1918, stretching in a continuous line of trenches from the English Channel to the Swiss frontier. By 1916 the forces of Germany, France and the British Empire, armies millions of men strong, measured advances in terms of a few miles (or kilometers) gained over several months. Casualties for each big attack or 'push' ran into hundreds of thousands on both sides, with calculations for victory based on national birth-rates to replace the losses. This was not the kind of war that anyone, including the politicians and generals who directed it, wanted to fight.

**This was... a demonstration of the prodigious strength, resilience and killing power of modern states.**

What made World War One so different was the long-term impact of the Industrial Revolution, with its accompanying political and social changes. This was the first mass global war of the industrialized age, a demonstration of the prodigious strength, resilience and killing power of modern states. The war was also fought at a high point of patriotism and belief in the existing social hierarchy; beliefs that the war itself helped destroy, and that the modern world finds very hard to understand.

More than a century before, the French Revolution of 1789 had seen the first attempts to harness citizenship and patriotism to a national war effort. In the ideology of revolutionary France, young men were conscripted into the armed forces as part of their duty as citizens, but the remaining population was also expected to make personal sacrifices for the war, blurring the distinction between civilian and soldier.

Known at first as 'People's War', this idea developed in the 19th century as part of a growing sense of national identity. By the middle of World War One it was known as 'Total War' - the organization of entire societies for war in a social, economic, and even spiritual sense. There were, of course, protests and debates, but the vast majority of people fought in World War One, or supported it with the 'Home Front' because they believed that victory for their own country was worth the cost.

**The age of iron and steam**

The 19th century saw the industrial transformation of much of Europe, with vastly increased populations, developing urbanization, and new scientific inventions. In particular, this was the age of iron and steam. Railways and steamships led to a revolution in transport, allowing large armies with their supplies and ammunition to be moved long distances in days rather than weeks. Developments in metallurgy, chemicals and electricity led to new forms of explosives and propellants for improved firearms and artillery, and to a revolution in communications with the electric telegraph.