‘TYPICAL’ CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS – A BETTER CLASS OF CONSCIENCE? NO-CONSCRIPTION FELLOWSHIP IMAGE MANAGEMENT AND THE MANCHESTER CONTRIBUTION 1916 - 1918. [i]

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With the introduction of conscription in January 1916, the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF), principal organisation for 1914-18 war resisters, began a protracted campaign to secure influence in the largely hostile environment of wartime government, press and public opinion. Catherine Marshall, its Parliamentary Secretary, was the key figure in that work, central to which was the promotion of an image of the ‘typical’ Conscientious Objector (CO). With the help of hitherto under-used archive material - including a detailed report on the NCF’s Manchester membership - this study looks to address notions of the ‘typical’ CO and to reflect on its impact on our subsequent understanding of the experiences and motives of 1914-18 war resisters.

Introduction

The only detailed indication of the total number of British First World War Conscientious Objectors (COs) was published in 1922 by the anti-war movement’s first historian, John W. Graham, or ‘Principal Graham’ of Manchester University’s Dalton Hall. He calculated that there were probably 16,100 of them, a tiny number when compared with the millions of volunteers and conscripts who served in Britain’s armed forces.[ii] Nevertheless, almost from the outset, they have been the subject of a vigorous, and probably disproportionate, debate. The argument began in the heated propaganda-rich setting of the war itself and has been continued by historians and politicians ever since. Indeed, despite the passage of time, and probably because of the continuing relevance of issues of war, peace and conscientious resistance, the debate has never really been able to escape from the grip of its original wartime polemic. Such a highly politicised argument, by its nature, frequently distorts reality – it becomes an alternative reality. Nowhere is this more true than in the treatment of the debate’s central question: ‘Who were the COs, and why did they do it?’

Answering that question has, so far, been less about the rich diversity of the 16,100 individual stories, and much more about recruiting stereotypical foot-soldiers for a wider conflict. A conflict which has at its core the question of freedom of speech and the right to dissent within a democracy, especially at a time when other pressures might urge the importance above all else of loyalty and obedience.

The No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF), as the principal organisation representing First World War COs, was as guilty as its critics of creating and dealing in stereotypes. From the summer of 1916 onwards, it developed its own model of the ‘typical’ CO. That model was used in its campaigning for better treatment for COs and against the war. Those it sought to influence, including members of the government, were, on the whole, a select group of opinion formers, rather than the mass of the population. For that reason the ‘typical’ CO was portrayed as a principled good citizen with religious or ethical objections to the war, badly treated by an insensitive wartime machine but standing up for his rights to conscientious objection as allowed in the law. He was no threat to the state or the social order, or even to the conduct of the war, but rather a reminder of democracy’s responsibility to freedom of speech and conscience.

For some, this was such a persuasive model that it has lasted far beyond 1919 and the release from prison of the last of the COs. As with all models of the ‘typical’, however, it involved the suppression or denial of alternative realities. It has, as a consequence, persisted as a distorting mirror of the reality of the anti-war movement. The Manchester NCF branch’s June 1916 survey of its members, *Conscience and Character* [See Appendix for a verbatim transcript], could be said to mark an early and influential contribution to that process.

The No-Conscription Fellowship National Committee, May 1916
Front row, left to right: C.H. Norman, Alfred Salter, Aylmer Rose, Fenner Brockway, Clifford Allen, Edward Grubb, Will Chamberlain, Catherine Marshall.
Standing, left to right: Rev. Leyton Richards, Morgan Jones, John P. Fletcher, A. Barratt Brown, Bertrand Russell.

The NCF and the Anti-War Movement

The particular history of the NCF is dealt with in detail elsewhere.[iii] Briefly, the accounts begin by concentrating on the contribution of Fenner Brockway. At the outbreak of war he was editor of the Independent Labour Party’s (ILP) newspaper the *Labour Leader*, and working in Manchester where the paper and the ILP's publications department were based. In November 1914, he published an appeal inviting all young men who intended to refuse military service to join a 'No-Conscription Fellowship'.[iv] The response was encouraging. By February 1915, the NCF had 339 members and the names of a number of men beyond military service age who were prepared to help.[v] Originally organised by Fenner Brockway and his wife Lilla from their house in Derbyshire, the flow of new members and its developing work prompted the opening of a head office in London later that summer.

By that time the British system of voluntary recruitment was in trouble. The Derby Scheme, which attempted to encourage every man of military age to 'attest' his willingness to serve should he be called on to do so, was voluntarism's last throw and it failed. Notwithstanding a vigorous opposition mounted by radical Liberals, trade unions and anti-war campaigners, by late autumn conscription seemed inevitable. As a consequence, membership of the NCF grew to the point where it became necessary to convene its first national conference. This was held in London in November against a background of press hostility and attempts to disrupt proceedings by groups of soldiers and pro-war civilians.[vi]

The conference formally agreed the NCF's organisation, elected its National Committee and set down its definition of the 'Statement of Faith' as the basis of membership.

> *The No-Conscription Fellowship is an organisation of men likely to be called up for military service in the event of conscription, who will refuse from conscientious motives to bear arms, because they consider human life to be sacred, and cannot, therefore, assume the responsibility of inflicting death. They deny the right of Governments to say. "You shall bear arms"' and will oppose every effort to introduce compulsory military service into Great Britain. Should such efforts be successful, they will, whatever the consequences may be, obey their conscientious convictions rather than the commands of Governments.*[vii]

Although unquestionably the most significant, the NCF was not the only anti-war grouping in Britain during the 1914-18 war. Its commitment to 'oppose every effort to introduce compulsory military service' had already been the major part of its work for much of the summer of 1915. In this it was joined by other organisations from within a broad anti-war community – the Society of Friends, Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), Union of Democratic Control (UDC) – and from the wider world of party politics – the ILP, parts of the British Socialist Party (BSP), elements of radical Liberalism and a growing number of women from the movement for women's suffrage – together with local Trades Councils and parts of the trade union movement. This disparate group came together in a broad and hectic campaign largely co-ordinated by the National Council Against Conscription, later the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) to prevent the inevitable introduction of the first Military Service Bill. This eleventh hour attempt to co-ordinate resistance came too late. However, something of that failed campaign was preserved in the creation of the Joint Advisory Council – better known as the 'JAC'. This co-ordinated the work of three principal anti-war groups; the NCF, the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Friends' Service Committee (FSC) for the remainder of the war years and beyond.[viii]

Context

On 29 June 1916, six months after the introduction of military conscription, the NCF circulated its branches with a letter headed 'Branch Activities'. The letter, written by Catherine Marshall, its Parliamentary Secretary, set out some advice to branches and a number of requests along with a commendation, '... of a most valuable report received from Manchester ...' and a suggestion that '[t]he preparation of similar reports in other districts would be very useful'.[ix] Why she was so enthusiastic about this report and why so keen to have the exercise repeated elsewhere is not immediately obvious.

Parts of an answer to this question can be found in the contents of the letter and in the other documents enclosed with it. The message was essentially about comparing good practice. Attached to the letter were 'brief notes' on four examples. The first suggested that branches ought to gather detailed 'biographies' of their members. This was supported by an exemplary, and quite exhaustive, questionnaire. How this information was to be used is not clear, although the notes suggest that it had been found very useful 'when a comrade is out of reach and therefore cannot reply'.[x]

However, the detail recommended for the members' survey suggested that it was meant to be about more than just contact details for absent COs. What seems to have been intended was a branch-by-branch analysis of members together with their motives and experiences. A collection of local studies of this kind would have been invaluable. In the event, the Manchester report was the only one actually produced. Even then, it describes itself as 'far from complete' and as an 'interim report'. It was never actually completed, nor was it published anywhere but in the NCF's own privately circulated fortnightly Newsletter. Nevertheless, it seems to have been influential in establishing the NCF's view of its local membership and, as a consequence, in helping to identify 'typical' COs.

By the summer of 1916, such a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the community of war resisters at large had become urgently necessary. The anti-war movement was in difficulties. In January, Parliament's approval of the first Military Service Bill meant that the fight to resist conscription had been lost. The second Bill, proposing the conscription of married men, was approved in May. In the same month, the NCF's entire National Committee was put on trial for publishing a pamphlet called *Repeal the Act*, which, it was argued, breached the Defence of the Realm Act (DoRA) by attempting to hinder the conscription process. In July, fined £800, five members of the National Committee went to prison rather than pay up. Thirty-five COs sent to France by the army only avoided death by firing squad after last-minute intervention by sympathetic MPs.[xi] As the letter on 'Branch Activities' went in the post, British artillery was pounding the German front lines in preparation for the first battle of the Somme.

At home, the anti-war movement was facing a barrage of its own. With the introduction of conscription, and especially after the first week in March when the first COs began to appear before local Military Service Tribunals (MSTs), the war's opponents were having to contend with an increasingly virulent set of negative images of COs promoted by elements of the popular press. Aitken's, later Beaverbrook's, *Daily Express* and Northcliffe's *Daily Mail* were especially abusive.[xii] As De Groot suggests, with this encouragement in the public mind anti-war campaigners of all kinds were being equated to aliens, spies and other undesirables.

> *The "enemies in our midst" were a focus for hatred and a stimulus to combative determination. They also provided easy scapegoats if anything went wrong: ships were sunk because of spies: aliens sabotaged shell production; pacifists undermined recruiting efforts. It is not entirely fatuous to suggest that the British people needed aliens and dissenters to keep their hatred stoked. Bertrand Russell, Clifford Allen and their comrades probably did more for the cause of war than they ever achieved for the cause of peace.*[xiii]

The anti-war movement's reactions to the Home Office Scheme provided even more opportunities for negative comment. The scheme divided the NCF. Introduced in August 1916, it allowed COs to do work, which it was claimed was not war-related, in Home Office Work Centres rather than stay in prison. For some – the National Committee included – the only proper stance for the CO was as an 'Absolutist', refusing to co-operate with the conduct of the war in any way and to remain in prison. However, the majority of imprisoned COs opted for the Home Office Scheme and became known as 'Alternativists'.[xiv] By May 1917, the War Cabinet had come to regard all COs with profound suspicion. During a debate on a proposal to release certain COs from prison, General Childs, the member of the War Office staff with responsibility for COs, informed the Cabinet that the 'Absolutists' could be further divided into two types:

> *... those who adopted an attitude of resistance to every attempt to make them work, and those who not only refused to undertake any service for the State, but were increasingly busy in their endeavours to induce their fellow citizens to defy the Government. This latter class were working in close co-operation with the Union of Democratic Control and the No-Conscription Fellowship, and other bodies whose activities, in time of war, were unpatriotic and dangerous. Such men, if they were released by the Military Authorities, would have immediately to be imprisoned under the Defence of the Realm Act.*[xv]

To this, the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel, added, '... that whereas religious objectors were generally harmless, if abnormal, political objectors were often dangerous propagandists, and their conduct in work centres constituted a grave scandal.'[xvi]

Aspects of these hostile judgements are probably more accurate than the NCF leadership was prepared to admit. But then, as the failed attempt at a branch survey in the summer of 1916 would seem to indicate, the leadership had very little understanding of its grassroots membership let alone its local political and personal dynamics. Millman attributes this to the leadership's class make-up:

> *In its first year, the NCF was essentially a middle-class, nonconformist socialist association. Not until a year later, in the autumn of 1916, with conscription a fact and industrial conscription on the horizon, did the NCF begin to find a wider working-class audience.*[xvii]

Millman may have a point about the late widening of the NCF's appeal. On the other hand, its membership had already expanded in the spring of 1916 as COs began to appear before the local MSTs and from there to courts martial, prison and eventually the Home Office scheme, and among this expanded membership there was a significant working-class presence.

NCF Membership

Exactly how many members the NCF had at any time is far from clear. The pressures of wartime, DoRA and work to support individual COs seems to have meant that keeping accurate accounts of membership was given a low priority. But, having said that, even after the war and with the whole of the Conscientious Objector Information Bureau (COIB) archive at its disposal, the NCF remained frustratingly vague. Graham's account of the April 1916 Convention describes a meeting of 2,000 members representing 198 branches.[xviii] Boulton suggests that total membership may have reached 10,000 but this is not confirmed either by the NCF's own *Souvenir History* or by the report given at its final convention in January 1920.[xix] If all the known Conscientious Objectors (COs) had been members of the NCF then the figure might have been in the region of 16,000. But they were not all members. It is also probable that not all NCF members had their conscientious objection tested by MST. In October 1916 the NCF's Newsletter claimed 15,000 members but added, '... we have no means of knowing the exact figure since we ceased, some months ago, to keep a list of members at headquarters, and we have not had a recent return from branches.'[xx]

Notwithstanding these uncertainties, what the NCF and its historians are very clear about is the extent to which the initial appeal attracted the support of numerous people who, if not nationally famous at the time, later went on to achieve some measure of prominence. Writing in 1942, Fenner Brockway listed some of the prominent early members of the NCF and its committee:

> *Clifford Allen, later Lord Allen of Hurtwood... C.H. Norman... an unusual man. He had become known for sensational articles exposing hidden scandals behind the war ... Barratt Brown, now Principal of Ruskin College, Oxford, then on the staff of Woodbrooke [Quaker] College, Birmingham ... Morgan Jones, a Welsh schoolteacher, afterwards to become a Junior Minister in the Labour Government of 1929-31 ... James H. Hudson, at that time a leading member of the Lancashire ILP, the most pugilistic of pacifists ... Will Chamberlain, a Tolstoyan despite the red, Kaiser-like moustache – he is now chief of the Press Department of the Labour Party ....*[xxi]

There was also Edward Grubb, the treasurer, '... a lovable Quaker, admired widely for his scholarship and revered by all who knew him for his nobility of character'. An older man, he was beyond military age and served the NCF throughout the war. Later, there was Bertrand Russell, already a famous philosopher and '...heir to an earldom...'.[xxii]

Worthy, high-principled and well-connected though the NCF 'stars' were – or were to become – the complexion of the NCF branches at the local level was far more diverse. James Maxton, himself a CO and a prominent representative of post-war 'Red Clydeside', anticipating Millman's judgement, expressed a sense of the leadership being 'too far removed from the class fight'.[xxiii] Arthur Gardiner a dyer's labourer from Huddersfield, a militant Marxist CO, although a member of the NCF regarded it as a 'sidetracking organisation'.[xxiv]

The dearth of reliable local studies of the 1914-1918 anti-war movement allows only occasional glimpses of the character of NCF branches. In Birmingham, for instance, a broad-based anti-war community seems to have been led by influential members of the Society of Friends. In Huddersfield, a vanguard of young men, all of them COs from the local branch of the British Socialist Party (BSP), was sustained by a broad-based centre-left coalition of anti-war Liberals, radical suffragists, ILP members and the local Trades Council.[xxv] In Glasgow, '... by summer 1915, patriot violence had driven dissent ... entirely into the hands of the militant left as the only force convinced enough and violent enough to provide protection. Glasgow in this was in the lead.'[xxvi]

The varying strengths of the local branches and their different combinations of backgrounds and motives explains why the NCF Statement of Faith was subject to a wide range of different interpretations. Graham described it very clearly.

> *The main statement never, except in the early stages, exactly reflected the feelings of all the members of the NCF. Many members signed, intending to prove their sincerity by the act of resistance rather than by giving deep thought to the implications of the phraseology; others signed with mental reservations; while others associated themselves with the fellowship without formally signing the basis at all. ... to many people resistance to conscription was the thing that mattered; forms of words mattered little. Not all working men, who formed a large part of the membership, have the same regard for formulas and phrases as some others have.*[xxvii]

Graham's description of the inconsistencies in NCF members' motives masked much sharper divisions. These were not simply the divisions between the 'Alternativists' and the 'Absolutists'. They were also the often acrimonious differences between those who felt they ought to 'play by the rules', even as COs, and those who took every opportunity to commit acts of resistance. The notion of COs and NCF members opposing, or even subverting, the wartime state in numerous acts of resistance – petty and principled alike – was one which sat uncomfortably with the NCF's emergent attempts to influence government and public opinion. Consequently, the sheer diversity and frequently challenging behaviour of its CO members in prisons and work centres seldom appeared in the NCF's lobbying and campaigning. The notion of NCF activity as an, at times, incoherent mix of acts of resistance which had much in common with street and workplace class struggle was largely excluded from its preferred image. That it is necessary to speak of 'image' at this time says much about the NCF's perpetually unequal struggle with government and the press. It also says a great deal about Catherine Marshall and about the ways in which the pre-war strategies of the NUWSS, with which she was so closely identified, were transposed and applied to the circumstances in which the NCF found itself.

Catherine Marshall, 1916 – probably the photograph attached to her permit to visit Clifford Allen in Newhaven Military Prison

Catherine Marshall

In June 1916, Catherine Marshall became Secretary of the NCF's Parliamentary Committee and rapidly became one of its most influential figures.[xxviii]

She had been born in 1880 into a prosperous family of radical Liberals. Her father, a former master at Harrow School, had brought the family to settle in Cumberland. Catherine made her first mark in politics in the women's movement. In 1909, with the support of Isabella Ford, she was elected to the National Committee of the suffragist National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). As a suffragist she was tireless worker, skilled lobbyist and brilliant organiser. Jo Vellacott noted that, '[b]y the end of 1913, she was of all lobbyists probably the best informed, and possessed of an extremely rare degree of access to leading politicians in all three parties.'[xxix]

By 1914 she was the NUWSS' Parliamentary Secretary. Along with other important figures in the women's movement, she opposed the war and was one of the organisers, in April 1915, of the Hague International Women's Conference on the war. It prompted the formation of the Women's International League (WIL), later the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Marshall worked for the WIL throughout much of 1915 and when the conscription debate grew more intense, threw in her lot with the National Council Against Conscription. When that campaign failed, she offered her services to the NCF.

The parallels between the needs and activities of the pre-war NUWSS and those of the wartime NCF were surprisingly close. Neither had any real political power and were, therefore, unable directly to influence government policy or legislation; but both had a strong political message to communicate and both had members to support and protect.

Where they differed was in their realistic political expectations. Wherever the truth might lie in the 'suffragists v. suffragettes' debate, there is little doubt that, war or no war, the 'woman question' would have been resolved, at least in terms of the franchise, at some time in the first half of the twentieth century. For the NCF, however, there was no such luxury as the long-term of political inevitability. The political struggle for peace had been lost in 1914. That loss was compounded by the introduction of conscription in 1916 and finally wiped from the political agenda by the government's refusal to negotiate an early peace and its determination to press for total victory in an 'all-out' war. The war was an immanent reality and resistance to it a daily struggle for all NCF members and supporters.

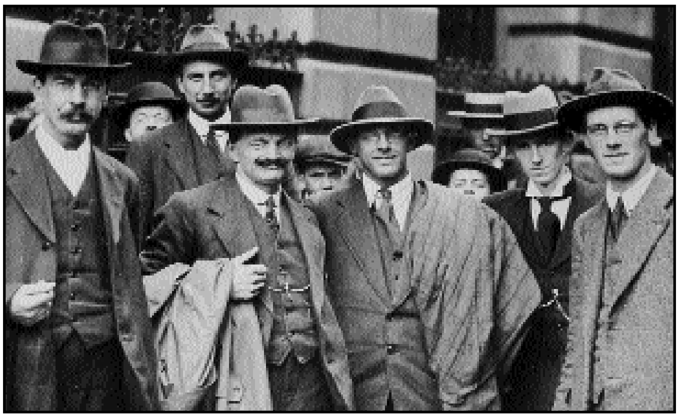
The demands of the war distorted the whole political process. Indeed, it is remarkable that the NCF and the other anti-war groups were able to press their case at all. Their activities were circumscribed in so many ways. The DoRA inhibited what might be written in journals or pamphlets and provided numerous opportunities for their suppression, the confiscation or destruction of printing presses and the imprisonment of those responsible. With few exceptions, the popular press was hostile and, at times, rabidly so. Many local authorities denied anti-war groups access to public halls or to public open spaces and anti-war meetings were challenged by periodic physical attacks.[xxx] Unsympathetic commentators have argued that after the near embarrassment in June 1916 of the Army's attempt to have thirty-five COs taken to France to be shot for cowardice, the government worked hard to deny the war's opponents any opportunities for similar publicity. The introduction of Army Order X in May 1916, which was intended to ensure that court-martialled COs were handed over to the Home Office to serve their sentences in civil prisons, was just such a move – as far as it went. It was, however, confined to those COs sentenced to hard labour which not all of them were. It did not prevent many of them serving sentences in army prisons or barracks guardrooms. The Home Office scheme was much more successful from the authorities' point of view.[xxxi] For the majority of COs, not only did it deny them the drama of the very real suffering of prisons and guardrooms, it divided the NCF. Added to that was the negative propaganda value of a Home Office scheme which the popular press took great delight in portraying as a 'soft option' for COs.

NCF Organisation

Nevertheless, even if ultimately ineffectual, and perhaps even counter-productive, the anti-war groups did persist in pressing their various arguments against the war. Such continued and defiant activity was probably far more important in asserting the solidarity of the anti-war community than as a realistic immediate influence on government policy or public opinion.

For the NCF, the consequence of all this was to concentrate the bulk of its work on the needs of its members. This was no small task and, if not in itself anti-war campaigning, indirectly kept the anti-war message before the public. It also helped to reinforce the solidarity of Britain's many anti-war communities. Indeed, under Catherine Marshall's management, it generated an impressive and unavoidable national and local bureaucracy of anti-war activity. Not just that, but along with this work and a crucial part of it went a programme of persuasion, lobbying and information dissemination which aimed at showing the COs' continued opposition to the Military Service Acts in the best possible light.

Writing to branches in September 1916, Catherine Marshall described the NCF's work. She described a central organisation divided into a number of 'Departments' – a Prisoners' Department, a Political Department, a Literature Service Department, a Peace Campaign Department a Press Department and 'Department V'.[xxxii] By July 1917, NCF headquarters in London employed more than twenty people – twenty on salaries and the rest, Catherine Marshall and Bertrand Russell among them, volunteers on expenses only. By this time the NCCL seems to have assumed responsibility for most of the work of preparing COs to face their Military Service Tribunals. It also trained and liaised with the 'Watchers' who monitored the workings of the Tribunals. The Society of Friends, working through the JAC, seems to have taken on much of the prison and work centre visiting. There were similar shared responsibilities for continued anti-war campaigning and propaganda work but each member of JAC took responsibility for its own pamphlets and propaganda material.[xxxiii]



NCF Committee members meeting the press outside Mansion House Court, May 1916

This had prompted changes in headquarters organisation but the NCF's London staff were still described as being organised into a number of 'Departments'. One of them, 'Head Office', supported the wider NCF organisation and the various national committees and sub-committees. The 'Press Department' gathered cuttings from national and local press across Britain, and was responsible for preparing a weekly index with digests and analyses. It also managed the production of the NCF's journal *The Tribunal* and was probably responsible for compiling and circulating the fortnightly Newsletter filled with the latest data on CO arrests, imprisonments, and courts martial. This was used by *The Friend*, *The Tribunal*, *Labour Leader* and other sympathetic parts of the press and sent out to branches, sympathisers and potential sympathisers.[xxxiv] The 'Parliamentary Department' for which Catherine Marshall was primarily responsible from 1916 until May 1917, monitored the Parliamentary sittings, briefed MPs and, most contentiously for some, worked with government departments. The COIB was run in conjunction with the JAC and, as its name suggests, gathered information on COs at every stage of their contact with the Military Service process from local Tribunals to prisons and Home Office scheme work centres. So assiduous was the COIB in gathering data, it was said, that government departments which had lost track of a CO, moving from barracks to prison, from prison to prison or from one work centre to another, often relied on the COIB to tell them where he was.[xxxv] Then there was 'Department V'. The air of mystery which so easily attaches to this description is misleading. It might better have been called 'The Department of everything else' or 'The Department for doing the things which don't quite fit into the other departments'. It was actually 'supposed to be able to undertake any miscellaneous investigations connected with prisoners – prison regulations, Army Law, etc.' It also had a brief for investigating civil and other legal points especially arising from the operation of DoRA. More generally, it seems to have had a role in the NCF's joined-up thinking.[xxxvi]

Of course there was much more to it than that. Filling the gaps and making the connections between the different parts of this burgeoning bureaucracy was the role which Catherine Marshall expanded during 1916 and early 1917. On her departure from the role of Parliamentary Secretary in May 1917, she left behind for her successor a thorough set of notes which described the way her part of the NCF Head Office ought to work. As well as exhortations to ensure the co-ordination of Head Office activities, the notes contain advice on the ways in which NCF policy might be advanced, including (the underlining is Catherine Marshalls's own),

> *Forseeing needs likely to arise and providing for them. Planning series of activities, in carefully thought-out sequence, not haphazard. Relating all political action to the general political situation of the moment. Approaching the right people at the right time through the right channels. (A great deal more might be done than we do with regard to groups of people throughout the country, such as TU's, Professional groups, the Universities, the Churches etc.) In order to be able to do this, Keep in touch with other political movements and general trend of affairs. This involves much seeing people, and attention especially to activities of: Civil Liberties Group in Parliament, ILP, NCCL, UDC, WIL. ...*
>
> *It is very important to have feelers out in all directions so as to hear at once of any new ideas in the wind with regards to the treatment of COs. For this reason it is important to see government officials fairly frequently even if there is no urgent business to put before them: - War Office (Gen. Childs); Home Office (Mr. Whiskard best); Prison Commission (Col. Winn) and various private secretaries as occasion arise.*[xxxvii]

Without pursuing this further, a number of observations come to mind. The first is of a very busy and increasingly sophisticated organisation desperate to ensure efficiency and cost-effectiveness. The second is of the central importance of Catherine Marshall to the whole process, but the third, and perhaps most important, is the suggestion, '[r]elating all political action to the general political situation of the moment. Approaching the right people at the right time through the right channels.'[xxxviii]

To which might be added, 'with the right message'. If the NCF was to exert any influence, she argued, then it would have to acknowledge the nature of the world in which it found itself and to work with the grain, rather than against it. The NCF policy, which was to grow out of this understanding, resulted in the promotion of a particular view of COs and what they stood for. In promoting that view, other views had to be played down or reluctantly, and belatedly, accommodated. The result, not unusual in such an organisation, was the need to manage a public image alongside a private, and often contradictory, reality.

In looking for influence in this way, without having any real political power, NCF policy inevitably had to bend to the government agenda. It is not clear whether Catherine Marshall appreciated the risk. Her pre-war experience of playing a similar role for the NUWSS, however, would suggest that she knew exactly what she was doing but, for the sake of the COs whose welfare she was attempting to protect, she was prepared to take the risk. Given her background and the presence of a number of Old Harrovian officers in General Childs' department, she moved in those circles with some ease. This enviable access to the machinery of government enabled her to bring a gentle pressure to bear on the administration of policy towards COs. What this amounted to, in practice, was the opportunity to intervene to trace COs and to lobby for improvements where evidence of illness, poor conditions or bad treatment came to light. As a consequence, many COs suffered less at the hands of the military or in the Work Centres than might otherwise have been the case. But there was a price. Marshall and the NCF National Committee had to be seen to be representing the 'sensible' COs. That meant distancing themselves publicly from the subversives and the would-be saboteurs of the 'awkward squad'. It also meant suggesting that the 'real' COs were not like that and that all else was deviant. Hence the emergence of the 'typical' CO. He was part of the price that Marshall had to pay for the NCF's modest influence.

NCF – Private and Public Faces

Catherine Marshall calculated that the number of times she had broken the law in aid of conscientious objectors meant she was liable to a total of 2,000 years' imprisonment.[xxxix] She never actually enumerated the offences, but was probably thinking about the NCF's 'illegal' and often clandestine operations in support of its members. On a number of occasions, *The Tribunal* and NCF leaflets had to be printed on hidden presses to prevent their confiscation. NCF networks and those of affiliated or simply sympathetic groups and individuals, provided fugitive COs with forged papers, safe houses and even access to opportunities to leave the country. Parts of this 'underground railway' were inherited from the pre-war women's movement which had provided safe houses for suffragettes on the run from the 'Cat and Mouse Act'. Another example of the linkage between the many radical anti-war fragments in Britain but par-

Catherine Marshall avoiding the press outside Mansion Court, May 1916

ticularly of that between the anti-war community and the women's movement was the final escape on board ship to North America. This, from Liverpool at least, was organised in collaboration with Irish Republicans for whom this was a route used after 1916's failed Easter Rising.[xl]

None of this could, for obvious reasons, become widely known or spoken of. The public face of the NCF was intended to be very different. COs were to be seen as respectable men of principle whose actions, given the provision for Conscientious Objections incorporated in the Military Service Act, did not break the law. Indeed, they were simply standing up for the rights which they claimed had been granted by Parliament. They were to demonstrate impeccable pre-war credentials as hard-working members of their communities, often politically radical but infused with a high-principled, often religious, dedication to the sanctity of human life. Young, socially engaged Quakers, were ideal examples. Such paragons could not possibly be doing anything wrong.

Edith Key, Huddersfield. A suffragist and anti-war campaigner, she provided a 'safe house' for fugitive suffragettes before 1914 and fugitive Conscientious Objectors after 1916.

The Manchester Report

The Manchester survey of June 1916 was not obviously an attempt to construct such a model, but its use of anonymous examples of 'typical' COs anticipated the development of NCF policy. Under its title, *Conscience and Character: The Record of Conscientious Objectors. An Enquiry and its Results*, it was the only survey of the NCF's local membership which achieved any level of real detail. Described as an 'interim report', it is not known whether a final version was ever completed. Manchester probably had in excess of 200 COs, most of whom would be members of the NCF. Therefore, notwithstanding the difficulties of prisons and guardrooms, a response of 127 is a good sample from which to produce a fairly accurate picture of the total membership.[xli]

The data on which the report is based is used in two ways. There is a limited numerical analysis based on responses to questions about age, marital status, occupation, membership of societies and public activities. There is also a selection of 'typical' cases chosen to exemplify the nature of the membership.

What the report describes is an organisation of young men drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds. They are drawn from the skilled working-class – 'only one was a labourer' – and the lower-middle-class, including sixteen who were 'professionally engaged', six of them teachers. Seventy of them professed a background in some form of organised religion. There was no particularly dominant religious sect – there were five Quakers but eleven Wesleyans, while fifty of the remainder had no such belief. Some had severed their religious connections because of their church's stance on the war. Beyond this the numerical analysis is silent. We know that those without religious belief were largely socialists - either ILP or BSP - but we know nothing of the politics of those who professed a religious belief. There were nineteen temperance workers, six vegetarians and two former scoutmasters, but there is no attempt to correlate these with other things. There were municipal councillors, naturalists, members of the Workers Educational Association and assertions about membership of trade unions, Trades Councils and various charitable organisations. Unfortunately this is only vaguely quantified.

The report then proceeds to describe a number of specific examples which seem to have been selected to suggest a number of CO archetypes. There was the Methodist Sunday School teacher who was also a temperance worker, ILP branch Secretary and worker for both the NCF and the FOR. Another was a Sunday School teacher, member of a Literary Society as well as an active Trade Unionist and Trades Council delegate.

> *A third example is that of a young Quaker of 23 whose energies went out through more than a dozen organisations, religious, moral, socialist or other. Still another individual record is that of a man not claiming theological beliefs. He was actively associated with a Labour Church, the ILP, Labour Party, Society for the Abolition of Destruction, National League of the Blind, Trades Union, Trades Council, co-operative organisation and other bodies.*[xlii]

The report's final paragraphs abandon any semblance of the analysis and become a polemic. The case presented is of high-principled young men sacrificing everything for beliefs conscientiously held. Thirty-five of them, we are told, could have appealed successfully for exemption from military service on grounds other than conscience. They chose, however, to make conscientious objection the basis of their claim.

The closing flourish is an evaluation of how all these young men fared in front of the local Military Service Tribunals and a ringing denunciation.

> *And how did the Tribunals treat these men? How did they apply their "rough justice"? By disallowing one third of the religious applicants and nearly one half of the active moral idealists; and by giving absolute exemption to no single one. ... There must be laughter even in Heaven over these Courts of conscience, this new priesthood of the State, these benches of frequently worthy men appointed to an impossible task.*[xliii]

This high sense of moral outrage was to characterise much of the anti-war movement's reaction to the administration of the Military Service Acts and most of the other measures put in place to deal with those who opposed the war. The Manchester report's selective use of 'typical' individual case histories was itself to become typical.

However, it is not at all clear just what purpose the Manchester report was originally intended to serve, or what prompted it. Whether it was initiated at the request of NCF Head Office or whether it was a local initiative is not known. Certainly, its being done encouraged Catherine Marshall to ask for others. What is also clear, is that although the Manchester report was not published in any form other than that provided with the NCF Newsletter, it did contribute to the NCF's emerging campaigning strategy which was to depend so much on notions of 'typical' COs. Much less detailed reports published as pamphlets by other NCF branches serve to illustrate the point.

Bristol, Dulwich and South Shields

During 1916 and 1917, three local anti-war groups published pamphlets describing their own 'typical' COs. None of them attempted the numerical analysis of the Manchester report. Two of the pamphlets are undated but were probably published in the autumn of 1916. One of them, published by the Bristol Joint Advisory Committee for Conscientious Objectors, describes itself as *What every Bristol man should know.* A second, published by the South Shields branch of the NCCL, is simply titled *South Shields Conscientious Objectors now Suffering Imprisonment on account of their Convictions*. The third local report was published by the Dulwich, London branch of the NCF in July 1917 under the title *What are Conscientious Objectors?*[xliv]

The South Shields pamphlet is very brief. It contains only nine names. They are arranged into six columns with entries, after Name, Trade and Married or Single, such as Church, Church and Social Work and, finally, Sentence. There is no mention here of politics. Six of the COs are Nonconformist Christians and variously Sunday School Teachers and temperance workers. South Shields COs recorded elsewhere bring the total up to sixteen but the impression of this first published list is sustained. Christian COs dominated the local anti-war community. This may account for the very distinctive feel to the pamphlet and the fact that in addition to the names *Extracts from Letters* are published.

> *"I believe the highest life is one of service to my fellow men."*
> *"I have always maintained that warfare was opposed to Christianity"*
> *"Nearer to Him in the isolation and solitude than ever in the past, From God through Christ all blessings flow."*[xlv]

The Bristol pamphlet is not so straightforward.[xlvi] It records the names of only twenty-nine local men when the true total figure for Bristol was nearer ninety, and perhaps more. Why these twenty-nine were chosen is not clear. The details recorded with each name are consistent only in their description of their experiences at the hands of Tribunals, courts martial, prisons and guardrooms. It is a catalogue of the perversity of the processes and of conscience denied, little more. All that is told of the individual COs is an occasional reference to their occupation or their religious affiliation. There are no politics here. Even the most prominent local CO, W. H. Ayles, a town councillor, serving a year's hard labour at Dorchester civil prison is described simply as working 'for the city, for labour and for peace'. A more detailed description would have mentioned his membership of the ILP, the FOR, the UDC and NCF. He was also Labour Parliamentary candidate for Bristol East and a Congregationalist lay preacher.[xlvii] So, why is that? The simple answer may be to do with the practicalities of putting the pamphlet together which may also account for the twenty-nine rather than ninety names. But there are other possible explanations. By the summer of 1916 the Military Service Tribunals had been dealing with CO appeals for exemption for almost six months. A body of Home Office advice, case law, and custom and practice had built up which distinguished between those whose conscientious objections arose from a moral or religious belief and those whose objections were regarded as 'political'-usually ILP or other socialists. The religious or moral COs were more likely to be treated sympathetically than the 'political' ones.[xlviii] It would seem then that, rather than risk a similar response from the general public, the Bristol members chose to leave out any mention of either political or even religious objections. In this it is the least detailed of all the accounts of typical COs. It compares poorly with the Manchester Report which does not shy away from establishing the political credentials of its COs.

The Dulwich NCF pamphlet is different again.[xlix] After a summary of CO experiences at the hands of the authorities it simply lists *Dulwich 'Absolutists' still in prison* and 'Dulwich men who, after court martial, have served terms of imprisonment because of their principles'. Each 'Absolutist' has his 'Society' listed along with the Tribunal at which he first appeared. The 'Societies' are simply stated as, for example, 'ILP', 'BSP', 'Perry Hill Baptist Church', 'Nat. Union of Teachers'. Dulwich NCF clearly did not feel as constrained by the political environment as its colleagues in Bristol. Nor was it so selective. The pamphlet probably lists all the local COs up to that point. The preamble to the listing of members summarises them as follows:

> *Of the 75 arrested, five joined the army under various circumstances, two were released medically unfit, and three have yet to be court-martialled. Twenty-seven of the arrested men are members of the Independent Labour Party, and 17 are unattached Socialists; 27 were Trade Unionists, while many were members of various churches, varying from the Church of England to the Calvinistic Church. Sixty-seven have been court-martialled once, 24 twice, and nine have undergone their third court-martial.*[l]

There is no equivocation here. Dulwich NCF does not appear to have felt the need to trim its account to match the prejudices apparent elsewhere. Perhaps they had been less evident in Dulwich or, more likely, the Dulwich comrades were more inclined to frankness. It is certainly clear from this account that, unlike the South Shields COs and, perhaps those from Bristol, the majority of the Dulwich COs were socialists and trade unionists. Dulwich NCF drew its members from Southwark, Lewisham, Camberwell, Deptford and Lambeth.[li] Their composition is most likely to have been a reflection of the social composition of this industrial area of Greater London and the pamphlet an unequivocal statement by a self-confident, radical and substantially working-class anti-war community.

What begins to emerge from this material is a sense of the variety of local anti-war communities. This is reflected in the emerging picture of the local CO experiences and in the characteristics of the local membership. What also stands out is the way in which the local anti-war groups wished to be portrayed. The Dulwich pamphlet is very open about the character of its local COs. It appears to have had no qualms at all about publishing the broad details of their backgrounds, political and religious alike. The South Shields material, although preferring the language of Christian and moral resistance to war, simply reflects the reality that the majority of local COs were from religious backgrounds. What are more interesting are the Bristol and Manchester accounts. The Bristol account because it appears to be so very narrow and even timid, preferring to describe the minority it lists by the injustices inflicted on them and their suffering, rather than by their motives. The Manchester report because, after an attempt at rational analysis, it prefers, again, the polemics of 'injustice' and 'suffering for a just cause'.

Setting aside the cases of Dulwich and South Shields, three possible reasons suggest themselves as responsible for the character of the Bristol and Manchester accounts: the particular enthusiasms and shortcomings of their authors, the internal politics of the local anti-war community and, thirdly, an attempt to project to a wider and, at best, sceptical, or, at worst, hostile, audience, a particular view of the anti-war movement in general and of local COs in particular. As to the first of these factors, there is little to say. Neither author is known. Where the internal politics of the local anti-war community are concerned, there are probably more clues in the Bristol piece than in the Manchester report. The Bristol piece was published in the name of the Bristol Joint Advisory Committee for Conscientious Objectors – a local version of the national JAC. That being the case it was probably made up of representatives of NCF, UDC, FOR and the local meetings of the Society of Friends. In such gatherings, conflict about the significance of the different religious and political roots of opposition to the war was seldom far below the surface. This would account for the pamphlet's reluctance to describe the appropriate motivation of those it lists. It does not account for the relatively small sample represented there. What seems more likely is that both accounts had the wider audience in mind and were at pains to represent their COs in the sort of light which they felt would attract more sympathy than hostility. The judgement seems to have been that the appropriate image for this was that of the self-sacrificing respectable man of principle – preferably moral or religious – being harshly treated but bearing his sufferings with dignity and fortitude.

'Typical' COs – The Head Office Version

In December 1916, NCF Head Office produced its own report on 'typical' COs under the title *Some Typical Cases of Conscientious Objectors who have refused work under the Home Office after serving a term of imprisonment.*[lii] It is a highly selective account of the experiences of thirteen COs. The basis for the selection is not clear. There are no reliable figures for December 1916 which would allow for a detailed critique, but figures published in *The Tribunal* on 1 March 1917 describe 3,591 COs who had been arrested and handed over to the military authorities of which 1,146 had accepted the Home Office Scheme. Of the balance of 2,445, 137 are described as having 'given in' and 234 as having been rejected by the military after having been handed over. What was happening then to the modified balance of 2,074 is not clear. Most of them seem to have been on to their first, second, third or, in some cases, fourth court martial or to have been in prison. How many more men might have answered the description of this typical thirteen is, therefore, impossible to say. All that we can be sure of is that if we take the final figure of 'Absolutists' – COs who refused the Home Office scheme and remained in prison – which the NCF claimed was 1,543, there were probably more than thirteen even in December 1916.[liii]

The motive driving the Head Office report, therefore, would seem to be propaganda and image management. In the autumn of 1916, a number of COs moved from prison to the Home Office scheme but then rejected it and were returned to prison. Their reasons for rejecting the scheme were various but among them was the abiding sense that the work to which they were put was actually supporting the war effort or was, in some way, allowing the release of other men for military service. To those who regarded the Home Office scheme as a soft option for COs, these refusals looked like ingratitude. There was negative propaganda here which had to be challenged.

Of the thirteen cases cited, nine are from London and the Home Counties, one from Leeds, one from Doncaster, one from Birmingham and one from Tunbridge Wells. In spite of the strength of the political background of most COs only one is mentioned as being a member of the ILP and all the rest have their motives attributed to a familiar mix of religious and moral values.[liv] Their experiences of the Military Service Acts, tribunals, courts martial, prison and, in one case, sentence to death by firing squad in France, are carefully detailed. As with the Bristol and, to some extent, the Manchester reports, the COs are being described by their experiences of suffering and injustice rather than by the reasons for their rejection of war and conscription. They have become victims.

In the political context of the time victimhood was probably about the best the NCF could hope for. Victims are seldom threatening and might be treated charitably even by those who disagree with them. Victimhood might also attract the support of the 'great and the good' – 213 of whom were provided with the NCF Newsletter every two weeks.[lv] The NCF needed money to maintain its burgeoning central bureaucracy, to help support the wives and families of many of its COs and to pay for its publications. It was also very useful for its contacts with government, as advised by Catherine Marshall, for the relationship to be based on a tacit understanding that rather than threatening the system, the NCF and its COs would abide by the rules. Pursuing her close working relation with General Childs on the basis of this understanding resulted in Marshall's resignation as NCF Parliamentary Secretary in May 1917. Members objected to the fact that she had shared with Childs information about the NCF's deep divisions about the Home Office scheme. She defended herself in hurt and angry terms on the grounds that it was essential if she was to encourage Childs to help COs that they should be frank with him about NCF policies.[lvi]

Conflict And Image

A preferred image of any kind is inflated by the omission or diminution of contradictory evidence. Avowed socialists of one kind or another constituted by far the largest identifiable group within the body of COs who resisted the Military Service Act.[lvii] Among them were Anarchists and Marxists who were reluctant to abide by any of the rules much as Catherine Marshall might have wished them to. The Home Office scheme work centres and projects were often disrupted by arguments between the different factions and, rather than accept the rules of the scheme, there developed a culture of subversion and sabotage. This was marked quite early in its operation. A Home Office camp was established at Fovant near Newhaven where the work was road building. On 3 December 1916, a letter was sent to the Friends Service Committee, and forwarded to the NCF on the 7th, which described widespread disagreements between the COs who were there on the Home Office scheme and those there as members of the Non-Combatant Corps.

> *The trouble here is mostly from the political objectors who actually resent the presence of conscientious objectors and workers amongst them, and these together with some (a minority) of those who profess religious objections, make up a majority who are not doing their best. However, most of the religious objectors are trying to do their best at work, but it is in the Camp that there is a lack of unity and Fellowship. All of us seem to be divided up into little groups... Further, the authorities have sent 40 COs from Wakefield, some of these have been to Dyce, and speaking candidly, there are some real bad characters and agitators amongst them*[lviii]

The author of the letter, William S. Household, was a Quaker from Ealing. The distinction he draws between 'political objectors' and 'conscientious objectors' is a crucial one and oddly reflects the distinction drawn by the Tribunals. In that light, the disagreements he describes are not too surprising.[lix] Little of this appeared on the pages of *The Tribunal* or *The Friend* or on the pages of the NCF Newsletter. In the same way that little of the clandestine activity of the NCF and its members was reflected there.

Conclusion

There were a number of consequences to the preference of the image of the acquiescent victim over the unco-operative rebel. At the time it enabled NCF officers, Marshall especially, whose policy it was, to work closely with government departments. This helped make the experience of British COs, if not entirely pleasant, then, for most, bearable. While there were those who died in prison or work camps or were released to die elsewhere, the CO mortality rate was in no way comparable with that of men on the Western Front. It probably also helped generate donations which kept the NCF going. On the other hand, it helped suppress much that might have been known of the diversity of the resistance to the war among COs and in the wider community. It ensured that discussions about war resisters would concentrate on the minority of COs - the 6,312 who resisted the Military Service Act and were arrested – rather than on all 16,100 who claimed exemption from military service on grounds of conscience. In so doing it not only deflected interest from the other 10,000 but also guaranteed that the war resisters would be seen primarily as COs when the reality was much broader and, significantly, included large numbers of women. Above all, it helped to concentrate the attention of sympathetic and unsympathetic historians alike on the CO as victim – an image much in need of revision.

Appendix

(Cumbria County Record Office, Carlisle, Catherine Marshall collection D/Mar/4/7)

21.6.16

Conscience And Character

The Record of the Conscientious Objectors. An Enquiry and its results.

An enquiry is being made into the past activities, religious, public, social or other, of conscientious objectors to military service. The enquiry is being limited to the Manchester district, since it is undertaken by the Manchester Branch of the No-Conscription Fellowship, amongst its members; but the Manchester membership is sufficiently large and varied to be fairly representative of the entire body.

The enquiry has taken the form of a questionnaire, seeking to elicit plain facts under a dozen heads. Unfortunately, during the period of the enquiry, some members have been in military prison or confined in guardrooms, or living from day to day under the shadow of arrest, and this hardly creates an atmosphere for research. The enquiry is proceeding under difficulties, and is far from complete; but the results so far are sufficiently instructive to warrant an interim report.

The papers returned number 127, 94 from single men and 33 from married. The occupations extend over a wide range, including artisans, clerks, commercial and professional men. Sixteen are professionally engaged, (6 in connection with teaching); the artisans numbered 29, clerks and warehousemen 29, and those commercially employed as salesmen, agents, travellers, managers or in business on their own account, totalled 48. Four were civil servants but only one was a labourer.

These are necessary particulars, but more to the heart of the matter is question 4 of the enquiry form, which asks for facts of religious and social activity. Seventy replies came from men professing religious beliefs, and forty-eight from men whose faith finds entire expression through political or social organisations. Only nine men made no return of public activities. Counting these ex-adherents who have left their Churches comparatively recently, the seventy were divided between organisations represented numerically in the following order: -

Wesleyans	1	4 resigned since war
Unitarians	8	
Church of England	6	1 resigned
Congregationalists	7	
JEWS	6	
United Methodists	5	1 resigned since war
Society of Friends	5	
Adult School member	4	Not otherwise defined
Primitive Methodists	3	
Baptists	-	1 resigned since war
Roman Catholics	2	
Church of Christ	1	
Christian Scientists	1	
Theosophist	1	
Undenominational	7	

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Nine were ex-members, six of whom definitely had severed connections upon the issue of the war, attaching themselves to Adult Schools or the outer circle of the Society of Friends. Practically every denomination is thus represented, but excluding the Catholic Church, a Bishop of which recently stated that no conscientious objectors were to be found amongst Catholics, the Christian witness against war is more catholic than he supposed.

Those not possessing religious beliefs were mainly Socialists, attached to the Independent Labour Party (37) or the British Socialist Party (13); while of the others nearly all had been Norman Angell Leaguers, Young Liberals or Single Taxers. Many of the major section were also members of political and social as well as religious bodies.

For example, here is the record of a young man of 26 years of age who was sentenced in May last to two years imprisonment with hard labour in a military gaol. He was a Sunday School teacher, a circuit representative in the Methodist body, and a local preacher, a local secretary in the Temperance Movement, a Band of Hope worker, a local secretary for the Independent Labour Party, a worker in an Educational Holiday Association, and since the war, the secretary of a Pacifist group, as well as a worker in the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the No-Conscription Fellowship. Another, a year younger, was connected with a Church, a Sunday School, a Literary Society, a Trade Union and the Local Trades and Labour Council, being a worker in each organisation.

A third example is that of a young Quaker of 23 whose energies went out through more than a dozen organisations, religious, moral, socialist or other. Still another individual record it that of a man not claiming theological beliefs. He was actively associated with a Labour Church, the ILP, Labour Party, Society for the Abolition of Destruction, National League of the Blind, Trade Unions, Trades Council, co-operative organisations and other social bodies.

In 19 cases the men were temperance workers and in six they supported vegetarianism. Associations like the W.E.A. were represented; others were municipal councillors, or workers; others again were naturalists or members of swimming clubs.

Many individual records are illuminating. One ex-Wesleyan worker of only 20 years of age was preparing to become a local preacher when the war, and the attitude of the church to it, pulled him up. During the first three months of the war he read through the entire Bible, simply to satisfy his conscience. At least two were at one time scoutmasters. One had visited Germany on a peace mission; others had entertained Germans during peace visits. The writer of one reply confesses to "the sorrow and shame" of not having worked for peace. He had believed such a war impossible to Christian peoples and so had given his leisure to helping charitable and public institutions by his musical abilities. But now "I have awakened."

In another case the father and uncles of a young man of 20, left Russia in protest against military service, basing their beliefs on the teaching of Hillel, the Jewish Rabbi, who circa 200 B.C., said to have anticipated Christ's teaching to love one's neighbours as oneself. The young man asks "How can I believe in war?"

Out of the 127 replies, 106 were from men who held peace views before the war. Included with this number are 19 who were brought up in Pacifist views. Apart from arrested and imprisoned men, many replies indicated sacrifices quietly accepted here and there – loss of employment, loss of positions, closing of prospects. Probably all those who talk so readily of "equality of sacrifice" have never known what it means in this country for men either with futures before them or reputations behind them, to embrace a highly unpopular cause. In the same spirit of fidelity to belief, 35 single men, out of a total of 94, having other grounds than conscience on which to claim exemption, dropped all except the one supreme reason. Some of the members had medical grounds; some might have entered or claimed reserved occupations; some had business reasons; some were supporters of dependents; one and another was the only son of a widow.

And how did the Tribunals treat these men? How did they apply their "rough justice"? By disallowing one third of the religious applicants and nearly one half of the active moral idealists; and by giving absolute exemption to no single one. Even the fact that out of a total of 72 cases investigated, 20 non-combatant certificates were awarded to religious objectors, and only eight to moral claimants, is discounted by an issue of non-combatant certificates to three out of five of those who could point to no public associations. Not for a moment is it suggested that these latter cases were less genuine. Two of these whom we may call private persons had suffered loss of employment for their views. But, then, one of these two was totally disallowed; for the Tribunal discussions cut across this as across all other classifications. There must be laughter even in Heaven over these Courts of conscience, this new priesthood of the State, these benches of frequently worthy men appointed to an impossible task. If the spirit be a true one which breathes through nearly all these 127 representative sets of replies, there is implicit in our civilisation and the slowly awakening masses a religious and moral revolt against war. And before its Tribunal of conscience there will have to appear not those who refrain from war, but those who dare the blasphemy (as it will then be considered) of teaching man to kill his fellow man.

Notes

[i] This work was made possible by a semester's Faculty study leave during 2003. Much of what it contains is based on several productive weeks spent working on the Catherine Marshall archive at the Carlisle centre of the Cumbria Archives Service. I am grateful to the County Archivist for permission to reproduce extracts from a number of the documents here. I must also express my most sincere thanks to all the Record Office staff whose unfailing professionalism and simple kindness made my stay in Carlisle so very rewarding. The other major source of material used here has been Friends House in London. Staff there were equally helpful and again I must record my thanks. In addition to the particular issues considered here, there has been the parallel development of what I have come to refer to as my *CO Register*. This is a growing database of named individual Conscientious Objectors. The sources from which this has been created include archives such as the Catherine Marshall archive, the collections held at Friends House as well as those held at the Imperial War Museum, the Commonweal Collection at the University of Bradford and the Liddle Collection at the University of Leeds. Reference is made to the *CO Register* where appropriate, although its publication is yet some time away.

[ii] J.W. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience: A History 1916-19* (London, 1922), pp. 348-9.

[iii] There are numerous accounts of the history of the NCF. The first, and arguably still the best, was written by one of its Manchester activists J.W. Graham (Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*). Also, in chronological order of publication, A. Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left: Thirty Years of Platform, Press, Prison and Parliament* (London, 1942); D.A. Martin, *Pacifism: An Historical and Sociological Study* (London, 1965); D. Boulton, *Objection Overruled* (London, 1967); T.C. Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience: A History of the No-Conscription Fellowship, 1914-1919* (Fayetteville, Arkansas, 1981).

[iv] Graham, *Conscription and Conscience,* pp. 171-2.

[v] Imperial War Museum, W. Harrison (Con. Shelf) vol. 1, *The No-Conscription Fellowship List of Members,* February 1915.

[vi] Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, pp. 176-82.

[vii] Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, p. 174.

[viii] *Ibid.*, chap. 5, 'The organisation of peace'.

[ix] C[umbria] R[ecord] O[ffice] (C[arlisle]), D/Mar/4/7. The letter and Manchester Report were published and circulated in conjunction with the NCF's fortnightly Newsletter. As a cyclostyled and largely internal news-sheet, copies of the Newsletter are not held by any of the British Copyright Libraries. In the UK, incomplete collections are to be found in the Catherine Marshall Collection: CRO(C) D/Mar; and at Friends House, London in MS vol. 149, *No-Conscription Fellowship 1914-1919.*

[x] CRO(C) D/Mar/4/7.

[xi] The events of the summer of 1916 are described in detail in Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, chap. 5, 'The organisation of peace'.

[xii] B. Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London, 2000), pp. 52-6. See also J.M. McEwen, 'The national press during the First World War: Ownership and circulation', *Journal of Contemporary History,* 17 (1982), pp. 459-86.

[xiii] G.J. De Groot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London, 1996), chap. 7, 'Aliens, outlaws and dissenters'.

[xiv] Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, chap. 6, 'Varieties of testimony', pp. 212-20.

[xv] The National Archives (TNA), WO/32/18765.

[xvi] *Ibid.*

[xvii] Millman, *Managing,* p. 63.

[xviii] Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, p. 188.

[xix] Boulton, *Objection Overruled,* p. 109; NCF, *Souvenir History 1914-1919.*

[xx] CRO(C) D/Mar/4/11: NCF Newsletter, 6 Oct. 1916.

[xxi] Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left,* pp. 67-8; Millman, *Managing*, p. 63.

[xxii] *Ibid.*

[xxiii] *Ibid.*

[xxiv] C. Pearce, interview with Arthur Gardiner (1889-1971), conducted 31 Oct. 1968 (unpublished tape and transcript in C. Pearce's private collection).

[xxv] A brief study of the anti-war community in Birmingham is to be found in G.J. Barnsby, *Socialism in Birmingham and the Black Country 1850-1939* (Wolverhampton, 1998), pp. 203-70; the Huddersfield experience is explored in C. Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience: An English Community's Opposition to the Great War* (London, 2001).

[xxvi] Millman, *Managing,* p. 57. The story of Glasgow in the First World War has been told from a number of different perspectives including: W. Gallacher, *Revolt on the Clyde* (London, 1936); J. Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards Movement* (London, 1973); W. Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1921: The Origins of British Communism* (London, 1969); J. McNair, *James Maxton: The Beloved Rebel* (London, 1955); R.K. Middlemas, *The Clydesiders: A Left-wing Struggle for Parliamentary Power* (London, 1965).

[xxvii] Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, p.175.

[xxviii] Jo Vellacott is the principal source for accounts of Catherine Marshall's life and work: *From Liberal to Labour with Women's Suffrage: The Story of Catherine Marshall* (Montreal, 1993); *Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists in the First World War* (Brighton, 1980); J. Vellacott and M. Kamester (eds.), *Militarism versus Feminism: Writings on Women and War* (London, 1987).

[xxix] Vellacott, *From Liberal to Labour*, pp. 363-4.

[xxx] Most versions of the history of the NCF cited above carry accounts of meetings which were attacked.

[xxxi] De Groot, *Blighty*, chap. 7, 'Aliens, outlaws and dissenters'.

[xxxii] CRO(C) D/Mar/4/10.

[xxxiii] CRO(C) D/Mar/4/21.

[xxxiv] *Ibid.*

[xxxv] Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, pp. 185-7.

[xxxvi] CRO(C) D/Mar/4/24.

[xxxvii] CRO(C) D/Mar/4/19.

[xxxviii] *Ibid.*

[xxxix] A. Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Peace Campaigners of the Great War* (London, 1985), p. 46.

[xl] S. Rowbotham, *Friends of Alice Wheeldon* (London, 1986), p. 38. West Yorkshire Record Office, KC 1060, Edith Key, Suffragette, Huddersfield records 1907-70s, contains an account of Edith Key's own contribution to the women's movement before 1914 by providing, among other things, a 'safe house' for suffragettes on the run. It also contains a memoir (KC1060/5) written by one of her two sons, Archibald, who was a CO who used the 'underground' to escape to North America by way of an Irish Republican network in Liverpool.

[xli] *CO Register.* Elsewhere, accurate figures describing the motives of individual COs are hard to find. The NCF's own *Souvenir History 1914-1919*, edited by Fenner Brockway and published in London in 1920, has a section headed 'Grounds of Objection', pp. 37-8, from which the following calculations are drawn:

COs arrested		5,231

(Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, p.349 has 6,261)

Motives known		1,470
Of those:	Quakers	184
	Quaker Attenders	95
	Socialists	1,191
	Organisations unknown	58
Socialists:	ILP	805
	BSP	78
	Socialist Labour Party	21
	Socialist Party of Great Britain	9
	International Workers of the World	6
	Anarchists	27
	Unattached 'socialists'	245

[xlii] CRO(C) D/Mar/4/7.

[xliii] *Ibid.*

[xliv] The Bristol, South Shields and Dulwich pamphlets are all to be found in CRO(C) D/Mar/4/40.

[xlv] *Ibid.*

[xlvi] *Ibid.*

[xlvii] *CO Register.* The entry for W.H. Ayles is based, among others, on material drawn from J.M. Bellamy and J. Saville (eds.), *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, vol. 5 (London, 1979).

[xlviii] Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, chap. 3, 'The tribunals at work'. For an alternative view, less sympathetic to the COs, see J. Rae, *Conscience and Politics: The British Government and the Conscientious Objector to Military Service* (London, 1970), chap. 6, 'The tribunals at work'; Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, pp. 157-87.

[xlix] CRO(C) D/Mar/4/40.

[l] *Ibid.*

[li] *Ibid.*

[lii] CRO(C) D/Mar/4/13.

[liii] Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, p.350.

[liv] See above note 41.

[lv] CRO(C) D/Mar/4/9. The 'Addresses for Bi-weekly notes' was added to during 1916 and 1917. Its range included known sympathisers but also extended to the Archbishop of Canterbury, most of the Anglican Bishops, Michael Sadler, Chancellor of the University of Leeds, various ministers of religion, newspaper editors such as A. G. Gardiner of *The Daily News*, Ernest Bevin, the poet John Masefield and George Bernard Shaw's wife.

[lvi] CRO(C) D/Mar/4/21.

[lvii] See above note 41.

[lviii] CRO(C) D/Mar/4/13, 7 Dec. 1916.

[lix] *Ibid*; Friends House, *Friends Service Committee Index*, 1916/20.