

AGAINST THE TIDE



- "Darling, I tried to stop it."

WAR-RESISTERS IN SOUTH LONDON

1914-16

J.H.Taylor

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The Why and the Where

Introduction

What follows is an act of recovery and homage: a salute across a century to some of the men and women who stood out against the tide of war between 1914 and 1918 and by their efforts sought to turn it aside. Specifically, it is about people who were active in the present London borough of Southwark. Here there were two centres of opposition. One was in Bermondsey in the north, around the Christian socialists Alfred and Ada Salter, who were both active at national level. Their part is well documented. Dulwich, the second and rather surprising centre in the south, is barely known at all.

Long introductions, explaining what the writer has tried to do, are generally a bore, or best read afterwards. To be very brief, I have sought to present my research in context: in the context of the war and national politics, in the context of the home front and in the context of national campaigns against the slaughter.

Inevitably for this background I have leant heavily on secondary material. I would like to acknowledge in particular Jo Vellacott's masterly *Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists*, recently reissued under the less interesting title of *Conscientious Objection*. Hers is by far the most scholarly account of the No-Conscription Fellowship at national level – as well as being a wry social comedy of the often difficult relationship between Catherine Marshall, the Fellowship's driving force, and her most illustrious collaborator. David Boulton's *Objection Overruled* is valuable for putting the anti-war campaigners in the wider context of the labour movement; though it is badly short of references. For individual prison experiences I have drawn on Cyril Pearce's heroic project of creating a national database of conscientious objectors from across the whole country.

For developments on the home front my debt is to Arthur Marwick's classic account *The Deluge* and to Jerry White's much more recent study *Zeppelin Nights*. Reliance on secondary sources means that simplifications and received ideas must sometimes creep in. For that I seek indulgence with the plea that it's the new research that counts.

Finally, a word or two about the local papers from which I quote extensively. There are three. The *Southwark and Bermondsey Recorder*, published at Dockhead, Bermondsey, covered Southwark, Bermondsey and Rotherhithe.

The *South London Observer*, published in Church Street, Camberwell, covered Camberwell, Peckham and Dulwich. It's an odd paper, in that it appeared twice

weekly – Wednesday and Saturday - with virtually the same news. I call it by its secondary title, the *Camberwell and Peckham Times* or *CP Times* since this is a reminder of its circulation area. For the same reason I refer in the text to the *SB Recorder*.

The third paper is the *South London Press*, happily still with us. It had its office above the underground station at the Elephant and Castle. I have failed to find out anything very useful about any of the papers. But when one compares them the *SLP*, as I call it, stands out as a much more professional product. It's a bigger paper with presumably a larger staff reporting over a much wider area – not only Camberwell, Peckham, Dulwich, Southwark and Bermondsey (though not Rotherhithe on the whole) but also Lambeth and sometimes Wandsworth to the west. It also treats the war very differently from the other two, as we shall see.

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Cover image © IWM (Q31442) Daddy's reply is based on that proposed by the miners' leader Robert Smillie: "I tried to stop the bloody thing, my child."

A south London triangle

I

One hundred years ago the present borough of Southwark, a rough triangle in shape - four-and-a-half miles of river frontage coming to a point five miles south just short of Crystal Palace - comprised three separate local authorities.

Bermondsey, running along the south shore of the Thames from roughly opposite Canary Wharf to London Bridge, comprised Bermondsey and Rotherhithe. Rotherhithe, in the east, had a long maritime history. The *Mayflower* set out from here, as did Lemuel Gulliver. Almost a peninsula, its surface area - more water than land - was occupied in 1914 by nine linked wet docks and six timber ponds, which were operated by Surrey Commercial Docks. This was the home of London's timber trade and of a substantial trade in grain and other foodstuffs. Greenland Dock, the largest, was a destination for trans-Atlantic liners, like Cunard. From it the Grand Surrey Canal fed south-westwards towards Peckham and Camberwell.

Rotherhithe's long waterfront was lined with wharves and docks, both wet and dry. Wharves, a flexible term, could mean an open quayside or (more usually), a warehouse of at least three-four storeys. A warehouse could be used merely for storage, or it could be a mill or a factory. Ship-building and ship-breaking yards had been numerous. Turner's "Fighting Temeraire" was broken up at Beatson's yard. Now barge-building and barge-repairing were more important.

Much the same riverscape continued into Bermondsey, tall warehouses with cranes projecting in front making a canyon of the street behind. Here however there were no inland docks. The other difference was that the wharves were served not by ocean-going ships but by lighters to which goods were transferred at Surrey Docks.

The frontage between Tower Bridge and London Bridge, dominated by the Hays Wharf Company, was known as "London's larder," but it was not just London's. In the early years of the 20th century it was importing more than 50 per cent of the nation's butter and 70 per cent of its cheese. Hays brought in both staple and high-quality foodstuffs from around the world and was a pioneer in cold-storage. It also operated a fleet of lighters. Goods were traded at the Home and Foreign Produce Exchange, next to London Bridge.

Away from the river but conveniently near, Bermondsey had a concentration of food processing firms, employing mainly women. They included such household names as

Sarson's, Crosse & Blackwell, Hartley's, Peek Freans and Liptons. The other, much older specialism in the hinterland was leather, reflected in such locations as Tanner Street, Morocco Street and Leathermarket Street.

The "larder" in fact extended further west along the river into Southwark. It was home to Borough Market, of course, then wholesale, and to Barclay, Perkins brewery, at one time the largest in London. Hop factors clustered around the florid Hop Exchange nearby. "The Borough," it should be explained, was the ancient term for the historic area either side of Borough High Street. It was the starting point for the Canterbury pilgrims and until the 1750s hosted Southwark Fair, as depicted in riotous detail by Hogarth.

From London Bridge the old municipal boundary rambled south-east. London's first railway terminus was just in Bermondsey. Its construction and extension to Charing Cross is estimated to have made some 40,000 people homeless, the railway companies having no obligation to rehouse them. Borough High Street was in Southwark. So was the firm of W.T.Pink, which employed some 2,000 women making jam, pickles and confectionery on a large site at the junction with Long Lane. J. Sainsbury had its warehouse and factory further west, near Blackfriars Bridge.

But this food-and-drink activity was submerged in a tide of other trades and manufactories that had grown in extent and variety as Bankside - once home to Shakespeare's Globe and the Bishop of Winchester's brothels - expanded towards the marshland further south. They included engineering - among them big firms like John Rennie, father and son, who designed the new London Bridge - as well as gas and electricity generation on the site of Tate Modern, hydraulic power, hat making, printing, and a host of small enterprises turning out an enormous range of products.

The old borough of Southwark, like the new one, terminated by the Oxo Tower, opposite the leafy gardens of the Middle Temple on the north bank. Continuing south and east, it took in Blackfriars, Newington and Walworth - this last being the area round the Elephant and Castle, situated due south of London Bridge.

Apart from the Atlas dye-works on the New Kent Road, Walworth was not a place of factories but of small workshops. The Elephant was not then a shopping centre - the shops were in Walworth Road - but it had some grand department stores and a cluster of theatres, later driven out by film, including the South London Palace of Varieties, one of the most famous Victorian music halls. Charlie Chaplin was born in East Street, still thriving today as a market, which before the arrival of electric trams spread into adjacent main roads.

South of Bermondsey and Southwark lay the extensive borough of Camberwell, consisting of Peckham, Camberwell and Dulwich. Camberwell and Peckham and little Nunhead had once been villages. Peckham, with its large Common, was a last staging post and grazing point for cattle drovers heading into London. By the late Victorian period Nunhead had a huge cemetery, while Peckham Rye drew Sunday and bank-holiday crowds to enjoy the sound of brass and listen to the competing soap-box orators:

There is the Salvation Army ranting and raving, and its off-shoot, the Nunhead Christian Band, with a sure following because of the

excellence of its music, and *** the converted sweep, who always collects a crowd; and *** the keeper of a second-hand bookshop in Paternoster Row, who gives rough coarse answers in a loud, harsh voice, but a genuine man; with Christadelphians and many others, including Socialists and Infidels. ¹

Camberwell, more substantial than its neighbours, had been known for its fair on the Green (abolished 1855). Under Georges III and IV it became a desirable residential area for the solid middle class. Browning, Ruskin and Joseph Chamberlain grew up on the healthy slopes rising to the south. The tall terrace houses there are still highly esteemed.

In the northern direction, however, lay the Grand Surrey Canal, which ran along the southern edge of what is now Burgess Park. It reached Camberwell in 1811. A branch to Peckham was dug in the 1820s. It brought lime-kilns, breweries, timber-yards, paint-works, many small workshops and what became a major gas works, the South Metropolitan, north of the Old Kent Road.

Camberwell and Peckham merged and were then engulfed over the century by London's expanding population, which was also being driven out of the centre by industry and railways. From the 1880s, on the other hand, cheap off-peak rail fares, 1d. each way, made it possible to commute in to work. North Camberwell became a close-packed maze of small houses and factories. Thirty streets were bulldozed when Burgess Park was created in the 1970s. The canal was filled in.

Beyond the southern slopes of Camberwell lies the vale of Dulwich, which rises beyond to Sydenham Hill and Crystal Palace. Camberwell and Dulwich were bound together historically by the fact that Dulwich was in the parish of St. Giles, Camberwell. Ruskin, in his memoirs, gives a poignant glimpse of the vanished rural arcadia that once sprang into view from the top of Herne Hill. Even today the area around Dulwich Village has a spacious leafiness hard to find in London. This is due to Dulwich College, founded by the celebrated Elizabethan actor Edward Alleyn. He assigned to his creation not just the manorial rights he had bought but the freehold of nearly all the land, with the result that development was tightly controlled, as it still is.

The Italianate College, surrounded by playing fields and a vision of public-school England, is the centrepiece of West Dulwich. (P.G. Wodehouse was a pupil, as was Raymond Chandler.) Its other three-star curiosity, as Michelin would say, is Dulwich Picture Gallery, the oldest purpose-built public art gallery in England, opened in 1817 on the basis of paintings collected for the last king of Poland, who then lost his throne when his country disappeared in the final partition. There are some fine mansions built by Victorian tycoons, particularly on the southern slopes. Mr Pickwick retired to a more modest residence in the area. After his time the railways came. Though they are now absorbed into the landscape, the accompanying housing developments drove Ruskin to the Lake District.

One of these developments was East Dulwich, on the other side of Lordship Lane, which once formed the boundary of Alleyn's Dulwich manor. It is very different.

¹ Charles Booth, *Life and Labour of the People of London*, 3rd series, vol. 6, pp. 79-80.

Until the 1860s it was all farms, which supplied inner London with vegetables and milk. Then, in the next 25 years or so, the British Land Company transformed it into a tight grid of two-storey brick terraces, soon occupied by members of the aspiring working class. East Dulwich had little in the way of industry: just a brickfield and a tile and brick factory, whose tall chimney was a local landmark. But it became the site of various institutions for the poor from more crowded areas.

Dulwich Park has its origin in five fields gifted to London by the College and opened in 1890. It did not go unnoticed that the park would act as a buffer between the exclusive population to the south and the artisans, clerks and paupers of East Dulwich to the north. To this day Dulwich is overall one of the wealthiest parts of London, with the second lowest population density.

II

Even today, the contrast with the northern parts of the present borough – the council estates of Bermondsey, for example – is striking. In the Victorian era many of the huddled masses to the north led an existence something like that of present-day Calcutta. In 1901, when numbers peaked, the three boroughs had nearly three times the population of the present combined authority. Southwark had the highest population density of any borough in London.

Twenty years earlier, in 1883, the Rev. Andrew Mearns, a Congregational minister, published *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, subtitled an *Enquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor*. In it he proclaimed that

seething in the very centre of our great cities, concealed by the thinnest crust of civilization and decency, is a vast mass of moral corruption, of heart-breaking misery and absolute godlessness.

Moreover, he added in small caps, “This terrible flood of sin and misery is gaining upon us. It is rising every day.”¹ He singled out Collier’s Rents, a short street off Long Lane, on the Bermondsey/Southwark border, for an extended description.²

Promoted in the campaigning *Pall Mall Gazette*, Mearns’ short polemic had an immediate and powerful impact. Among other things, it roused the Church of England to start improving its properties, it gave impetus to the settlement movement, it shook Queen Victoria and converted Lord Salisbury, the Conservative leader, to the need for interventionist housing reform – that is, building to relieve overcrowding rather than merely pulling down slums and dispersing the occupants. Gladstone, though, had to be pushed to set up a Royal Commission. It confirmed what Mearns had said.³

Mearns also inspired the social investigator Charles Booth. Starting in the East End he set out with his collaborators to chart poverty street by street according to a seven-point colour scheme. Initially they relied largely on the impressions of School

¹ Anthony. S. Wohl (ed.), 1970, pp. 55-6.

² *ibid.*, p. 72.

³ *ibid.*, pp. 17-34.

Board Visitors. For the revision of the maps they went on patrol in 1899 with Metropolitan Police officers.¹ The text was only partly revised.

The wonderfully sharp fold-out maps provide both overview and detail. Black and dark blue denote respectively streets inhabited in the main by occasional labourers, loafers and semi-criminals (“the elements of disorder”); and the very poor - casual labourers and others living from hand to mouth. Light blue denotes standard poverty, either because of irregular work or a low rate of pay. Pink denotes “working class comfort,” but also includes a large element of lower middle class tradesmen. Purple marks streets which combine this comfort with degrees of poverty. Red locates well-to-do middle-class families who keep one or two servants.²

The northern map shows the greatest concentration of black and dark blue in Southwark: a block around Mint Street, west of Marshalsea Road, an oblong containing more varied blue on Tabard Street, a block of blue further south, north-east of St. George’s Circus. To the east in Bermondsey there’s a spread of black and dark blue between the river and Jamaica Road. South of Jamaica Road however Bermondsey is solidly pink all the way to the Old Kent Kent, except for a blue-black patch south of Spa Road. Walworth also is generally pink but with enclaves of blue and purple.

The southern map shows a large rectangle of black and dark blue around Sultan Street, west of Camberwell Road. The eastern side of the road is purple. Otherwise the map from Kennington Road to the Old Kent Road is predominantly pink, with highlightings of red – except for some areas of blue in the angle between the Old Kent Road and the Peckham branch of the Surrey Canal. Nunhead, north-west of the cemetery, is also blue. East Dulwich shows purple, with some pale blue streets.

Booth’s final colour-code - yellow, denoting the wealthy who keep three or more servants and occupy houses rated at £100 or more - is only apparent in the extreme south of our area. It runs up and over Denmark Hill to Herne Hill where the colouring becomes mainly red. It also clusters on properties around Champion Hill. Before 1914 many of the residents here were Germans or naturalised Germans with business interests in London, including the merchant banker who founded what is now Kleinwort Benson.³ West Dulwich around the College would no doubt also be yellow, if it did not fall beyond the edge of Booth’s maps.⁴

The decades leading up to 1914 saw a succession of initiatives, both public and private, aiming to ameliorate the urban condition. New Board schools had already sprung up, “rising above the slates, like brick islands in a lead-coloured sea,” to quote Sherlock Holmes, scrutinising them from the train. “Light-houses, my boy!” he

¹ Jess Steele (ed.), *The Streets of London: the Booth notebooks. South East*, p. 8. In their introduction David Englander and Rosemary O’Day observe (p. 10) that black and dark blue are associated less with the degrees of poverty “than with degrees and kinds of criminality, roughness and disorderliness”.

² Charles Booth, 1st series, vol. 2, pp. 40-1.

³ Tony Wilson, “German Camberwell,” *Camberwell Quarterly*, no. 123, April 1999, p. 12.

⁴ Charles Booth, 3rd series, vols. 4 and 6.

proclaims to Watson, "Beacons of the future!"¹ By 1883 there were 38 in Southwark, Bermondsey and Rotherhithe alone.

The London County Council replaced the Metropolitan Board of Works in 1889 and continued its modest programme of house-building. In 1900 the metropolitan boroughs replaced the old Vestries and took over the tasks, among others, of tackling public health and premature death. The model dwellings of Peabody, Guinness and others, which predated *The Bitter Cry*, continued to appear, as did the university settlements. The Labour Party began its advance. It was also an era of assertive trade-union action. Perhaps the biggest single blow against poverty was the introduction in 1908 of the old age pension, providing 5s. a week for men and women of 70 and over.

Such, in brief, is the profile and history of the heterogeneous part of South London against which the following narrative plays out.² In the years immediately preceding the War the public issues affecting most people's minds were industrial conflict, the violent agitation of the suffragettes, and the likelihood of civil war in Ireland over Home Rule. Relations with Germany came some way behind.

¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Naval Treaty" (1893).

² Close readers may notice that this account owes much to the excellent histories of the various localities produced by Southwark Local Studies Library. Grateful acknowledgments therefore to the authors: the late Mary Boast, the late Stephen Humphrey, John D. Beasley and Leonard Reilly.

1914

1: “No friends here”

I

So it was that when Britain was tumbled into war over the bank holiday in early August 1914, most people were taken by surprise.

The *South London Press* for Friday 31 July gave no inkling that the crisis that had been unfurling in a zigzag across Europe since the murders in Sarajevo on 28 June was about to break over the nation's head. Its leader was headed “Future of Thames Steamboats” and it carried reports on school Prize Days.

The leader in the *Camberwell and Peckham Times* praised the work of the borough's Distress Committee. In the *Southwark and Bermondsey Recorder* a short editorial set out the allocation to local charities of monies raised from the Alexandra Day collection. A column headed “Bank Holiday Arrangements” celebrated the delights of the South Coast and other rail destinations.¹

In none of the papers over the preceding month was there a leader or a reader's letter on the subject of Europe. The public consciousness that July, according to H.G. Wells, is summed up by his alter ego Mr Britling, in the novel published in 1916. The threat from Germany had gone on for so long, he says – more than a quarter of a century – that “this overhanging possibility had become a fixed and scarcely disturbing feature of the British situation.” Or as a neighbour puts it more succinctly, “I'd got so used to the war with Germany that I never imagined it would happen.”²

Not everyone was taken by surprise however. In London Norman Angell's Neutrality League launched a leaflet campaign for non-involvement. The International Woman Suffrage Alliance, representing twelve million women, drew up a powerful appeal for mediation and delivered it on the Friday to the Foreign Office and to the various foreign embassies.³

The Independent Labour Party held rallies of warning and opposition up and down the country; one in Trafalgar Square on the Sunday drew a rain-soaked crowd of some 15,000. There was something of a rush back to London. The Suffrage Alliance

¹ *SLP*, 31 July 1914; *CP Times*, 1 August 1914; *SBR*, 31 July 1914.

² H.G. Wells, *Mr Britling Sees It Through*, pp. 123, 196.

³ Jerry White, *Zeppelin Nights*, p.20; Jill Liddington, *The Long Road to Greenham*, pp.77-8.

held a crowded meeting in Kingsway Hall on the evening of Tuesday the 4th and delivered resolutions to Downing Street; but within an hour Britain was at war.¹

At the end of the week (7 August), under the heading “South London and the War,” the *SLP* was reporting “Patriotic Scenes Everywhere,” plus other excitements, including “Alleged German Spy in West Dulwich” and “Food Riot in Bermondsey” (provoked by a sudden hike in prices).

Under the heading “Holocaust: Our Duties and Obligations” the paper editorialised: “It has been obvious in recent years that the Teuton has become the Bully of Europe... This country has never in the past shrunk from championing the rights of small peoples, Italy and Greece are examples...”

In a leader headed “WAR!!” the *Camberwell and Peckham Times* wrote: “The war is not of our seeking. Our whole interest as a nation is in the maintenance of peace. It has been forced upon us by the arrogance of our German neighbours, who have brushed treaties aside in their attempt to establish themselves as masters of the world.”²

In this spirit thousands flocked to volunteer. Revisionist historians like Adrian Gregory have argued that the real “rush to the colours” came somewhat later, after news of the first defeats in Belgium. But on his own figures, over 100,000 men had enlisted by 22 August. Niall Ferguson, who made the same point earlier, says 300,000 men had volunteered by the end of the month.³

One of the first units to go was the 24th Battalion of the County of London Territorials, known as “Southwark’s Own.” They marched away “To Teach the Kaiser a Lesson,” said the *SLP*, which saw them off with poem by Richard E. Mould. Verse two reads:

Every one of them a hero – when the captain cried “Who’ll go?”
“Ready! I am ready!” rang the voice of every one.
Every one of them a hero, oh! they made a gallant show,
As they started out for business - plucky boys of “Southwark’s Own.”⁴

II

While many people celebrated, many others were confused and dismayed. On the political Left they had been confident that the labour movements in the various countries would act in solidarity to prevent any war, or bring it swiftly to an end.

However this proved to be wishful thinking. The bureau of the Socialist International, meeting in Brussels on 29-30 July, did not get down to discussing the preventative general strike that its Copenhagen congress four years earlier had tentatively agreed

¹ David Boulton, *Objection Overruled*, p.32; Jerry White, pp.22-3; Jill Liddington, pp.78-9.

² *CP Times*, 8 August 1914.

³ Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War*, pp.30-32; Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, p.198.

⁴ *SLP*, 21 August 1914. The initial is probably a mistake. Later patriotic poems in the paper (26 February and 19 March 1915) are by Richard W. Mould. He was Southwark’s first borough librarian. See Mary Boast, *The Story of Walworth*, pp. 42, 73.

to consider in such a situation. Instead it called a full congress in Paris for 9 August, putting its faith meanwhile in rallies and demonstrations.¹

Now Jean Jaurès, the French socialist leader, was dead, assassinated. The German Social Democrats – the biggest party in parliament – voted credits for what they believed was a defensive war. Here, the anti-war Labour leader Keir Hardie, attempting to address constituents in Aberdare, was drowned out by uproar and the singing of “Rule Britannia.”²

Men and women like him were in despair. Among them was Alfred Salter, who had given up the prospect of a distinguished medical career to set up in Bermondsey as a “poor man’s doctor.” He had first come to the area as a resident at Bermondsey Settlement. This was a Wesleyan foundation, established, like Toynbee Hall and others, in the spirit of Social Christianity. Situated in Farncombe Street, at the heart of one of Booth’s black spots, it ran classes, a debating society, a choir and orchestra, a working girls’ club, and a boys’ brigade company. It supplied food and coals to the very poor. Its district nurse visited the sick. Alfred Salter started the Men’s Adult School.³

And it was here he met his wife Ada. Having both started out as Liberals, he became the driving force behind the local Independent Labour Party, or ILP, while his wife Ada, at national level, built up the Women’s Labour League. When elected to Bermondsey council in 1909, Ada became the first Labour woman councillor in the whole of London.⁴

The “Independent,” it should be explained, refers to the party’s independence from the Liberal Party, which in a few constituencies had working-class “Lib-Lab” MPs. The ILP predated the Labour Party, but when the latter was formed in 1900 it became one of the party’s affiliated organisations, along with the Trade Union Congress, the Fabian Society, and others.

The Women’s Labour League grew out of a women-only discussion group or “sewing circle” hosted by Margaret MacDonald, the wife of Ramsay, at their flat overlooking Lincoln’s Inn Fields. It aimed to promote issues of particular interest to women, to campaign on adult suffrage and in line with that to work to elect Labour MPs in national elections and women councillors in local ones. It formally affiliated to the Labour Party in 1908.⁵

Alfred Salter had led a large Bermondsey contingent to the demonstration in Trafalgar Square. He now roused himself to pen a passionate denunciation of the war from his Christian Socialist point of view. He was a Quaker; Ada, from a Methodist background, became a full member in 1915.⁶

¹ Caroline Benn, *Keir Hardie*, pp. 269, 322-3; David Boulton, pp. 20-22.

² Emrys Hughes (ed.) *Keir Hardie’s Speeches and Writings*, pp. 175-6.

³ Graham Taylor, *Ada Salter: Pioneer of Ethical Socialism*, ch. 3; Leonard Reilly, *Southwark: an Illustrated History*, p. 64.

⁴ Graham Taylor, pp. 64, 98.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 81-3, 88.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 65.

Should I heed the Prime Minister's call and hurry off to fight the Germans, Salter asked himself? He was then 41. His answer was:

Look! Christ in khaki, out in France thrusting His bayonet into the body of a German workman. See! The Son of God with a machine gun, ambushing a column of German infantry, catching them unawares in a lane and mowing them down in their helplessness. Hark! The Man of Sorrows in a cavalry charge, cutting, hacking, thrusting, crushing, cheering. No! No! The picture is an impossible one, *and we all know it.*

That settles the matter for me, wrote Salter.

I cannot uphold the war, even on its supposedly defensive side, and I cannot, therefore, advise anyone else to enlist or to take part in what I believe to be wrong and wicked for myself. A country, as an individual, must be prepared to follow Christ if it is to claim the title of Christian.

The article was published on 24 September in the ILP weekly the *Labour Leader*, edited by Fenner Brockway, the man who later wrote Salter's biography. It made a tremendous impact. Printed and reprinted as a pamphlet under various titles, a million and a half copies were distributed in Britain, says Brockway, and it circulated in translation across Europe, reaching Germany via neutral countries.¹

Ada had a front-page article "War and Internationalism" published in the *Labour Leader* a month later. In this she berated fellow-socialists for being against war in principle - against the last war, against the next one - but when it came to the test, making exceptions for "defensive," "national," or "altruistic" wars. She concluded that just as self-preservation was the first law of life, so "If a nation wants to preserve itself it will not go to war." Commercial and financial sanctions were a better way of exerting disapproval.²

Now recovered by Graham Taylor, Ada's article had no local resonance. Alfred's had a prompt response from the *SB Recorder* under the heading "Dr Salter's Outburst." If his views were seriously adopted, it said, "there would certainly be an end of civilization." Among other excerpts from the *Labour Leader* the paper quotes the statements: "I will, therefore, take no part in recruiting, not even to resist an invasion of England;" and "But if the Allies are to smash Kaiserism they can they only do it by smashing the German people first. May God prevent that crime!"

To which the *Recorder* replied: "We can assure Dr Salter the recruiting business will go very well without his aid. Every Britisher of spirit knows his duty too well to be led astray by such extraordinary advice;" and "The allies do not want to smash the German people, but to smash the officialdom of Germany." The leader concludes: "We do not like to question Dr Salter's loyalty, but intentionally or not, he is doing his best to injure his own country and assist the enemy."

Immediately below the paper prints a letter from the joint honorary secretaries. of the local Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, who write: "If we were to allow the principle of it being the duty of a Christian nation to be overrun... there would have

¹ Brockway, *Bermondsey Story*, pp. 58-9. The original title was "The War in Europe: What is the Duty of the Christian Citizen?"

² Graham Taylor, pp.144-5.

been an end to Christianity when the original Attila and his Huns overran Europe; fortunately the Christians of those days regarded it as their duty to defend themselves against outrage..." They add, "We have entered this war in support of our pledged word, in defence of a gallant but almost defenceless state that relied upon that word..."¹

According to Brockway, the *Recorder* put our placards asking, "Is Dr. Salter pro-German?"² He was already embroiled in fierce local controversy over the affair of the Rev. W. Kaye Dunn, pastor of Manor United Methodist Chapel, in Southwark Park Road, Bermondsey, and a local councillor.

Though he sat as a Liberal, Walter Kaye Dunn had worked closely with the Salters. During the Bermondsey Uprising of 1911-12, in which not only dockers, but women workers from the jam, biscuit and other local factories came out on strike – with Ada's Women's Labour League playing a major role - he had made his chapel available as a food distribution centre for strikers' families.³ It had a prominent notice outside reading, "Manor: the People's Church."⁴

Kaye Dunn now returned from holiday astounded to find the country on the brink of war. He had been in Germany and wrote in *Manor's Message*, the church magazine, "What a delightful people the Germans are. How kind to the stranger. How human, how cousinly, how Christian."

He denied the English and German people were at war with each other. "It is the few at the top in each country who have lost their balance. And when these politicians go to war they **"Go," by sending others**, and so poor fellows on both sides are being marched out as though they had been bought at Gamage's in wholesale boxes for kings' children to play with." He went on to berate Foreign Secretary Grey for being so dilatory over the years in reaching an accord with Germany.⁵

Brockway, in his biography, gets the story slightly wrong. According to the *SLP*, the ensuing affray broke out when Kaye Dunn arrived at the corner of Camilla Road, with a harmonium and a rostrum, to give his usual Friday evening address. Scarcely had he begun, says the paper, than it became apparent that the large crowd was in no mood to listen to him.

"A rush was made for the rostrum. Dr. Salter, who happened to be present, attempted to stem the tide of fury which threatened momentarily to overwhelm the meeting, but he was told not to interfere. According to one account, Dr. Salter mounted the rostrum and tried to quell the uproar.

"Dear friends," he began. "You ain't got no friends here," shouted a man in the crowd, and Dr. Salter desisted."

¹ *SBR*, 9 October 1916.

² Fenner Brockway, p. 60.

³ *ibid.*, p. 47. Graham Taylor, pp. 112-20.

⁴ Southwark Local Studies Library and Archive, A54/J2 (Bermondsey Labour Party). So the class feeling suggested by Jerry White (p. 32) was probably not an issue in what followed.

⁵ *ibid.*

Events, says the report, then moved with remarkable rapidity. The rostrum was overturned. Kaye Dunn, though shielded by several ladies from his church, was badly mauled. "A perfect hurricane of missiles followed him as he entered his residence, and in a very few seconds the windows were wrecked, panes of glass were broken in the church, and other damage done of a serious nature. Eventually a large force of police cleared the street." ¹

Driven out of the district, condemned by his fellow councillors,² Kaye Dunn disappeared, leaving behind a long trail of letters in the paper, mostly critical.

"One of his Old Congregation" wrote to call him a "cowardly traitor." A member of a neighbouring church, writing in his support as "One Who Loves Fair Play," said, "Give Mr Dunn a chance. Let his years of devotion outweigh harsh judgments. Is a man's past work to be blotted out because he has made a mistake? ... I certainly think the mob in a minor way was guilty of assuming the German spirit they are supposed to detest." To which "Englishwoman" retorted: "I, with many others, think he was treated far too leniently. Bermondsey is well rid of such a traitor as W. Kaye Dunn." ³

The controversy was revived in the New Year when Kaye Dunn, evidently back in Bermondsey, wrote in to deny allegations that he was an unregistered alien, an Austrian, a German, had money invested in the German toy trade, had offered up prayers for the Kaiser, and finally that he was pro-German. "Since the war broke out my conviction has been that Germany was badly in the wrong, and I have often said so."

Such kindly remarks about German working people, as against the Prussian military autocracy, had he said been spoken before the war to hundreds of people in Southwark Park; after which the crowd had unanimously supported an appeal asking the government to save the country from war. Now sincere prayers were being offered for our soldiers, doctors, nurses, and others, as well for all children of God.

But, he concluded, "as a Christian minister, and as one who has taught the New Testament for 18 years in this Borough. I am against all war, as war, because I believe Jesus Christ to have ruled it out of His kingdom." This self-defence provoked more critical letters and a long critical leader. ⁴

Alfred Salter had himself suffered a direct onslaught the previous autumn, according to Brockway, in the shape of an angry brick-throwing crowd gathered outside his home in Stork's Road, Bermondsey. Emerging from the front door to the top of his steps, a tall, imposing presence, he brought them to silence and said, "I've looked after you when you were sick. I've served you night and day. Is this the way you reward me? *Go home, you sinners!*" And they did. ⁵

¹ *SLP*, 18 September 1914.

² *SBR*, 25 September 1914.

³ *SBR*, 2, 9 and 16 October 1914.

⁴ *SBR*, 1 and 8 January 1915.

⁵ Fenner Brockway, p. 62.

The Salters weren't alone of course. They enjoyed considerable backing from within the Labour and trade union movement – exactly how much is impossible to gauge - and quieter support from certain religious groups like the Quakers. Nationally the Labour Party and union movement was divided, with the leadership and probably the majority of members supporting the government. David Boulton gives an overview, but is wrong in saying the ILP maintained an “astonishing degree of unity” in opposing the war. The *Labour Leader*, it's true, voiced unremitting opposition, but two of the party's seven MPs moved over to the official Labour line; and the party chairman, MP Fred Jowett, accepted the need for national defence and a British victory. According to Keith Laybourn, even the anti-war section of the party contained many shades of opinion; the majority appear to have followed Jowett's line.¹

The Labour Institute in Fort Road, Bermondsey, a red-brick building with high bowed windows and two pointed gables surmounted by finials,² became a centre of anti-war activism in south London, but also a target for patriots. Brockway reports that word came to the caretaker Charlie Gamble that autumn that the patrons of two local drinking clubs were planning a raid later in the evening. In the absence of Dr Salter he sent for a man called Arthur Gillian, shop assistant and trade unionist, “a militant rather than pacifist opponent of the war.” Together they bolted doors and windows, then constructed a barricade of parallel forms in the entrance hall so that, even if the front door were forced, the invaders could only enter one at a time.

When the crowd arrived at midnight, they broke all the windows, pushed their way up the steps and broke down the front door. But Gillian was ready for them. As they pressed forward in single file he whacked them with a blunt instrument and, with caretaker Gamble in support, sent them away with broken heads.

Alfred Salter was not pleased. In fact Gillian said he had never seen the doctor so angry. “You have betrayed everything for which we stand,” he thundered. “I would rather the Institute were destroyed than defended by such methods.” Gillian, a Cornishman whom we shall meet again, thought it prudent to leave the area for a while.³ Neither of these confrontations made it into the local papers.

Brockway cites instances of other projected assaults which were broken up or diverted by the police. “For a while,” wrote Salter after the war, “it seemed as if the whole fabric of our organisation, so laboriously built up in the past years, was doomed to go under. We were the most unpopular section in the borough. Our individual members were the most hated and vilified of all people in South London... Very few people will ever know the extraordinary difficulty we had in keeping going through this terrible period of the first two-and-a-half years of the war.”⁴

¹ David Boulton, pp 34-49; Keith Laybourn, *Philip Snowden: Biography*, pp. 64-6.

² Photograph in ILP pamphlet, 1923, Southwark Local History Library andd Archive, file 329.

³ Fenner Brockway, p. 61. “A Cornishman”: from Cyril Pearce, Register.

⁴ Fenner Brockway, pp. 61-3. He is quoting from the *Bermondsey ILP Labour Messenger* of December 1919, now no longer to be found.



The military context for these strong feelings is given in “South London and the War,” which had become a regular weekly feature in the *SLP*. Running top-left across two columns on pages 5 or 7, opposite the leaders, it carried headlines from the fighting below, followed by reports. (The paper’s front page was still reserved for adverts.) Some of the headlines read:

28 August: “BRITISH TROOPS REPULSE THE GERMANS”

[at Mons] – but “fall back,” says the text below.

11 September: “TURN OF THE TIDE/ Germans Exhausted and Retiring”

18 September: “Allies Rolling Germans Back Towards the Front”

25 September: “GERMANS’ LAST HOPE IN FRANCE”

9 October: “HEROIC DEFENCE OF ANTWERP”

On 16 October the truth was out: “THE HUNS OVERRUN BELGIUM”

The *SB Recorder* of 11 September had carried some dramatic photographs. One showed “The German Huns Marching on Paris” through a damaged village. They got within 23 miles. Another depicted “A Remarkable Snapshot of the Kaiser,” showing him in a spiked helmet, orating with raised arm. One can imagine readers poring over these sinister images.

First-hand accounts from the front are few. At the end of October the *Recorder* printed a long account of the retreat from Mons two months earlier by Stanley Storey, former assistant secretary of Bermondsey Conservative Association, now attached to the Royal Army Medical Corps. Though there’s a profusion of detail, it conveys little of the physical experience of the retreat or the seriousness of the defeat. In early November the same paper printed a feel-good letter from another Bermondsey man, Lance-Corp. H. Potter. He writes, implausibly, “We are all in good condition, and the men are always cheerful and happy under all circumstances.”¹

The day the Germans were reported in control of Belgium, the *Recorder* published Dr Salter’s reply to the paper’s misleading placards about himself. “Of course, I am not pro-German – I do not know how anyone in the wide world can be pro-German after what has happened in Belgium and elsewhere.

I have also to say that I have never, either in speech or in print, advised anyone not to enlist. I could not enlist myself, and I could not, therefore, advise any man to enlist. I have always taken the position stated in the ‘Labour Leader’ article that ‘It is for each man to answer for himself at the bar of his own conscience.

As an example of the power of non-resistance he instanced the seventy years of good relations that Quaker settlers in Pennsylvania had established with local Indians. Christian non-violence was the only real wisdom, he concluded. “I hope that whatever wrong a fellow man may do me I shall have grace enough not to kill or try to kill him. ‘Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay,’ and it is not for any human being to arrogate to himself the rights of the Almighty.”

¹ *SBR*, 30 October and 6 November 1914.

The paper appended an editorial note. “We publish Dr. Salter’s letter with pleasure, but at the same time we are still of the opinion that, in the interest of Peace, his article had better been left unwritten.”¹

Two well argued letters took issue with him. One from John Lort-Williams, future Unionist MP, homed in on the paragraph in which Salter had written that the German soldiers were just plain folk like our Bermondsey folk: “with the same hopes, the same fears, the same weaknesses, the same virtues, the same passions, the same sorrows, the *same humanity* as ours.” In the light of German atrocities in Belgium – “the shooting, bayoneting or butchery of wounded prisoners, the shelling of Red Cross hospitals, the murder and mutilation of mothers and little children, the raping of young girls, the violation and outraging of Belgian wives, the wanton destruction of the art treasures of centuries” – Lort-Williams commended this “extraordinary statement” to the consideration of Bermondsey working men.² Dr Salter did not respond.

The poet “Decka” submitted six verses on the subject, including:

Yet here we have in Bermondsey,
A man who speaks disloyally;
He says that we should not resist
The menace of the mailed fist;
And tells [us] we should all lie low
Whilst German hordes through Belgium go.³

The paper published letters of support from two trade unions. The Bermondsey branch of the National Union of Railwaymen wrote to express to their confidence in the doctor “and honour him for having the courage to state his personal opinion publicly.”⁴

The London branch of the Amalgamated Society of Leather Workers expressed their confidence too. “Though he objects to the war he is doing as much as any man in Bermondsey to relieve the distress due to the war.”

H. Fletcher, branch secretary, went on to point out that local leather firms were either failing to pay the proper rate and/or making a “pile of money” from War Office contracts. A subsequent letter identified one of these firms as Bevingtons, of Abbey Street, Bermondsey, said to be paying 10d a dozen (for gloves presumably) against the 1s1d previously paid to German workers, now dismissed.⁵

Not for the last time German shops were attacked in a weekend of violence on the Old Kent Road, Jamaica Road and elsewhere. In Deptford High Street a crowd of over 5,000 was cleared only with the help of military and mounted police.⁶

Tower Bridge magistrates were told that Heinrich A. Gobel, naturalised 16 years, had had his butcher’s shop in Lower Road, Rotherhithe, damaged three times in recent

¹ *SBR*, 16 October 1914.

² *ibid.*

³ *SBR*, 30 October 1914.

⁴ *SBR*, 13 November 1914.

⁵ *SBR*, 30 October and 13 November 1914.

⁶ *SBR*, 23 October 1914.

weeks. James Brady, 51, a labourer, was committed to London sessions for throwing a tressle through the plate-glass window. James Atkinson, 36, also a labourer, was likewise committed for breaking nine windows at another Rotherhithe butcher's shop, that of Oscar Stahl in St. Marychurch Street.¹

An advert in the *CP Times* addressed "A Patriotic Appeal to the British Housewife", asking "Do you not think the time is ripe when the Baking Trades of London, now largely in German hands, **should not be transferred to your own countrymen?** Is it **RIGHT** that we should depend upon the German Bakers for our principle article of food? [etc]

"Purchase your bread supplies from the under-mentioned shops, the proprietors of which, together with their assistants, are all of British parentage." The appeal is signed by 26 members of the Peckham, Nunhead and Dulwich Association of British Master Bakers.²

"Are We Downhearted?" asked a leader in the *Times* just after the rout in Belgium.

Not a bit of it. When a real man, the man with backbone, gets a nasty thwack he pulls himself together and hits back... That is true of the average Briton. It is equally true of the nation... The day of victory may yet be a long way off; we may have to endure many humiliations and much loss of life and treasure before we reach it. But as sure as the sun sets we shall win...³

A "drumhead service" on Peckham Rye drew an "immense concourse of people," reported the paper.⁴ By mid-October it noted that one thousand Belgian refugees were enjoying the hospitality of Camberwell. Among the first to arrive were 300 who were bedded down in Goose Green public baths. In Bermondsey the Tanner Street workhouse was emptied to make room for 600 Belgians, the first of 2,000 who passed through there.⁵

It was the arrival of these refugees, suggests Jerry White, that sparked the attacks on German shops; though the military setbacks must also have been a factor. White quotes a figure of 30,000 for the number of Germans in the County of London in 1911, plus 5,000 or more in the outer suburbs. No foreign community was more integrated, he writes: German waiters, bakers and barbers were seemingly "irreplaceable fixtures" in the capital's economic life and there was a high rate of inter-marriage.

An Aliens Restrictions Act, rushed through parliament on 5 August, required all "enemy aliens" to register with the police. It provided the framework for restrictions on movement and, when necessary, for arrest and internment. Internment began at the end of the month of those thought likely to be dangerous, mainly young men of military age. They were lodged in Alexandra Palace and in the exhibition halls at

¹ *SLP*, 30 October 1914.

² *CPT*, 7 October 1914.

³ *CPT*, 17 October 1914.

⁴ *CPT*, 21 October 1914.

⁵ *CPT*, 17 October 1914; Jerry White, p. 74; Henry Fuller Morriss, *Bermondsey's "Bit" in the Greatest War*, pp. 210-13.

Olympia. The disorders in October led to a fresh wave of internments, more as a public order measure than to protect national security, says White.¹

There's less evidence at this stage of controversy about the war in Camberwell, the borough which also included Peckham and Dulwich. Arthur Creech Jones, secretary of Camberwell Trades and Labour Council, (and a name to follow) wrote to the *SLP* in September to complain that trade unions, working women's organisations and other labour bodies had been excluded from the committee set up in the borough for the prevention and relief of distress caused by the war.

He wrote again in October to stress the need for prevention. Unemployment, he says, has nearly doubled in the borough. The committee should not withhold relief from these people until they are reduced to dire poverty. Moreover relief should also take the form of work for wages. "What," he asked, "is the policy of the Camberwell Committee?"²

The Trades and Labour Council sent a deputation and held five open-air meetings. This pressure secured it four places on the fund-raising Prince of Wales' Relief Fund and one on the borough Distress Committee that oversaw distribution of the money collected.³

Even at this early stage of the war the annual report for 1914 notes, among six others, a resolution which reads, "We...representing the organised workers of Camberwell express our detestation of war and call upon the Government to accept at the earliest possible moment the services of President Woodrow Wilson as mediator."⁴ The press doesn't seem to have picked this up.

IV

Later that autumn a leader in the *SLP* initiated an argument that was to become very familiar. Though staunchly patriotic, the paper was quite prepared to demur from Lord Kitchener's confidence that voluntary recruiting would be sufficient to raise a New Army of one million men. It had earlier predicted that, far from being over by Christmas, the war would last three years.

It now quickly mounted what was to be a favourite hobby-horse. To be quite frank, it wrote, many of the eligible men who do not volunteer "are shirkers, and if they escape many more weeks without the thumb-screw of compulsion being applied we shall indeed be disappointed."⁵

W. Bryon, hon. secretary of the Peckham Liberal, Radical and Progressive Association, (12 Ivydale Road, Nunhead) took a different view. In a long letter beginning "Conscription is once again raising its ugly head in this country," he

¹ White, pp. 3, 70-5.

² *SLP*, 18 September and 23 October 1914.

³ Trades and Labour Council annual reports for 1914 and 1915, Creech Jones archive, Bodleian Library, box 2 file 4.

⁴ Annual report for 1914, *ibid.*

⁵ *SLP*, 13 November, 23 October, 27 November 1914.

concluded: "Our present system gives us men strong in the consciousness of merit in volunteering for their country's service; conscription will give us numbers, discontent and the jack-boot firmly planted on our individual and corporate liberties." ¹

In France and Flanders the front had stabilised into the stalemate of trench warfare, though the *SLP*'s headline detected "Signs of German Weakening in Belgium and France." ² The paper's regular feature "South London and the War" is now retitled "The War Week by Week." The *SB Recorder* and the *CP Times*, on the other hand, made little or no attempt to report the progress of the war. There is nowhere any systematic reporting of local casualties - just the occasional paragraph, such as this one in the *Times*, well down the page, headed "His Life for His Country"

We regret to hear that Mr R. Brooks, who was stewards' clerk at Camberwell Infirmary and went to the front with the Queen's Westminster Territorials, was killed in the trenches on November 27. Mr Brooks, who was a most promising officer had been in the service of the Board since 1908. He was the son of Mr J. Brooks, general relieving officer...³

As the year's end approached, The Rev. P.T.R. Kirk, vicar of St. Mary Magdalene, Peckham, using a script from a war correspondent, gave a "realistic limelight lecture" entitled "Fire and Sword in Belgium: How Germany Makes War." Patriotic concerts were held at Bermondsey Settlement (Mrs Lloyd George in attendance), at the premises of Bermondsey Conservative Association and at Rotherhithe Conservative Working Men's Club.⁴

The *SLP*, published on Christmas Day, quoted Lord Derby on the recent bombardment of Scarborough. That raid was not the last, he said. "I go further and say that I believe Germany will be able to land troops on these shores (Shouts of 'No!' and 'Never!') Well, they will never get back. (Cheers) But my opinion is that is what they may do, and, if so, you will see exactly the same horrors in this country as you have seen in Belgium."

The paper had this seasonal message: "We must pay homage to peace and goodwill, and we must keep our patriotic spirit, whose necessary expression at the moment is – to put it bluntly – the shooting down of Germans."

By way of contrast the *SLP* also carried an account of the famous Christmas Truce. It began on Christmas Eve, wrote Corporal R. Ridley of Clapham Road, when singers on the British side heard clapping and cries of 'Encore' from the trenches opposite.

We lighted candles and stuck them on entrenching tools, and they copied us. We then held up lighted candles and stood up on the parapets. They did likewise, so we said 'Hang it all! If they don't fire at that we'll get out in front.' This we did and struck matches and smoked cigarettes, danced, sang, etc., and they sang and clapped...They then shouted 'Happy Christmas! Football to-morrow!'

¹ *SLP*, 13 November 1914.

² *SLP*, 20 November 1914.

³ *CPT*, 9 December 1914.

⁴ *SLP*, 29 November 1914; *SBR*, 11 December 1914.

When I got up I found our chaps walking about out of the trenches, and further, the Germans were doing likewise, as if we were only separated from joining hands by the trenches...

We then went out and helped some Germans bury a few of their snipers we had killed and held a service over them. They thanked us and we went our respective ways to our trenches. We were not satisfied, so went out on our own and called them out, and we exchanged cigars, cigarettes, buttons, hats, etc., and shook hands as though we had been friends reunited after years of parting.

Corporal Ridley concludes:

Then, to crown it all, a German came rushing out with a camera. After shaking hands as before, he took my photo, with each arm through a German arm. We made a truce on our own, and if it was left to the soldiers we could finish the war today.¹

No actual football reported, then, but a dangerous idea. The officers who allowed the fraternisation were punished and at Christmas 1915 strict orders were given to prevent it happening again.²

¹ *SLP*, 8 January 1915.

² Adam Hochschild, *To End all Wars*, pp.130-1,172; Alan Clark, *The Donkeys*, p. 41.

1915

2: Still small voices

I

Nineteen-fifteen opened confidently: “Germans being Steadily Pushed from Belgium Coast/ RUSSIA SMASHES AUSTRIA”, or so the *SLP* told its readers on 1 January. It also brought a new horror when a Zeppelin raid on the Norfolk coast killed five people. Were they, wondered the paper, demonstrating against Sandringham, where the King and Queen were staying.¹ At the end of the month 20,000 people turned out to cheer Corporal Frederick Holmes VC as with Mayor and Corporation he was driven three miles through the streets back home to Bermondsey. He had carried a wounded comrade three miles to safety under enemy gunfire, and then gone back to rescue a gun carriage.²

A leader in the *CP Times* offered the Government “a few plain words” about its reluctance to let the public know how the war was going. “Practically speaking we know nothing about it... Now, if the Government would only take the country into their confidence we should have neither the pessimist or the optimist or the man who is indifferent. The nation would realise the situation and act accordingly.”

The absence of reliable news, the paper added, was also causing a certain amount of jealousy among the troops. Some, like the London Scots, deserved all the praise they got but many other regiments, equally gallant, “have not received a single word of commendation from the Press for the simple reason that no one but the authorities knew what they had done.”³

Meanwhile, in a local initiative, St. Mark’s Church, Camberwell, had started its own memorialising of the men at the front. A Peace Bell was rung each day at noon, and every Tuesday night 400 of the 700 men enlisted from the parish who had asked to be remembered before God had their names read out. “A parlour for the wives and mothers of soldiers has been opened and has proved a great success.” The church also started a roll of honour. The *CP Times* lists the names: 14 dead, 26 injured, seven prisoners.⁴

¹ *SLP*, 22 January 1915.

² *SLP*, *SBR*, 29 January 1915. Mary Boast, *The Story of Bermondsey*, p. 30.

³ *CPT*, 20 January 1915.

⁴ *CPT*, 9 January 1915.

Local Quakers also bore witness, though from a different perspective. The Friends' Meeting House in Hanover Street, Peckham (now Highshore Road) had been a centre of quiet though unreported anti-war activity in the early part of the conflict. Fortunately, Quakers are meticulous record-keepers. So going back a little in time and consulting the minutes, we find the Preparative Meeting, as it was termed, declining to contribute to the Prince of Wales Relief Fund, as requested by the Mayor of Camberwell, on the grounds that it was being used as a recruiting agency.

Nationally the Friends acknowledged the pull of patriotism. "Today," said the London Yearly Meeting in September 1914, "Many of our fellow-countrymen are impelled to enlist by a sense of chivalry towards the weak and by devotion to high national ideals... We can well understand the appeal to noble instincts that makes men desire to risk their lives for their country." Yet: the Meeting reaffirmed its "continued unshaken persuasion that all war is utterly incompatible with the plain precepts of our Divine Lord and Lawgiver."¹

Despite this statement of principle, statistics gathered after the war revealed that across the country one-third of eligible members had enlisted in the armed forces.² Many others however enrolled for medical and relief work at the front and behind the lines with the Friends' Ambulance Unit.³

The record shows no evidence of such debate in Peckham, where the Salters attended. The Meeting (equating roughly to a church parish) collected money for the War Victims' Relief Fund and the Ambulance Unit.⁴ Then in the New Year of 1915 it held a series of four open meetings on successive Sundays "to further the cause of peace in our neighbourhood;" or as the small display ad in the *CP Times* put it under the heading WAR! - "a series of meetings will be held to which all who feel the difficulty of reconciling Christianity and the War are most cordially invited."⁵

Two of the talks, by Maude Royden, - previously editor of *The Common Cause*, the suffragist weekly, and now a founder of the Fellowship of Reconciliation of Christian pacifists - and Richard H. Smith (not identified), were reported at length. Miss Royden argued that Belgium could have been safeguarded without the present war. Mr Smith drew out lessons for reconciliation and a new world order after its end. Each in turn made the point that economic pressure, ie. the blockade of Germany, "was a graceful phrase" for the torture of women and children - in fact meant starvation. Neither suggested a way out of the current deadlock.⁶

At the end of February an editorial comment in the *SB Recorder* was scathing about Bermondsey ILP's resolution to the party's annual conference in Norwich urging socialists to refuse to support any war, even if it was nominally of a defensive character. "What fools some folk are!" A paragraph following on Dr Salter asserted there was not a bona fide working man in Bermondsey who would support a candidate

¹ Minutes of Peckham Preparative Meeting, September 1914, Friends' Library.

² Summary, *Wartime Statistics Committee (1917-1922)*, *ibid.*

³ David Boulton, pp. 54-57.

⁴ Minutes of Peckham Preparative Meeting, 4 October, 1 November 1914.

⁵ *ibid.*, 6 December 1914; *CPT*, 13 January 1915.

⁶ *CPT*, 23 January and 6 February 1915.

with such views. “If the Bermondsey members of the ILP had their way we should all be cads and cowards.”¹

The paper was delighted when, so it reported in April, the proposal was not put to the conference after a motion of “Next Business” was carried by one vote. “So ‘pop’ went Dr Salter’s resolution.” The paper got that wrong: the resolution was passed but by only vote, not enough to form the basis of policy.²

In March, the *SLP* reported, a deputation of Labour and Socialist organisations had met with Southwark Council to request a town’s meeting to discuss the high price of food and fuel.³ Prime Minister Asquith had admitted the month before that compared with February 1914 flour had risen by 75 per cent in price, sugar by 72 per cent, coal by 15 per cent. Food prices in June were about 32 per cent up on the previous summer, though wages were also on the increase.⁴

II

In March and April the paper was much exercised by the “drink crisis” – that is, the alleged impact of alcohol on the domestic war effort. In its leader of 16 April it advocated permanent state ownership of breweries and public houses in order to control drinking. The *CP Times* took a different view, commenting “We are unable to see why those who never exceed the bounds of moderation should be deprived of their glass of beer or their drop of whiskey. The war has given cranks of all descriptions a glorious opportunity to air themselves... Of all those who hold extreme views the teetotallers have been the most persistent in urging them.”⁵

The government was on the side of the cranks, indeed taking the lead. In March 1915 Lloyd George declared, “We are fighting Germany, Austria and Drink, and, as far as I can see, the greatest of these deadly foes is Drink.”⁶ By December 1915 pub opening in London had been reduced to two-and a half hours in the middle of the day and three hours in the evening, with closing time at 9.30pm.⁷

“Treating”, i.e. buying a drink for someone else - even one’s wife, one correspondent protested - made the publican who served it liable to six months’ hard labour and a £100 fine. South London magistrates generally took a more lenient view. In June 1916, for example, the licensee of the Railway Tavern, Blackfriars Road, was fined 2/6, his wife, who served the drink £1 and the customer 10/-. The following month the landlord of the Black Lion, Walworth Road, was fined 40/- and two customers 10/- each.⁸

¹ *SBR*, 29 February 1915.

² *SBR*, 16 April 1915; Graham Taylor, pp. 141-2.

³ *SLP*, 26 March 1915.

⁴ Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge*, pp. 42, 125.

⁵ *CPT*, 24 March 1915.

⁶ Arthur Marwick, p. 65.

⁷ Jerry White, p. 58.

⁸ *CPT*, 5 October 1915; *SBR*, 16 June 1916; *CPT*, 15 July 1916.

Such cases are regularly reported. Less common are reports of another offence unheard of in peacetime - the "long pull," that is, serving a pint that was more than a pint. For this generosity the licensee of the Crown beer-house, Wells Street, Camberwell, was fined 40/-.¹

The regulations met vehement opposition, not least from the Dockers' Union and its leader Ben Tillett. Both the union and Bermondsey Council sent deputations of protest to the new Central Control Board for liquor traffic.

Concessions on opening hours were made to 250 named pubs near the London docks. Southwark Band of Hope Union wrote to express its "intense indignation" at another exemption, the one that the House of Commons had granted itself.²

Over the course of the war the government increased the price of beer and reduced its strength, raised the tax on it and curtailed production. It took over breweries and licenced premises in three areas of arms production or naval importance, including four pubs near the Royal Small Arms Factory at Enfield Lock. Pubs without beer from Monday to Thursday became a common frustration of working life, says Jerry White.³

Like the editor of the *CP Times* he places the panic about alcohol within a wider campaign by evangelistic moralists who saw the conflict as an *opportunity* - for "a holy war, not just against the evils of Prussianism abroad but the evils of sin at home." This crusade targeted professional football, abandoned after the 1915 cup final, music halls, cinemas. The cinemas continued to flourish, but drinking habits changed forever. Convictions for drunkenness in Greater London fell from nearly 68,000 in 1914 to just over 10,000 in 1918.⁴

III

The main news from the western front that spring was the capture of Neuve Chapelle in the first British offensive of the war: "a valuable strategic position" and "a dashing achievement," according to the *SLP*. It represented a gain of 1,200 yards along 4,100 yards of front. The cost is reported as 2,527 officers and men killed, 8,533 wounded, 1,751 missing.⁵ But there are still no local casualty lists.

Another headline read: "Allied Fleets Blowing Dardanelles Forts to Atoms."⁶ This was the attempt, championed in cabinet by Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, to circumvent the impasse in the West by forcing a way through the straits of the Dardanelles to capture Constantinople and so knock Turkey out of the war. How this would open up the western front was not so clear.

¹ *CPT*, 31 May 1916.

² *CPT*, 27 November and 15 December 1915; Jerry White, p. 58; *SBR*, 3 December 1915.

³ Arthur Marwick, pp. 64-8; Jerry White, pp. 58-9.

⁴ Jerry White, pp. 50, 60.

⁵ *SLP*, 12 and 19 March; Tonie and Valmai Holt, *Battlefields of the First World War*, p.33; *SLP*, 16 April 1915.

⁶ *SLP*, 5 March 1915.

An Anglo-French fleet entered the straits in March, bombarded and severely damaged the Turkish forts, but then withdrew to Egypt, never to return. By the time the first troops appeared a month later, the Turks had repaired their forts and increased their numbers threefold. The British, French and newly arrived Anzacs who were landed on the Aegean side of the peninsula found themselves pinned down on the rocky shore by defenders dug in on the cliffs above them. There they clung on for ten months.¹

In his despatch after Neuve Chapelle, Sir John French blamed his failure to break the German lines on a shortage of shells. The cause was taken up by the papers owned by Lord Northcliffe (the *Times*, *Daily Mail* and *London Evening News*). Churchill's demand for more ships to move troops to Gallipoli caused Fisher, the First Sea Lord, to resign. Both these events contributed to a sense of a government under stress and not coping, which in turn precipitated the formation of a coalition in May 1915. The Conservatives came in as junior partners and Arthur Henderson joined the cabinet on behalf of Labour. Lloyd George took charge of a new Ministry of Munitions.² The local papers approved.

IV

Meanwhile the Peckham Quakers, encouraged by the good attendance at their earlier meetings, embarked on further gatherings, advertised, as before, in the *CP Times* and by small card ("Questions invited. No collection.") The Peace Committee was asked to consider co-operation with local trade union and labour organisations.³

George Lansbury, a future mayor of Poplar and Labour Party leader, spoke on "The Futility of War." A Christian pacifist, he said with humility that however strongly anyone like himself might feel that war was wrong – yet "We must respect and honour all those young men who have joined the army from the highest motives, and at the same time we must do what we can towards ensuring a really permanent peace... He hoped all would realise that war will only stop when the individual realises that he existed to act as a brother towards his fellow men."⁴

At another meeting Dr. Salter spoke on "Labour and Peace." Each attracted an audience of 150 to 180, though Salter's talk - "through a misunderstanding" - went unreported. The children's author Theodora Wilson Wilson, speaking on "Fear or Love," drew in 90 listeners - and an angry riposte in the *CP Times*. Quoting Christ's "I come to bring you a sword," [sic] F.Grayson, of Sedgemoor Place, Camberwell, wrote in to say, "Miss Wilson and all who think like her should be interned as enemy aliens until after the war to prevent their spreading such mischievous rubbish."⁵

¹ A.J.P. Taylor, *The First World War*, pp. 50-64.

² A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, pp. 29-32; Arthur Marwick, pp. 168-9.

³ Minutes of Peckham Preparative Meeting, 11 April 1915.

⁴ *SLP*, 23 April 1915.

⁵ Minutes of Peckham Preparative Meeting, 11 April 1915; *CPT*, 17 and 21 April 1915.

Meanwhile that April Ada Salter was one of a group of women attempting to get across the Channel to attend an International Women's Peace Conference in The Hague. At first the government resisted. Then, under pressure from Catherine Marshall, a skilled lobbyist and campaigner for women's suffrage (of whom much more later) McKenna, the Home Secretary, was persuaded, after consulting the Foreign Office, "that it would be unfortunate if the Congress [which was going ahead anyway] had no opportunity of hearing any expression of opinion from this country."

He decided to let 20 women attend, out of an original list of some 160. One of these was Ada Salter, described as "Official Delegate, Women's Labour League." She was in fact national president. The women took the train to Tilbury but got no further. Churchill, at the Admiralty, refused to let them embark.¹

Twelve hundred women did attend, including 28 from Germany; like the English the rest were stopped at their own border. The delegates passed resolutions urging governments to end the fighting and begin peace negotiations. Elected envoys then took to the resolutions to the heads of both belligerent and neutral countries. Sweden declared itself ready to host a mediating conference. In the United States Woodrow Wilson heard the deputation with respect. "But," in Jill Liddington's words, "no statesman dared grasp the women's challenge." The 28 German women were arrested on their return.²

After report-back meetings a record of the congress was hurried into print. A British committee of the Women's International Congress was formed. At the first AGM in the autumn it renamed itself the Women's International League.

What did the Hague Congress achieve? While stressing its symbolic importance, Liddington says it was the start of a wider revival of anti-war activity. Beyond this it helped shape the principles of a future peace settlement and the idea of a possible League of Nations.³

None of this was reported locally. But the press got wind of something. "Notes and Comments" in the *SLP* referred to the "mischievous though insignificant movement" that was preaching peace. "To talk peace now," it argued, "is to betray the high and noble motives which dominate the Allies in this war. Besides, who should dare to speak of peace while the fiendish invader remains in ravished Belgium?"⁴

Unknown even to later histories is the fact, uncovered by Graham Taylor, that in March 1915, prior to the gathering in The Hague, Ada Salter was one of four British delegates who attended an international women's socialist conference in Bern. Lenin, pulling strings from a nearby café, was desperate that the meeting of 27 women

¹ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/76.

² Jill Liddington, p. 104; Adam Hochschild, p. 140.

³ Jill Liddington, p. 105.

⁴ *SLP*, 30 April 1915.

should support the Bolshevik line of ending the war by armed revolution. Instead it endorsed what Lenin's wife Krupskaya called the "goody-goody pacifism" of the ILP and the Women's Labour League, which demanded an end to the war and a peace treaty without annexations or punitive sanctions.¹

V

In May the *SLP* headlined the Germans' "POISON-GAS INFAMY" at Ypres.² A leader headed "Intern! Intern!" commended the government for ordering the internment of enemy aliens of military age. "The indignation of the public has grown to boiling point," it said, particularly since the torpedoing of the liner *Lusitania* off western Ireland (1,200 drowned) and other atrocities. Indeed: the same issue of 14 May carried reports of attacks on German shops and homes in south London that ran across three columns and had a picture of a crowd kicking in a German baker's in Lambeth Walk.

Punishment of those arrested would seem to have been on the lenient side. Women tended to be bound over. Frederick George Jeffreys, a 22-year-old plumber's mate - to take a male example - was fined 40s plus 10s compensation for smashing up a hairdresser's shop in Wyndham Road, Camberwell. The Lambeth magistrate H.C. Biron (misspelt Brion) was scathing: "You behave in this way, and instead of attacking a German you attack a perfectly harmless Pole and wreck his shop. Even if he were a German you bring discredit upon your country by behaving in this way."³

In Bermondsey the Rev. W. Kaye Dunn's home was broken into. Five local boys were charged with stealing a pair of field glasses and other items. Not far away in Galleywall Road, Frederick William Zahn, aged 54, and 29 years in England, hanged himself after his grocer's shop was badly damaged.⁴

"What surprises me," wrote Henry Morriss after the war, "is that where the foe was so inhuman and adopted such unheard-of methods of cruelty, our people were so tolerant and unvengeful;" though some residents, he admits, "lost all sense of control." A former mayor of Bermondsey, he notes that making good the damage put a heavy charge on the rates.⁵

At the time the *SB Recorder* commented that such attacks were "deeply to be deplored... for among the sufferers are many whose sons are fighting in the English forces. The attacks show that there is still in the midst of us a strong force of the lawless element, who are out for loot, equally as much as the German Hun."⁶

The government, said the paper, was also to blame for not long ago interning all enemy aliens. By October 1915 the total interned nationally reached 32,400. Women,

¹ Graham Taylor, pp. 151-4. One of the other delegates was Marion Phillips, who wrote a lengthy account of the conference in *Labour Woman*, May 1915.

² *SLP*, 7 May 1915.

³ *SLP*, 14 May 1915.

⁴ *SBR*, 11 June; 21 and 28 May 1915.

⁵ Henry Morriss, p. 7

⁶ *SBR*, 21 May 1915.

children and those over military age would be repatriated where possible, the government had announced. Naturalised Germans and Austrians would be left alone unless they presented a proven danger.¹

Likewise in May 1915 the *SLP* carried Lord Kitchener's announcement that the Allies would use gas back in order to protect themselves against "this diabolical weapon."²

Amidst this tumult still small voices were reported from Browning Hall, Walworth. In April C. Roden Buxton urged that the people ought to have a voice in any future peace terms, as "I do not think honestly that we can trust those in authority in Europe, in our own country or in any other, to make a settlement." He warned prophetically:

It is absolutely futile to have fought this war if at the end of it we so humiliate and crush any nation that it is resolved from that day forward to build up its strength for another war.³

The settlement, founded in 1894, was a Congregationalist foundation named after Browning the poet. It had been the headquarters of the national campaign for old age pensions and was a centre of activity for the newly formed Labour Party. It provided free medical treatment and legal advice, promoted horticulture, and organised civic education by means of Science Weeks, and the like. Charles Booth, a prominent supporter of the pensions campaign, opened its temperance tavern in 1902.⁴

In May 1915 Browning Hall staged a Sunday afternoon conference on the "bold proposition," as the *SLP* called it, of abolishing all war and promoting world peace. To achieve this, the warden, F. H. Stead, advocated that a Third Hague Conference be convened as soon as hostilities ended. This, he hoped, would establish a regime of peace and disarmament, able to enforce it on recalcitrant nations by economic sanctions and in the last resort through "armed force by international police."

Two previous peace conferences had met at The Hague, in 1899 and 1907. But diplomats who took part approached the issues with "cynicism or hypocrisy," according to Golo Mann. The Germans refused even to discuss arms limitations. A tribunal was set up to settle international disputes, but it was purely optional.⁵

The resolution now proposed by Harry May, of the International Co-operative Alliance, assumed that the world-wide revulsion against the horrors of war would guarantee an overwhelming desire for peace. Peace-lovers of all nations, he said, should focus their efforts on securing another Hague Conference, the only official means of expressing the collective will of mankind. The resolution was seconded by Ethel ("Mrs Philip") Snowden, wife of the Labour MP and future Chancellor. The *SLP* reported the meeting at length, but gave no figure for attendance.⁶

The same May several thousand south London Catholics, carrying statues and church banners, walked in two peace processions from St. George's Cathedral in Lambeth

¹ Jerry White, p. 78.

² *SLP*, 21 May 1915.

³ *CPT*, 3 April 1915.

⁴ *SLP*, 17 December 1915; Mary Boast, *The Story of Walworth*, pp. 37-8.

⁵ Golo Mann, *The History of Germany since 1789*, pp. 446-7.

⁶ *SLP*, 14 May 1915.

Road and from the Franciscan Capuchin Church in Peckham. They invoked the Mother of God for the speedy termination of the war and for those who had died in action.¹

VI

The *SLP* continued to urge compulsion. This was the preferred term, because “We, of course, differentiate between conscription of the arrogant Prussian type and compulsory military service at a time of national stress and danger.”

In an editorial tirade against young “slackers” the type was characterised thus.

He haunts the music-halls, public-houses, boxing rings and dancing halls. He is, for the most part, a self-indulgent, irresponsible personality. Shall the cream of our industrious manhood of all classes abandon their occupations and risk their lives and limbs in battle to make the country comfortable for such as these?

To its credit, the paper also made space for the opposite view. It carried in the same issue a column-long article on “The Curse of Conscription” by R. W. Bowers (not identified). “Conscription – the curse of Continental nations” he wrote, “has made this war possible. Do we want, do we need to be Prussianised? A thousand times No! The British voluntary system is unique in the history of the world, and the envy of foreign nations.”²

Camberwell Trades and Labour Council also expressed its strongest opposition. It declared conscription in any form “to be a violation of the principle of civic freedom hitherto prized as one of the chief heritages of British liberty.” The Rotherhithe branch of the Women’s Labour League declared it “contrary to right and justice to force a man to enlist against the dictates of his own conscience.”³

The *CP Times*, too, opposed compulsion. But it was just as hard on “slackers” as the *SLP*. A leader quoted a West Yorkshire private training in Surrey who had written in:

Last Sunday when on leave I was on Peckham Rye in company with my wife and child. I am sorry to say I saw thousands of young men of military age larking about with young girls. Cannot, sir, something be done to make them toe the line in England’s hour of need? I asked several to join but to no purpose.

The leader-writer agreed, though happily he believed that many of the larking youths were not locals but trippers from surrounding districts. Camberwell, he went on, had recruited magnificently, as had Bermondsey and Deptford but Lambeth, and Brixton in particular, were full of slackers. “You can hardly walk the streets there are so many of them about. How these young men have the effrontery to walk about in civilian clothes when their country needs their services so badly passes our comprehension.”⁴

¹ *SLP*, 28 May 1915.

² *SLP*, 4 June 1915.

³ *SLP*, 11 June 1915; *SBR* 11 July 1915.

⁴ *CPT*, 5 June 1915.

The *SB Recorder* located the slackers elsewhere. In August it commented that:

in Dulwich and Clapham there were more 'knuts' skulking about than are to be found in districts like Bermondsey and Southwark. These youths are clerks, shop assistants, and minor officials in some public service – the Councils, Boards of Guardians, and insurance companies - and no amount of recruiting will reach them, for they fight shy of recruiting meetings and officers.¹

The *Recorder's* opinion on conscription at this point is not clear. While "slackers" are given a hard time all round, we can assume the leader-writers were of an age to be secure from military service.

On June 18 the *SLP* announced "STRIKING PROGRESS IN FLANDERS" The *SB Recorder* published a trench-eye view of this progress from Corporal Bird, of Bermondsey. While getting water from a farmhouse, he wrote,

a 'Ypres Express' came over, and put all the poor fellows out, and I was the luckiest chap not to get it. I was absolutely stuck to the ground and could not move a hand or foot for fright. I was half conscious. I gathered up the bottles, and I had to look twice to see if my legs were still there. I tell you I got down on my knees and thanked God that I was alive. All the time snipers were firing all around me. I got back and found my poor chum with a bullet in the brain, after being so brave to play his machine gun for so long.

The next night, on the way to headquarters for some sandbags,

a big whizz-bang came over, and blew all my poor fellows to pieces. By this time I was half mad and rushed right back, not knowing what I was doing. While going back I got played on with a machine gun. I crawled and dragged myself about 1½ miles to the dressing station, and was taken down the line.

Now invalided back to England, Corporal Bird concludes fondly, "Good old Bermondsey. How is it looking [?]"²

The same month Charles Trevelyan MP addressed the South London Ethical Society on similar terms to C. R. Buxton earlier in the year. "The peace, when it did come, should not be made by diplomats sitting in secret, but there should be a real public opinion for the real ending of war on the right lines." He warned his large audience in Surrey Masonic Hall, Camberwell New Road, not to listen to the militarists who claimed the time was not right for discussing the terms of peace. "They would keep on saying this until the last shot was fired."³

Though not identified as such, both Buxton, a former principal of Morley College, and Trevelyan, a future Labour Education Secretary who had resigned from the government at the outbreak of war, were both active with the Union of Democratic Control, established the previous year. Trevelyan had been a founder member along

¹ *SBR*, 13 August 1915.

² *SBR*, 25 June 1915.

³ *SLP*, 18 June 1915.

with the campaigning journalist E.D. (Edmund) Morel. Morel had achieved fame before the war for exposing the colonial atrocities of forced labour in the Belgian Congo.

Later in 1915 the UDC added the demand for peace negotiations to its programme. Its main thrust however was for a just settlement of the war and the prevention of future conflicts by - above all - the democratic control of foreign policy;¹ as opposed to the sort of secret diplomacy that had allowed Grey, the Foreign Secretary, to reach a military understanding with the French which even the rest of the British Cabinet knew nothing about. Indeed Grey had assured the Commons in November 1911 that no such commitment existed.²

The UDC was thus the first anti-war organisation to take the field. Privately mocked at first by Bertrand Russell as “eight fleas talking of building a pyramid,”³ and publicly vilified as pro-German, it rapidly built middle-class support.

On 4 June the *SLP* reported a new horror: “ZEPPELINS RAID LONDON DISTRICT.” Its account reads: “Altogether about 90 bombs, mostly of an incendiary character, were dropped from hostile aircraft on various localities not far distant from each other. A number of fires (of which only three were large enough to require the services of fire engines) broke out. All were promptly and effectively dealt with ...” One notes the lack of topographical detail and the down-playing of the event.

This first attack on London (31 May) was the work of a single Zeppelin gravitating over the north-east of the city, from Stoke Newington to Leytonstone.⁴ Even when the Isle of Dogs, Rotherhithe and Deptford were targeted on the night of 7-8 September and the riverside from Surrey Docks to Woolwich on 13 October the reporting was equally bland and uninformative; though inquest reports will have helped close readers to identify where the victims were. According to the paper, twenty people were killed and 86 injured in the first of these autumn raids and 41 killed and 101 injured in the second.⁵

The Germans suspended their attacks after this. The wonder is that aircraft and air defences both failed, until raids resumed the following year, to bring down what seemed like “very fat sitting ducks” (Jerry White’s phrase). More guns were brought in, including “Barking Charlie” perched on the upper tier of Tower Bridge. A searchlight was sited in Bermondsey at Lipton’s factory in Rouel Road.⁶ Further south, in Honor Oak, a 6” gun set up on One-Tree-Hill was fired only once. The shell missed the Zeppelin overhead but on falling to earth destroyed part of the tramway on the western side of Peckham Rye.⁷

¹ Jo Vellacott, *Conscientious Objection*, p. 22.

² Arthur Ponsonby, *Falsehood in War-Time*, pp. 33-4.

³ Jo Vellacott, p. 13.

⁴ Jerry White, p. 126.

⁵ Jerry White, pp. 125-9; *SLP*, 10 September and 15 October 1915.

⁶ Jerry White, pp. 129-30; Henry Morriss, p.46.

⁷ John D. Beasley, *The Story of Peckham and Nunhead*, p. 62. The gun emplacement is still there.

3: War and war reporting

I

June-July 1915 saw a transformation in the *SLP*'s war reporting. First, on 7 June, the nature of the coverage changed. News items on the individual local fallen now start appearing, together with lists of south London casualties. Thus we read, across all seven columns and underlined: "Dashing Work in Flanders by Four South London Territorial Batts" Below come individual stories, including, "Kennington Family's Remarkable Record/ Six Sons Resign Lucrative Positions to join the Colours," with little oval portraits. (This, 2 July, is on page 5.)

A week later the paper took adverts off its front page and, for the first time in its 50-year history, put news there instead. By 16 July local war news occupies the whole of the front page, headed from left to right:

- IN MEMORIAM/ Impressive Services for Fallen South London Territorials/ COMFORTING THOUGHTS FROM BISHOP AND VICAR
- CHORISTER'S CALL/ The Inner Meaning of the 'Waste' Of Life/ A WALWORTH SERVICE
- D.C.M. HERO'S FATE
- A CHEERFUL CHUM/ In the 'Best of Health' Though Severely Wounded/ THREE BROTHERS KILLED
- IN AND OUT OF THE TRENCHES/ Incidents Grave and Gay from Battle Line and Dug-out."

Two more "families in khaki" are featured, each with six sons serving, including Mr and Mrs Steadman, of 55 Maxted Road, Peckham. Casualty lists are more systematic. And for the moment, "The War, Week by Week," headlining with added comma the big strategic news from the various fronts, is put inside the paper.

And so the paper's reporting continued over the summer. The *SLP* now presents the war in much more personalised terms of local engagement, heroism and sacrifice. In early July a heavily underlined banner headline extending across seven columns proclaimed "Camberwell's Great Patriotic Festival." Seven miles of cheering crowds, we read, lined the streets to bid farewell to Lieut.-Colonel Hall and the men of the

Borough of Camberwell Gun Division as they marched off for training. Summer crowds are pictured on Camberwell Green.¹

Trafalgar Street, Walworth, is reported to have supplied 175 recruits: "Whole Street in Khaki." The headline stretches across page 5 and all the men are listed by name. The following week's "In Memoriam" speaks of "Fallen South London Public School Boys/ MEETING DEATH CHEERFULLY." The first anniversary of the war is "celebrated" in Camberwell with another patriotic rally.²

The Walworth Wheelers get a mention in an item headed "Cyclists as Fighting Men." In the same issue a letter from Bandsman T. Davey, of Trafalgar Street, gives another glimpse into the reality of the fighting. "It was terrible to be under shell-fire; it made our nerves shake a bit," he writes. But he goes on, "It was great sport when the Germans made their attack. They came in mass and went down like cut corn. They had the surprise of their lives."³ That must have reassured wives and parents.

Trafalgar Street, Walworth, features again with even more names on its roll of honour. "It is little short of marvellous," says the *SLP*, "that a little over 120 houses – not tenement dwellings – should produce 200 recruits." Warden Stead, of the Browning Settlement, makes it clear that abolition of war will be possible only when the human race is rid for ever of Absolutism and Militarism by a German defeat – which is the government line. The Magenis family, of 50 Phelp Street, Walworth, is reported to have nine men in khaki: a father and eight sons, all pictured.⁴

Meanwhile, the *CP Times* notes a "mass meeting" on Peckham Rye of the Anti-German Union: its objects being to keep alive the patriotic spirit and to defend British freedoms against German aggression, competition and influence. "We have to take care that when the war is over no German is welcomed back to these shores." A further meeting, described as "very successful" is reported at Central Hall, Peckham High Street, in November.⁵

The *South London Press*, one can say, is saturated with the war. The other papers treat it very differently. Neither the *Southwark and Bermondsey Recorder* nor the *Camberwell and Peckham Times* tries to cover the course of the war, even though the latter several times repeats its editorial plea to government for more frankness on the subject. As shown already, its leaders engage vigorously with war issues, such as temperance and conscription. The *Recorder*, on the other hand, carries no leader as such, just an item entitled "Notes and Comments" – more the former than the latter – in which its opinion, when offered, is almost always on local matters. It has nothing to say about the fighting or conscription.

Both papers keep adverts on the front page and it's notable that both in their reporting generally integrate war-related news with the usual miscellany of civilian items.

¹ *SLP*, 9 July 1915.

² *SLP*, 30 July; 6 August 1915.

³ *SLP*, 20 August 1915.

⁴ *SLP*, 17 September; 24 September; 8 October 1915.

⁵ *CPT*, 29 September and 13 November 1915.

For example, on 12 June, the *CP Times* has a single column headed “FOR KING AND COUNTRY/ Some Personal Notes/ FURTHER LIST OF CASUALTIES.” It comes between “Births, Marriages and Deaths” on the left and items to the right headed across the page “A Pretty Wedding”, “A Labourer’s Suicide,” “Guardians at Work” (across two) and the miscellany “Notes and Notions” (“Mr Churchill Optimistic/ When Camberwell was Rural”).

Similarly the *SB Recorder* on 8 October devotes two-thirds of a single column to casualties from the 24th battalion of the London Regiment, “Southwark’s Own.” It is positioned between a three column advert for Men’s and Boys’ Overcoats and the top-page headlines “Camberwell New Road Mystery” and “Our Book Table (across two). Alongside the casualties down the page to the left are reports headed “Percy Mission Hall Band of Hope,” and “Workhouse Inmates’ Allegations at Peckham.”

That said, from early November 1915 the *SB Recorder*, increased in size from six pages to eight, starts publishing Rolls of Honour, described as “a complete list of those from this district who have joined the colours”. They appear area by area and street by street, starting with Bermondsey. The first one occupies one and two-thirds pages, the names of the dead marked with an asterisk, the wounded with a dagger. A corrected version is republished the following week as the previous issue had been practically sold out the day it appeared. The lists continue into 1916 – a labour of Sisyphus for the paper, one imagines, as they keep having to be updated.

This feature makes the war extremely visible to the reader. But neither here nor in the *CP Times* is the war effort personalised and localised in the way it is in the *SLP*. The reporting in the *Times* has the effect, one could say, of routinising the war into everyday life; or perhaps of distancing it by diluting it with peacetime normality. At the same time, as we shall see, it also introduces a columnist with very trenchant views on the subject.

The differences between the papers in their presentation of a war they all supported are quite marked. What to make of them? Part of the explanation must be that the *SLP* had a much wider circulation area and produced a bigger and better paper (10-12 pages) than the other two. It must have had a larger staff, able to gather and bring together stories about local heroes. News from the various fronts was disseminated by the Official Press Bureau in London.¹ The *SLP* evidently signed up to this service from 1914, unlike the other two papers, thus foregrounding the war from the start. The localisation of its coverage is an extension of that policy. Was it simply down to editorial initiative, or was it encouraged and facilitated by higher authority? It’s not clear. I think the former; at least I have turned up no indication that there was official orchestration.

¹ Edward Cook, *The Press in War-Time*, pp.46-51.

II

Back on the front page now in the *SLP*, The War, Week by Week for 1 October announces "ALLIES' GREAT ONSLAUGHT IN FRANCE." It's the battle of Loos, the first at which the Allies used gas, code-named the accessory. "The news from the Western Front... has been glorious," rejoiced the *CP Times*. Three weeks later, under the heading "Excellent progress in France," the *SLP* published sober particularised accounts of the fighting from local participants.¹

This is the battle about which Robert Graves writes so memorably, describing, after the meticulous orders, the experience of being in the chaos that followed. He was part of a sideshow, a diversionary attack without proper artillery support that wasn't meant to succeed.²

The gas, even when it went the right way, did not deal with the enemy barbed wire. Still, the main attack went well at first. London men and kilted Highlanders took the pit village of Loos and occupied Hill 70 beyond. Now was the time to punch through with fresh reserves.³ "Where were they?" ask the Holts in their guide to the battlefields. "They were too far away, too tired and too new to mount a successful follow-up assault. Why? Whose fault was it? The generals [Haig and French] blamed each other."⁴

The two raw reserve divisions arrived after eighteen hours on the move, struggling through a tide of congestion. Two days later they were thrown, without adequate artillery or other cover, against a now heavily defended German position. Alan Clark compares the attack to the Charge of the Light Brigade but magnified a hundredfold.⁵

The overall offensive petered out in early November. The British lost over 50,000 men, more than twice as many as the Germans.⁶ Officers who came back, wrote Philip Gibbs, "said things which were dangerous to speak aloud, cursing their fate as fighting-men, asking of God as well as of mortals why the courage of the soldiers they led should be thrown away in such a muck of slaughter."⁷ Gibbs was there as a war correspondent. His anguished memoir appeared in 1920.

In December, in a third-tier headline, the *SLP* reported French's replacement as commander-in-chief by Haig, or one self-confident bungler by another.⁸ The new commander had failed his Staff College examination. However his elder sister Henrietta was acquainted with the Duke of Cambridge, who had the right to nominate candidates. So Haig was rescued by royal patronage and admitted without further testing of his abilities.⁹

¹ *CPT*, 2 October; *SLP*, 22 October 1915.

² Robert Graves, *Goodbye To All That*, ch.15.

³ Philip Gibbs, *Now It Can Be Told*, pp. 165-6.

⁴ Tonie and Valmai Holt, p. 47.

⁵ Alan Clark, pp. 164-9.

⁶ A.J.P.Taylor, *The First World War*, pp. 73-4.

⁷ Philip Gibbs, pp. 200-1.

⁸ *SLP*, 17 December 1915.

⁹ Alan Clark, p. 22.

On Christmas Eve the paper carried the news “GALLIPOLI STRATEGY/ British Withdrawal from Suvla-Anzac Coast/ SPLENDID ACHIEVEMENT.” Helles, the remaining beach, was evacuated in January. Fifty thousand Allied dead remained behind, no nearer Constantinople than when they landed.¹

¹ Geoffrey Moorhouse, *Hell's Foundations*, p. 12.

4: Towards conscription

Meanwhile, the coalition formed in May 1915 had been sidling towards compulsion. Some Conservatives had long been in favour of what they called “national service”. The party had increasingly swung behind this view, driven on latterly by the Northcliffe press. Recruitment in mid-1915 was averaging at 100,000 volunteers a month. In October Lord Kitchener, the Minister of War, told the cabinet that he needed 130,000.¹

First there was a national registration scheme to determine how many men were available to serve. These were then categorised according to the importance and dispensability of their current work. There followed the Derby Scheme under which eligible men were visited by canvassers and invited to attest their willingness to join the army when called up. Those who agreed got an armband to wear. The Earl of Derby was Director-General of Recruiting.²

Camberwell Trades and Labour Council, representing, it said, 4,800 organised workers in the borough, reaffirmed its opposition to conscription, both military and industrial. The latter meant forced labour in which manual workers would have no voice. It urged the labour movement to resist. If proposals came before parliament it should call conferences in all the major industrial centres to determine on steps to avert such a disaster. Nationally the TUC also denounced conscription, though without the same commitment to action.³

The Trades Council had an unexpected ally in Albion Richardson, the Liberal MP for Peckham. In a speech reported at length he told a party meeting: “The movement in favour of conscription was designed to one great end – to destroy organised labour in this country; to destroy the only weapon which workers... had to fight the greed and the cupidity of the capitalists. (Hear, hear)” If such a measure was introduced - which he doubted - he would give it “a most unhesitating and uncompromising opposition.”⁴

A further intervention that autumn came from a contributor whose column - always under the heading “Labour’s Outlook/ By Verax/ Things as the Worker Sees Them” – started appearing in the *CP Times* early in October. His very first contribution opens

¹ James McDermott, *British Military Service Tribunals 1916-1918*, p. 13.

² David Boulton, pp. 86-7; John Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, pp. 14-17.

³ *CPT*, 13 October 1915; David Boulton, p. 84.

⁴ *CPT*, 23 October 1915.

with the statement that opposition to the designs of “our militarists” is steadily increasing within organised labour and quotes the Camberwell Trades Council resolution.¹

Subsequent columns deal authoritatively with a range of issues, among them child-care and infant mortality, coal prices and coal-owner’s profits, and the social and economic problems likely to follow the end of the war.

In December Verax returned to the subject of conscription, arguing that no movement could do more to defeat the designs of “our” militarists and those who wished to destroy our democratic institutions than the trade unions. “Trade Union branches,” he declared, “should not be content with merely passing anti-conscription resolutions, but should show their active and determined hostility in the matter.” He doubted whether the government would try to force the measure through in the face of such unhesitating opposition.

Any measure for compulsory war service, he continued, would also meet the unrelenting resistance of a body of men of military age, some thousands in number, “who on conscientious grounds would refuse to perform such service, whatever the consequences. A fellowship has been formed of such young men,” he says, and goes on to quote from their manifesto:

The destruction of our fellow men – young men like ourselves – appals us; we cannot assist in the cutting off of one generation from life’s opportunities. Insistence upon individual obligations in the interests of national well-being has no terrors for us; we gladly admit – we would even extend – the right of the community to impose duties upon its members for the common good, but we deny the right of any Government to make the slaughter of our fellows a bounden duty.²

Verax’s bold promotion of this Fellowship did not go unchallenged, of course. T. Bishop, of 45 Farmer’s Road, Kennington, wrote to say it was beyond his comprehension that at a time like that a man should refuse to fight for his country. “I find it quite consistent with the teaching of Christ to avenge a wrong. ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’...”

In the same issue the *CP Times* published three letters from the other side, including one from E.T. Jope. He quotes Col. Sir Augustus FitzGeorge, “son of the late Royal Duke of Cambridge, Commander-in-Chief.” In a phrase cited elsewhere in anti-conscription literature, FitzGeorge had apparently told the Service Club in August that “compulsory service was necessary when the people were getting out of hand.” Jope concludes, “Industrial organisation has been our weapon. Conscription, if it ever became an accomplished fact, would strike this weapon from our hands, leaving us a prey to rack-renters and greedy exploiters forever.”³ We shall meet Jope again.

He might more pertinently have quoted Lloyd George, who had said in June that year: “We do not want any more recruits for the army. We are getting too many men for the

¹ *CPT*, 2 October 1915.

² *CPT*, 11 December 1915.

³ *CPT*, 18 December 1915.

army. We are getting more men that we can equip. What we want is not compulsion for the army, but compulsion for the workshop.”¹

But who was Verax? An answer is suggested below. The annual report of the Trades and Labour Council for 1915 records merely that the *CP Times* had kindly placed a column at the council’s disposal and says, “We are indebted to our Press correspondent ‘Verax.’”² Why the paper should have given a platform to such radical opinion on the war is a puzzle. True, it opposed conscription, though its later leaders suggest a certain resignation on the issue, at odds with the militancy of Verax. The paper supported the war, however, and so would disagree with talk of “our militarists.”

In a leader at the start of December (“The End Not Yet,”) it said it did not believe the British people desired “a patched-up peace” – the phrase is Asquith’s – but “peace with honour” after the last German soldier had quit occupied France, Belgium, Poland and Serbia. “We must not pay heed to statements of internal trouble in Germany; still less must we listen to the pleadings of peace cranks, who, like their confrères, the rabid teetotal cranks, are, at times like these, a public danger.”³

The *CP Times* believed the Derby scheme was a genuine attempt to save the voluntary principle. If it failed, it would not be for want of patriotism but because the “conditions of service” – pay presumably - while fairly attractive to the man of humble means, would entail of serious loss to a man on a comfortable middle-class income.⁴ Nothing to do then with conscience or the possibility of death and mutilation; it seems an odd argument.

The Derby scheme could equally be seen as a device for working Liberal and Labour opinion round to accepting conscription. Arthur Marwick calls it “a gigantic engine of fraud and moral blackmail,” but also a very astute piece of tactics. If it succeeded the sanctity of voluntarism had been maintained; if it failed the case for conscription would be almost irresistible.⁵

Lord Derby’s figures, when he reported to Cabinet, showed that conscription would bring in an extra 651,000 single men, over and above the 1,150,000 who had attested; a number later re-calculated down to 316,000.⁶ On this less than overwhelming evidence the Cabinet decided at the end of year that voluntary recruitment would not be sufficient for the task in hand; which included a greater British share in future operations, agreed at the Inter-Allied Conference in Chantilly in November.⁷

A measure of that task was that over the year the Allies had regained just eight square miles of territory.⁸

¹ David Boulton, p. 104.

² Creech Jones archive, box 2, file 4.

³ *CPT*, 8 December 1915. Asquith had told the Commons the present struggle could not be allowed to end “in some patched-up, precarious, dishonouring compromise, masquerading in the name of peace.” *CPT*, 21 October 1916.

⁴ *CPT*, 11 December 1915.

⁵ Arthur Marwick, p. 77.

⁶ John Rae, p. 20.

⁷ James McDermott, p. 14.

⁸ Adam Hochschild, p. 173.

1916

5: Compulsion and resistance

I

So the editor of the *South London Press* got his wish. A Military Service Bill to conscript all single men aged between 18 and 40 was introduced on 5 January 1916. Even now Asquith's approach was crablike. Proposing the Bill in the Commons, he said it could be supported by those (like himself) who were opposed to "what is commonly described as conscription." Its sole purpose was to redeem his earlier promise that married men who attested would not be held to their commitment until all unmarried men had been called up, if necessary by compulsion.¹

A hurriedly convened conference of the Labour Party and TUC rejected compulsion by almost two million votes to 873,000 and urged Labour MPs to vote against the measure at every stage. The latter's representatives in government, however, refused to resign.²

Long prepared for Asquith's announcement, the No-Conscription Fellowship, flagged up by "Verax", sprang into action. So did its close ally, the National Council against Conscription.

The first of these had been the brainchild of Lilla, the newly-married wife of Fenner Brockway. The couple saw conscription coming, and as early as November 1914 the *Labour Leader*, which he edited, carried the suggestion, in a letter written to himself, that men of enlistment age who were not prepared to take the part of a combatant in the war should band themselves together, "so that we may know our strength." Three hundred people responded to the invitation to write in. One of these was Arthur Creech Jones. From these a founding committee was formed. Lilla Brockway initially acted as secretary from their cottage in Cheshire.

The National Committee when established brought together an assembly of high-powered and highly committed talent. Brockway, the ILP journalist, was joined by Edward Grubb, a veteran Quaker campaigner who had been organising secretary of the Howard League for Penal Reform, by forceful younger Quakers and Labour

¹ John Rae, pp. 19, 33.

² E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Home Front*, pp. 285, 287.

people like Alfred Barratt Brown and C.H. Norman, by Alfred Salter, and a little later by the mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell.

The first chair was the saintly and charismatic Clifford Allen, who had been general manager of the Labour *Daily Citizen*; now defunct, it supported the war.¹ Fenner Brockway became secretary. The organising secretary was Aylmer Rose, a young London Fabian who lived in Nelson Square, a well-to-do enclave off Blackfriars Road. Like Allen they too became prison graduates. Edward Grubb, too old for the army, served for the duration as treasurer.²

The Fellowship went public in December 1914. In September 1915 it issued its first manifesto. Already quoted by “Verax,” this went on:

We have been brought to this standpoint by many ways. Some of us have reached it through the Christian faith in which we have been reared... Others have found it by association with international movements; we believe in the solidarity of the human race, and we cannot betray the ties of brotherhood which bind us to one another through the nations of the world.

All of us, however we may have come to this conviction, believe in the value and sacredness of the human personality, and are prepared to sacrifice as much in the cause of the world's peace as our fellows are sacrificing in the cause of the nation's war.³

At the first national convention in November 1915 delegates, after hearing a passionate address by Clifford Allen, adopted a resolution that declared: “though realising the grave consequences to ourselves that may follow our decision, [we] solemnly and sincerely reaffirm our intention to resist conscription, whatever the penalties may be.”⁴ In readiness for action the NCF set up a network of branches across the country.

At this moment, by an initiative not entirely clear even from the archives, a parallel and related organisation sprang into being called the National Council Against Conscription. Its aim, says Jo Vellacott, was to rally a larger spectrum of opponents against compulsion. The president was Robert Smillie, the granitic Scotsman who headed the Miners' Federation of Great Britain. George Lansbury and the trade unionist and WLL activist Margaret Bondfield served on its executive and it attracted many Labour and trade union affiliates. Its executive also included radical Liberals and a number of unattached intellectuals - among them H.W. Massingham, editor of the Liberal weekly *The Nation*, and even, according to Vellacott, the writer and aesthete Lytton Strachey.⁵

Strachey's biographer Michael Holroyd records him helping in the office and writing leaflets for the Council but, in following his man round the Bloomsbury-Garsington

¹ Arthur Marwick, *Clifford Allen: the Open Conspirator*, pp. 16-18.

² David Boulton, pp.107-8; Jo Vellacott, pp. 28-30, 124; Brockway, *Inside the Left*, pp. 66-9.

³ David Boulton, p. 144.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 117.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 119; Jo Vellacott, p. 32.

circuit, he makes no mention of his attending any meetings, nor indeed of the executive.¹ The Council's secretary was B.N. (Bernard) Langdon-Davies, of the UDC, a Cambridge graduate and former university extension lecturer.²

There was a considerable overlap of individuals between the two organisations, the leading case in point being Catherine Marshall. Equally skilled as a lobbyist and campaigner, she had worked almost full-time between 1908 and 1914 as parliamentary secretary for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, the non-violent wing of the movement.

The war divided the movement still further, particularly after Millicent Fawcett, the NUWSS president, declared in February 1915 that, until German troops were driven back, "I believe it is akin to treason to talk of peace."³

Marshall and many others resigned. She then threw her weight behind the international women's conference being organised in The Hague. When conscription loomed, she joined the executive of the National Council. While retaining that position, she soon became, under various titles, the organisational driver of the Fellowship; which, with periods of collapse from overwork, she remained for the greater part of the war.⁴ She was "the genius" of resistance to the government, according the movement's first historian, John Graham.⁵

The No-Conscription Fellowship and the National Council Against Conscription worked closely together. Nationally the NCF claimed to have produced and distributed nearly five million leaflets opposing the Military Service Bill, an impressive figure.⁶ The National Council claimed to have put out half a million. Unlike the Fellowship it did not have branches but sent out eleven temporary organisers to arrange meetings and establish local joint committees of supporting organisations.⁷

II

Local activity kicked off on the first Sunday of January 1916. In Bermondsey a women's peace procession was abandoned after what looks like a threat of disruption - "as they did not wish the lives of the police, who wished to protect them, endangered." But a meeting at the ILP Institute in Fort Road went ahead. Ada Salter told the hundred women and the dozen or so men present that women as non-combatants had a special responsibility to try and preach the spirit of internationalism among the people. Would they try, by their lives and influence, to teach the real and truest patriotism, the spirit of love for all?

¹ Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey*, p.339. In the Council's annual report of January 1917 in the Marshall archives (D/Mar/4/94) neither he nor Massingham are listed as members. In the February 1918 annual report Massingham is named as one of five vice-presidents. S.J. Haggis papers, Imperial War Museum.

² So described in his book *The ABC of the UDC*, 1915, "a handbook for lecturers."

³ Jill Liddington, p. 97.

⁴ Jo Vellacott, pp.34-5.

⁵ John Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, p. 185.

⁶ NCF newsletter of 31 January 1916, in Henry Hovell papers, Imperial War Museum.

⁷ Annual report of 19 January 1917, in Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/94.

Her friend, the formidable suffragist Charlotte Despard, said, "They had met together to swear before God and before the world that they wanted to stop the war... They were determined to stand firm and hoped that 1916 would hear the ringing of peace bells." ¹

The following Sunday saw the first of many rallies on Peckham Rye Common. The large gathering, under the auspices, says the *SLP*, of the Anti-Conscription Council, was supported by Dulwich ILP, Dulwich Women's Labour League, Camberwell Trades Council, Lambeth Labour Party, Dulwich NCF, Camberwell British Socialist Party, various trade unions and religious organisations, plus the Social and Political Vigilance Committee.

The latter has not been identified. The British Socialist Party, or BSP, was a pre-1917 Marxist party, in rivalry with the ILP.

The resolution, proposed by the combative Mr Gillian, of the Shop Assistants' Union, believed the real motive behind the Bill was that the enemies of the workers were seeking further means to enslave them. He said that trade unions would smash it if they could. (Cheers) He advised workers to see they were they were not shackled and bound by compulsory industrial or military service.²

The resolution was seconded by Mr Pell, of the National Union of Clerks. Mr Stenning, of the ILP, "urged that conscription would be a violation of the rights of civic freedom... Conscription was the very basis of Prussianism and all other military autocracy." ³

The same week the *SLP* and the *CP Times* each published four (different) letters critical of compulsion. In Dulwich the Women's Labour League declared,

As working women and mothers of the race we detest and abhor militarism in all its forms, because it leads to the sub-ordination and oppression of our sex and the training of our children in ideas that are 'Prussian', and for which we have nothing but repugnance.⁴

Two further Sunday demonstrations on the Rye were reported in January. Among those listed as supporters of the second of these are the Society of Friends and the Christian pacifist group, the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Attendance is given as 250 in the first case and 300 in the second.⁵ Were other meetings - of salvationists and anti-salvationists - going on alongside, as before the war? One imagines so.

Despite the widespread opposition, the legislation passed quickly through parliament and received the royal assent on 27 January 1916. With the Irish Nationalists abstaining – since Ireland was excluded from the Bill – only 36 MPs (plus two tellers) opposed the third reading: 15 of them Labour members, out of 31 in the Commons, the remainder Liberals. The latter did not include Albion Richardson.⁶ Conscription took immediate effect: all single men were deemed to have enlisted.

¹ *SBR*, 31 December 1915; *SLP*, 7 January 1916.

² *SLP*, 14 January 1916.

³ *CPT*, 15 January 1916.

⁴ *SLP*, 7 January 1916.

⁵ *CPT*, 29 January 1916; *SLP*, 5 February 1916.

⁶ John Graham, p. 59.

The campaigning continued, however, partly to repeal the Act and partly because pressure quickly built up for general conscription. The papers continued to report demonstrations on Peckham Rye: on February 18, March 4, March 25. At the second of these Mr S.V. Bracher “reminded his audience how strong a tool conscription had been in the hands of that terror of Europe, Napoleon.”¹

In March the *SB Recorder* published an indignant letter from Helen Wraye, no address, about NCF activity. “The above society must be in a very bad way when to further its object it has to adopt such means as house-to-house distribution of ‘Repeal the Act’ leaflets, and this in Bermondsey, where most of the married working men with their wives are better off than they have ever been, owing to the men having joined the army.” An extended diatribe follows, ending, “Can nothing be done to stop these people flooding the district with their abominable literature?”²

The letters in the *CP Times* provide a vivid feel of the ongoing debate. “A Soldier’s Father,” writing from Denmark Hill, recounts an encounter between his son, evidently a volunteer, and some jeering “slackers.” They taunt, “You must be a fool. What’ll they do for you when you come back, if you ever do?” The soldier replies, “Yes, I think I must be a fool,” and then adds grimly, “But I am going back.” Derisive laughter was the response, reports the father, who concludes with the question, “Is conscription necessary?”³

Two long letters plead for an end to the fighting. J. George Stone, of 79 Grove Lane, Camberwell, begins, “I cannot bring myself to believe that we, England, can achieve the purpose set out in the beginning, by carrying on the war any further.” Supporting him, W.N. Clark, of Peckham, writes, “It seems that the militarists of Europe are incapable of finding a way out the situation, and it is time a saner method was sought by way of negotiation... There is little doubt our own Government is in a peculiarly favourable position to take the initiative...”⁴

“Meteor,” editor of the column “Town Topics” said he fully sympathized with opponents of compulsory service. But he was convinced that “unless we have the proposed partial and temporary ‘Conscription’ we shall have, in the not distant future, to knuckle under to permanent Prussian militarism, of the worst kind.”⁵

In his column “Labour’s Outlook,” in the same paper “Verax” continued to articulate his opposition. Then, after a short piece in early March summarising parliamentary criticism of the tribunals – discussed below - he vanishes. In late April a new column appeared, headed WAR AND LABOUR/ By T. Quelch/ INDUSTRIAL CHANGES. Beneath in small print is the bracketed disclaimer, “It must be understood that the Editor does not necessarily share the opinion of the writer.”⁶

¹ *SLP*, 18 February 1916.

² *SBR*, 10 March 1916.

³ *CPT*, 8 January 1916.

⁴ *CPT*, 22 and 29 January 1916.

⁵ *CPT*, 2 February 1916.

⁶ *CPT*, 29 April 1916.

The columns do not deal directly with the war, but rather with the impact of the war on trade union rights and workplace relationships; on women's working conditions and the exploitation of the young; on civil liberties and prices; on the automation of labour. The tone initially is expert and academic. But then it becomes more polemical.

"There is unmistakeable evidence on every head that the great trend of economic development, foreshadowed by Karl Marx, has received additional impetus as a result of the war." It is creating 'a "tremendously powerful oligarchy" whose attitude towards the workers "will be ruthless and terrible." (10 June)

In the face of problems post-war "what we want is the solid, organised, determined working class to move forward definitely, knowing its strength, conscious of its power." Locally trades councils were the best bodies to bring all sections of the movement together. The article concludes, "The old order is cracking up. Amidst the fogs of war, amidst all the carnage, pain and misery, we dimly discern the possibility of a nobler order." (24 June)

And that concluded Quelch, as far as the paper was concerned. He can be identified as Tom Quelch, a compositor, aged 34 in 1917, who lived at 35 Limesford Road, Nunhead. Active in the BSP like Harry, his more famous father, and a conscientious objector, he went on to become an executive member of the Communist Party of Great Britain.¹ As with "Verax" it is intriguing how he could have found a niche in the paper; perhaps he worked there.

Were he and "Verax" were the same person? That would be the obvious assumption. It's possible, but there seems to me to be a difference in style and substance between them. Both are forceful, articulate and well-informed but "Verax" focuses on immediate moral and practical issues, chiefly the war of course, rather like a Fabian, while Quelch is more a rhetorical visionary of the future. So I don't think the two are the same. On the basis of his court-martial statements and prison letters – discussed below - I suspect that "Verax" was in fact Creech Jones, of Camberwell Trades and Labour Council.

But to return from this digression: early April saw a conference of delegates representing 49 trade union and labour bodies in south London commit itself unanimously to work for the immediate repeal of the Military Service Act and to oppose any extension of conscription.

Proposing the resolution at Friends' Meeting House in Peckham, a young Herbert Morrison, Home Secretary in another World War, said he wanted trade unionists especially to note that "we had experience of conscription as practised in other countries, and we knew that in every such country conscription had been used to injure the working-class in that country.

"Mr Lloyd George had shown that he wanted to be able to do with the engineers and the workmen in the munition factories precisely what the general or the officer

¹ Cyril Pearce, Register; James Klugmann, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, vol. 2, p. 90.

commanding could do with the soldiers at the scene of battle.” He appealed to trade unionists to recognise that the young men who were going to resist the Act “were fighting one of the biggest fights for trade unionism.”¹

Asquith the Prime Minister had explicitly denied the need to conscript married men. But under pressure from Lloyd George, the Minister of Munitions, a divided Cabinet in May introduced a General Compulsion Bill, which received the royal assent at the end of the month. The Easter Rising in Dublin helped settle opinion. The same lone band of 36 MPs as before opposed the legislation at the second reading.²

III

With compulsion a sort of new front had stabilised across Britain. It was represented on the government side by the army’s conscription machine; and in the front rank facing opponents of the war, a system of civilian tribunals whose job it was to adjudicate on claims for exemption from military service; more on these in a moment.

On the opposing side stood the No-Conscription Fellowship, the National Council Against Conscription, the ILP and other anti-war organisations. Vital to the Fellowship’s campaigning were, at national level, its publication *The Tribunal* and its extensive network of local branches.

A well-produced four-page quarto news-sheet, *The Tribunal* started appearing in March 1916. It came out weekly throughout the war and beyond, despite arrests, surveillance, police raids, seizures and sabotage. It’s a heroic story. The paper missed barely an issue, thanks above all to Catherine Marshall’s team of brave and resourceful women: Miss Violet Tillard, Miss Gladys Rinder, Miss Joan Beauchamp and Miss Lydia Smith. These formalities are always observed, at least in writing.

As well as campaigning for the repeal of conscription and pressing for peace negotiations, the organisation used *The Tribunal* to publicise the harsh treatment of the men who refused to serve. It developed a well-tuned record system to keep track of them. This was work in which the branches played a key part. The Fellowship’s records show that in May 1916 it had 165 across the country.³

There were 31 branches in London alone. One, not surprisingly, was in Bermondsey, “within the ILP,” says Brockway. Its secretary was Archie Lewis, who was Alfred Salter’s own secretary. By July 1916, says Brockway, 19 members of Bermondsey ILP were in prison.⁴

There’s little more one can say about the branch. There’s no detail in the Catherine Marshall archive. Its base, the Labour Institute in Fort Road, was destroyed by a German bomb in September 1940. Worse still, the materials used by Brockway to write his Salter biography of 1949 are now also lost, despite the efforts of Graham Taylor to find them for his biography of Ada Salter.

¹ *SLP*, 7 April 1916.

² David Boulton, pp. 94-5.

³ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/5.

⁴ Fenner Brockway, *Bermondsey Story*, p. 65.

Other NCF branches in south London included Blackheath, Lambeth, Clapham, Streatham, Kennington and Dulwich. About the latter there is a good deal to say. As early as February 1915 Arthur Creech Jones received a letter in rounded handwriting, beginning "Dear Comrade" and signed "L. Brockway (Mrs)" inviting to him to join the Fellowship. He must have been one of those who wrote in response to the letter in the *Labour Leader*.¹

Creech Jones, a bookish civil service clerk, was then 23. Though born in Bristol, he had moved to London to live with his aunt and uncle and his cousins Florence and Violet at 46 Keston Road, a superior part of Peckham bordering on Goose Green. He appears to have been the initiator of the branch. Through his position as secretary of the Trades and Labour Council position he was already the chief articulator in Camberwell borough of the anti-conscription view.

Also in his archive is a typed list of members on the letterhead of the South London Federal Council Against Conscription, that is, the local joint council of the NCAC.² Arthur C. Jones is there, and so, at this early stage - before the Council changed its name in July - is Mrs Cahill, who was to serve tirelessly as branch secretary throughout the war.

Sarah Ann Cahill lived in Lewisham, at 60 Limes Grove: a large house in the street running up from the main library, just off the town centre. Now aged about 53, the wife, or widow perhaps, of a railway signaller born in Ireland, she was the mother of four children. Her only son William was a conscientious objector: had been for nine or ten years, she told the tribunal, and had learned his beliefs from her. She herself, she said, had been working for peace ever since the war started.³

For some reason neither Lewisham nor Deptford – then a separate borough - had an NCF branch, which explains why Dulwich branch came to have members from there. Quite how the branch was put together has not come to light. It met though at Hansler Hall, off Lordship Lane in East Dulwich. This was the headquarters of Dulwich ILP, of which Creech Jones was also secretary. Tucked away along a passageway between Hansler Road and Shawbury Road - behind where Dell Autos now is - it was the focus of intense political and social activity, as shown by the party's programme for the first quarter of 1916.

A surviving small card (3" by 4.5") advertises weekly lectures each Sunday at 7.00 – speakers include both the Salters, Herbert Morrison, and Miss Miriam Price, of the National Federation of Women Workers – and on the other side weekly meetings each Friday at 8.30. Among these are four sessions on the Sanctity of Treaties, the Balance of Power, Armaments After the War, etc. by W.N. [Winifred] Ewer, of the Union of Democratic Control, and four sessions on the French Revolution. The Women's Labour League meets there fortnightly, we read, and in addition: "A Social & Dance is held in Hansler Hall on Saturdays & Thursdays at 8. You are invited."⁴ Though it does not say so, the NCF branch met there on Wednesdays.

¹ Creech Jones archive, box 1, file 3.

² *ibid.*

³ Ann O'Brien, Biographies.

⁴ Creech Jones archive, box 2, file 1.

East Dulwich, it will be remembered, not the lawned and leafy idyll around Dulwich College and the Picture Gallery: that is Dulwich Village and West Dulwich. East Dulwich, on the other side of Lordship Lane, is a wedge of quite modest terraced housing, now increasingly gentrified along with the shops on the main road, but built in the late 19th century for working-class occupation, in some cases (initially at least) two families to a dwelling.¹ When Charles Booth came with his survey, he noted that large numbers of men connected with building lived there, “as well as many clerks and warehousemen employed in the city.”²

Hansler Hall was a comfortable stroll from Creech Jones’s home in Keston Road on the other side of Goose Green. It was quite a trek from Lewisham. To make the journey today you catch a 185 bus, which takes you there in 30 minutes via Catford and Forest Hill. One hundred years ago Sarah Cahill presumably made the same journey by tram.

IV

The National Council Against Conscription continued to press for the repeal of the Military Service Acts. But once the legislation was passed, it concentrated increasingly on championing the traditional freedoms being put under severe pressure by conscription and the restrictions on labour, by the war effort generally and the Defence of the Realm Act in particular. To reflect this emphasis it renamed itself in July 1916 the National Council for Civil Liberties.³ It is not a lineal ancestor, however, of the NCCL established in the 1930s and now called Liberty.

The Defence of the Realm Act, popularly known as DORA, gave “His Majesty in Council” – that is, without reference to parliament – power to make regulations designed (*inter alia*) to prevent persons jeopardizing the war effort. Over time a stream of regulations from different ministries were issued in its name, covering the blackout, early closing, food control and much else.⁴

The two key measures however were regulation 18, which absolutely prohibited the reporting of troop, shipping and aircraft movements, the manufacture and storage of war material or works of fortification and defence; and regulation 27. The latter was far more diffuse, prohibiting not only false reports, but statements likely to cause disaffection or to interfere with the success of the armed forces, to prejudice recruiting, or prejudice HM’s relations with foreign powers, even to undermine confidence in the currency.

The system of censorship was a cunning one. Newspapers were not obliged to submit any material beforehand. But if they did not, they laid themselves open to prosecution under DORA. In this way they were constrained to play it safe. Either they submitted material, which might be censored; or on the precautionary principle they censored themselves.

¹ H.J. Dyos, *Victorian Suburb*, p. 185.

² Charles Booth, vol. 6, p. 89.

³ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/92-4.

⁴ Arthur Marwick, pp. 36-7.

It was a policy which “at once censored the Press and did not censor it,” wrote the highly civilized Edward Cook, joint director of the Official Press Bureau. A Liberal imperialist and biographer of Ruskin, he was a former editor of the *Daily News*, and before that of the campaigning *Pall Mall Gazette*. His account of operations does not reveal how much censoring actually occurred – papers were requested not to indicate cuts – but he summarises that the press “was left throughout the war in possession of a very wide freedom.” And again: “It was full of war news and still further of war views.”¹

This is only partly true. Certainly, as we saw, papers reported the demonstrations against conscription and printed heterodox opinions on the war. Thanks to regulation 18, on the other hand, press and public had only heavily doctored knowledge of the fighting itself. Moreover this bland view of DORA applies only to the mainstream press. Leaflets “of a propagandist character” were supposed to be submitted in advance, a provision reinforced in 1917 with the requirement that they carry the name and address of the author and printer.²

It was under DORA that in May 1916 eight members of the Fellowship’s national committee were prosecuted for publishing the leaflet headed *Repeal the Act*. The eight were convicted, even though the Home Secretary Herbert Samuel had assured the Commons that agitation for repeal could not be considered illegal.³

Sir Archibald Bodkin, prosecuting, came out with the statement that “War would become impossible, if all men were to have the view that war is wrong.” The NCF seized on this sentence and published it as a poster. The printer was then prosecuted, as was Edward Fuller, a journalist member of the Forest Gate branch who sought to get the poster pasted up. The original poster was widely reported, and the *Manchester Guardian* published the complete text without legal sanction; which nicely demonstrates the distinction between mainstream and campaigning publications.⁴

In June that year Bertrand Russell was fined for writing a leaflet that condemned the court-martial sentence of two years’ hard labour imposed on Ernest Everett, a young teacher and a conscientious objector from St. Helens. Russell had volunteered his authorship in a letter to *The Times* after NCF people in various parts of the country were fined under DORA for distributing it.⁵

On successive days that month that the police raided the offices of both the NCF and the NCAC, taking away in the latter case every document, printed or written, including the entire stock of headed notepaper, cheque books and account books; all later returned. They raided Gladys Rinder’s private address. In August they raided the printworks of the ILP’s National Labour Press with a warrant to seize copies of NCF leaflet *More than 1000 Conscientious Objectors*. Finding none, they took the stereos and seized instead 20,000 copies of the NCCL flyer *Are We Fighting for Liberty?*

¹ Edward Cook, pp. 11, 164-5, 187.

² *ibid.*, p. 41n; *Tribunal* 84, 27 November 1917.

³ Jo Vellacott, p. 67-8.

⁴ David Boulton, p. 181; *Tribunal* 29, 5 October 1916.

⁵ Jo Vellacott, pp. 60, 78-83.

The Fellowship was raided regularly thereafter. Graham says 150 branch officials were visited in this way. The ILP also suffered, as did the UDC, and even the saintly Fellowship of Reconciliation.¹

The anti-war spokesmen in the Commons like Charles Trevelyan and Philip Snowden were handled with kid gloves.² Protected by parliamentary privilege, their speeches were not censored but nor did the papers necessarily report them. The Press Bureau could only advise, says Cook, but it seems to have been diligent in sending out guidance on such matters.³

The government used DORA to remove leading campaigners who were not so protected. In September 1917 E.D. Morel was jailed for six months for conspiring to smuggle out his pamphlet *Tsardom's Part in the War* to the writer Romain Rolland in neutral Switzerland. In January 1918 Bertrand Russell was imprisoned for six months for a casual jibe about the US army.⁴ In the last year of the war the police dismantled three separate presses used to print *The Tribunal*.⁵ For campaigners these were repressive times.

Two homely examples illustrate how wide the reach of the legislation could be; both admittedly come from the dissident press. In the first Herbert Broome was arrested while speaking at a recruiting meeting (!) in Hyde Park. Replying to a question he deplored the fact that railwaymen who had been earning 27s a week had been replaced by girls at 12s 6d, "and stated that the employers who had done this were not patriotic." According to the *Women's Dreadnought* (Sylvia Pankhurst's paper) he was sentenced to 21 days' imprisonment, without the option of a fine.⁶

The *Labour Leader* reported the case of William Holliday, "a well-known Trade Unionist." Denouncing attacks on Germans and people of German extraction, he had reminded his audience at an open-air meeting in Birmingham that the King was a German and had not a drop of English blood in his veins. The police claimed Holliday had said "--- German," which he denied. He was sentenced to three months' hard labour, presumably for inciting "disaffection to his Majesty" under regulation 7; the conviction was quashed on appeal.⁷

¹ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/8; Jo Vellacott, n337; *Tribunal* 84, 22 November 1917; John Graham, p. 198.

² Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain*, p. 88.

³ Edward Cook, pp. 73-8; Millman, p. 181.

⁴ UDC, *Rex v. E.D. Morel: Trial at Bow Street*; Jo Vellacott pp. 223-6.

⁵ *Tribunal* 84, 97, 105, 22 November 1917, 21 February and 25 April 1918.

⁶ Reprinted in *Labour Leader*, 15 July 1915.

⁷ *Labour Leader*, 3 June and 8 July 1915.

6: The tribunals

The Military Service Tribunals, originally set up under the Derby scheme to consider applications for postponement, started in February 1916 to process claims for exemption. They had plenty to do. For they were not just weighing up conscientious objections; these comprised a small fraction of cases. They had to consider applications for exemption on all kinds of grounds: on grounds of ill-health, of being the sole support of an aged or infirm relatives, of running a small business, of doing work that was essential to the community or important for the war effort. Employers often submitted applications en bloc for groups of workers. John Rae quotes a figure of three-quarters of a million applications nationwide between January and July 1916; this from a total of 1.2 million deemed to be enlisted.¹

Exemption could be absolute, but was usually conditional or temporary. A conscience clause for those who objected to combatant service on religious or ethical grounds had been inserted into the first Military Service Bill through an amendment by the Quaker MPs Edmund Harvey and Arnold Rowntree.²

The provision was a progressive one; but, as John Rae elaborates, the clause was ambiguous as to whether these objectors could be given absolute exemption, or exemption from combatant service only, which the government assumed they would accept.³ In practice, if judged genuine, they were given conditional exemption, the condition being that they undertook alternative service in the army with the Non-Combatant Corps, or joined an ambulance unit at the front or did work of national importance. For many objectors the first two in particular were a compromise they could not accept.

Tribunals quickly became notorious, on the Left at least, for their treatment of these men. Philip Snowden led the indictment with speeches in the Commons, later reprinted as a pamphlet entitled *British Prussianism: the Scandal of the Tribunals*. He complained of their unfairness. He cited cases (in brief) of applicants whose case was dismissed without a hearing, who were refused representation or the benefit of testimonials, who were refused leave to appeal (not needed in fact) or whose decision letter was delayed until it was too late to appeal or who were taken for military service

¹ John Rae, p. 98; James McDermott, p. 24.

² David Boulton, p. 91. Jo Vellacott, pp. 31-2.

³ John Rae, pp.27-32, 46-8.

while their appeal was in process. At Tunbridge Wells one applicant was turned down because he was not a Christian. Another was told he must subordinate his conscience to the conscience of the nation. The chairman of the Middlesex appeal tribunal said the applicant was a socialist and so could not have a conscience. The chairman of Wirral tribunal said he did not agree with the conscience clause.

Snowden complained of inconsistency. Some tribunals, he said, gave absolute exemption while others refused to give it. Some tribunals refused to give exemption on religious grounds, even to Quakers; for others it was the only ground they would accept. He complained of abuse by tribunal members, for example:

“It seems to me there are two things you possess – cowardice and insolence.” (Oldbury)

“You are the most awful pack that ever walked the earth!” (Nairn)

The applicant was a traitor, said the Military Representative at Gower –

“only fit to be on a point of a German bayonet.”

“God help you, you blackguard.” (Bow Brickhill)

Other MPs followed Snowden’s lead; the *Daily Chronicle*, even the Bishops of Oxford and Lincoln, among others, took up the cause.¹

“The tribunals are monstrous,” wrote Bertrand Russell, “the law is bad enough, but they disregard it and are much worse. It is simply a madness of persecution.”² Lytton Strachey went to observe Hampstead tribunal at work ahead of his own hearing. He reported back, also to Lady Ottoline Morrell, “It was horrible, and efficient in a deadly way. Very polite too. But clearly they had decided beforehand to grant no exemptions, and all the proceedings were really a farce. It made one’s flesh creep to see victim after victim led off to ruin or slaughter.” He wrote to another correspondent, “I believe the name of the tribunals will go down to History with the Star Chamber.”³

John Rae, writing from the tribunals’ perspective, admits there was some contemptuous treatment of conscientious objectors, but only in a minority of cases. Tribunal members were public-minded citizens, he argues, who reflected public opinion; firmly behind the national cause, but inexperienced in their judicial function and under a heavy pressure of cases.⁴

The law, as explained, was also unclear. It was made more confused by rulings from the Central Tribunal and the High Court.⁵ The problem, says Rae, was that the tribunals lacked central control. Walter Long, at the Local Government Board, which oversaw the tribunals, could do little more than advise, and was often ignored; as when he clarified that they *could* give absolute exemption in exceptional cases (not

¹ David Boulton, p. 136.

² Jo Vellacott, p. 33.

³ Michael Holroyd, p. 346.

⁴ John Rae, pp. 57-61, 108-9.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 116, 120.

however defined).¹ That was 23 March 1916. Five days later, according to Snowden, Durham appeal tribunal declared, "We are not bound by any statement made by any members of parliament or by any circular issued by the Local Government Board."²

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 53-4, 119. James McDermott, p. 37.

² Philip Snowden, p. 18.

7: In Bermondsey and Southwark

I

In Bermondsey the Council elected 20 members, mainly from amongst their own number but also including two non-council JPs and two executives of Knight & Co. Though not identified in the paper, this probably means the publishing firm Charles Knight, of Tooley Street, mentioned in Henry Morriss's account of Bermondsey's war effort, and praised for their good work, which included ministering to Belgian refugees.¹

The *SB Recorder* noted that the tribunal was elected on strict party lines - 10 Moderates (or Conservatives) and 10 Progressives (Liberals)² - and that Labour had a good representation, meaning that the members included working men. It added though that the committee would have inspired more confidence had it had more non-Council members, "as suggested by Mr Long."³ The tribunal in Southwark was similarly dominated by council members, though no list appeared in the press.

The tribunals seem to have operated on a rota basis, under which a varying number of members appear to have sat at any one time. The Mayor usually occupied the chair and the Town Clerk had charge of the clerical and administrative side. Alongside the tribunal members and acting as an advocate for enlistment was a uniformed junior officer, the Military Representative. He joined in the questioning. He could, and often did, appeal against the tribunal's decision.

Did the tribunals operate like a Star Chamber? Was there a madness of persecution? A long report in the *SB Recorder* for 17 March 1916 gives a feel of proceedings in Bermondsey. Along with 19 other applications 16 men sought exemption on grounds of conscience. The reporter says 14 and gives a different breakdown; but by my count only one got absolute exemption, five were passed for non-combatant service, six were refused altogether. Of the rest one was 'starred' as belonging to a reserved

¹ *SBR*, 11 February 1916; Henry Morriss, p. 240.

² Strictly speaking the Progressives were a coalition of Liberals, the ILP and independent Radicals formed to fight the "Moderates" in the London County Council elections. Both Bertrand Russell and Bernard Shaw stood as candidates. Graham Taylor, private communication.

³ *SBR*, 11 February 1916.

occupation, one was referred to the doctor, and one found he had come to the wrong tribunal; one outcome is unclear.

The one "let off" with absolute exemption, as the crosshead puts it, was George James Conns, described as a schoolmaster at Croydon and a member of the Adult School that met at Bermondsey Settlement. He said "the only way to obtain a lasting peace was to obey the law of Jesus Christ and endeavour to live up to his teachings. He did not know what he would do if the Germans came to London."

Two brothers named Boxall both had their applications refused. The reporter got their first names wrong, as other sources show. They lived together in Long Lane. One, described as secretary of the Drummond Road Sunday School, said "his master did not permit him to take part in warfare." Whatever the decision of the tribunal he would follow his teachings. He had always objected to war.

In a lengthy exchange with tribunal members he was asked, "Did not your Master say, 'I come not to bring peace but the sword'? What do you say to that? – He did not speak in English but in Hebrew. The Mayor: The translators, you say, are at fault.

"A member of the tribunal: If Bermondsey was attacked by the enemy, would you help, I wonder? - I cannot say. I might under the circumstances.

Alderman Wills: You know that food is brought to this country in ships, which probably have had to kill Germans to get here. Do you object to eating that food? As applicant did not reply, Alderman Wills said: Then it amounts to this. You are not prepared to fight, but you are prepared to eat the food that other people have fought for to bring here for your comfort.

"A Member of the tribunal: If 500 wounded soldiers came to London Bridge would you help them? – I would not do it under orders."

And so on. The application was refused by seven votes to six. The brother, described as a civil servant at Somerset House, said he believed it wrong to take human life, which was sacred, a view he had held for the past five or six years.

"He stated he was not concerned with any religious views, but objected to taking human life on moral grounds. He was a member of the ILP. He would not take part in defending any person, if it was connected with the military machine. The Mayor: What do you mean by the military machine? - Anything that is out to destroy human life.

"Councillor Embledon: Would you do anything to prevent Zeppelins dropping bombs on women and children? Applicant: I would do nothing unless in a civil capacity.

Alderman Clarke: What would you do in case of an invasion? Applicant: I would use moral persuasion." His application was refused.

The other reports are shorter. No addresses are given. Most of the applications were expressed in religious terms, as in the case of Arthur Balliet, an engineer's fitter. "As a believer in Jesus Christ, [he] held that he could not go down on his knees to pray for a man to be saved, and then get up the next minute to kill him. He was willing to do something to save life, but he had an objection to make [*sic*] munitions. He was passed for non-combatant service."

An exception to this pattern was Daniel Driscoll, of Jamaica Road, described as a traveller and as secretary of the Irish National Foresters. He applied on conscientious grounds, stating that he objected to “the imperial business altogether.” This caused laughter and a comment from the Mayor: “You are the first Irishman who does not want to fight.” But then amid banter Driscoll denied this was so. He had a brother in the Artillery and believed it was necessary “in the public safety” that people should go and fight. “But not you,” said a tribunal member, to more laughter. “If I went they would throw me out in a month.” By now quite confusing, his application was rejected.

Two brothers, Harold and Ernest Coleman, are reported jointly in one item. They held that all war was wrong, an opinion that Harold had held since the age of eight and Ernest since the outbreak of war. “Harold was sent for non-combatant service, whilst Ernest’s application was refused, it being held that his was a political and not a religious objection.”

The tribunal did not consistently follow this rule, however, as shown in the case of the Boxalls. In another case of possible brothers, J.E. Voller said he believed in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, and therefore to take part in military warfare was contrary to teachings of Jesus Christ.

“The Mayor: Would that mean that if the country was invaded you would not defend it? Applicant: Yes, by taking up arms I should be helping to prolong a warfare in which I do not believe... How do you thin[k] England is to be saved from invasion? – By the forcing of the teachings of Jesus. It could be done by moral persuasion. “Belgium was not saved by moral persuasion. – Because Belgium did not try it.”

Albert Edward Voller, a clerk in Peek Frean’s biscuit factory, said he had been accepted by the Colonial Office for missionary work in Australia. He objected to military service as it might involve taking the lives of men who were not prepared to meet their Creator. He produced a letter of support from the vicar of St. James’ Church, Bermondsey.

“Alderman Clarke: If the ship [to Australia] was attacked, would you defend yourself? – I might do the best I could to save myself. I would not retaliate.” The applicant was exempted for non-combatant service. His namesake was refused exemption.

Among non-conscientious claims at the same hearing Dr Salter appealed for the exemption for eight men (out of 45) employed by Bermondsey Labour Co-operative Bakeries Ltd. This was an ILP enterprise started in 1914 on land behind the Labour Institute in Fort Road. Turnover had increased six-fold, he said, and the number of ovens from two to six, since the closure of the many German bread shops in the borough. The tribunal, in response, granted exemption to two bakers but refused it to a third baker and five barrow-men.¹

To judge by the brief press reports, this session was typical of the way the Bermondsey tribunal treated conscientious objectors over the year. It was typical too of the sort of case the applicants presented. The following week Samuel Dakin, of Fort Road, said he could not obey any order of the State (refused). Joseph Hazlitt, of Maze

¹ SBR, 17 March 1916.

Pond, said he was a disciple of Tolstoy and was given total exemption; the Military Representative said he would appeal. John Thurston said, "I refuse to be a licensed murderer." He also cited domestic difficulties and was given three months' exemption to allow him to make arrangements for his mother and crippled sister.¹

Tribunal members don't appear to bully or hector. Instead they attempt cross-examination to test the genuineness of the convictions professed and where possible to show up their eccentricity and inconsistency. The questioning was aimed in part, no doubt, at the scribes at the reporters' table, for whom the tribunals were a good source of copy. The nearest to bad behaviour reported in Bermondsey occurs when John Bowles protested at a member of the tribunal reading the paper while his case was being heard. The news item continues:

Mr Shearring (the culprit): You go on protesting (Laughter)

Alderman Bulmer: You would do nothing to prevent the Germans coming to London?

Applicant: Not by force of arms.

Councillor Vezey: You would drive them away with words.

The Mayor remarked that the replies of these people were all on the same lines.

His application was refused.²

When Dr Salter's secretary, Archie Lewis, came before the tribunal in August 1916 he argued that the war could only be stopped by love. He said he was willing to take the place of a woman engaged in a dangerous occupation, but would not undertake anything that would help the war forward.

Councillor Lawrence: Have you made any sacrifice on behalf of your conscience?

Applicant: Trivial. I have given up smoking because of the war tax.

The Mayor: That might be because tobacco and cigars have gone up in price.

Lewis was given exemption on condition of taking up work of national importance. He was followed by eight unnamed applicants. Their occupations included two warehousemen, a carpenter and joiner, a boot and shoe salesman and two clerks. Four of the eight said they were members of the Adult School, started by Dr Salter, that operated out of Bermondsey Settlement.³

Two of the eight men were refused exemption; six were given exemption on the same condition as Lewis. This option, under the Pelham committee, was now better organised and more available than earlier in the year. The committee developed a directory of openings across the country, usually with major employers, in such areas as market gardening and forestry, food supply, shipping and transport, mining, education and public utilities. Local tribunals, interpreting and applying government directives, were also able to place men in essential work, or allow them to stay in their existing jobs. They referred men to Pelham when the local economy did not provide

¹ *SBR*, 24 March 1916.

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*, 25 August 1916.

suitable openings, likewise when the Central Tribunal began to insist that COs should be employed away from home.¹

Archie Lewis became a farm hand on the Cliveden estate, outside Maidenhead.² Another who chose this path was Dr Salter's protégé Herbert Morrison. He was sent to Letchworth Garden City to take up market gardening. It was an ironic destination as this alternative Utopian community – perceptively satirised by John Buchan in his war thriller *Mr Standfast* (published in 1919) - was a haven of objectors. His employer was prominent in local left-wing politics. Morrison met his first wife there, a “Burne-Jones figure”, according to his biographers, whom first he encountered while folk-dancing at the Skittles Inn.³

Salter himself was an absolutist in sympathy, but he insisted that each man should follow his own conscience and gave these two every support. According to Brockway he took the lead in urging that Morrison in his rural exile should continue as secretary of the London Labour Party.⁴ Morrison, incidentally, was blind in one eye and so would never have been conscripted. However rather than rely on medical grounds, “I was intent in sticking to my principles.” His biographers say he told the tribunal in Wandsworth “he had a deep conscientious objection to taking part in a war which was a product of capitalism.”⁵

II

At Southwark tribunal the tone of proceedings, as reported, is similar, as the following exchanges illustrate. Oscar Nye, a stock clerk, said he could not conscientiously take up arms against his fellow men. He was willing though to join the RAMC. The report continues: “The Mayor said the Germans had ravished Belgium and other countries, and the cards were that they might come to England. Would it not be best to stop them?”

Applicant: The best way to stop the Germans coming here is to offer them terms of peace.” He was granted a month's extension on domestic grounds.⁶

When Nye returned to the tribunal in July he asked for further consideration on the grounds that he was not only supporting his mother who was over 60 but was going to look after his aunt, aged 86.

The Mayor: Why should you take this extra burden on yourself?
Applicant: If I do not I do not know where she will have to go.
He was also a conscientious objector, maintaining that the teachings of the Gospel were opposed to the taking of human life.

¹ John Rae, pp. 125-6, 195-200; Cyril Pearce, private communication, 5 October 2016.

² Fenner Brockway, *Bermondsey Story*, p. 65.

³ Bernard Donoughue and George Jones, *Herbert Morrison: Portrait of a Politician*, pp. 41-2.

⁴ Fenner Brockway, *Bermondsey Story*, pp. 65-6.

⁵ Herbert Morrison, *An Autobiography*, p. 65; Donoughue and Jones, p. 65.

⁶ *SBR*, 24 March 1916.

The Mayor: Do you not think it is your duty to help your brothers in this great struggle?

Applicant said he had thought this matter over, but felt he could do nothing to assist in the destroying of his fellow man. He would be willing to assist in Red Cross work.

His application was refused, applicant being passed for non-combat service.¹

Albert Clark, a window cleaner, said he believed human life was sacred. He was asked by Cllr. Weaver, "You know the Army has a branch for saving human life." He replied:

The Army Medical Corps has a means of patching up life and throwing it away again.

Councillor Hewitt: Then you would not help a wounded man in any way?

Applicant said he would assist to preserve life, but not in the ultimate objective of throwing it away again."

He was ordered to join the Non-Combatant Corps.²



From the press reports one can observe the tensions within the tribunals. Bermondsey had a hard-liner in its only woman member, Cllr Mrs Richmond. He exercised her ferocity, not (as far as reported) on conscientious objectors but on other cases, such as that of an unnamed married man who sought a deferment because his wife was about to give birth. The tribunal was advised to postpone the call-up in line with recommended practice, but Mrs Richmond characterised the recommendation as "Rot," informing her colleagues that if she had her way she would give no young married man exemption in such cases. "Happily," wrote the reporter, other members did not take the same view.³

Another case involved the Ship Aground pub, at Dockhead. Mrs F. McIntosh, applying on behalf of her brother Herbert Broughton, said he did all the work; she could not manage the business alone. (Yes, it was in a very rough neighbourhood, agreed Cllr. Siddle.) A second brother had tuberculosis and had been recommended to go away for his health. The Military Representative suggested the brother be granted a three-month deferment but Mrs Richmond proposed he be given one month only, saying

They could do wonders in a month for a man with TB. The brother might be back in a month and able to manage the business.

Alderman Willis characterised the proposal as heartless. The manager was helping to support his sister and her three children, a brother in ill-health and himself. He might be single, but he had more responsibilities than many married men.

Mrs Richmond: 'I do not suppose he has any responsibilities at all. He is paid a salary, I expect.'

¹ SBR 7 July 1916.

² SBR, 14 July 1916.

³ SBR, 14 April 1916.

“The tribunal adopted the humanitarian view,” says the *Recorder*, granting three months extension, with leave to apply again the end of that period.¹

In June 1916 the *SLP* reported that Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Trades Council and Labour Party had made an emphatic protest to Bermondsey tribunal about Mrs Richmond’s “lack of judicial spirit” and about the “insulting remarks and behaviour” directed at applicants to the tribunal. What she is supposed to have said, and to whom, is unfortunately not specified, nor reported elsewhere. Described as the wife of a Rotherhithe GP, she was in fact married to Dr Ben Richmond, who was in partnership with Alfred Salter in Bermondsey; like his wife he was a Liberal councillor.²

The *SLP* promptly received a solicitor’s letter from the Richmonds. The paper pleaded the following week that it had published the resolution in good faith without expressing any opinion, and now entirely dissociated itself from the statements in the resolution, which were “a grave imputation on her.”³

The press also reported a spat between the Mayor, the Town Clerk and the Military Representative over who should withdraw exemption certificates when they expired. The Military Representative said it was the Town Clerk’s job. The Town Clerk said it was not part of his duties, as the certificates expired automatically when their time was up.

The Mayor said he could not accept the ruling of the Town Clerk. The Town Clerk said he could not accept the ruling of the Mayor.

The Mayor: Write to the War Office for their decision.

The Town Clerk: I shall do nothing of the sort.

The Mayor: Write then to the Local Government Board.

The Town Clerk: Ah, that’s better.

The Mayor: If the Town Clerk talks to me like this I shall vacate the chair.

The Town Clerk: If you talk to me like this I shall leave the room.

This Toytown exchange went on until Cllr. Wingrove, “a quiet member,” urged that they should get on with the business. In the course of the argument it was claimed that “men were walking about Bermondsey laughing at the tribunal and the Military Representatives, as although their certificates of exemption expired months ago they had not been called up to join the colours.” The following week the Town Clerk reported – no doubt with satisfaction - that he had been informed by the Board that it was no part of the tribunal’s job to collect in expired certificates.⁴

Such “slackers” risked being rounded up in raids by the authorities. In September 1916 a posse of police from Rotherhithe police station and a detachment of military under the command of a Provost Marshal “paid a visit”, as the paper puts it, to the Rotherhithe Hippodrome – in Lower Road, where Rotherhithe Free Church now stands. “Great was the excitement of the audience when all the male members who looked at all likely of being liable to serve [were] politely requested to produce

¹ SBR, 26 May 1916.

² My thanks to Graham Taylor for this identification. Richmond had also been Salter’s best man.

³ *SLP*, 30 June and 7 July 1916.

⁴ *SBR*, 14 and 21 July 1916.

documentary evidence that such was not the case..." The police and soldiers went on the same evening to visit the "Star" Picture Palace in Abbey Street, Bermondsey.¹

At the "Ring" in Blackfriars Road – once a fashionable chapel - a boxing match was likewise interrupted when Provost Marshal, military and police appeared again the same month, "springing as it were from nowhere." Soldiers with fixed bayonets stood guard at the exits. Some of the spectators tried to escape over the roof but were caught by the police. Of the 145 men held and checked out seven soldiers were charged with being absentees and sent back to their units. Seven civilians liable to military service were charged with failing to report themselves.²

In Bermondsey tribunal members intermittently expressed concern about dock workers. Between five and seven hundred young men gathered each morning at the gates of Surrey Commercial Docks, said Cllr. Lawrence in April 1916. They worked two or three days a week, "and then obtained their cards of exemption as dock labourers, being missing for the rest of the week. Many were Jews coming from the other side of the water." The Mayor said it was a disgrace, but unfortunately the tribunal was powerless as the men were exempt as employees of the Port of London. It was agreed to raise the matter with the Local Government Board.³

An issue that divided the tribunal in Bermondsey was whether they should make it a condition of conditional or temporary exemption that men should drill with the Volunteer Training Corps, as urged by the War Office.⁴ Some members argued that this was too much to ask of applicants, particularly in one-man businesses, who were already working from dawn until late. In July 1916 the tribunal adopted a formula which said such men were expected to take immediate steps to join either the VTC, or the Special Police, or the British Red Cross.⁵

IV

In Southwark press reports show ongoing friction between tribunal members and the Military Representative, a man named Butcher, rank unclear. It surfaced in May 1916 over an unnamed porter employed at Borough Market. Mr T. Haynes, a JP, thought the man should be given an extension of time but the Military Representative insisted, "The needs of the country come first."

Councillor Leyton: Quite true, but the needs of the people should also be considered. When you have to pay 6d. a pound for potatoes you will look out. We don't want to be as bad as Germany.

Alderman Boyd: We are getting to be as bad a Germany, thanks to the lack of organisation.

Applicant was given four months' extension.

¹ *SBR*, 15 September 1916.

² *CPT*, 9 September 1916.

³ *SBR*, 14 April 1916.

⁴ James McDermott, p.7.

⁵ *SBR*, 28 July 1916

Later in the same sitting “a breeze” broke out between Haynes and the Military Representative after the latter had stated that a man would “have to serve.” Haynes said, “I object to the Military Representative taking the duties entrusted to us out of our hands.”

The Military Representative: I am not taking the matter out of your hands, but I have a responsibility which you cannot take from me. The country needs men.

Mr Haynes: Well, don't take the business out of our hands.

And so on. The incident then closed, says the paper.¹

A later report reveals Haynes to have been superintendent of Borough Market. The Military Representative said he did not think he should adjudicate in cases where employers in the market were seeking exemption for their men. Haynes replied that he had no business interest in the market except in his capacity as superintendent.

Mr Boyd said he agreed with the Military Representative, although the same objection might be taken to every member of the tribunal when cases were heard in which he was engaged in the same trade. The Mayor ruled that Mr Haynes had a perfect right to sit in any case whether it affected the Borough Market or not. Mr Haynes challenged the Military Representative or any member of the tribunal to point to any case where a man should have been in the army which he had opposed.

“The Military Representative: There have been a good many cases. It has got scandalous. It is common talk of the borough that everybody from the Borough Market can get off if he appeals.” Butcher was given short shrift, however. Had he appealed against any of the decisions, asked Cllr. Weaver. “I don't think I have.” “That is your alternative,” said the Mayor. “Appeal against decisions.”

In fact, in his own way, this is what Butcher has been doing. It was at this session, after a six-week break, that the tribunal returned to work to find the Military Representative had obtained a review of over 400 out of a thousand-plus cases granted conditional exemption. He had done this by taking them to the local Advisory Committee. The Mayor (Cllr Ward) asked for an explanation. Butcher said the military authorities thought that all the tribunal's conditional exemptions should be reviewed every month. The Mayor sought to clarify:

“Even if we give conditional exemption, you maintain that you have the right to ask for these cases to be reviewed?”

The Military Representative: Yes.

The Mayor: Then there is no finality to our decisions.

The Military Representative: You must consider the state of the country.

The Mayor: And we must consider the public, whom we represent.

What is meant by “review,” fairly plainly, is that the Advisory Committee had on Butcher's recommendation looked again at conditional exemptions given by the tribunal and revised or cancelled over 400 of them. The ensuing discussion is further

¹ SBR, 5 May 1916.

complicated by Mr Haynes' complaint that Butcher had sent revised notices to the men but not to the employers who had secured exemption for them.

The argument evidently became heated: "Scenes and Protests," says the headline. Cllr Layton said the Advisory Committee were setting themselves up as a court of appeal. "Who composes the Advisory Committee?" Councillor Wilson: "Are they all alive?"¹

It is by no means clear the Advisory Committee had the power to revise certificates. Above the local tribunals there was a higher tier of appeal tribunals. But the Advisory Committees were something else. According to John Rae, the authority on the subject, the committees – made up of men with knowledge of local industry – were there to scrutinise applications and to instruct the Military Representative "as a solicitor instructs counsel."²

At the same session the Town Clerk reported the Military Representative had sent back to the tribunal 24 cases of men given conditional exemption, asking for them to be reviewed. He gave no fresh facts or reasons on his application forms.

The Military Representative: The grounds for a review are that these men ought to be in the army. They ought to be serving the King.

The Town Clerk pointed out that the applications for review, as presented by the Military Representative, were out of order. He gave no fresh facts.

After further exchanges the tribunal decided to adjourn all the applications until fresh facts were produced.³

In November the same issue blew up again when Southwark members, led by Mr Haynes, protested that the Military Representative was submitting "wholesale appeals" against their decisions; though now through the proper channel of the appeal tribunal.

Haynes gives a glimpse into human strain of their task. He said,

It made their hearts ache when they heard some of the stories, but they were not there to play at this thing. They were out to get men for the army, and that would be realised when they knew that the Chairman had two sons serving, whilst Councillor King, Councillor Layton and himself each had a son serving, so they were not out to give any preference to appellants.

After further debate he asked: "What is the good of coming here? It is a waste of the applicants' time as well as our own." Cllr. Weaver proposed and Ald. Woodham seconded, that the tribunal adjourn as a protest. In the end members decided to hear that day's cases, in order not to inconvenience the applicants.⁴ The outcome was that the Military Representative asked the tribunal to review its previous exemptions. These clashes followed on from the slaughter at the Somme - discussed below - when

¹ *SBR*, 22 September 1916.

² John Rae, p. 17.

³ *SBR*, 22 September 1916.

⁴ *SBR*, 24 November 1916.

the Local Government Board was urging tribunals to assume that all able-bodied men under 26 were of more use in uniform than in civilian work.¹

Just before Christmas the tribunal reviewed 41 cases at the request of the Military Representative, who argued that the “exigencies of the war” required the services of all eligible able-bodied men. Three of the 41 were rejected on medical grounds; the rest had their conditional exemption withdrawn. Just after Christmas the tribunal reviewed 61 conditional exemptions and withdrew them all. Many men were refused further time; others were given temporary exemptions of between one to three months.²

V

Southwark was a tribunal mocked in the NCF’s publication of the same name. It reported belatedly that there “exemption for six months was granted to 21 single men employed by the Amalgamated Press Ltd., printers of ‘Home Chat,’ ‘Forget-me-Not,’ ‘Comic Cuts’ and ‘Chips,’ all work of the highest national importance...”³ These titles seem to have derived from a question in the Commons in March 1916 by R.L. Outhwaite, the member for Hanley. He asked whether such work was of national importance at a time when single men were being discharged for army service from munition works.⁴

It’s instructive – for several reasons - to look at the hearing in question. The report in the *SLP* says the firm applied for the temporary exemption of 53 employees on the ground that they were essential to their business. The company’s representative admitted it was rather a formidable list, but explained the company employed hundreds of hands; and out of 1,500 employed before the war, 400 had enlisted. Moreover, they were not seeking the exemption of all 53, but were petitioning for a certain number. The tribunal awarded six months’ exemption for 21.⁵

So: the Amalgamated Press, whose works were in Lavington Street in Bankside, had a huge workforce, not all of whom could possibly have been engaged in producing comics and the like. There’s no suggestion the 21 were specialists in those titles, which are not mentioned. They appear to have been a rhetorical flourish by the MP, which was then picked up by *The Tribunal*.

The tribunal went on to express concern about the men who had been in the company’s longer list and afterwards dropped. That too is revealing. Cllr Wilson complained about one who had been included without his knowledge and then “bargained away,” because he thereby lost the right to make a personal application. Members decided to enquire whether the men in question had been consulted. The Amalgamated Press replied they did not know they had to consult.⁶ Whatever the

¹ James McDermott, p.25.

² *SBR*, 22 December and 29 December 1916.

³ *Tribunal* 39, 14 December 1916.

⁴ *SLP*, 31 March 1916.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *SLP*, 7 April 1916.

strict legalities, at least two of the men were later allowed to apply for exemption on their own behalf.¹

The Military Representative, at the original hearing at the end of March, is not reported as saying anything. In late June however the paper reported that “acting on the advice and with the consent” of the tribunal he had reduced the certificates from six months to two, meaning the men had to join up at once.²

The tribunals are usually regarded as a compliant civilian cog in the military machine. The arguments in Southwark however show that tribunal members there saw themselves representing, at least in part, the people, the public, as opposed to the army, even if they at times may also have had a vested interest. In the end, though, it would appear that the military machine ground them down. The concern for individual applicants, in both Southwark and Bermondsey, is also worth noting.

¹ *SBR*, 5 May 1916; *SLP* 30 June 1916.

² *SLP*, 23 June 1916.

8: In Camberwell

Camberwell Council elected 25 members to its tribunal; the list as reported was headed, after the Mayor, by Sir Perceval Nairne, Major-General Sir A. Montgomery Moore and Colonel Sir Wodehouse B. Richardson; splendid names. Another grandee was Evan Spicer JP, of the paper firm. Knighted at the end of year, he lived at "Belair," one of Dulwich's finest big houses. According to the *SLP* the rest of the tribunal was composed of 12 magistrates, two of whom were also members of the council, two council members who were not magistrates, and four men who were neither JPs or councillors. The paper gives no further biographical details.¹

Camberwell Trades and Labour Council submitted two nominations. The Peckham Friends submitted one. None were accepted. The Trades and Labour Council tried to send a deputation to argue that labour was not adequately represented. The council declined to receive it. At the following council meeting loud voices from the public gallery interrupted proceedings, protesting that the council had not carried out Local Government Board regulations on the representation of labour: "We have no confidence in your tribunal (Uproar)."

The Mayor said the matter had been dealt with in a proper manner and the gallery had no right to interfere. "You must retire from the gallery if you cause any obstruction or annoyance."

A voice: You will get more of it as time goes on.

Another voice: You have got a biased tribunal.

The protesters then withdrew, singing "The Red Flag".²

How did Camberwell tribunal treat its conscientious objectors? The *CP Times* makes no systematic attempt to report cases of any kind. The *SLP* is then our one source but, covering tribunals in Lambeth, as well as Southwark and Camberwell, it reports only briefly, rarely giving more than a paragraph. For example:

E. Chinn, a buyer of trimmings in drapery, raised religious objections and stated he would not take any part in, not would he countenance, any preparation for war or warlike operations.

¹ *SLP*, 18 February 1916.

² *ibid.*, *CPT* 23 February 1916; Peckham Preparative Meeting minutes, 16 February 1916.

He had a sympathetic gallery, who later were called to order by the Mayor. [He was] placed in the non-combatant section, with, of course the right of appeal.¹

Exemption was denied to H.B.T. Gibb, Red Post Hill, a “conscientious objector,” who pleaded he could not as a disciple of Jesus Christ, take any military work whatever, even to assisting wounded men. He was, however not averse to accepting wages from his firm, who were war account auditors. He quoted Scripture liberally to report his claim, but repudiated passages as tended otherwise.²

M.W. Field, Camberwell-grove, believed that all human life was sacred and that the taking of human life was contrary to Christian duty. He was also a Civil Servant and recognised civil authority but would not recognise any military authority. Dr F. Meyer supported his scruples and he was referred to the non-combatant section.³

Dr F.B. Meyer was Baptist Minister at Christ Church, Westminster Bridge Road (opposite Lambeth North underground station). He supported the war effort, even after the death of his only son at Vimy Ridge; but he also had a close involvement with the NCF and was always ready, when requested by Catherine Marshall, to write to the papers or join a deputation in support of COs. Jerry White records his sensationalist campaign against prostitution around Waterloo station.⁴

Three objectors from the same street - Choumert Road, Peckham - came before the tribunal that day. One, R.H. Burt,

was a second division clerk in the Civil Service, but objected to war on conscientious grounds. He would not object to assisting wounded men provided that he was in no sense called upon to bear arms. He was referred to the non-combatant section.⁵

Cross-examination is evident in some of these compressed accounts. But the tone of the exchanges is missing. There were complaints however, and from members of the tribunal itself. Mr S. Sayer protested that these objectors were not being treated fairly. “He declared that members were biased and did not exhibit the judicial attitude required of them. He said that some members were continually muttering such remarks as ‘They ought to be shot, or ought to be hanged.’ ”

This criticism drew protests from other tribunal members and cheers from the public gallery, promptly suppressed. Later in the session a second member, H.E. Wood, objected to a colleague saying about the statements of a conscientious applicant, “We don’t want to hear all their trash.” Such terms, he declared amid protests, should not be used to men appealing.⁶

¹ SLP, 25 February 1916.

² SLP, 3 March 1916.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Jo Vellacott, *passim*; Jerry White, pp. 183-4.

⁵ SLP, 3 March 1916.

⁶ SLP, 10 March 1916.

The paper says nothing as to who the offenders were. Unlike Sayer, Wood was a JP. Who they were beyond that waits on further investigation. The *SLP* was scornful of what it called “Mr Sayer’s ebullition.” “To know Mr Sayer is to know one who is like the Irishman in the fable, agin’ the Government - or invariably [*sic*] so.” Quoting his words, “Notes and Comments” continues, “The burden of proof rests with the applicants, and if a humbug has no case, he quickly bungles when he knows he is face to face with men who have not spent their lives in the Arcadia portrayed in opera.” The writer is confident the policy of the tribunal will not change. “The conscientious objector now has a hard fight to get exemption.”¹

The paper reports that of 13 men applying wholly or partly on conscientious grounds that day, one was sent for medical examination and one granted a month’s exemption. Three were sent for non-combatant duties. The other eight were refused any exemption.

The following week the paper opened its tribunal report: “Camberwell cannot, apparently, go far without some internal disturbance.” The Town Clerk read a letter (“from a Government department”) drawing attention to “the reprehensible practice of members animadverting on the motives which prompted the appeals of conscientious objectors.” Despite this warning Ald. H.J. Raiment is reported later in the session severely rebuking a fellow member for what he regarded as a bullying attitude towards an appellant on moral grounds. He said he strongly objected to any member of the tribunal treating an applicant other than with courtesy. The chairman, Evan Spicer, agreed. Of the six conscientious applicants before the tribunal that day, four were refused exemption, while two were referred to the Non-Combatant Corps.²

The paper’s own sympathies are evident. It usually used the term “War tribunal,” or sometimes “Army tribunal.” One of its headings reads, “Conscientious Objectors Advance Many Strange Excuses.”³ It commended the Non-Combatant Corps and criticised the conscientious objector who “wants to be left at home ‘strafing’ his fellow-citizen engaged in the horrid war.”⁴ It deplored the “noisy exhibition” by the Trades and Labour Council – but printed in full a letter putting their case.⁵

The *CP Times*, while reporting few cases, took a different view of the tribunal’s task. The paper had opposed conscription. A leader in February now recognised compulsion as a necessity, but hoped that tribunals would see to it that as little hardship as possible was caused by the operation of the Act, particularly to small businessmen. It advocated a “spirit of impartiality” and set out its own six principles of exemption. The last of these was that conscientious objectors should be allowed non-combatant service and be judged in the “impartial and tolerant spirit” urged by Mr Long, of the Local Government Board.⁶

¹ *ibid.*

² *SLP*, 17 March 1916.

³ *SLP*, 3 March 1916.

⁴ *SLP*, 17 March 1916.

⁵ *SLP* 18 February 1916.

⁶ *CPT*, 12 February 1916.

In May 1916 the *SLP* remarked that the conscientious objector “has become very scarce.”¹ The paper’s own reports from the tribunals tail off from about this time, though some conscience cases continue to appear.

Not all objectors came before the tribunals. One such was Eddy Thomas Jope, of 86 Crofton Road, Peckham: we quoted from his letter to the *CP Times*. A clerk aged 36 and a member of Dulwich NCF, he declined to apply for exemption and was then arrested for failing to report for service. Brought before the magistrate in July 1916 he declined to confirm any details about himself and said “he had never been before the tribunal because he did not think the onus was upon him to prove he was a conscientious objector. The Military Service Act appeared to him to be a simple travesty of justice.”

Chester Jones, magistrate at Lambeth: “Even if it is a travesty of justice I have to administer it.

Jope: My attitude has been that I would not submit to it. I claim that even now you have the power to put me within one of the exceptions of the Act. I am a Socialist.

Jones: Socialists are among the most loyal people we have at the present time.

Jope was fined £5, to be taken from his army pay, and handed over to a military escort; the usual procedure.²

With the reduction of coverage there are no more reports in the *SLP* of disputes within Camberwell tribunal. Reports from the tribunal disappear altogether from late September. They probably give way in part to allow reporting of the “rolls of honour” – discussed below – that surge into the paper from that time.

In November a leader in the *CP Times* quotes a local tribunal member as saying, “We are here to find soldiers for the army.” It then corrects him, saying, “The real function of the tribunal is to discover how best the man whose case is before them can best serve his King and country... Men have been sent into the Army who ought to have been kept in the factory, and men who will better serve their country in the ranks of commerce have been forced into the Army also.” To support his case the writer says agriculture has been denuded of male labour, but he gives no local examples.³

The Military Representative however was driven by the same pressures as his colleague in Southwark. Lieut. Lucy is not reported as taking part in the arguments at the tribunal, but he now entered a strong protest against granting extensions to existing exemptions. The article cites recent circulars from the Local Government Board.

One of these, already quoted, said it would not be justifiable to give exemption on grounds of business or employment (with certain exceptions) to any man under 26 who was fit for general service. The article refers to the recent protest at Southwark tribunal and maintains Walter Long’s statement on the urgent demand for men is

¹ *SLP*, 12 May 1916.

² *SLP*, 7 July 1916.

³ *CPT*, 18 November 1916.

sufficient reason for reviewing exemptions. Exemptions granted in the early days of the war were not now justified "in the altered circumstances." Military Representatives were now directed to apply for the review or withdrawal of exemption certificates granted to men working in large firms, who and which, it was complained in some quarters, had hitherto been privileged over small shopkeepers.¹

¹ *CPT*, 6 December 1916.

9: A madness of persecution?

So how are we to sum up the attitude of the local tribunals towards conscientious objectors? Clearly there was a general scepticism, shading into hostility, and in the case of Camberwell some contumely and intimidation. Equally important though: the tribunals were not monoliths. Where there was discourtesy or worse, other tribunal members spoke out against it.

The tribunals seem to have tried to assess the genuineness of applications by the sort of questioning seen in the case of Bermondsey. But working without central guidelines, particularly in the first few months, they had to develop their own. It was widely believed that only religious and ethical objection to war was an acceptable ground for exemption, not political objection. This appears to have been Bermondsey's view, though it was not consistently applied. Did an unwillingness to tend the wounded mean a refusal to take human life was not genuine? Individual tribunal members had to decide. Hardly any discussion is reported. The cases most sympathetic to tribunals, perhaps, were those where the applicant was willing to accept non-combatant service or ambulance work or work of national importance. Such willingness is rarely spelt out, however. *Unwillingness* to do alternative service is noted more often. If the applicant refused these options, did tribunals impose them anyway, or did they refuse exemption altogether? In these cases the answer is 9 impositions against 12 refusals. But the newspaper reports are really too scanty for proper analysis.

The tribunal minute books would have provided the evidence. Nationally the great majority of these were ordered to be destroyed after the war, but Camberwell's minutes survived. John Rae consulted them in writing his book. Unfortunately they have since gone missing. All three tribunals, no doubt, made arbitrary and anomalous decisions. In the cases reported, the overall outcome by tribunal is as follows

<i>Tribunal</i>	Southwark	Bermondsey	Camberwell
Total conscience cases	25	30	41
Absolute exemption	-	2	-
Conditional exemption	11	12	20
Exemption refused	14	10	14
Temporary exemption	-	1	-
Other	-	3	5
Outcome unclear	-	2	1

Rae quotes the missing minutes to note that Camberwell tribunal said in 1918 it never gave absolute exemption.¹

What is noteworthy, given the tribunals' evil reputation, is how few conscientious cases came before them; at least how few are reported, given the contentious nature of the objection. Based on a careful count, these are the figures for 1916 only, of course. The papers undoubtedly omit many cases, particularly after the *SLP* stopped reporting tribunals. The *SB Recorder* carried on reporting them, but with evident gaps. The man who applied to Bermondsey tribunal by mistake is not reported reappearing at Southwark. The paper does not cover Aylmer Rose's first appearance before Southwark tribunal; it only reports his attempt to secure a rehearing.²

A search of Cyril Pearce's national Register of conscientious objectors over the whole of the war identifies, once interlopers have been weeded out, 21 men from Southwark, 46 from Bermondsey and Rotherhithe, and 147 from Camberwell, Peckham and Dulwich.

So the numbers were in fact very small, both in absolute terms and in relation to the overall workload of the tribunals. Camberwell tribunal, at the end of May, was reported to have around one thousand applications still to hear. Southwark tribunal was processing 400 cases a week in mid-June, but had another 2,000 pending. Later Camberwell and Bermondsey tribunals decided to forego any summer break in order to plough on with their work.³

One might think that, compared with the heart- and headache that such a volume of work represented, weighing up the occasional conscience came as something of a relief; compared, that is, with distressing cases of family hardship, hard cases involving small businesses, and multiple applications by employers in Bermondsey's leather trade.⁴

The latter was inter alia producing boots, saddles, straps, harnesses, Sam Browne belts and gloves for handling barbed wire. Morriss writes that "thousands" were so employed.⁵ Here it wasn't just a matter of mediating between employers and the army. These items were essential for a war machine still held in place by leather, - to quote White's nice phrase - and skilled men had to be retained to make them.⁶ As McDermott has shown in great detail for Northamptonshire - where the main suppliers of boots to both the British and Allied armies were located - the tribunals were in fact mediating between the War Office and its Army Contracts Department.⁷ It was a heavy responsibility to put on councillors, JPs and other amateurs, even if some had a background in the trade.

To conclude: the evidence on the tribunals from this part of south London seems to me to favour John Rae's side of the argument. One is impressed by their members'

¹ John Rae, p. 121.

² *SBR*, 23 June 1916.

³ *SLP*, 26 May 1916; *SLP*, 16 June 1916; *SLP*, 1 September 1916.

⁴ See *SBR*, 22 September 1916, for example.

⁵ Henry Morriss, p. 73.

⁶ Jerry White, p. 97.

⁷ James McDermott, pp. 64-89.

readiness to stand up and dissent, to disagree with each other and with the Military Representative, and by their efforts to navigate between the conflicting pressures upon them.

II

Leather was by no means Bermondsey's only contribution to the war effort. The docks and wharves also employed thousands, those between Tower Bridge and London Bridge now handling food supplies for the army and navy, as well as for London and the provinces. What was handled elsewhere is less clear. Much of it was of a confidential nature, says Morriss: "a constant watch was kept on all our waterside premises against spies and other undesirables."¹

Among much direct war production Brandram Bros, off Lower Road, refined chemicals essential for explosives. In Rotherhithe Street, Austin Hallett and Sons refined antimony for shrapnel bullets. Welsh Margetson and Co. of Long Lane, made the white tape used to keep patrols safe in no man's land. Austin's, of Bermondsey Street, manufactured an antidote to poison gas. In the same street S. Sard & Sons turned out nosebags for horses.²

Brandram's paint and chemical works was a large concern. Hallett & Sons kept 60-70 poisonous antimony furnaces in constant operation. It's not clear how big the other manufactories were. After leather and the docks the biggest single sector of war-related employment were probably companies like Peek Frean and Lipton's who, with other local firms, supplied the troops with food staples and delicacies; perhaps also Hobson & Sons, of Tooley Street and Shand Street, who made army clothing and equipment. All of these had a large female workforce, of no interest to the War Office.³ "It was an impressive sight," writes Morriss, "to see the hundreds of women streaming out from [Hobson's] buildings at the close of the day."⁴

¹ Henry Morriss, pp. 188-192.

² *ibid.*, pp. 32; 95-7; 70; 18; 200.

³ *ibid.*, pp. 96; 36-8; 193-9.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.199.

10: The question of motivation

I

It's apparent, from the examples quoted, that most conscientious applicants for exemption expressed their objection to military service in religious terms.

Very few cited a political objection in the way that Eddy Jope did. One of the Boxall brothers, we saw, told Bermondsey tribunal he belonged to the ILP. So did A.D. Chipperfield, a French polisher, from Carlton Grove, Camberwell. He added that he was an International Socialist and told Camberwell tribunal, "As a Socialist he was doing his duty to the State and to humanity."¹ The tribunal was not impressed. Like Boxall, he was refused exemption. Sometimes socialist loyalties are encoded in phrases about the brotherhood of man or humanity, as with Chipperfield. One of the problems with declaring yourself a Socialist was that it invited questioning on the lines of: "Do you oppose all war or only this one?" Probably for this reason the objection, as quoted in brief summaries, is more often phrased in undefined moral statements, such as:

"He did not think it right to fight." (Henry Rivett, Southwark)

"His conscience would not let him undertake combatant service, nor to make munitions." (Henry Wiggins, Bermondsey)

"I refuse to be a licenced murderer." (John Thurston, Bermondsey)

"[He] objected to taking life." (Eric Dawes, Dulwich)

Religious objections - explicitly referring to Christ, the Gospels, the fifth commandment or the faith – were the biggest category, however.

<i>Tribunal</i>	Southwark	Bermondsey	Camberwell
Motivations			
Religious	18	11	14
Moral	4	6	16
Political	-	4	1
Other	1	-	1
Not clear	2	9	9
Total	25	30	41

¹ SLP, 1 September 1916.

Cyril Pearce's database has a column for motivation, but the entries are too fragmentary to be very useful. Moreover the distinction between "political" and "religious" motivation may well be simplistic, particularly apropos the ethical socialism of the ILP. How would one categorize Alfred and Ada Salter, for example? Or Arthur Creech Jones, whose representations to the tribunal are set out below?

II

That deals with motivation on one level, at least as far as the brief reports allow. But there is another level to be considered: which is how far objectors, in refusing to bear arms, were expressing a personal conscientious objection; and how far they saw their objection as a wider stand against the war.

The NCF manifesto, quoted earlier, concluded that its members, whether Christians or Socialists or ethical moralists, all shared a belief in the value and sacredness of the human personality – "and are prepared to sacrifice as much in the cause of the world's peace as our fellows are sacrificing in the cause of the nation's war." ¹ So that further aim was there from the beginning.

When conscription came in the Fellowship opposed it on principle but also saw it as an opportunity. While prepared to work within the framework of the Act as far as it served their purposes, the leadership "saw it as a vehicle for opposition to militarism rather than a means to exemption," to quote Jo Vellacott ² - or more exactly: as a means to just any kind of exemption. They insisted on absolute exemption. The National Convention, meeting in April 1916, unanimously opposed alternative service, though it left the decision to the conscience of individual members.³

This hard line dismayed influential Liberal figures like Gilbert Murray who were working to improve the treatment of objectors.⁴ It also baffled tribunal members in South London. The reasoning of the Convention was that the result of such service "would be the more efficient organising of the country for war, or the advancing of militarism as exemplified in the MSA." ⁵

Work of National Importance was only now being organised by the Pelham Committee, set up the same month.⁶ The Non-Combatant Corps wore army uniform and were under military control. Posted to camps in France as well as England, they built roads and railways, erected huts, loaded and unloaded ships and trains and, adds Rae, did the "sanitary work" of burning excreta. Orders to handle munitions later provoked mutinies, as we shall see.⁷ The Royal Army Medical Corps was likewise objectionable as a uniformed service under military control.

¹ David Boulton, p. 144.

² Jo Vellacott, p. 33.

³ *ibid.*, p. 48.

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 53-4.

⁵ Jo Vellacott, p. 48.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 46.

⁷ John Rae, pp. 87, 192.

The same National Convention urged the Government to end the war by immediate peace negotiations.¹ The Fellowship's agitation on behalf of prisoners was more than a campaign for averting hardship and injustice, says Vellacott. It was a means of swinging public and Parliamentary opinion behind the objectors, "who were not passive sufferers as much as the vanguard of the attack on militarism."²

Bertrand Russell hoped their resistance might mobilise and make articulate the desire for peace he was convinced was latent in ordinary people, writes Vellacott.³ She quotes from his letter to the *Nation*: "It is their belief that a stand for peace is the greatest service they can render to the community... Their belief may be wrong, or it may be right; but no one who has seen them can doubt that it is sincere and unshakeable"⁴

To what extent did objectors seeking exemption from Southwark, Bermondsey and Camberwell tribunals see themselves as part of a vanguard? As reported at least, the case they made rarely had a ring of defiance or challenge. The 21 who refused non-combatant or medical work may have seen themselves in that way. The press reports are too sketchy to be able to say how many overall expressed willingness to do alternative service. Forty-three men were "put down" for it, but that's something else.

In the end it's impossible to say at the tribunal stage how many were more concerned with their consciences than with the ongoing massacre in Europe. A more accurate measure will appear later when we discuss imprisoned objectors' responses to the Home Office scheme.

¹ Jo Vellacott, p. 48.

² *ibid.*, p. 43.

³ *ibid.*, p. 65.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 52.

11: One man defiant

One man who used conscription as an opportunity to make a personal stand against the war was Arthur Creech Jones, who appeared before Camberwell tribunal in March. The *SLP*'s report of the case (which doesn't name him, oddly) begins, "The friction among members has become so acute that on the slightest pretext, real or imagined, the members criticise one another immediately. Such an incident occurred when the secretary of the local Trades and Labour Council applied for exemption on conscientious grounds." ¹

Jones sought absolute exemption, telling the Camberwell tribunal that military service violated his deepest religious convictions. We can't be sure exactly what he said: his notes specify six grounds, with sub-sections,² but the *SLP*, the only paper to report the case, provides no account.

Jones referred to his past membership of the Liberal Christian League, his vegetarianism, his trade union and Socialist work. He presented testimonials, including one from Robert Young, of 301 Ivydale Road, Peckham, general-secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, and another from Herbert Morrison, secretary of the London Labour Party.

The paper continues: "The evidence he produced apparently satisfied and complete exemption was suggested. This was opposed by certain members, who desired to follow the course previously adopted in such cases and refer the applicant to the non-combatant class." That was the eventual decision, by a vote of 6-0. At this there was commotion and protest in the public gallery. The paper reports shouts of "Because you have been unfair to other applicants you refuse to be fair to this man" and "Your name stinks throughout the country." ³

After this initial hearing Creech Jones appears to have wavered. In May, while appealing, he consulted his brother Will as to whether he could or should accept alternative service. In reply Will bent over backwards to avoid giving advice but in the end said that to accept such work under the Act "seems to me to be making no

¹ *SLP*, 24 March 1916.

² Creech Jones archive, box 1, file 2.

³ *SLP*, 24 March 1916.

effective protest at all.” Also preserved in the archive is a set of application papers for the Friends’ Ambulance Unit.¹ He evidently considered that too.

But then Creech Jones reverted to the resolve of his tribunal appearance. Non-combatant work, say his notes for that hearing, “would in a very real way assist in carrying on the war, would make me part of the machinery of militarism, would probably release other men from actual fighting and would undoubtedly involve killing by proxy.” Likewise:

I cannot perform ambulance work because I regard it as a big compromise with militarism... Indeed its principal purpose is to maintain the efficiency of the fighting forces – it provides additional men for the carrying on of the war, it patches men up to return to the fight and is often work of a temporary character since many men return only to be slaughtered.

Jones now took his case to the appeal tribunal at County Hall. In the course of some vigorous cross-examination his notes say he professed his belief that all mankind should be united in brotherhood. Including the Germans and black races? asked the chairman. Just so, was his answer: “the Germans are my brothers.” He was pressed on treaty obligations, on the support of continental socialists for a national citizen army. He was asked repeatedly whether he wanted Britain to succeed. He replied: “I do not believe in warfare; I believe in negotiations.”²

Turned down by the appeal tribunal in May and refused leave to appeal to the Central Tribunal, Jones - despite his hard line - exploited to the full the opportunities for delay. (Readers may wish to skip these three paragraphs.) He tried to persuade the local tribunal to reopen his case, returning his call-up notice to the recruiting office at Camberwell Baths, in Artichoke Place, off Church Street, and saying “My case is before the tribunals and is not yet settled.” Another summons came and went in June.

Camberwell tribunal refused to reopen his case. Jones replied that he had new facts and evidence he wished to place before it. The tribunal reiterated its decision. Jones wrote back that it was acting unconstitutionally and quoted the regulations in the Military Service Act on the variation of a certificate. Replying, the Town Clerk pointed out that “may” was the operative word in the phrase “may be reviewed,” and that in his case the tribunal had decided not to do so.

Jones now wrote to the Local Government Board, enquiring whether the tribunal was right in refusing to hear him. Despite two reminders the Board did not reply, but at the beginning of August Camberwell tribunal relented and the Town Clerk wrote asking for further and better particulars. He wrote again towards the end of the month confirming the tribunal’s refusal to review the certificate. Two days later Jones appealed to the appeal tribunal against the refusal.³

¹ Creech Jones archive, box 1, file 2.

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

On 8 September he was again summoned to Camberwell Baths. He evidently failed to present himself, for on the 16th the *CP Times* reports: CREECH JONES ARRESTED/ Handed over to Military/ HIS PROTEST TO THE MAGISTRATE.

He told the court he had not received written notice of the decision of the appeal tribunal and had another tribunal to which to appeal. The Military Representative said he had no further tribunal to appeal to. He had been passed for non-combatant service. Jones retorted, "I am a conscientious objector and under no circumstances shall I perform military service."

The Lambeth magistrate, H.C. Biron, replied "That has nothing to do with me," imposed a fine of 40/- (to be deducted from his army pay) and handed him over to a military escort.

Even now Jones and his supporters continued to protest. He wrote to the *CP Times*, which didn't print his letter. His aunt, Emma Tidman, wrote to the magistrate. The Trades and Labour Council passed a resolution expressing deep regret and wrote to Arthur Henderson (the Labour leader), the War Office, the Prime Minister, the Local Government Board and the Parliamentary Labour Party.¹

Jones meanwhile had been removed to Hounslow Barracks, where he refused to stand to attention when paraded. According to his own account, he stepped out of the ranks, and when asked why, told the Sergeant, "I refuse to do anything for the Military as I am a conscientious objector."²

Taken to the guardhouse, he wrote in pencil a powerful four-page letter to his former comrades:

I may be absent for over a year but it is up to you to continue the fight for the liberation of labour, for the conditions whereby men can live noble and splendid lives, - the fight against militarism and war in all its forms. I am in the Guard Detention Room and shall probably be court-martialled on Friday. It is an experience I cannot regret. Our quiet testimony for fraternity and liberty of conscience is worthwhile.

He goes on to describe the very mixed company of wounded men and men released from military custody in which he found himself.

You begin to understand after talking to these men what war and militarism mean. In many cases bitterness has eaten into their souls. You faintly comprehend the tragedy of war and of army life. Cruelty and inhumanity you hear about which make your heart ache. The men are mere numbers, just so much lumber and no better than dogs in the eyes of the authorities. From the men who have seen the horror and the tragedy of the battlefield you get the greatest response to our ideals. They tell you frankly they appreciate and admire the stand we conscientious objectors are making ...

Some of the soldiers are openly hostile, but it's not those who have been to the front and been through the mill. Prussianism is not a Prussian product but it is bred here. Militarism produces the same vices

¹ *ibid.*

² *ibid.*

everywhere. You see it here. The life, we observe, coarsens and brutalises the men. Never have I seen men so given to depravity and filth, so dehumanised and without sense of decency and refinement as in the barrack room here. The corrupting influences are plain and it will be a crime to throw our boys of 18 into so degrading a life. But beneath the crust you can discern sympathy...

Every soldier you meet will express his utter detestation of the army and his desire for peace. Apart from the 'constitutional' objections to granting votes to the soldiers, the politicians know that the soldiers realise the ghastliness, costliness and folly of the war and they know that the soldiers would vote for peace tomorrow. If you listen to the soldiers at work you will frequently hear them humming the 'Red Flag.' Every evening in the twilight (for we have no artificial light) we sing our labour songs out into the night.¹

Jones told the court martial, again according to his own carefully preserved notes:

I view War merely as a test of might, resulting from dynastic ambitions, commercial rivalries, financial intrigues and imperialistic jealousies. It is a stupid, costly and obsolete method of attempting to settle the differences of diplomatists, in which the common people always pay with their blood, vitality and wealth.²

The court martial was not persuaded by this. He was sentenced to six months' hard labour and taken to Wormwood Scrubs; and there we'll leave him for the moment.

The Trades and Labour Council kept the flag flying, as Creech Jones exhorted. His cousin Florence Tidman took over as secretary pro-tem and sent out a notice of future activities. These included a tutorial class at the Fellowship Hall, in Queens Road, Peckham, on the Problems of Social Economics arising from the War; to be followed by a visitor from the NCCL who would speak on "several urgent matters."³

¹ *ibid.*

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

12: The war goes on

All this time, month after month, the insatiable war was continuing to devour its victims. The Germans had launched their massive attack on the French from the east. "Carnage at Verdun Resumed," headlined the *SLP* on 17 March; and a month later "Verdun: More Slaughter;" and six weeks after that "Huge Losses on Verdun Front; British Reverse on the Vimy Ridge." ¹

Ant-war demonstrations continued too. In May 300 members from south London branches of the Fellowship held a church parade outside evening service at Spurgeon's Tabernacle, the pillared Baptist temple at the Elephant and Castle. The police were on hand but did not intervene since, reported the *SLP*, "beyond the distribution of literature after the service [the gathering] passed off in an orderly manner." ²

The superintendent minister, Dr Dixon, later told the paper the protesters were welcome as individuals but he would not receive them as an organisation. He said he respected the convictions of conscientious objectors provided they accepted alternative service; but "I believe those who deliberately plan and begin war are criminals who ought to be punished... I am heart and soul with Great Britain and her Allies." ³

In June 1916 there were two anti-conscription meetings on Peckham Rye. The second was broken up by a hostile crowd after someone shouted, "How much longer are you going to listen to this?" In an instant, says the *CP Times*. "there an ominous rush towards the speaker, and in the twinkling of an eye he was dragged from his stand." Luckily for him, the report continues, sub-divisional Inspector White was at hand. He kept the crowd back, while police sergeant Wood and two park-keepers pushed their way through to the rescue.⁴ Further afield similar rallies took place on Clapham Common in May and in Brockwell Park in June. The latter was also broken up.⁵

Pope Benedict's support for German peace proposals gets mentioned, negatively, in a report of a talk at Surrey Masonic Hall. It would, said Joseph McCabe, leave

¹ *SLP*, 14 April and 26 May, 1916.

² *SLP*, 12 May 1916.

³ *SLP*, 26 May 1916.

⁴ *CPT*, 10 June 1916.

⁵ *SLP*, 12 May and 23 June 1916.

Germany, comparatively speaking, in the same position as they were before the war began. "The only safe peace would be if we crush Germany (meaning the military machine) so that it would never again be able to aggress any nation..."¹

To achieve this, and specifically to relieve pressure on the French at Verdun, Haig, the new commander-in-chief, put in place his "Big Push" on the Somme. It began with a huge bombardment, so powerful the vibration could be felt in Camberwell, as Vera Brittain records.² She was nursing at the 1st London General Hospital, the military extension of Bart's which had commandeered St. Gabriel's Teacher Training College, overlooking Myatt's Fields Park. It spilled over into huts on the grass.³

Designed to soften up the German positions and destroy the barbed-wire entanglements, it lasted five days. It also told the Germans what was coming and they had time to dig themselves deep underground, sometimes 40 feet.

At 7.30 in the morning of 1 July 1916 the whistles blew. The British had a seven to one superiority over the defenders. Officers and men went over the top, only to find the barbed wire was still largely in place. The Germans climbed up from their deep trenches "and as English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh battalions of our assaulting divisions trudged forward over what had been No Man's Land, machine-gun bullets sprayed upon them, and they fell like grass to the scythe," wrote Gibbs, the war correspondent. Behind the men each battalion had "battle police" to drive stragglers forward.⁴

Sixty thousand men of the New (still volunteer) Army were killed or wounded on that first day. Haig said on day two that the numbers, reported to him as 40,000, "cannot be considered severe." He complained if particular regiments did not have sufficient dead and wounded: it meant they were not trying hard enough.⁵

Haig made a point of never visiting any field dressing-station – "our Butcher's Shop," as one hard-pressed doctor described it to Philip Gibbs. Haig's son said it made his father physically ill.⁶

Vera Brittain recalled immense convoys of wounded arriving non-stop for about a fortnight and continuing at short intervals for the whole of that July and early August. At Charing Cross station one day there was not enough platform space to unload them all and some had to be sent on to Paddington.⁷ A painting by the war artist J. Hodgson Lobley conveys the shocked silence of the crowds outside Charing Cross as they watch the procession of ambulances emerging.⁸

¹ CPT, 17 June 1916. A Joseph McCabe is listed on the honours board at Conway Hall as an "appointed lecturer" at South Place Ethical Society from 1907 to 1955. The speaker may have been him.

² Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth*, p. 246.

³ *ibid.*, p. 182; SLP, 29 October 1915.

⁴ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 12; Adam Hochschild, pp. 203-7; Philip Gibbs, p. 367.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 205 and 209.

⁶ Philip Gibbs, p. 372; Adam Hochschild, p. 210.

⁷ Vera Brittain, pp. 252 and 251.

⁸ Imperial War Museum, *Art from the First World War*, p.13.

“The War Week by Week” in the *SLP* carried upbeat headlines however:

7 July: “Germans Beaten Back in France”

14 July: “BEATING BACK THE HUNS/ More Gains in Great
Franco-British Offensive/ Heroism of Our New Army”

21 July: “GERMANS BEATEN at ALL POINTS”

On the second anniversary of the war, below a Union Jack stretched across the entrance of the town hall, the citizens of Camberwell, we read, registered their “inflexible determination” to continue with the struggle.¹

By 11 August the front page of the *SLP* was carrying one and two-thirds of a broadsheet column of south London casualties, in very small print.

At the Labour Institute in Bermondsey that month the south London Council for Civil Liberties voted to work for the repeal of the Military Service Acts and to stand up for the civic freedoms endangered by conscription, the Defence of the Realm Act and other laws.²

The *SLP*'s headlines continued to relay good news from the Somme:

1 September: “BRITISH THRASH THE PRUSSIAN GUARDS
IN FRANCE”

8 September: “GREAT PUSH RESUMED/ Germans Beaten Back
in France”

15 September: “NOTABLE VICTORIES IN FRANCE”

29 September: “OUR BIGGEST VICTORY OF THE WAR”

6 October: “HUNS HAMMERED ON ALL FRONTS”

Back home in September a huge procession was led on to Peckham Rye by the band of the National Reserve and the Mayor in a carriage to take part in a rally of Repentance and Hope called by local churches. The service opened with the hymn:

O God of love, O King of peace
Make wars throughout the world to cease.

In his address though the Rev. P.M. Herbert, vicar of St. George's, Camberwell, said, “We know we are fighting a winning cause; it is our fight; it is God's. He calls us today.”

The reporter from the *CP Times* was evidently moved by the occasion and the sea of heads – he estimated there were 8,000 people parading and considerably more looking on. “As one gazed upon the vast concourse” he wrote, “one could not help remembering that they did not represent the number or nearly the number of brave British boys who each week fall in the dreadful struggle across the Channel.”³

The fighting on the Somme continued until November 1916. The Germans were pushed back a dozen square miles, but at a sacrifice of 400,000 British casualties. Survivors, says Paul Fussell, called it “the Great Fuck-Up.”⁴ The view of the German

¹ *CPT*, 9 August 1916.

² *SBR*, 18 August 1916.

³ *CPT*, 20 September 1916.

⁴ Paul Fussell, p. 12.

high command, confirmed by Alan Clark, was that Haig and the others were donkeys in command of lions. Clark, admittedly, is writing about the battles of 1915; but he makes the point that at the Somme nothing had changed: the infantry were still being directed to advance line-abreast and forbidden under pain of court-martial to take cover.¹

That opinion has been challenged, of course. The best the revisionists can say, however, is that the generals learned on the job and over the course of the conflict eventually developed an efficient war machine that combined infantry with tanks, artillery and aircraft. But - as David Reynolds comments - "This so-called 'learning curve' was greased with a terrible amount of blood: whether such a costly education can be justified remains a matter of debate."²

¹ Alan Clark, p. 126.

² David Reynolds, "The Long Shadow: the Great War and International Memory, 1914-2014."

13: Exposing ill-treatment

Having successfully delayed his call-up from March to September 1916 Creech Jones was in the hands of the army for just the short time between his arrest and court martial – about a week. Early in the letter to Trades Council comrades quoted previously he writes, “The first night of my arrival in the barrack room was a wretched experience but since then my treatment has been good” – which suggests he may have been knocked about, though he does not make anything of it.

Such rough-handling was frequent. In summer 1916 three unnamed Bermondsey men visited by the Salters had their civilian clothes removed while taking a bath. When they refused to put on khaki, they were kept in the bathroom naked for six hours with no food. Then they were marched the whole length of the parade ground and across a road back to the guardroom, wearing only a towel. They were left in this condition until the next day when they were given two blankets each and a ration of bread. After Dr Salter’s visit, though he was unable to see them, they were placed on full rations and given six blankets, and these were their covering for five days until they were paraded before the Colonel and again refused to put on uniform. Finally, they got their own clothes back, ready for the court martial.¹

On the brink of the Second World War Alfred Salter, still adamantly opposed to conscription, told the story of the carpenter Isaac Hall, “a full-blooded negro” from Jamaica and “very simple-minded soul” who believed the Bible literally. Refused exemption – in Westminster - he failed to report himself and was arrested. At the camp he refused to fall in and quick march whereupon he was kicked and cuffed; finally a rope was tied to one wrist and he was dragged round the parade-ground face downwards until he lost consciousness. His story could be repeated a hundred-fold, wrote Salter. He compared such treatment to the brutalities inflicted on the Jews in Germany.²

¹ *Labour Leader*, 16 June 1916.

² Alfred Salter, “A True Tale of Conscription: a Story of the Last War.” The Marshall archive (D/Mar/4/61) includes a typescript of Hall’s court-martial statement at Hounslow of October 1916. This stresses less his faith than his race, his unwillingness to defend a colonial power like Belgium and his experience of discrimination in England. The phrasing reads, it must be said, like left-wing lawyer’s work. A shortened version appeared in *The Tribunal* 31 (19 October 1916).

Objectors sentenced earlier than Creech Jones were not as fortunate as he, since after court martial they served their time in military prison, where such ill-treatment was liable to continue, and did. An early example in summer 1916 brought C.H. Norman, a notably combative member of the NCF executive, up against Lieutenant Colonel Reginald Brooke, commandant of Wandsworth Military Detention barracks. Brooke had contempt for objectors, regarded the Government as too soft and boasted he would use a free hand with them. In this conviction he had Norman twice confined in a strait-jacket for forcible-feeding. The jacket, too small, made him lose consciousness and put him in hospital for a week. Brooke spat at him, and abused him as a swine, a beast and a coward.¹

Norman was able to smuggle out a message, whereupon Catherine Marshall pulled on her most influential contacts. They got through to Asquith, and Brooke was removed from his post; within the hour, says Rae.²

John Rae maintains that military brutality to conscientious objectors came to be “one of the most persistent myths” of the First World War. But it kept on happening, even after district commanders were instructed in September 1916 that punishments other than laid down in the Army Act and King’s Regulations were strictly forbidden.³

At a camp in Cleethorpes, in June 1917, James Brightmore, a solicitor’s clerk, was forced to stand for a week in a waterlogged pit deeper than he was tall. A sympathetic soldier passed down a cigarette packet and pencil and sent the resulting letter to Brightmore’s family, who got it published in the *Manchester Guardian*. Brightmore was no absolutist, says Graham, but was ready to accept the Home Office scheme.⁴

The same month, at a camp near Hull, John Gray, aged 19, refused to salute, whereupon the officer threw a live Mills bomb at his feet. The following day he was made to stand facing a bitterly cold wind and forced to march carrying a valise full of stones as a pack. The ordeals went on for several days. Finally Gray was stripped and with a rope round his middle was completely submerged eight or nine times in a filthy pond containing sewage. Eight of the soldiers refused to obey their punitive orders. But Gray was broken and gave in.⁵

John Graham devotes a chapter to many more such cases.⁶ The NCF took them up by publicising them in *The Tribunal* and by getting questions put in the Commons by a small group of sympathetic MPs, chief amongst them Philip Snowden and the Quaker Edmund Harvey.

The Fellowship’s parliamentary secretary (and much more) was Charles Ammon. In that capacity he edited the *COs’ Hansard*. A Methodist lay preacher and temperance man, this former post office sorter grew up on the Old Kent Road and helped Alfred Salter re-establish Bermondsey’s ILP branch in 1908.⁷ He now combined his

¹ David Boulton, pp. 153-4; John Graham, pp. 144-5.

² Jo Vellacott, p. 70; John Rae, p. 149.

³ John Rae, pp. 141, 143.

⁴ John Graham, pp. 140-3.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 143-4.

⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 110-154.

⁷ Graham Taylor, pp. 65, 92-3; election biographies in A54/J2 (Bermondsey Labour Party), Southwark Local Studies Library and Archives.

parliamentary role in the NCF with being an executive member of the NCCL and secretary of its influential trade union committee. For some time he also wrote a weekly article for the *Labour Leader*,¹ where “Notes of our COs” was a regular feature. Extremely active, he will appear again in this narrative.

Catherine Marshall also used her skills as a lobbyist on behalf of prisoners. While driving the Fellowship’s organisation and campaigning she maintained close contact with General Wyndham Childs, director of personnel service at the War Office, and regularly raised cases with him. After a meeting about Clifford Allen, she wrote: “I was very much obliged to you for giving me the opportunity of such a long talk the other day. I think it helped me understand your point of view better than I have done before, although I am afraid I cannot flatter myself that it resulted in any greater respect on your part for the point of view of the Conscientious Objector.”²

This conveys the deferential tone of her representations. General Childs was unsympathetic to conscientious objectors in principle and to political objectors in particular. In his memoirs he writes that he always thought the leadership of the NCF should have been dealt with under the Incitement to Mutiny Act. At the same time he had a high regard for military law and would intervene firmly when presented with evidence of illegal treatment.³

Alerted about James Brightmore Childs put in hand determined enquiries, detailed by Rae, and was not put off by obfuscation. When he got to the truth, he dismissed the camp commandant and forced a colluding Major to resign. He likewise sacked the camp commandant in the case of John Gray.⁴

General Childs, disappointingly, does not mention Miss Marshall in his memoirs. He says however, “So bad had the treatment of the Conscientious Objectors become that I formed a liaison with the No-Conscription Fellowship, in order to be able to take immediate action where cases of brutality were brought to my notice and substantiated;”⁵ which rather gives the lie to John Rae’s talk of “myths.”

Illegal treatment apart, there remained real issues, spelt out by Rae: namely that it was not for the army to consider the reasons a man might have for refusing to obey orders; and that even authorized punishments were very severe.⁶ The question arose as to whether continued disobedience would ultimately incur the death penalty, the maximum penalty for a number of offences and not only those committed on active service.⁷

In May 1916 select batches of objectors were removed to France where their refusal to obey orders became mutiny. After punishment and court-martial 35 of them, by the latest computation, were mustered to hear their death sentences read out – then, after a long pause, commuted to ten years’ penal servitude.

¹ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/12.

² *ibid.*, D/Mar/4/8.

³ Sir Wyndham Childs, *Episodes and Reflections*, p. 149; Jo Vellacott, p. 105.

⁴ John Rae, pp. 144-6.

⁵ Wyndham Childs, p. 152.

⁶ John Rae, pp. 135, 149.

⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 150-1.

The story is a complicated one, well told by David Boulton. The key points are that it was only by chance that a sympathetic London railwayman picked up a note thrown out of a train transporting one contingent to Southampton. He alerted the NCF, there were questions in parliament, deputations went to see Asquith – but even then it still took a sustained outcry to be sure that executions would not take place.

Was it a military conspiracy? After re-examining the evidence in the reprint edition of his book, Boulton concludes that once he was notified, Asquith took his own steps to ensure executions did not happen. But he kept his veto secret, which encouraged elements in the War Office and commanders in the field to conspire “to kill the peace movement stone dead, as they thought, by rolling out their ultimate deterrent.” Boulton means the firing-squad, but he does not quite (it seems to me) dispose of Rae’s claim that reprieve always part of the military’s plan.¹

That aside, Boulton agrees with Jo Vellacott that the NCF deserves the major credit for intervening with the Prime Minister and keeping up parliamentary and other pressure to prevent executions. This included local activity. The May demonstration on Peckham Rye called for the return of the men sent to France.² Catherine Marshall at once mobilised the NCF branches, writing after the first draft of objectors to France, “Please obtain the utmost possible publicity for the facts in your local Press,” and promising that a leaflet on the subject would be sent immediately.³

No such publicity has been found in this part of south London. But a letter in the Marshall archive reports back to her that some 16 to 20 Dulwich members had been to see the MPs John Burns and Albion Richardson and would go again to the Commons to try to see Dr McNamara, MP for North Camberwell, and the member for Lewisham.

“The former as I suppose you know is already giving his untiring support & using his personal influence.” Burns, the Lib-Lab member for Battersea North, had resigned as President of the Board of Trade on the declaration of war in 1914 and had voted against conscription. Richardson told them “we could rest assured that none of our men will be shot, & if they are court-martialled in England they will not be sent out of the country.” Miss Marshall’s blue crayon underlines the first part of this sentence and puts a large question-mark alongside the second. The writer is M.E. Hoggins, of 18 Lordship Lane, East Dulwich.⁴

In May 1916, amid ongoing accusations of ill-treatment and with the prospect of an increasing number of recruits defying authority on grounds of conscience, Kitchener, the War Minister, announced a new policy. From now on, under Army Order X, conscientious objectors convicted by court martial would serve their sentences in the nearest civil prison.⁵ Creech Jones, sentenced the following September, benefited from this change, though the many already convicted remained in army custody.

¹ David Boulton, pp. xxxii-xxxvi; John Rae, pp. 155-7.

² *SLP*, 2 June 1916.

³ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/4.

⁴ *ibid.*, D/Mar/4/5.

⁵ John Rae, pp. 158-9.

14: Serving hard labour

Creech Jones, we saw, went to Wormwood Scrubs on a six-month sentence. Two years' hard labour was more usual. Though at first often commuted, this was the most severe sentence available to the civil courts (short of life imprisonment and death, obviously); longer sentences were served under the less rigorous conditions of penal servitude.

"Hard labour" evokes images of pickaxes and leg-irons. It wasn't quite that. The normal work was making mailbags, using large needles like skewers which were pushed through the canvas by a lead knob strapped to the palm of the hand.¹ For the first month the work (10 hours a day) was carried out in strict isolation in a small cell. The bed consisted of a bare board and three thin blankets; a mattress was added after 14 days. No visit or letter was allowed for the first two months.

After the first month prisoners worked "in association" with others, except that the silence rule prevailed and they were not allowed to talk, even on exercise. After two months they were allowed to write and receive one letter a month and to receive one visit. Letters and visits were "privileges," frequently taken away for minor offences. The food was inadequate, of poor quality and got worse over the course of the war, and prisoners' health suffered accordingly. In winter the men often suffered severely from cold.² Brockway gives a vivid account of his time in the Scrubs, then in Walton and Lincoln jails.³ The regime was punitive but abuses were few, provided prisoners followed the rules.

One who did not was the Jamaican Isaac Hall. In Pentonville he refused to work on soldiers' haversacks and was repeatedly placed in solitary confinement on a bread and water diet. By the time Dr Salter was called in by the Quaker chaplain this giant of 6ft. 6½ ins had become a living skeleton, "a coal-black man with ashen lips and sunken eyes."⁴ Salter got him out, took him into his home in Stork's Road for nine months and secured him a safe passage back to the Caribbean.⁵ Later on, treatment in general changed for the worst when many more objectors started to rebel.⁶

¹ Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left*, p. 93.

² Jo Vellacott, pp. 191-3.

³ Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left*, pp. 90-119.

⁴ Fenner Brockway, *Bermondsey Story*, pp. 67-8.

⁵ Alfred Salter, "A True Tale about Conscripton".

⁶ David Boulton, pp. 220ff.

Creech Jones in the Scrubs seems to have been fairly comfortable; at least he doesn't complain. He wrote to his comrades of Camberwell Trades and Labour Council:

My life since I left you to become a common felon... has been varied and not uninteresting. There is of course an awful monotony and regularity about prison life and the mental and nervous strain is not too good for one. There is, too, an unutterable sadness about the life. Nevertheless, my spirits never flagged. Perhaps I had moments of dumpiness and depression, but I had the sustaining faith that humanity was one, that I was not a tool of the governing classes to slay my fellow workmen in a senseless suicidal slaughter, that I was trying in a poor way to bear testimony to the ideals of liberty, internationalism & fraternity.

Descending from this high plane, he continues:

I was chiefly a laundryman and maker of mailbags. As a worthy civil servant I scrubbed shirts & pillowslips morning & afternoon. It was a funny picture – beard, clogs, leather apron, scrubbing brush! ¹

One should note the past tense here. A sentence might be commuted but there was a catch. Released objectors were called back to the colours and when they refused to obey they were court-martialled again. In this way they were, in effect, punished over and over for the same offence. Creech Jones was now back in the guard room at Hounslow barracks, writing before his second court martial in January 1917. This sentenced him to two years' hard labour, commuted to six months. After a year or so the military courts stopped commuting sentences since they saw it was not breaking down resistance. Creech Jones was court-martialled four times in all and was not released until April 1919. We shall return to him.

¹ Letter of 9 January 1917, Creech Jones archive, box 1 file 2.

15: Dyce and Dartmoor

In June 1916 Asquith announced another twist to government policy. Imprisoned absolutists would have their cases reviewed by the Central Tribunal to determine whether or not their conscientious objection was genuine. Those judged genuine would be offered release from prison and transfer to section W of the Army Reserve, where they would no longer be subject to military control or the Army Act. The condition was that they perform work of national importance under civil direction.¹

Rae notes that a deliberately lower standard of genuineness was applied than at tribunal level.² The aim was to clear the prisons and, probably, to further divide the NCF, already unhappy about objectors who accepted non-combatant service or work of national importance.

The first work centre established under the Home Office scheme, as it was called, was at Dyce quarry, outside Aberdeen. The scene here did resemble classic hard labour. Accommodated in leaking bell-tents, the men worked a ten-hour day breaking granite and barrowing it away.

Two hundred and fifty arrived in August 1916. These were seriously undernourished men, decanted straight from prison. In a little over a fortnight one of them, Walter Roberts, aged 20, from Stockport, was dead from pneumonia. Fortunately the men had established a camp committee which quickly kicked up a stink by means of resolutions, a manifesto, a paper (*The Granite Echo*) and letters to the press. They demanded, inter alia, the replacement of the medical officer, a telephone line to the village and removal to hospital in every case of serious illness.

Alerted at head office in London, Fenner Brockway and Catherine Marshall pressed the Home Secretary Herbert Samuel for a public enquiry. Ramsay MacDonald was given permission to visit. An investigating committee ordered the men to be removed from the tents to barns in the neighbourhood, the setting aside of a separate building for the sick, plus better food and clothing.³ At the end of October the camp was closed.

¹ John Rae, p. 161; David Boulton, p. 186.

² John Rae, p. 163.

³ Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/36.

The secretary of the camp committee was Eddy Jope, of Peckham. There's a photograph in the archives of the Imperial War Museum showing him seated among a group of comrades at Dyce. Standing behind him is one of the Boxall brothers, of Long Lane, Bermondsey, mentioned earlier: probably William, a 31-year-old advertising clerk, since he was also on the camp committee. They look relaxed but purposeful; both are wearing a waistcoat and tie.¹

Under the Home Office scheme numerous other work centres were established across the country; Boulton names a dozen but there were more than this. Three prisons were also transformed into centres. William Boxall went on to do time at Ballachulish, near Fort William, in Wakefield prison and on Dartmoor.²

Dartmoor prison, renamed Princetown Work Centre, became the largest Home Office settlement, with over a thousand men, after other centres were closed down as part of a rationalisation. The work there was hardly of national importance - quarrying, land reclamation and "ordinary prison industries" according to Rae - but more like forced labour for its own sake. Vellacott gives the example of men with oversized spades being made to dig a field for three weeks that could have been ploughed in three days.³

There was a faction of prisoners there, led by C.H. Norman, who sought to go slow and "slack" in order to show up the futility of the work, which upset Catherine Marshall's relations with General Childs at the War Office. The jingo press got on to it and made much of the supposedly cushy life being led: "Princetown's Pampered Pets," and so on. Prisoners were physically attacked in surrounding villages. Altogether Princetown gave the NCF's executive a lot of grief. Bertrand Russell played the lead role in resolving the issue. After his persuasive visit to the prison in May 1917 the men voted to repudiate slacking; but protesting against the penal character of the work, they also demanded "civil work of real importance with full civil rights."⁴

The Home Office scheme added to the strain within the Fellowship about the whole principle of alternative service. The organisation's leadership had been opposed to the Non-Combatant Corps, a stand strongly endorsed by members. It was equally opposed to the Home Office scheme, which was fiercely debated by branches. The weight of opinion, says Boulton, seems to have been with the National Committee.⁵ But this position was undermined by the numbers in prison who were prepared to sign up for the scheme.

The committee was forced to accept this *fait accompli*. Most members continued to regard absolutism as the best expression of resistance to conscription and war. But in August 1916 it also undertook to try to obtain for non-absolutists "those forms of exemption which are acceptable to them." In this way it managed to keep absolutists and alternativists together. It did so on the basis of unity of purpose and the

¹ M.H.C.(Mark) Hayler papers, Imperial War Museum.

² Pearce Register.

³ John Rae, p.184; Jo Vellacott, p.178.

⁴ Jo Vellacott, pp.175-88.

⁵ David Boulton, p. 198.

supremacy of individual conscience; cemented, says Vellacott, by a high degree of mutual trust.¹

The Fellowship, as we saw, sprang to support the men of Dyce. It was not so readily supportive of men from the Non-Combatant Corps. In November 1916 a mutiny broke out at Newhaven when about 200 men employed as dockers refused to unload lorries containing shells and explosives. One striker, A.G. Melhuish, wrote that the whole workforce was drawn up under armed guards with fixed bayonets to hear the General - Sir Archibald Woolf Murray – read the military law as it applied to those who disobeyed orders. He warned that all cases would be dealt with in terms of the utmost severity. Many strikers gave in at this point but over 120 were placed under armed guard and marched off to Seaford.²

The National Committee, meeting in December, declined with expressions of sympathy to take up the cases of men who had “submitted to Military control by joining the NCC” and merely objected to certain specified sections of the work.³ It declined officially, that is, but allowed Catherine Marshall to act privately on their behalf. She made representations to the War Office but failed to get the handling of munitions excluded from the definition of NCC work. She succeeded though in getting the mutineers sent to civil prisons and not military detention to serve their sentences.⁴

This is what happened. Over the following weeks the men were drafted in batches to court martial in Lewes, where they were jailed for between six and 12 months. From there they were transferred to Wormwood Scrubs, where they were able to apply for the Home Office scheme, as agreed with Catherine Marshall.⁵

Among the letters from mutineers in her archive are several from Robert Stott, of 30 Edith Street, Peckham, a 21-year-old engineer, who describes himself as a member of the Camberwell branch of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and a Buddhist. He puts the NCC workforce at 600 and the number of strikers arrested at about 90. He asks for legal advice, complains about the food and overcrowding, reports that most of the Canadian soldiers in the camp “frankly envy us and wish they too had had the nerve to perform our ‘stunt.’ ”

He is scornful of other Corps members (Plymouth Brethren in particular) - the majority of whom he says “are prepared to handle anything in order to save their skins.” For his part, “I feel thoroughly ashamed of myself for having given in at all [by joining the NCC] and feel happier now that the opportunity for resistance is here.” He had met Clifford Allen on the cliffs “and he was cheered when he knew that we were determined.”⁶ Stott was sentenced at Lewes to one year’s hard labour in January 1917, then transferred from Wormwood Scrubs to the Home Office scheme the following April – though it’s not clear where he went.⁷

¹ Jo Vellacott, pp.108-9.

² Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/25.

³ Letter from national office to Marion Daunt, of Brighton, a court-martial friend to several of the strikers, in Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/37.

⁴ Jo Vellacott, p. 132; Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/23.

⁵ *ibid.*, D/Mar/4/25.

⁶ *ibid.*, D/Mar/4/37.

⁷ Cyril Pearce, Register.

16: The numbers

I

This is probably the place for some figures. John Graham, writing in the early Twenties, says firmly that “we have no reliable knowledge of the actual number of men who rose up against conscription.” He says this because many objectors - members of the Friends’ Ambulance Unit already abroad, other Quakers working with the War Victims Committee and some fundamentalist Christians – “were outside the ranks of the Fellowship.” By which he means, I take it, that these men did not come before the tribunals and therefore the NCF had no information about them. Moreover, there was no official (ie. government) record of how many men did apply to the tribunals on grounds of conscience. Some, additionally, applied on more than one ground; some were given temporary exemption and had to come back to the tribunal; both of which made counting difficult.¹

These caveats stated, Graham does his meticulous best, using figures in part from the Conscientious Objectors’ Information Bureau (COIB) which, as discussed below, grew out the record system established by the NCF. On this basis he puts the total number of conscientious objectors over the course of the war at 16,100, made up as follows:

Arrested	6,261
Non-Combatant Corps	3,300
Work of national importance under Pelham Committee	3,964
Work of national importance directly under tribunals	900
Friends’ Ambulance Unit	1,200
War Victims’ Relief	200
Royal Army Medical Corps	100
Evaded the Act	175
TOTAL	16,100

The category “Arrested” is not spelled out, but it means pretty clearly men who declined or were refused the various forms of alternative service, and then refused to accept induction into the army and, like Creech Jones, set out on the path of court-martial and imprisonment.² These men are sometimes called absolutists. But there

¹ John Graham, pp. 344-5.

² *ibid.*, p. 349.

were different levels of absolutism, as became apparent when the Home Office scheme was introduced.

Home Office men	3,750
Accepted combatant or non-combatant service	351
Rejected for military service on medical grounds	267
Deserted	21
Other	59
Records incomplete	270
"Absolutists"	1,543
TOTAL	6,261

Graham's definition of "absolutists" is men – non-alternativists, obviously – who were released from prison having served two years or more, or on medical grounds.

He goes on, with great scrupulosity, to whittle down this figure still further by deducting men denied the Home Office scheme because they were not deemed genuine by the Central Tribunal (157), men who were returned to prison for some breach of the rules or who returned voluntarily, sometimes for conscientious reasons (96), or who returned for reasons unknown (31). This gives him a final number for absolutists of 1,350.¹

John Rae, using government sources almost fifty years later, put the total of conscientious objectors at 16,500. His definition is "men whose bona fides were established by a tribunal, or who, having failed to satisfy or appear before a tribunal, still refused combatant service on conscientious grounds."

Included in this figure are the 1,400 Christadelphians exempted en masse by the Army Council, but not the similar number of Friends' ambulance men who were also collectively exempted by the Council.²

Within this overall total Rae gives a rather higher figure than Graham for those in the Non-Combatant Corps and engaged in work of national importance – over 9,000 altogether.³ He differs from Graham also in his computation of the absolutists. Using the numbers placed in the five categories used by the Central Tribunal in its screening for the Home Office scheme, he puts the figure at 985: made up of 692 men who refused to appear before the tribunal or who rejected the scheme while in custody, and 293 who objected to the scheme after release and had to be returned to prison.

He excludes two other categories of men who remained in prison: firstly, 46 who, while they objected to war in general, would, it appeared, fight in a war of which they approved. The other category comprised 267 men who were judged not to have any real conscientious objection to military service.⁴ Graham, we saw, acknowledged and excluded this element too but put their number at 157. In the case of the latter group one is relying on the assessment of the tribunal, even though it was bending over backwards, according to Rae, to recommend release. One cannot say absolutely

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 350-1.

² John Rae, pp. 69-71.

³ *ibid.*, p.191.

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 166-7.

whether men in either group would have would have accepted transfer to a Home Office scheme had it been offered. The fact they attended an interview with the Central Tribunal is no certain indication; Creech Jones did that.

In the end there is a discrepancy of 350 between Graham and Rae in the number of absolutists which is difficult to close; except by making the assumption that men in the categories excluded by Rae (the politicals and the “not genuine”) would all have rejected the Home Office option, which is unlikely. More widely, one can see inconsistencies and omissions on both sides.

As part of his on-going research into geographical concentrations of war-resistance Cyril Pearce has to date identified over 18,000 men who either declared themselves COs or can be identified as such by where they ended up. His categories are more elaborate than Graham’s and Rae’s and not always easy to compare. He puts at 5,930 (in round figures) the number of men court-martialled for refusing either combatant service or the Non-Combatant Corps. He puts the number who accepted service with the latter at 2,410, and the number who undertook work of national importance at 4,375 – 500 fewer than Graham.

Pearce writes that he is inclined to accept the others’ figures for the number who accepted the Home Office scheme: 3,700 and 4,126 respectively. He computes the number of absolutists as 1,430. However if these are deducted from the number court-martialled (5,930) – it leaves a higher figure of 4,500 Home Office men. Someone has got it wrong, he writes, and stresses the incomplete nature of his data.¹

II

It’s almost certainly right to identify this hard core of 1,000 to 1,500 as men who strove to set a maximum example of opposition to the war along the lines envisaged by Bertrand Russell. Creech Jones resolutely turned down the offer when it was put to him in October 1916. The Central Tribunal, he wrote, “offered me ... exemption from Military Service but upon conditions I could not accept.”² At the same time it’s important to recognise there was also a movement of principled men between prison and camp and back again.

Aylmer Rose, from Southwark, the NCF’s one-time organising secretary, is a case in point. His second sentence of hard labour had, he said, completely broken him up, so he accepted the Home Office scheme. He did so with a sense of guilt, having previously gone into print with a scathing letter about alternative service.³ Transferred to Princetown in March 1917 he mobilised the non-slackers there, was Bertrand Russell’s chief point of contact and helped broker the eventual settlement.

After three months, his health and equilibrium restored, he returned to prison and was subject to two more courts martial (making four in all, according to Pearce; Vellacott says three). He told the second of these: “If I am to be punished for my convictions,

¹ Cyril Pearce, personal communications, September-October 2016.

² Creech Jones archive, box 1 folder 2.

³ *ibid.*, The cutting (undated and unidentified) may be from *Labour Leader*.

I must be punished openly. I cannot consent to half-punishment and call it liberty.”¹
Like Creech Jones he was released in April 1919.²

Edward Harby, a Lewisham member of Dulwich NCF, accepted the Home Office scheme and in August 1916 was transferred to Kedington in Suffolk. After ten weeks of digging and sifting gravel for the repair of the road between Bury and Haverhill he found he had been helping upgrade it into a *military* road, part funded by the Army Council. A wages clerk aged 23 in 1917 he travelled to London to protest. After a spell on the run, he was caught and court-martialled three more times– went on hunger strike - and was likewise released in April 1919.³

After the closure of Dyce Eddy Jope returned to prison also, though the circumstances in his case are not so clear. Court-martialled twice more, he was released on medical grounds in March 1919.⁴ He told his third court martial, at Hounslow:

Freedom has to be won and maintained against the Government of one's own country. I do not share the patriotism which teaches one to be jealous of other nationalities, to seize and dominate three-fifths of the world's surface. My patriotism teaches me, amongst other things, to love my fellow countrymen, to be jealous of the liberties and institutions which have been won from their rulers by men who were unpopular and persecuted as we conscientious objectors are to-day.⁵

¹ *Labour Leader*, 5 July 1917.

² Jo Vellacott, pp. 176-7; Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/17; Cyril Pearce, Register.

³ Clara Gilbert Cole, *The Objectors to Conscription and War*, p. 38; Ann O'Brien, Biographies.

⁴ Cyril Pearce, Register.

⁵ *Tribunal* 70, 16 August 1917.

17: Branch and centre

I

To turn now from the objectors in camp and prison, it's high time to look in more detail at how NCF head office and its branches worked together to support the men and the cause. It was the close relationship between them that made the Fellowship so effective. With Dulwich as our example, that partnership is illustrated in the letter already quoted reporting the lobby of MPs about the men taken to France.

The writer goes on to invite Catherine Marshall to speak at a special meeting in Peckham "when we want the members to bring their women relatives (who are not members) & are also inviting the Bermondsey & Kennington Branches. We shall have the Friends' Meeting House, Hanover St Rye Lane... I am also asking Mrs Salter. Yours in the Cause - M.E. Hoggins." ¹

The Fellowship had relocated from the cottage in Cheshire to 5 York Buildings, a street close to Charing Cross between the Strand and the Thames. From there it spread to adjacent premises in 4 Duke Street and 6 John Street.² (Neither of the last two streets appear in the current A to Z: perhaps there's been a change of name.) At all events: it was at these three addresses that Catherine Marshall set up first seven, then nine departments: organisation, legal, editorial, publication, maintenance, parliamentary, publicity, record, and investigation.³

She was tireless in sending out directives and exhortations to branches. Her archive shows that in July and August 1916 she was advocating peace work as well as work on behalf of prisoners, urging branches to press forward with the collection of signatures on a Peace Memorial to the government urging peace by negotiation. With two hundred thousand signatures already sent in she wanted a million by the end of September. A six-page circular suggested activities to support the campaign: a local conference concluding with a resolution, a local propaganda committee to arrange public meetings, a deputation to the MP and much else. It ends with a questionnaire, to be returned by the end of August, asking branches to report what they are doing.⁴

¹ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/5.

² *ibid.*, D/Mar/4/16 and 4/28.

³ NCF: duplicated papers 1914-1919, file 1, Library of the Society of Friends.

⁴ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/8.

Classes were suggested for men awaiting arrest. Under the heading "Trading" it was reported that many men have been started in remunerative work, "some dealing in Tea, Cocoa, etc, others in Insurance Agencies, Jobbing Gardening and Boot repairing", in addition to window-cleaning and joinery work. Each man, we read, was his own employer; the divisional secretary "simply assists in starting them." It's not very clear how men awaiting arrest could build up much of a business.

In September 1916 Catherine Marshall proposed that branches raise funds by holding a Freedom Festival (or Garden Party). She complained that only 50 per cent of branches had returned the questionnaire on the Peace Campaign.

A circular the same month suggested that the war documentaries now being shown offered an opportunity for propaganda work, which should not be missed. "The meetings of the [Church of England's] mission of Repentance and Hope, especially those held in the open air, offer a similar opportunity." ¹

Film documentaries about the war were certainly screened - for example, at the Grand Hall Cinema Theatre, Camberwell New Road, the Tower Cinema, Rye Lane, Peckham, and the Cinematograph Theatre, Walworth Road - but the papers do not report any picketing.²

In December 1916 the circular was suggesting a Self-Denial Week, during which members would reduce their fares and expenses by walking, cutting down on tobacco and chocolates and giving the money saved to branch funds.

The same circular proposes branches apply a levy or subscription on members of 1/- per six months for national funds, ("about ½ d a week"), plus at least 1d a week for branch funds and 3d a week for the Maintenance Committee. "It will be seen that a weekly subscription of 6d or 1/- per member could easily cover the expenses of the various phases of the work." ³ The work of the Maintenance Committee is discussed below.

Jumping forward to March 1917: a four page circular gave guidance to branches about Agitation on behalf of Prisoners: via petitions, memorials, deputations to parliament, church parades (with badges), meetings and demonstrations, speakers, and literature; all set out in great detail.⁴

That autumn *The Tribunal* reported on a "North London Rally." The 10 branch secretaries each tried to persuade us that their branch was the best .. Nine branches are doing Open-air work; all are spreading leaflets broadcast. Seven of them run educational lectures and 'curly-wurlies' (the latest name for study circles). Tottenham and Hackney keep in touch with absent members by a monthly branch letter, an idea worth copying. Many are learning Esperanto, but why not all? If we want Internationalism we must learn the International language." ⁵

¹ *ibid.*

² *SLP*, 22 September 1916, 12 and 19 January 1917.

³ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/13.

⁴ *ibid.*, D/Mar/4/17.

⁵ *Tribunal* 80, 25 October 1917.

Esperanto! I think we hear Miss Marshall's authentic voice here. Branch secretaries like Sarah Cahill might be forgiven for sagging a little in face of such relentless encouragement. Yet: Catherine Marshall inspired great confidence from branches, branch members and prisoners, and she had to deal with a blizzard of correspondence from them, most of which seems to have passed across her desk.

Among the letters from Dulwich in the Marshall archive are two, dated March and April 1917, in which Mrs Cahill asks advice on what to say when lobbying in parliament.¹ Miss Marshall had already written to Charles Ammon suggesting it would be good to get out some notes for this purpose. She told him, "I found a deputation of our folk from Dulwich at the House last night and gave them some coaching for which they were very grateful."²

A two-page letter to Catherine Marshall of August 1917 supplies information on a number of prisoners, Mrs Cahill writing,

As I knew I should be visiting Mr Jope at Pentonville yesterday, & he was a personal friend of Mr Ashton's, I thought he would give me his address, but unfortunately he did not know it, & there is no one else now that I can make enquiries of so I must leave it to you.

There is one of our members who was visited recently in Wandsworth & was told about Ashton. He promised to find out what he could in regard to him. And as this man comes out at the beginning of next month we shall no doubt hear from him and whatever he tells us about him we will send on to you at once.

She goes on:

I saw a Mr Hyams in Wandsworth since speaking to you & he told me that the month of solitary confinement was still in practice there, the reason I am bringing this forward is that another of our members released after the second sentence from Exeter (E.W. Harby), whom you may know hunger-struck, has now been court martialled & removed to Wandsworth Prison, & I am afraid what the effect of that month will be on him because when I saw him in the hospital that seemed the part he dreaded so much. Can you ascertain if what Mr Hyams said is correct?

Mrs Cahill concludes:

Now I would like to speak of A.E. Allen in Exeter Prison, whom I spoke to you about in the lobby of the House of Commons, that when I visited him he seemed so gloomy thinking the stand he was taking was useless as no-one knew anything about it.

Since then I have had two letters from him which are much more cheerful in tone, but in the last he speaks very badly of his health. He says that sometimes he feels quite silly & his legs are so weak that they can hardly carry his body & that he has taken to feeling faint now and then. He adds that the MO says he is slightly anaemic. He will not be

¹ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/18.

² *ibid.*, D/Mar/4/17.

leaving this prison for another 2 months & I hear the food is very bad there. Do you think anything can be done in the matter [?] Yours fraternally, S. Cahill."

In a PS Mrs Cahill adds that Mr Jope had informed her on her visit that in Pentonville it had just been made a punishable offence to smile. Again Catherine Marshall has underlined names and key points in blue crayon for typing up, filing and action.¹

Jope of Dyce quarry and Harby, of the military road in Suffolk, we already know something about. John Ashton, of Dulwich, aged 21 in 1916, was a member of the NCF branch and the National Union of Clerks. He was turned down for the Home Office scheme by the Central Tribunal on the grounds that his conscientious objection was not genuine. After three courts martial and several suicide attempts he was discharged from Wandsworth in October 1917 to a mental asylum in Epsom.²

Albert Allen was a Lewisham member of Dulwich NCF, living in Sydenham. Aged 35 in 1917, a carpenter, trade unionist and ILP-er, he was also turned down for the Home Office scheme - because he was judged a political, that is, someone who would fight in a war of which he approved. First court-martialled in June 1916, he served three terms of hard labour and was released in April 1919.³

II

This and other letters shows an active branch providing intelligence for the record department, which was central to work with and on behalf of prisoners. It sought to maintain a complete and up-date history of each man, from his first court-martial appearance to his last-known prison or camp.

Graham elaborates: "Every known CO had a card, and stage by stage this card was marked up with the man's movements or with important episodes in his prison or camp career. Every entry was duplicated in case of accident to the first card index. These duplicate entries were also used for the geographic index, which showed at a glance all the removals day by day. A special court martial list was also kept from which could be seen how many first, second, third or further courts martial had taken place."⁴

The record department was hived off from the NCF, probably in May 1916, to no.11 Adam Street nearby, in order to try and prevent the files being seized by the authorities.⁵ Renamed the Conscientious Objectors' Information Bureau, or COIB, it was put under the control of the Joint Advisory Committee; the latter was formed of the NCF, the Quakers' own anti-conscription body, the Friends' Service Committee, set up in May 1915, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Graham pays tribute to its "able and zealous management" by Miss Gladys Rinder and Miss Morgan Jones.⁶

¹ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/53.

² Cyril Pearce, Register

³ Ann O'Brien, Biographies.

⁴ John Graham, p. 186.

⁵ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/28.

⁶ John Graham, p. 186.

In this as other things Catherine Marshall was never less than demanding. In August 1917 (the same month as Mrs Cahill's letter) she complains of the "slackness" displayed by many branch secretaries in sending in reports – "not only information about ill-treatment, but complete and *regular* notices of all removals." ¹

The monitoring of COs sought by the Fellowship and largely achieved by its branches was comprehensive and systematic. To begin with, they sought to place "watchers" at tribunal hearings. There's a nice account by a hostile correspondent in the *SLP*. "A Father," of Camberwell, wrote to complain about women inciting young men not to join the army in the country's hour of need, and mentions one in particular –

at one time a well known militant suffragist leader [who] is given idolatry worship [*sic*] by misguided young men. At the appeal tribunal she still uses her power by a smile or a wave of the hand as they repeat the parrot cry of 'Human life is sacred' and which they are not prepared to help save.

It was time, he wrote, the government stopped the harm these women were doing.²

This sounds like Catherine Marshall, though it may have been Violet Tillard, or even Sylvia Pankhurst. Most tribunal watchers, no doubt, were more guarded than this. The Fellowship, when it could, also organised court-martial "friends", which, military regulations (rather surprisingly) allowed.

Writing to the wife of Charles Phillips, of 23 Rainbow Street, Camberwell, in September 1917 Marshall tells her no Commanding Officer can legally refuse a man awaiting court martial full opportunity for seeing the person whom he has appointed to act as his court martial friend. Without this free access the whole court martial can be quashed. "Anyone can act as a Court Martial friend. Your husband should arrange for you to do this. You do not have to take part in proceedings." ³ She herself acted as court-martial friend to Clifford Allen, the conscripted chairman of the Fellowship. Charles Phillips was a cabinet-maker. Sentenced to two years' hard labour at Wimbledon, commuted to one year, he initially refused the Home Office scheme, but towards the end of his prison term he accepted it and was transferred to Princetown.⁴

Once men were sentenced branches began the work of visitation, conveying messages and reporting back to head office, as demonstrated by Sarah Cahill.

Picketing outside prisons was another important source of information. Imprisoned objectors seem to have been moved a good deal between jails; it's not clear why this was: perhaps just to foil the NCF. In fact it gave the Fellowship an opportunity to collect and pass on news, a task (one imagines) largely carried out by branch members.

It does not appear that all London prisons were picketed all the time. In February 1917 J.A. Harrop, at head office, was appealing for increased support for the work.⁵ In September that year it was discontinued for two months at Wandsworth. Pickets were

¹ *Tribunal* 70, 16 August 1917.

² *SLP*, 12 March 1916.

³ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/24.

⁴ Cyril Pearce, Register.

⁵ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/16.

paid: the rate for Wormwood Scrubs fixed that month was 1/- an hour, with two pickets on duty each day for five hours each, to be supplemented at certain times by volunteers, if possible.¹

Harrop speaks of a special fund having been set up to pay for the work. But pickets seem to have paid by the local branch. When Violet Curtis, of Clapham Common, the wife of an imprisoned absolutist, wrote to Catherine Marshall in August 1917, it was to complain that the Kennington branch secretary Nellie Best was trying to reduce payment for the four hours a day she stood outside Wandsworth. She asks whether she may deal directly with her instead of Mrs Best, who is “sometimes quite insulting in her remarks.”

Mrs Curtis was frank about needing the money.

I might add that my work is very fruitful in many ways. I am converting both soldiers & police, so much so, that the Governor of [the] Prison has reported me to the Police for to have me arrested & they are busily engaged hunting up DORA to catch me and get rid of me, they say I am a very dangerous woman to have near the Prison as I spread disaffection among the soldiers.

Well perhaps. In her notes for a soothing reply, Catherine Marshall scribbles: “No question of grudging - Work greatly valued but whole question under consideration of Cm. – Come & see me.”²

Nellie Best had herself been inside. Sylvia Pankhurst recalled her as “a frail, white-faced woman,” who had re-issued as a leaflet an appeal first published in the United States on behalf of starving and broken men discharged from the war. Her leaflet was headed: “A Warning to those about to be Conscripted! This is how your King and country are treating the lads who voluntarily enlisted!” She was jailed for six months under DORA. Pankhurst organised a procession from Tower Hill to Holloway to protest at the sentence.³

The reports of the Information Bureau provide further snapshots of pickets at work. This for example from Wormwood Scrubs in August 1916:

At 1.40 the Prison door opened once more, and out rushed 47 unshaven beings, clad in corduroys, who swarmed on to the two buses. We were not allowed into the courtyard but owing to some mysterious magic one of the buses pulled up a short way from the gates and did not get started again until some half dozen relatives and friends had overtaken it and squeezed themselves in among the weird looking primitive [*sic*] men.

The thing which struck one most about these fellows was their cheerfulness. The atmosphere reminded one of a Sunday school treat. When we asked them if there was anything they wanted they all replied ‘News’ ...⁴

¹ *ibid.*, D/Mar/4/24.

² *ibid.*, D/Mar/4/23.

³ Sylvia Pankhurst, pp. 291-2.

⁴ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/97.

The friends and relatives had been waiting since 8.00 am. Word of the transfer had presumably reached the Fellowship “by one of the mysterious means by which messages do leak out, even through prison walls!” to quote Catherine Marshall in another connection.¹

From another report the same month we read:

A cyclist followed the buses, but the military escort signed to the policemen to intercept him. [However] by watching at the railway stations the party was discovered at Paddington. The military escort was very hostile and annoyed at being traced and a military policeman was called and asked to remove the friends of the conscientious objectors. The party left by the 3.00 pm express. Information was obtained later that it left the train at Bath en route for Devizes.²

As well as these pickets members of the Dulwich branch may well also have taken part in a sort of offshoot of them, the NCF choirs. One was singing regularly outside Wormwood Scrubs in the autumn of 1916. *The Tribunal* printed an appreciation from Clifford Allen, who wrote

The singers can have little idea how eagerly we looked forward to the evening when we imagined them due... ‘England, Arise,’ ‘The Red Flag,’ ‘Auld Lang Syne,’ ‘Lead, Kindly Light,’ and many other songs and hymns will live in our memories all our lives and be associated with those nights when we stopped our hard labour for a little while (or our reading if it was Sunday) and took courage from the knowledge that we were not forgotten.³

The choirs seem to have been a branch initiative, for in March 1917 Nellie Best of Kennington announced via the paper that a group had been formed to sing outside Wandsworth prison every Sunday at 7.00 pm, and would be glad of any assistance.⁴

That June however *The Tribunal* carried a note from Mrs Best reporting that singing outside the two prisons would probably have to cease unless Peace people were prepared to make as great a sacrifice to attend as “war people do to try and prevent our singing. This would be a pity as the ‘COs’ have sent us large numbers of appreciative letters.” She invited all interested friends to a meeting at head office to discuss the matter.⁵

Finally, in this overview of branch activity and how it meshed with national intelligence-gathering and campaigning, it is important to mention the work of the Maintenance Committee. This provided financial support for dependents of imprisoned absolutists and was chaired by Ramsay MacDonald, though Ada Salter, assisted by Violet Tillard, did all the work.

At the end of 1917 Mrs Salter reported to the National Committee that the fund had disbursed a little over £3,000 up to the previous July (when from is not clear) and that

¹ *ibid.*, D/Mar/4/53.

² *ibid.*, D/Mar/4/97.

³ *Tribunal* 40, 4 January 1917.

⁴ *Tribunal* 51, 15 March 1917.

⁵ *Tribunal* 63, 21 June 1917.

expenditure was running at about £140 a week. The balance in hand was £1,141.13s. 8d.¹

John Graham says that below this central fund there were local and divisional funds. Each area (branch?) met its own needs as far as possible, contributing to or drawing from the divisional fund as circumstances required; with a similar exchange operating between division and centre.²

Graham Taylor says the wealthy Quaker sisters Marian and Edith Ellis donated “huge sums of money” to support the work.³ On the other hand the budget quoted above and the individual payments both seem quite modest; Catherine Marshall, as we saw, urged local fund-raising. An unsourced handwritten note in the Marshall archive gives an idea of the payouts.

1. Member of Walthamstow Branch having widowed mother of about sixty years of age dependent upon her, and sister working at home upon blouse making (average earnings 12/- per week) Owing to mother's age sister has to help in the house. Maintenance allowance: £1.p.w.
2. Young married woman (husband in Scrubs) with one son 12 years of age. Maintenance allowance: £1.10/- p.w.”⁴

Incarcerated in the Citadel Barracks, Dover, Frank Scrace, not identified, wrote in pencil on YMCA notepaper (“For God, for King and for Country”) to express his thanks. “It is difficult for me to describe my feelings on learning that my wife is being assisted by you. I feel extremely obliged to you.”⁵

¹ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/27.

² John Graham, p. 207.

³ Graham Taylor, p. 159.

⁴ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/50.

⁵ *ibid.*

18: “True fellowship and sympathy”

Just as important as their key part in national activity, of course, the NCF’s branches provided fellowship and support to their own conscientious objectors and their families, as Mrs Cahill showed. To focus in more closely on Dulwich branch we have, firstly, the memoirs of Clara Gilbert Cole, entitled *The Objectors to Conscription and War*, published in 1936.

She says there that she began the war nursing wounded soldiers near her home in Kemsing (Kent) until “I found we got them better to go out again.” She wrote a pamphlet *War Won’t Pay*, which was seized by police from soldiers stationed there.¹

Moving to London, she went into Trafalgar Square in July 1915 bearing a placard with the words, “Men and Women of England, Arbitration finally settles all wars. If at the end of a war why not at the beginning?” The public, she recalled, was hostile and bloodthirsty, unlike the numerous soldiers.

In 1916, aged 46, she went on a walking tour of Northamptonshire distributing peace literature with her friend Rosa Hobhouse. They were charged under DORA with prejudicing recruiting, fined, and on refusing to pay, spent three months in Northampton jail.² Clara Cole was in court again that year for another solo protest in Trafalgar Square.³

Sylvia Pankhurst gives other details. While at Kemsing Clara had formed a League against War and Conscription, appealing for people to come forward who were ready to join “a united protest in case Conscription is thrust upon us.” She collected 500 names, which she passed on to Lilla Brockway at the NCF. Like Pankhurst, Clara and her husband Herbert were Mancunians. Herbert had studied at the School of Art under Walter Crane and had heard Richard, Sylvia’s father, speak. That was the background to their friendship.⁴

By now the couple had moved to 85 Camberwell Grove. Herbert Cole was a successful illustrator who supplemented his income by teaching at Camberwell

¹ Clara Cole, pp. 8, 62.

² *ibid.*, pp. 8, 10.

³ *SLP*, 21 April 1916.

⁴ Sylvia Pankhurst, pp. 260, 330-1.

School of Art. Clara attached herself to the NCF branch in Dulwich, which she says was 200 strong, though it's not clear what that means. She felt duty bound "to stand by, comfort and back up the only man who was going to be the means of abolishing war – the CO... and saw man after man march away with the light in his eye which seldom paled." ¹

She mentions Victor Beacham (elsewhere spelt Beecham), who "suffered long and patiently as an Absolutist;" and "none of us at Dulwich will ever forget his beautiful white-haired, sweet-voiced mother, one of the dearest old ladies I ever met, visiting him when allowed, ever cheerful and helpful at all our meetings – a brave mother among many others who suffered and helped, not in the war but against it." ²

Dear old lady she may have been - she is also reported addressing one of the many anti-war rallies on Peckham Rye, alongside Eddy Jope.³ Victor and his mother lived at 9 Costa Street, Peckham. A painter and decorator and a member of the painters' union, he was judged not to be a genuine CO when interviewed by the Central Tribunal, so was not offered a transfer to the Home Office scheme. He remained in prison on hard labour, was court-martialled twice more, and was finally released in April 1919.⁴

In a letter written from Wandsworth at the end of the war Beecham salutes Clara Cole and the branch.

I feel sure I am expressing the feelings of many here who have been struck with admiration of your work and that small band of militant women workers around you ... My mother ... has never known such true fellowship and sympathy as that which she has received from all the many friends who have come forward to make her life a little cheerful through the sad times which she has had to endure.⁵

Clara Cole herself pays tribute to Sarah Cahill who "worked unceasingly in visiting prisoners, taking up any and every task possible." She explains:

Many things had to be done, and there were alas! few women to rely upon as, week by week, reports and letters from the men in prison were read out at the Branch. Some of the prisoners had neither relatives nor friends, the homes of others were in distant parts of the kingdom, and it was necessary for someone to visit them and attend to their wrongs and requests, which latter were often on behalf of others, not for themselves.

Mrs Cahill always attended most regularly and could be relied upon to volunteer for some task and to carry out the work most thoroughly. Mrs Cahill 'knew the ropes,' and mothered many sons besides her own. When I wanted a witness or help at a meeting I never remember calling upon her in vain.

¹ Clara Cole, p. 8.

² *ibid.*, pp. 44-5.

³ *SLP*, 25 March 1916.

⁴ Cyril Pearce, Register. A Victor Beacham is named as a major player in Ken Weller's account of anti-war activity in north London. He must be a double, even though he too was a painter, or at least became an official in the Painters' Union. Ken Weller, *Don't Be a Soldier! The Radical Anti-War Movement in North London 1914-1918*, pp 47-8.

⁵ Clara Cole, pp. 45-6.

She adds that Mrs Cahill's son William "put up a fine fight, and suffered greatly in health throughout his imprisonment."¹ He was a chief clerk, aged 27 in 1916, who could have been exempted had he been prepared to continue in post when his firm in Greenwich took on war work. Instead he chose prison, was court-martialled three times, refused the Home Office scheme on principle, and was invalided out in January 1918.²

Creech Jones always included the Cahills in the long list of greetings at the end of his prison letters. In February 1918 his cousin Violet Tidman reported back, "Cahill, no doubt, you have heard, has been sent home, broken in mind & body and after three weeks' careful nursing has not made a rational remark."³

Clara Cole says she visited jailed COs and sent them books. One of those she visited was "the robust Arthur Gillian", defender of the Labour Institute in Bermondsey, his home now 86 Park Road, West Dulwich, a street no longer in the A to Z. "To the authorities," she says, "this uncompromising Absolutist was a veritable thorn in their sides, for he was an inspiration to the Dulwich branch of the N.C.F, and as soon as it was possible to take married men he was 'grabbed.'

"His wife kept the home going by letting rooms, and his beautiful baby was born whilst he was prison. His wife and I took it for the father to see for the first time behind prison bars. The natural instinct of the father was to clasp the babe to his breast, but it was impossible."⁴

Gillian had become an official with the engineering union, the ASE, and as such was exempt from conscription. He lost the exemption when, pugnacious as ever, he had an altercation with some army drivers during a strike at Finsbury. Court-martialled at Wimbledon in August 1917, he was sentenced to two years' hard labour, but not before getting into another scrap - in support of two young Jews who were being knocked about by the military guard. Brockway gives other examples of his fighting spirit. Gillian refused the Home Office scheme, served his sentence in Wormwood Scrubs and Wandsworth, and was released in April 1919.⁵

Cole's memoir is disjointed, yet it conveys well the spirit and activity of the branch. Strangely, she does not mention that her son Philip was also an absolutist. Jailed for a year in August 1918 and refusing the Home Office scheme, he remained in the Scrubs until April 1919. Sylvia Pankhurst wrote that he had a passion for architecture, and from his cell would send his parents delicate pen drawings on the blue official notepaper.⁶

Branch activities were under the eye of the authorities, as is revealed in a cross-examination at Camberwell tribunal in May 1916. In the account by his brother Albert, Eric Dawes was asked by the clerk whether he belonged to any society - say the NCF. Yes, he replied. Which branch? - "The local one." The one which met at Hansler Hall

¹ *ibid.*, pp. 56-7.

² Ann O'Brien, *Biographies*.

³ Creech Jones archive, box 1 file 3.

⁴ Clara Cole, p. 52.

⁵ Fenner Brockway, *Bermondsey Story*, p. 68; Cyril Pearce, *Register*.

⁶ Sylvia Pankhurst, pp.330-1.

each Wednesday? -“Yes.” Was he there last Wednesday? - “I cannot say.” When he was there last, how many attended? - “I did not count.”

Why these questions, asked a tribunal member after Dawes had retired. “I can tell you,” said the clerk. “The Leaders of this Society were fined £100 at the Guildhall last week, and we have been asked to find out what we can about [it.]”¹ This must refer to the trial, mentioned earlier, at which eight members of the NCF executive were fined for issuing the *Repeal the Act* leaflet. Dawes, a bank clerk, of Beauval Road, East Dulwich, accepted work of national importance and was sent to a farm in Kent.²

II

Another perspective comes from the Dulwich branch itself. In July 1917 it produced a smart buff-covered brochure, four inches by seven-and-a-half, printed by the Pelican Press in Gough Square, off Fleet Street, and entitled *What are Conscientious Objectors?* It opens with outside tributes, from Lord Roberts to the Archbishop of Canterbury, not to objectors as such but to the force of conscience and the futility of coercion.

A section follows headed “What COs Say”: court-martial statements from Creech Jones, William Cahill, R.W. Albery, a Lambeth trade unionist and Labour man, Sidney R. Turner, “late Deptford Liberal Association,” and Edward Harby, of Lewisham ILP. The sentiments will be familiar by now but the statements deserve quoting from. How much the men were allowed say, of course, is uncertain.

Cahill:

To me the killing of a man is murder, and in my opinion all the conceit and vanity of society expressed in terms of Victoria Crosses, Military Crosses and medals and the like cannot remove the guilt of so grave a crime...

I, on my part, must continue my course, meeting violence and force with the only weapons that a Pacifist can handle – passive resistance and the unconquerable power of reason: the proudest possession of man and that which alone can rescue him from falling to the level of the brute beast.

Albery:

I do not believe that militarism can overthrow militarism. Militarism can only be overthrown by the growth of international thought among the peoples and the abolition of trade competition among nations caused by capitalist interests, which predominate in all nations...

Therefore I refuse to take part in slaughter which is reasonless and futile, and which will only lead to further international complications in the future. The peoples of the ‘enemy’ countries are *not* my enemies; the rulers of this and other countries *are*, because in no instance are

¹ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/5.

² Cyril Pearce, Register.

they representative of the people, but only of the capitalist, landlord and propertied class...

Turner:

I believe all men are brothers, and I refuse absolutely to take part in the murder of my fellow-men. I deny the right of the State to compel me to undertake any service to which I have a conscientious objection...

I submit to you that it is the leprosy of militarism that is to-day rapidly turning Europe into one vast graveyard of peoples... I am prepared to follow in the footsteps of those early Christians who appeared before the Pagan tribunals of Rome in a similar cause.

Harby:

I am opposed to all wars because I believe that they are opposed to the interests, not only of my class – the working class – but of the whole of humanity.

There's part of an account of the court martial of K.C.Otley, an ILP man, also from Lewisham. The outcome reads: "On May 4, 1916, Otley was sentenced before the men on parade to two years' detention. The commanding officer gave a speech in which he stated 'that they might have to shoot people in England if many men took up that position.' " It was about this time that batches of objectors were being shipped to France for just that purpose.

The booklet goes on to give some interesting figures. To date 75 objectors from the Dulwich district had been arrested. Of the 63 men offered work under the Home Office scheme 28 had accepted; 35 had refused to accept what they held to be a compromise with militarism and were serving repeat jail sentences. Of the 75 arrested five had joined the army under various circumstances, two were released as medically unfit and three were still awaiting court martial. The figures don't quite add up; perhaps the missing two joined the Non-Combatant Corps.

Then there's an analysis of the objectors by political and religious affiliation. Of the 75 men arrested, we read, 27 were members of the ILP, and 17 were "unattached socialists," a category not explained, but which included the British Socialist Party. Twenty-seven were trade unionists; among them are Victor Beecham, Painters' Trade Union and Eddy Joep, National Union of Clerks. Curiously, Arthur Gillian's name is missing.

Many, says the brochure more vaguely, were members of the various churches, from the Church of England to the Calvinist Church. There follows a list of the absolutists still in prison, from which we can pick out a little more detail. Three brothers, Archibald, Cyril, and Herbert Miles, were members of Perry Hill Baptist Church, in Lewisham. In fact there was Walter as well, all scions of a family upholstery business.¹ Two other Lewisham men belonged to the Fellowship of Reconciliation; a third was a Quaker.

¹ Ann O'Brien, Biographies.

Though praised in *The Tribunal* as a model for other branches to follow,¹ the booklet does not in itself support Cyril Pearce's argument that Catherine Marshall was concerned to "manage" the image of COs in order to maintain a good working relationship with her contacts in government. He says she did this by playing down the diversity of opposition to military service - socialist opposition in particular - distancing the NCF from the "awkward squad" in the camps and elsewhere, and presenting COs as victims rather than rebels.²

None of this applies to Dulwich's account of itself. The branch is open about the socialist motivation of many objectors; it makes more of them than of the religious objectors. The court-martial statements are defiant. There is no mention of prison conditions, so victimhood is not an issue.

Pearce's whole thesis seems rather shaky. It is based essentially on one head office publication of December 1916 ("Some Typical Cases") which, in his words, gives a highly selective account of the experiences of 13 COs. Certainly Catherine Marshall set great store on her relations with General Childs and others, as we have seen. Pearce goes further however to argue that the NCF sought to influence a select group of opinion formers, including members of the government, rather than the population at large. This is a surprising claim - contradicted by the National Committee's preference for absolutism and by the hopes of Bertrand Russell and other members that this vanguard of absolutists would swing public opinion against the war.

¹ *Tribunal* 66, 12 July 1917.

² Cyril Pearce, "'Typical' Conscientious Objectors – a Better Class of Conscience?," pp 38-50.

19: Strength and impact

I

Our war narrative broke off in the autumn of 1916. After the military failure on the Somme this was perhaps the low point of the war. It was perhaps a turning point at which things might have gone in a different direction.

It's worth pausing to note the strength of the anti-war movement at this point. The NCF had over 160 branches nationwide, as we saw; *The Tribunal*, at its height, had a weekly circulation of 100,000.

For all its concern with civil liberties, the NCCL's first object, according to a leaflet of November 1916, was still the repeal of the Military Service Acts. It did not have branches but affiliates, members, associates and Local Joint Councils. The flyer lists 62 affiliated Trades and Labour Councils, 59 trade union branches, 78 ILP branches, 37 NCF branches, plus 48 miscellaneous affiliates.

The report of the annual meeting held in January 1917 claimed 545 affiliations, of which more than half were labour bodies, among them 98 Trades Councils and Labour parties, eight national trade unions, 150 trade union branches and 95 ILP branches. The remainder included 99 joint councils and various NCF branches.¹

The UDC had around 100 branches, its membership rising to a peak of 10,000 in 1917.² It was campaigning hard well before conscription. It did not formally oppose compulsion, it's true, but in late 1915 it came out in favour of a negotiated peace.³

That summer the Fellowship of Reconciliation took to the road too with a Peace Pilgrimage of open-air and other meetings in the east Midlands. Speakers kept entirely to the religious and Christian aspects of the issue, wrote Maude Royden; they refused to be dragged into political discussion and acknowledged the self-sacrifice of those who enlisted.⁴ The pilgrimage was small but the FoR built up over the war to

¹ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/94.

² David Boulton, p. 51; Brock Millman, p. 116. It also had affiliates, many of them labour.

³ Jo Vellacott, p. 22.

⁴ Jill Wallis, *Valiant for Peace*, p. 13; A. Maude Royden, "The Pilgrimage," unsourced FoR report in S.J. Haggis papers, Imperial War Museum.

8,000 members in 165 branches.¹ No doubt there was some overlap between these various organisations.

Martin Ceadel says the NCF's claim of 15,000 members in summer 1916 was "grossly exaggerated," though he provides no evidence for this statement. Keith Robbins, whom he cites, talks of 15,000 supporters.² It's evident from the case of Dulwich that branches included relatives as well as COs themselves. If there were 165 ranches, as the archives indicate, 15,000 members or supporters seems entirely reasonable. It's not clear though where that figure comes from.

Millman notes that the number of ILP branches fell in the middle war years from 600 to 500, its membership sinking to 35,000.³ The annual conference, held in Newcastle at Easter 1916, adopted Dr Salter's resolution, foiled the year before, calling on socialists of all countries to refuse to support any kind of war, even of a defensive nature.⁴ Yet the party was no longer in the front rank of opposition. Divided at the top, as we saw, and isolated within the overall labour movement, its anti-war stance was further weakened by the readiness of party members to join up, at least if Bradford was typical.⁵ It had, in Boulton's phrase, settled for a support role behind the NCF.⁶

The Quakers seem to have done the same. Locally the Preparative Meeting in Peckham wrote to urge Albion Richardson to oppose the Military Service Act. In February 1916 it held a conference to advise intending objectors. It responded sympathetically to the south-east London "Stop the War" Committee and sent two delegates to a conference in May. But, significantly, it held no further public meetings of its own, as it had done in 1915. However it continued collecting money for the Friends' War Victims' Relief Committee and the Friends' Ambulance Unit.⁷

Southwark Monthly Meeting – the equivalent of the diocese in relation to Peckham's parish – likewise expressed sympathetic support for the Anti-Conscription Council and sent two delegates to a meeting at Hansler Hall in early 1916. When they reported back it was decided they should continue as delegates. However, the minutes report nothing more. From September 1916 they focus on collecting for a committee formed to look after the dependents of local objectors, its remit extended the following year to include non-Quakers.⁸

Other actors in the anti-war field included of course tireless Sylvia Pankhurst. From its base in Old Ford Road, Poplar, her East London Federation of Suffragettes – which became the Workers' Suffrage Federation in March 1916 – campaigned strongly in the local area, with frequent rallies in Victoria Park.⁹ But it also regularly led or contributed to demonstrations in central London, tramping all the way. It was while she

¹ David Boulton, p. 52.

² Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain* p. 33; Keith Robbins, *The Abolition of War*, p. 84.

³ Brock Millman, p. 116.

⁴ *SBR*, 28 April 1916.

⁵ In February 1916 the Bradford branch had 119 young men serving in the army or Royal Navy, while 118 were undergoing military training. Sixteen were dead, wounded or prisoners. Keith Laybourn, p. 64, citing the *Bradford Pioneer*.

⁶ David Boulton, p. 107.

⁷ Minutes of Peckham Preparative Meeting, Library of the Society of Friends.

⁸ Minutes of Southwark Monthly Meeting, *ibid*.

⁹ Patricia W. Romero, *E. Sylvia Pankhurst: Portrait of a Radical*, pp. 113-4.

was on the plinth at a major anti-conscription meeting held in Trafalgar Square in September 1915 that newsboys came running into the crowd with placards announcing the death of Keir Hardie, her former lover.¹

Sylvia Pankhurst also spoke in Finsbury Park, the favoured pitch of the North London Herald League, which Ken Weller says held anti-war meetings “all over north London.” On this occasion, in January 1916, a hostile crowd surged forward and pushed over the platform. Sylvia Pankhurst insisted on speaking from the ground, protected by a ring of supporters holding hands.²

In 1916 the Women’s International League – the body which grew out of the Hague Congress – held a three-day conference in London on “The Terms of a European Settlement.”³

The same crowded year saw the launch of the Peace Negotiations Committee, the body behind the Peace Memorial that Catherine Marshall chivvied her branches about. It seems to have been an initiative of the UDC, grafted on to the body of the defunct Peace Society, which had died after failing to condemn the outbreak of war. Certainly the idea was C.R. Buxton’s; he became treasurer, while Helena Swanwick, another UDC stalwart, became chair.⁴

The memorial said simply: “The undersigned urge His Majesty’s Government to seek the earliest opportunity of promoting negotiations with the object of securing a lasting peace.”⁵ An NCF circular of September 1916 details extensive joint campaigning by the Committee and the NCCL: 31 meetings had been arranged for September-October; a further 14 had no date fixed. In London, the first group included Stratford, Willesden, Richmond, Poplar, Ealing, Highbury and Hammersmith.⁶

In Glasgow Helen Crawford, a Minister’s wife turned suffragette and ILP activist, who wanted, “a more militant, socialist opposition to militarism,” formed the Women’s Peace Crusade. It only came into its own in 1917 but Anne Wiltsher credits Sarah Cahill, of Dulwich’s NCF branch, with having energised the women of Glasgow by her letter of May 1916 in *Labour Leader*. “Are the Socialist women of Britain less mindful of their men than the women of Germany?” it asked.

It is now twenty-two months since war started and as far as my knowledge goes there has not been one public demonstration against the wholesale slaughter of our menfolk. This has not been the case with the German women; they have had several... Surely we women must make a strong effort to stay this terrible slaughter that grows in numbers every day. Is it possible that Socialist women can allow such frightful suffering for our men?⁷

¹ Sylvia Pankhurst, p. 230.

² Ken Weller, pp. 39, 46; Brock Millman, p. 85.

³ Jill Liddington, pp. 105, 118.

⁴ H.M. Swanwick, *Builders of Peace*, p. 78; Martin Ceadel, p. 32.

⁵ H.M. Swanwick, *loc.cit.*

⁶ NCF: duplicated papers 1914-1919, file 1, Library of the Society of Friends.

⁷ Jill Liddington, p. 115; Anne Wiltsher, *Most Dangerous Women: Feminist Peace Campaigners of the Great War*, p. 148. *Labour Leader*, 18 May 1916.

Within three weeks Helen Crawford was writing in to say she had been approached by several women to see if they could get up a demonstration. She announced a meeting of women's societies to discuss the possibility. This was the beginning of the peace crusade. The same issue of the paper reported that the peace memorial had secured over one million signatures.¹

II

Thus the volume of public activity was very great. We have seen some of that locally: the mass leafleting in Bermondsey, the repeated rallies on Peckham Rye. But what was the impact? There are some indicators from other parts of the country. The first is the response to Bertrand Russell's speaking tour of industrial South Wales in July 1916.

The tour, under the flag of the NCF and the Council against Conscription, lasted three weeks. It consisted of small private meetings with members of the sponsoring organisations, public indoor meetings, and outdoor meetings, often held on village commons. The last two were sometimes enormous and almost always Russell's speeches drew enthusiastic endorsement of his call for immediate peace negotiations. It's good to imagine the great mathematician pitching his "precise, clipped, aristocratic voice," which Leonard Woolf thought derived from his 18th century Whig ancestors, to unfamiliar audiences of miners and steel-workers.²

Jo Vellacott gives of a good account of the tour, using Russell's letters, but for once slips up when she says that the campaign gives a rare insight into the state of feeling among a section of the *inarticulate* public. She evidently has a blank about the Welsh culture of chapel, oratory and self-improvement.³

There were plans for a further speaking tour, paid for by the NCF, which was welcome to Russell who had lost his regular income since being stripped of his lectureship at Cambridge. He had also been refused a passport to take up a post at Harvard. In the event he was banned from "prohibited areas" - not under DORA but under a provision of the Aliens Restriction Act 1914 designed to deal with suspected enemy agents. His lectures were delivered in full only in Manchester and Birmingham. In Glasgow Robert Smillie, of the Miners' Federation, delivered it for him before an audience of a thousand, not revealing until the end that it was not his paper but Russell's.⁴

The Rossendale by-election of early 1917 in Lancashire provides a glimpse of similarly sympathetic opinion. The main parties maintained an electoral truce during the war but here there was a Peace by Negotiation candidate. The ubiquitous Charles Ammon was present, both witness and active participant. "The Valley is awake," he reported to Catherine Marshall, "and the great thing to note is that the fight from first to last has been on the *Peace* issue." He went on:

¹ *Labour Leader*, 8 June 1916.

² Leonard Woolf, *Beginning Again: an Autobiography of the Years 1911*, p. 213.

³ Jo Vellacott, pp. 86-91.

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 91-99; Brock Millman, p. 82.

Like the other speakers I have tramped miles addressing dinner hour meetings every day and indoor meetings every night. Last night we ran five indoor meetings at two of which there must have been 1,000 at each meeting; the smaller meetings were crowded which meant in all about 3,000 people listening to the message. At one of the dinner hour meetings in one of the big works addressed by a Rev. Swan [?] for the opposition, [he] remarked 'a vote for Taylor is a pro-German vote;' he was not allowed by the audience to continue.¹

The Peace candidate, Albert Taylor, was a local trade unionist (secretary of the Rossendale Slipper Makers' Union) and a member of the BSP. He had declined conditional exemption and was arrested at the outset of the election and handed over to the military, and so could not campaign. That helped him almost certainly to 23 per cent of the vote.²

Interventions by peace through negotiation candidates at by-elections before and after this were less impressive. At North Ayrshire in October 1916 the Rev. Humphrey Chalmers obtained 15.4 per cent of the vote. At Stockton on Tees in March 1917 the Quaker Edward Backhouse obtained 7.2 per cent.³

Unlike in Rossendale, anti-war campaigners more often encountered hostile opposition, even the FoR's quietistic Peace Pilgrimage of 1915. In Hinckley, where a battalion of local men had been wiped out in the Dardanelles, the 15 pilgrims were attacked by a crowd of two to three thousand. Their caravan was looted and set on fire; they (mercifully) were marched to the police-station.⁴

UDC meetings that year were regularly broken up. The disruption climaxed in in November 1915 when uniformed Anzac and Canadian soldiers and medical students, using forged tickets and throwing stink bombs, stormed the platform of the Memorial Hall in Farringdon Street and took over. Here, as at Hinckley and Finsbury Park, patriots were alerted in the press to come and "defend the good name of their country."⁵

The most spectacular example of such an encounter in 1916 was the battle of Cory Hall, in Cardiff, in November of that year. Here 1,500 patriots broke through the barricades of an under-strength police force to invade a meeting convened under the aegis of the NCCL by James Winstone, a local ILP leader and miners' agent. Inside the hall were 900 supporters who had come to hear Winstone, Ramsay MacDonald and J.H. Thomas, the Labour MP and railwaymen's leader. While the speakers were hustled away by the police or (in the case of MacDonald) slipped out of the back door, the insurgents took over the hall, applauded speeches by local worthies and passed a resolution urging the government to pursue a relentless prosecution of the war.⁶

¹ Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/16.

² *ibid.*, D/Mar/4/20; *Tribunal* 52, 22 May 1917; Wikipedia.

³ Wikipedia.

⁴ Maude Royden, "The Pilgrimage;" Jill Wallis, p.14; Sybil Oldfield, *Women against the Iron Fist*, p. 55.

⁵ H.M. Swanwick, pp. 92-3.

⁶ Brock Millman, pp. 139-155.

Brock Millman tells a vivid story, untold I think elsewhere. He also provides a rich context from which to draw some important conclusions. In the first place the triumph of the patriots took place in South Wales, only six months after Russell's acclaim there; the Somme had intervened meanwhile.

Secondly, this was an alliance that brought together local coal-owners, shipping magnates and other leading citizens with large elements of the local labour movement, including the ILP and the miners. The tribune of the latter was Charles Stanton, "a fully engaged patriot." In a bitterly fought by-election in Merthyr after Hardie's death he had stood as an unofficial ILP candidate against James Winstone, the official candidate; and wrested the succession from him by a majority 4,000 on the basis that "Every vote for Winstone is a Vote for Germany."

Local papers did their part. Headlines trumpeted, "Britons Beware!!!" and warned of "Peace Plotters." Alongside Stanton and his faction were members of Havelock Wilson's Seamen's and Firemen's Union. Those in the merchant navy were at the sharp end of German torpedoes and fiercely patriotic. German U-boats had sunk 227 vessels in 1915. Then they restricted their attacks, to resume again in October 1916.¹

Alongside and closely entwined with them was the British Workers' National League. The League was started (it seems) by labour patriots rather than Viscount Milner, as Hochschild claims, but was steadily drawn into the ambit of this apostle of Empire, who would shortly join the war cabinet. The League combined chauvinist support for the war and conscription with demands for better wages and pensions, plus state control of key industries. Under Milner's guidance it absorbed the pre-war National Service League, taking over its assets and its connections with wealthy funders.²

By the end of 1916, says Millman, the seamen's union was difficult to separate from the Workers' League. Its members were prominent in increasingly violent patriotic disturbances, targeting among others meetings of the North London Herald League.³ "Colonial troops" were also often prominent, as we saw. Alerted (again) by the press, they helped break up a major demonstration by the NCF and others held in Trafalgar Square on Easter Sunday 1916.⁴ Sylvia Pankhurst recalled:

To speak from the north was impossible for the din the soldiers were making. I opened proceedings from the east, where the crowd applauded me... From the north the disturbers hurled at me roughly-screwed balls of paper, filled with red and yellow ochre, which came flying across the lions' backs...

The soldiers from the north were now forcing their way towards us, resisted by the crowd on the east. After a brief tussle the soldiers prevailed, and came surging forward to storm the plinth...

¹ Adam Hochschild, p. 155; Arthur Marwick, p. 177. Ships were not necessarily sunk with all hands, however, but early on at least only after the crew had been ordered into the boats. N.A.M. Roger, "Grieve not, but try again."

² Adam Hochschild, pp. 177-9; Brock Millman, pp. 112-16.

³ *ibid.*, p.118; Ken Weller, pp. 56-7.

⁴ Brock Millman, p. 85.

The law offered no protection, she wrote. Instead of the hundreds usually present at their meetings, a mere six policemen were to be seen.¹

By summer 1915, claims Millman, open meetings had become impossible in London.² This is an overstatement: there were regular rallies on Peckham Rye, as we saw. It's true though, as he says, that the Asquith government had stumbled into a sophisticated way of dealing with anti-war dissent.

In May 1916 the Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel, advised Philip Snowden that disturbances at recent meetings had made it impossible for the police to guarantee even his safety or that of his wife at a forthcoming meeting to mark the centenary of the London Peace Society. In the event the meeting was cancelled to avoid the risk of the hall being broken up.³ Indoor meeting space was often refused for this reason.

When MacDonald and Thomas protested about Cory Hall Samuel said the chief constable had attempted to prohibit the meeting under DORA. He (Samuel) had declined to suppress anti-war opinion, but it was also impossible for him to "guarantee in all cases and at all times, especially as the police forces are so depleted owing to the war, that every pacifist meeting shall remain undisturbed."⁴

The police were indeed overstretched. The chief constable of Cardiff could only muster 150 regular police officers, and didn't feel he could trust the specials. But this was also a mechanism, to quote Millman, "tailor-made for British scruples."⁵

So it was that, as the war progressed, anti-war campaigners had a hard time making their case. Not only did bodies like the British Workers' League and the Anti-German Union break up meetings: they held meetings of their own. Millman says the League grew to 150 branches, published the daily *British Citizen and Empire Worker* (circulation 35,000) and organised 100 mass meetings a week.⁶ This last figure seems highly improbable, even with funding from wealthy backers.

Certainly, in 1916 at least, only one meeting is reported in our part of south London, though there are several mentions of the Anti-German Union and British Empire Union. In April the Camberwell branch of the former held a meeting on Clapham Common, after the crowd had cleared the platform, occupied by a body of non-conscriptionists.⁷

The same month the British Empire Union ("to which is incorporated the Anti-German Union," which is however "in no manner to be... confused with the Anti-German League") advertised two "Grand Sacred and Patriotic Concerts" – with speeches - to be held on Good Friday in the Tower Cinema, Peckham. The union's objects are set out as:

¹ Sylvia Pankhurst, pp. 304-6.

² Brock Millman, p. 57.

³ *ibid.*, p. 87.

⁴ Brock Millman, p. 158.

⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 87, 155.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 116.

⁷ *CPT*, 12 April 1916. Two meetings in Peckham were also reported the previous autumn. See above, p. 41.

No German Influence. No German Labour. No German Goods that compete with British. A decisive victory. A conclusive peace. Justice for our Allies. Security for our Empire. The British Empire for British Subjects.¹

In July a letter from the organising secretary of the Camberwell branch (George Smailes, 23 Elsie Road, East Dulwich) drew attention to a mass meeting of the British Empire Union in Hyde Park the following Saturday. The next week he wrote again to inform readers the branch was unable to provide bus transport to this "Intern them All" rally owing to the new petrol regulations.²

The only reported meeting of the British Workers' National League was held on Peckham Rye in August 1916 under the chairmanship of the Labour MP John Hodge. Among its objects, we read, were the application of the war's "most emphatic lessons." These were: national ownership and control of vital industries under the joint management of administrative and manual workers; the establishment on a democratic basis of defences adequate to the empire's security by the recognition of every citizen's duty to defend the life of the State; the State's reciprocal duty to guarantee the right to work at a full living wage. The lessons, as quoted, say nothing more in terms of the war effort, and the report makes no mention of the numbers present.³

Also campaigning on the ground was the pro-war branch of the women's movement, led by Christabel Pankhurst. In July 1915 the WSPU staged a Women's War Pageant along the Embankment to Whitehall, said to be 50,000 strong, demanding women's "right to serve" by making munitions.⁴ This was an event concerted with Lloyd George, the minister in charge, in order to put pressure on male trade unionists to accept dilution.⁵

Sylvia Pankhurst staged a counter-demonstration the following week, her people marching from Old Ford Road to Westminster with the slogans "Down with Sweating!", "A Man's Wage for a Man's Job!", "Down with High Prices and Big Profits!" The procession, she recalled, "surprised me by its size and stirred my heart by its earnestness."⁶

In March 1916 the chair of the WSPU, Annie Kenny, spoke at Queen's Hall, Peckham. When she defended the Union's suspension of its suffrage campaign in favour of war work, she was interrupted by protests by what the paper called extremists and malcontents. "They were quite small in numbers but they contrived to make a good deal of noise at one point... until the stewards intervened and several ladies made hurried exits."⁷

¹ *CPT*, 15 April 1916.

² *ibid.*, 15 and 19 July 1916.

³ *ibid.*, 19 August 1916.

⁴ Jerry White, pp. 101-2. Brock Millman (p. 100) says the demonstration was accompanied by 90 bands; surely an exaggeration.

⁵ Adrian Gregory, p. 100.

⁶ Sylvia Pankhurst, pp. 199-201.

⁷ *CPT*, 1 March 1916.

Just as during the Uprising of 1911 the Union had sent suffragettes into Bermondsey to try and persuade the striking women to return to work, so in the later stages of the war the Women's Party, as it was now called, began an industrial campaign among the munitionettes to see off "Pacifist intrigues."¹

There's no measure of the impact of the anti-war movement in south London. But it's clear that in general it was having to compete with aggressively contending voices.

¹ Graham Taylor, p. 117; Brock Millman, p. 121.

20: What did they know?

I

The question hovering here is how civilian morale held up in the face of military failure and the never-ending lists of dead and wounded: one whole broadsheet column of south London casualties in the *SLP* for 15 September 1916, most of column on September 29, a column and a third on 6 October, almost two columns on 27 October, two columns on 3 November, one and a third columns on 10 November, one and two-thirds of a column on 17 November, “relatively light losses” of about a column on 1 December.

It’s difficult for us, in a softer age, to understand the resilience of people confronted with this slaughter and the constant threat to their loved ones; particularly as unbeknown to them, one member of the government had had enough. In November 1916 the Marquess of Lansdowne, a Conservative elder statesman, now Minister without Portfolio, wrote to Asquith: “We are slowly but surely killing off the best of the male population of these islands.” He meant primarily the officer class. “Generations will have to come and go before the country recovers from the loss.”¹

Lansdowne had been Foreign Secretary when Britain concluded the *entente* with France in 1904. He now presented a paper to Cabinet in which he argued that it might be impossible to win the war, that it would destroy civilisation and that therefore peace should be made on the basis of the pre-war status quo. Vellacott says Lansdowne was not without support within the government. Alan Taylor, whom she cites, says he got a brusque response from fellow Conservatives and the ever-optimistic military.² The Cabinet considered the memorandum, but decided to press on to victory.

The question of how ordinary people endured the slaughter turns in part on what they knew. I mean people at home. The motivation behind the endurance of the men in the trenches is a different question, about which there is an enormous literature.³

The war news, as we saw from the headlines, was largely mendacious. Initially the War Office sought to keep reporters from the war altogether and to ration the press to

¹ Adam Hochschild, p. 302.

² Jo Vellacott, p. 148; A.J.P. Taylor, *English History*, p. 65

³ For a recent summary, see Niall Ferguson, chapter 12.

communiqués from its own supposed “Eye-witness” at GHQ. Only in June 1915 were five war correspondents officially accredited, later followed by others. Chauffeured about the front, they were able to go where they wished but were always escorted by a press officer. Back at their quarters, they shared what they had seen, while keeping back any personal impressions.¹ They wrote their stories, submitted them to the military censor. Back in London their reports were sometimes super-censored by the Official Press Bureau.²

And they censored themselves, of course, as Philip Gibbs explained, “We identified ourselves absolutely with the Armies in the field.” He represented the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Chronicle*. The *Times* correspondents felt their job was to sustain the morale of the nation in mortal combat.³

In his memoir on the operation of Press Bureau Sir Edward Cook, its joint director, wrote that, subject only to military considerations, “the censorship was not used to keep the home public in the dark.”⁴ It’s an enormous “only.”

Later commentators have taken a different view of the war reporting. John Simpson, of the BBC, said the correspondents “wrote what they wanted to be true, and they do not seem to have exercised any serious measure of scepticism.”

Philip Knightley (of the *Sunday Times*) is more severe. “They were in a position to know more than most men about the nature of the war of attrition on the Western Front, yet they identified absolutely with the armies in the field; they protected the high command from criticism, they wrote jauntily about life in the trenches, kept an inspired silence about the slaughter, and allowed themselves to be absorbed by the propaganda machine.”⁵

Lord Rothermere, in his cups after a dinner, admitted as much to Charles Masterman, the first head of the government’s Department of Information, which promoted the Allied cause overseas. According to Masterman’s widow, he said,

We’re telling lies, we know we’re telling lies, we daren’t tell the public the truth, that we’re losing more officers than the Germans, and that it’s impossible to get through on the Western Front. You’ve seen the correspondents ... they don’t know the truth, they don’t speak the truth and we know they don’t.⁶

Lloyd George was well ware of this. In December 1917 he told C.P. Scott, of the *Manchester Guardian*:

If people really knew, the war would be stopped tomorrow. But of course they don’t know and can’t know. The correspondents don’t write and the censorship would not pass the truth... The thing is horrible beyond human nature to bear and I feel I can’t go on with the bloody business.

¹ John Simpson, *Unreliable Sources*, pp. 127-133.

Philip Knightley, *The First Casualty*, pp. 95-6.

² Edward Cook, p. 36.

³ Philip Knightly, p. 97.

⁴ Edward Cook, pp. 175-6.

⁵ John Simpson, p. 143; Philip Knightly, p. 81.

⁶ Lucy Masterman, p. 296.

He had just been briefed by Philip Gibbs.¹

The soldiers in the trenches held the newspaper-men in hearty contempt, especially the gushing, self-promoting W. Beach Thomas, of the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*. He wrote lyrically of the “first gay, impetuous and irresistible leap from the trenches” at the Somme. He was nowhere near the action in fact, but readers at home loved him.²

The failure of the press was compounded by a second betrayal, that of the literary establishment. At a conference convened in early September 1914 23 authors – from J.M. Barrie to H. G. Wells – offered their services to the British cause and dutifully churned out propaganda for domestic consumption, often after sanitized tours of the front. In her biography of Arnold Bennett, to take an example, Margaret Drabble compares the bleak comments made in his journal after such a trip in 1915 with his published articles: “patriotic, cheerful, false.”

She quotes: ‘Supreme grief is omnipresent [in France]: but it is calm, cheerful, smiling.’ “Amazing, if it were true,” she comments. “He is pledged to an image of the French as noble, stoic sufferers, of the Germans as brutal barbarians ... He is also pledged to describe the English soldier as gay and cheerful, saluting his officers with a salute ‘so proud, so eager it might have brought tears to the eyes.’ ”³

Of course people at home saw the weekly casualty lists, and if they didn’t experience bereavement and mutilation in their own family, they saw it all around them. “Everybody in those days wore mourning, and everywhere you went : black, black, black, everywhere.”⁴ “Barker of the Borough for Black Wear,” announced an advert in the *SLP*. Above two sketches of matronly blouses it showed a “charming widow’s toque in good quality grenadine closely folded,” price 18/11. “The full veil hangs very gracefully from the crown with strappings of grenadine and dull beads.”⁵

Creech Jones felt the anguish in his cell in Wandsworth prison. Writing home in April 1917 he said,

I am often haunted with the memory of dear Morris Rogers (oh! his gay, boyant chivalry and generous heart!) rotting away in the blood-soaked soil of France; I think of Aunt Sarah’s agony & heartbreak in losing a son like Joe, and of Mrs Mason wearing away in ceaseless anxiety over Tom, besides the distress & suffering that have come to others of our friends. Is not the world weary of this bloodshed & misery & weeping...?”⁶

Even so, people at home only knew so much, despite what Paul Fussell calls the “ridiculous proximity” of the front, just 70 miles away. “They knew the statistics of death... but not the foul horror of it; they saw the glory, but not the sordid filth of trench life,” to quote Marwick.⁷ With one exception mentioned later, little or nothing of this

¹ Philip Knightly, p. 109.

² John Simpson, pp. 110,144.

³ Margaret Drabble, *Arnold Bennett: a Biography*, pp. 217-8.

⁴ Mrs Brough-Robertson, quoted in Peter Hennessy, *Lloyd George’s Revolution*, BBC Radio 4, 3 December 2016.

⁵ *SLP*, 8 June 1917.

⁶ Letter of 28 April 1917, Creech Jones archive, box 1, file 3.

⁷ Paul Fussell, p.64; Arthur Marwick, p. 135.

appeared in print until the literary memoirs starting appearing ten years after 1918. Erich Remarque's equally influential novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* was not published until 1929. Above all, people at home were ignorant of the prodigal incompetence of the military command.

It's true that, with some anxiety, the government sanctioned a 75-minute documentary film on the battle of the Somme, which was released in August 1916 while the offensive was still at its height. More than 19 million people saw it in the first six weeks. It's a powerful and moving film but even with staged scenes and genuine footage of the wounded, it is inevitably removed from the reality of the fighting. As a result it strengthened civilian morale and support for the war, as the government hoped, rather than weaken it.¹

II

Letters home were censored at the front; even then they were passed for delivery, not publication.² Soldiers returning on leave seem to have been unwilling or unable to speak of their experience. Both Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon remark on this breakdown in communication. Graves, writing of 1916 after the Somme, recalled:

England looked strange to us returned soldiers. We could not understand the war-madness that ran wild everywhere, looking for a pseudo-military outlet. The civilians talked a foreign language; and it was newspaper language. I found serious conversation with my parents all but impossible.³

Sassoon says much the same. Of Captain Huxtable, an old buffer in his village in Sussex, he writes: "I gave him to understand it was a jolly fine life at the front, and, for the moment, I probably believed what I was saying. I wasn't going to wreck my leave with facing facts, and I'd succeeded in convincing myself that I really wanted to go back."⁴

Later, in April 1917, on the ambulance train after being hit in the shoulder at Arras, he says

Our minds were still out of breath and our inmost thoughts in disorderly retreat from bellowing darkness and men dying out in shell-holes under the desolation of returning daylight. We were the survivors; few amongst us would ever tell the truth to our friends and relations in England. We were carrying something in our heads which belonged to us alone, and to those we had left behind us in the battle."⁵

Sassoon is talking here of the courage and comradeship (and exhilaration) he had experienced as well as the horror. But the difficulty – and unwillingness too – of

¹ Adam Hochschild, pp. 226-8; Jerry White, p. 168.

² Edward Cook, pp. 33-5.

³ Robert Graves, p. 237. The original 1929 edition has slightly different wording.

⁴ Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930), p. 30.

⁵ *ibid.*, p.161.

communicating that horror must go some way to explaining the relative buoyancy of morale at home.

Adrian Gregory dismisses this alienation between frontline soldiers and the civilians at home as a “literary stereotype,” claiming “Indeed it is difficult to find a contemporary civilian account that doesn’t demonstrate a fairly high degree of knowledge about conditions at the front” – which is a very broad statement indeed. He draws a few examples from letters and diaries and cites a poem by a titled lady. But in the end he admits, “Soldiers could not fully express their experience and emotions about front-line service;” and “There was ultimately an existential gap that should not be denied.”¹

Against Gregory one could cite other witnesses. Firstly: Philip Gibbs, turned, in John Simpson’s words, into a “burdened, angry figure” by what he had seen as a war correspondent. In *Now It Can Be Told*, published in 1920 he reports men returning from leave “fuming and sullen” that people in England all seemed to be having a comfortable patriotic good time. This is an example of his rather feverish style.

People at home, it seemed, were not much interested in the life of the trenches; anyhow they could not understand. The soldier listened to excited tales of air raids. A bomb had fallen in the next street. The windows had been broken. Many people had been killed in a house somewhere in Hackney. It was frightful. The Germans were devils. They ought to be torn to pieces, every one of them...

An air raid? Lord God, did they know what a German barrage was like? Did they guess how men walked day after day through harassing fire to the trenches? Did they have any faint idea of life in a sector where men stood, slept, ate, worked, under the fire of eight-inch shells, five point-nines, trench mortars, rifle-grenades, machine-gun bullets, snipers, to say nothing of poison-gas, long-range fire on the billets in small farmsteads, and on every moonlight night air raids above wooden hutments so closely crowded into a small space that hardly a bomb could fall without killing a group of men.

‘Oh, but you have your dugouts!’ said a careless little lady.
The soldier smiled.
It was no use talking.²

A rare contemporary expression of this alienation came from the future economic historian R.H.Tawney, author of *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*. He declined a commission in 1914, rose to the rank of sergeant and was badly wounded at the Somme. While convalescing that autumn he published two essays. One, “The Attack,” gives a sober understated account of going over the top, crossing no-man’s land in a hail of machine-gun fire and being hit in the chest and stomach.

The second, “Some Reflections of a Soldier” starts gently: “It is very nice to be at home again.” Yet am I at home, he asks? “One sometimes doubts it. There are occasions when I feel like a visitor among strangers...” Then he turns on his hosts, accusing them of creating a veil of falsehood between themselves and the men at the front.

¹ Adrian Gregory, p. 133.

² Philip Gibbs, pp. 535-6; John Simpson, p. 147.

You have chosen to make to yourselves an image of war, not as it is, but of a kind which, being picturesque, flatters your appetite for novelty, for excitement, for easy admiration, without troubling you with masterful emotions. You have chosen, I say, to make an image, because you do not like, or cannot bear, the truth...

There has been invented a kind of conventional soldier, whose emotions and ideas are those you find it most easy to assimilate with your coffee and marmalade. And this 'Tommy' is a creature at once ridiculous and disgusting. He is represented as invariably 'cheerful,' as revelling in the 'excitement' of war, as finding 'sport' in killing other men, as 'hunting Germans out of dug-outs as a terrier hunts rats...'

Do you not see that we regard these men who have sat opposite us in the mud – 'square-headed bastards,' as we called them – as victims of the same catastrophe as ourselves, as our comrades in misery much more truly than you are...

For the rest we are depicted as merry assassins, rejoicing in the opportunity of a 'scrap' in which we know that more than half our friends will be maimed or killed, careless of our own lives, exulting in the duty of turning human beings into lumps of disfigured clay.... Of your soldiers' internal life... you realise, I think, nothing...¹

The essay is a remarkable assault on conventional civilian attitudes, even if it too plays down the physical reality of the fighting. It is also, of course, an indictment of the continuing war, though Tawney was never connected with the wider peace movement. It appeared in October 1916 in the Liberal weekly *The Nation*.

The journal published two appreciative responses, E.A. writing that the article "coincides so aptly with the opinions of many soldiers personally known to me." H.R.P. noted that "the actual physical horrors, devastation and misery of war have been almost entirely absent from the experience of the nation as a whole." As a result the majority of men and women "go in a kind of hopeless fatalism, scarcely raising their head from their task to try and see for themselves what is really happening." An editorial note added: "We have received a very large number of similar communications."²

"A game organised by lunatics" was the closest Tawney came in print to criticising the generals. In private he wrote to his wife that the "higher command is not up to the game." Staff officers, when they failed, causing the deaths of thousands, were not removed from command but given "more men to throw away in their next bungle." At the end of his life this distinguished academic and Labour Party sage said he could never think of British generals with anything but hatred and contempt.³

So I think the point holds. Men on leave could not tell the truth because the truth could not be conveyed. In quotations collected by Paul Fussell, the look of the front was, in the words of the artist Paul Nash, "utterly indescribable," the smell of decomposing

¹ *The Nation*, 21 October 1916. Reprinted in *The Attack and Other Essays*, pp. 21-7.

² *The Nation*, 28 October 1916.

³ Laurence Goldman, *The Life of R.H. Tawney*, pp. 94-5, 107.

corpses “beyond description,” the noise of the constant bombardment uncommunicable, even for Robert Graves.¹ The truth was *unspeakable*, except at times by the war poets; and people at home did not necessarily want to know.

¹ Paul Fussell, p. 170.

21: Sustained by local solidarity

Loyalty to the fighting men no doubt also played a part in civilian morale, as well as a generalised patriotism and a hatred of the Germans that, as indicated, was far stronger at home than in the trenches. Whether “a deeply held sense of moral purpose” still survived among the general population, as Marwick claims, is more doubtful.¹ Contemporary opinion, says Gregory, noted that those who had lost children in the war tended to be less willing to contemplate a compromise peace than those who still had children fighting.² That sounds psychologically plausible, and presumably applied to fathers and brothers too.

The Zeppelin attacks, it’s worth noting, had briefly resumed. In the first raid (late August 1916) the one airship out of 12 that reached London scattered bombs around Woolwich, killing nine people and injuring 40. In later raids that autumn four airships were brought down, the last, in the night of 1-2 October, being that of the ace commander Heinrich Mathy. His craft fell in slow-motion, “a gigantic pyramid of flames,” over Potters Bar, watched, says White, by hundreds of thousands of Londoners.

When at last it vanished from sight, wrote the *Times* journalist Michael MacDonagh, who was on Blackfriars Bridge, a shout went up the like of which he had never heard before – “a hoarse shout of mingled execration, triumph and joy; a swelling shout that appeared to be rising from all parts of the metropolis, ever increasing in force and intensity.” That was effectively the end of the Zeppelin war on London.³

People were also sustained, I suggest, by a view of the war which honoured individuals in terms of specific groupings, as we saw: families in khaki, streets in khaki, Walworth Wheelers, men from the South Metropolitan Gas Company (“2,311 on Active Service”),⁴ and so on. In other words, serving the colours became an engagement that drew on local community and family loyalties. I am relying here on

¹ Arthur Marwick, p. 49.

² Adrian Gregory, p. 245.

³ Jerry White, pp. 170-3.

⁴ *SLP*, 10 November 1916. In all 386 of the company’s men lost their lives. They are commemorated by a memorial window in Southwark Cathedral. John Beasley (p. 62) has a dramatic picture of women replacement workers flinging coal into the furnaces on the Old Kent Road. He says 3,000 women were employed there.

the *South London Press* which (to repeat myself) was steeped in the war; unlike the more detached *SB Recorder* and *CP Times*.

Such a perspective might be a matter of reporting by a paper committed to the war and anxious to firm up civilian morale. That it was more than this is suggested by the appearance in the autumn of 1916 of rolls of honour. These, which in south London at least, seem hitherto to have been mostly virtual (as we would say) now became physical honour boards. The first reported, on 6 October 1916, was in Trafalgar Street, Walworth. Inscribed THE ROLL OF HONOUR PRO PATRIA, “beautifully framed in oak,” and “tenderly adorned by fresh flowers, every day,” it celebrated nearly 300 men from 124 houses who had joined up but listed just the 17 who had “given their lives for their country” and the 28 who had been wounded. It was in the charge of Mrs Goodman (four sons serving, one missing) and Mrs Baker (two sons serving, one killed).

A murky photograph shows an array of flags on a house-front, plus a number of portraits. There are some small children beneath the display, called a war memorial as well as a roll of honour, and to the left a crowd of women.¹

This was evidently not the first. The report mentions the unveiling of a memorial in Ethelred Street, Kennington, and says it is a continuation of the already established scheme of street records in south London initiated in the parish of St. John, Larcom Street, Walworth, and continued in that of St. Peter’s, Walworth, and St. Mark’s, north Camberwell.

Immediately more rolls of honour are reported, sometimes called war shrines. There’s one in St. Oswald’s Place, Kennington (64 men from 44 houses, four dead), another in Camberwell Presbyterian Church, Brunswick Square, listing 76 men serving and four dead.²

Other boards follow: in Cobourg Road (110 men serving, five dead), Kempshead Road (59 serving, four dead), Pepler Road (105 serving, six dead) – these under the aegis of St. Mark’s, Camberwell - and opposite the Wesleyan Chapel in Barry Road, Dulwich (124 men serving, 14 dead). The latter is described as “beautifully inscribed on the back and opening folds of a lock-up case, space being about the pedestal for floral decorations.”³

In November the *SLP* reports shrines outside the vicarage of All Saints’, in Sumner Road, North Peckham, in Wyndham Road, Camberwell, and at the Peabody Estate, Herne Hill. More (though fewer) are reported in December, including Tilson Road, north Camberwell, and Orient Street, Southwark.⁴

Jerry White says honour boards started to appear in elementary schools and outside council buildings from early 1915. Helen McCartney says the street shrines began in August 1916 in Hackney but did not take off until the autumn when the Lord Mayor

¹ *SLP*, 6 and 13 October 1916.

² *ibid.*, 13 October 1916.

³ *ibid.*, 27 October 1916.

⁴ *ibid.*, 17 November 1916; 8 and 22 December 1916.

promoted them in a newspaper article. By the end of the October there were 250 across London.¹

The St. Marks, Kennington, honour board is described as “erected by the *Evening News*,” and was unveiled by the Bishop of Kingston. The one outside All Saints, Peckham, was opened by the Bishop of Woolwich.² So there was evidently some official and higher ecclesiastical support behind the swift appearance of so many shrines. But essentially it seems to have been a grassroots movement - one spontaneous tribute to servicemen from the immediate area sparking off others.

The memorials were clearly a matter of local pride and competition. They were a public expression of a neighbourly togetherness that, I suggest, helped people bear the inexorable casualty lists that came ever closer to home and endure a war that offered no prospect of victory.

One small mystery is that hardly any shrines are reported in Bermondsey and Rotherhithe. This must be because the main paper for the area, the *SB Recorder*, chose to ignore them, just as it failed to record honour boards in Southwark – Trafalgar Street, for example - which the *SLP* reported.

The only mention in the *SB Recorder* is contained in a reader’s letter suggesting “a wayside calvary” on vacant land at the junction of Tower Bridge Road and Grange Road in “sacred recognition and remembrance of the devotion of Bermondsey’s sons to their country.” The paper carried no response to this idea. The following January, though, the *SLP* reported the dedication of a shrine to the fallen at St. Mary’s, Rotherhithe.³

The shrines expressed a solidarity that was born of pride at men doing their duty by their country, of shared and potential mourning, but also I suggest of the fatalism identified by *The Nation*’s correspondent H.R.P. Not only was fatalism about one’s survival part of solidarity in the trenches; Fussell presents evidence of the belief there - often jocularly expressed - that the war would go on, in stalemate, into the 1920s and beyond. Robert Graves, for example, recalled, “We held two irreconcilable beliefs: that the war would never end and that we would win it.” After meeting Haig on a tour of the front Bernard Shaw wrote, “He made me feel that the war would last thirty years, and that he would carry it on irreproachably until he was superannuated.”⁴

“The horror of the years 1914 to 1918,” recalled Leonard Woolf, “was that nothing seemed to happen month after month and year after year, except the pitiless, useless slaughter in France.” Similarly: Vera Brittain served through most of the war as a VAD nurse, in France and Egypt as well as in Camberwell. She lost first her fiancé, then their best friend and finally her brother. Yet it seems never to have occurred to her at the time that anything could be done to end the conflict. Holding the hand of a wounded German she reflected, “The world was mad and we were all victims; that was the only way to look at it.”⁵

¹ Jerry White, p. 123. Helen McCartney, *God and the Great War*, BBC Radio 3, 9 November 2014.

² *SLP*, 20 October and 17 November 1916.

³ *SBR*, 1 December 1916; *SLP*, 26 January 1917.

⁴ Paul Fussell, pp. 71-4.

⁵ Leonard Woolf, p. 197; Vera Brittain, p. 343.

22: Was it a turning point?

A leader in the *SLP* in October 1916 headed “Warning to Peace Cranks” commended Asquith’s rejection of a “patched-up peace” – “a timely announcement when so many cranks are making themselves ridiculous and dangerous by compromising this country.” It supported Lloyd George’s commitment in an interview with *The Times* the month before that “The fight must be to a finish, to a knock-out blow.”¹

“So many cranks.” that most likely refers to the Peace Memorial and the other activities of the Peace Negotiations Committee, though no local meetings or other demonstrations were reported that autumn. Did the Fellowship know in the autumn of 1916 that this was the moment, after the catastrophe on the Somme, to apply particular pressure for a negotiated peace? It’s not clear. One gets no sense from *The Tribunal*, or from the Marshall archives or from Jo Vellacott, its best historian, that it did; though such awareness may have quickened the campaigning of the Negotiations Committee. The *Labour Leader* of 30 November carried a four-page Peace Negotiations Supplement, in which the committee secretary, Herbert Dunnico, urges one last effort to collect more signatures.

Like the Supplement, *The Tribunal* did not mention the offensive at all, in order probably to keep clear of DORA. The other anti-war groups hardly mentioned it in print either; at least only two instances are known to me. The first, referred to by Millman, is an article by Ramsay MacDonald in the publication *UDC* dated October 1916. He wrote that the Somme had established what had been known for some time: that the Germans could not win the war; while it remained to be seen whether the Allies could, and at what cost. The attempt to achieve absolute victory could, potentially, destroy victor and vanquished alike. “We will fight to the last man and the last shilling’ is not figurative language, though it is meant to be. It is literal.”²

The other exception is an unattributed pamphlet, headed “A Knock-Out Blow,” and published by the New Order Press. It is a reply to Lloyd George’s interview. After a well-informed explanation of how a well-entrenched army can resist the attack of a much larger force which, even if it breaks through, loses much more heavily than the defenders, it cites the Somme. There “in five months on a line about 25 miles long an average advance was made of about five miles. The British casualties alone were

¹ *SLP*, 13 October 1916.

² Brock Millman, p. 97.

about 500,000... No wonder the British War Office clamours for more men!" The reference to five months dates publication to the end of 1916.¹

So the cost of the offensive in human life was known. The NCF and the NCCL might have campaigned both on this and the fact of its failure, though it would probably have provoked still harsher repression. They did not, it seems, recognise that the war was at a possible turning-point. They of course knew nothing about Lord Lansdowne's intervention. The choice at that moment, in Alan Taylor's words, was between peace negotiations or a more effective conduct of the war based on a controlled economy.²

Bertrand Russell believed the desire for peace was almost universal among the "wage-earning classes" on both sides. Earlier in the year he had hoped that conscientious objectors, by refusing to compromise with militarism, would, in Vellacott's words, mobilize this desire and make it articulate.³

Russell was disappointed on this score. He felt a sense of failure that all but "a handful" of COs were accepting alternative service, as he wrote to Ottoline Morrell.⁴ Clifford Allen was openly critical of these men. Russell, though close to Allen in principle, had greater understanding of their position because he recognised that in practice absolute intransigence might break some of them, as indeed it was physically breaking Allen himself.⁵

Russell was also wrong about the universal desire for peace. Millman argues that by 1916 British society was starting to turn against itself, with ever increasing social-political polarization, and within that "a splintered working-class reaction to the war."⁶ That's overly schematic: the working-class response was fractured from the start.

In terms of new developments he cites in addition to the Workers' League the two uniformed Dockers Battalions formed on Merseyside to go, under joint military-union control, wherever in the country they were required. The first battalion had been established in 1915 in fact and, according to Boulton, met strong hostility from the great majority of dockworkers; a second battalion followed in 1917.⁷ Millman instances splits over conscription in the trades councils of both Liverpool and Birmingham, as well as in the London Busworkers' Union.⁸

At national level he names the leading pro-war figures as Havelock Wilson, of the Seamen and Firemen, and Ben Tillett and his lieutenants Sexton and Bevin, of the Dockers' Union. Certainly Tillett, once a syndicalist who had initially opposed the war, was now a tireless orator in its support, closely involved with the Workers' League. Ernest Bevin, on the other hand, was a more sceptical kind of patriot. One of the union's three national organisers, he opposed conscription and was critical of the Labour Party for joining the two coalition governments. His priority, according to his

¹ MS 1152/box1/file1, Senate House library. An attached unsourced cutting reports the press and three printers being fined £80, £80, £50 and £120 respectively under DORA.

² A.J.P. Taylor, *English History*, p. 65.

³ Jo Vellacott, pp. 149, 65.

⁴ Bertrand Russell, *Autobiography*, p. 302.

⁵ Jo Vellacott, pp. 104, 115.

⁶ Brock Millman, pp. 130,139.

⁷ David Boulton, pp. 105-6.

⁸ Brock Millman, pp. 105-9.

biographer, was to defend trade union interests on the basis of the majority view of his members, rather than risk dividing the movement by opposing the war. But neither did he champion it.¹

Here, as elsewhere, Millman tends to simplify and exaggerate. His account of the NCF and the NCCL is badly garbled.² He is I think plain wrong when he says the Peace Negotiations Committee was “prohibited outright” in October 1916.³ In her postwar account of the UDC Mrs Swanwick, who was the committee’s chair, makes no mention of a prohibition. The committee seems still to have been in existence in the early part of 1917: Catherine Marshall lists it among her various memberships.⁴

All that said - Millman is probably right that in late 1916 the division in the labour movement was hardening and the pro-war faction was becoming more assertive, as demonstrated by the battle of Cory Hall. Sylvia Pankhurst, on the other hand, claims in her memoir of 1932 that while “we” were still a minority, “in large measure it was true that enthusiasm was passing to the side of the Pacifists; “Peace talk was everywhere growing.”⁵ Surprisingly, she does not mention the Somme either.

The pro-war elements were urged on of course by a powerful pro-war national press. Some of these titles soared in readership. The *Daily Express*, for example, nearly doubled its circulation over the war. Others, like the *Daily Mail*, rose only to fall, while the *Telegraph* stagnated. *The Times* lost readers. By the end of 1918 the rabid *John Bull* was selling two million copies a week.⁶

Bertrand Russell expressed his view of a near-universal desire for a peace in a letter to Woodrow Wilson that was smuggled out of the country and delivered to the White House in December 1916. Seeing, despite this opinion, that the momentum was on the side of the war leaders, he placed his hopes on the American president and pleaded for his active mediation.⁷

In both Bermondsey and Rotherhithe that month there were town hall meetings to protest against rising food prices. Speaking on behalf of the ILP Alfred Salter said there would be a famine in the next six months unless the people were prepared to make their governments declare peace. (Applause) He was there to say that they called for peace by negotiations as the first means of solution – though it would bring no immediate relief. “The immediate enthusiasm for the war had long fizzled out, and it was only being stoked by people who had some particular reason for wanting it to go on.” (Hear, hear)⁸

The Germans on 12 December proposed a conference to discuss peace terms. The anonymous pamphlet just mentioned supports the idea, and of “a Peace by consent and not by coercion, a Peace of peoples, and not of plunderers.”

¹ Alan Bullock, *The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin*, vol. 1, pp. 48, 57.

² Brock Millman, pp. 60-1, 84.

³ *ibid.*, p. 84.

⁴ Catherine Marshall archive, D/Mar/4/19. Her briefing to the NCF national committee is undated but it appears in the archive between items dated April and May 1917.

⁵ Sylvia Pankhurst, pp. 418, 420.

⁶ Niall Ferguson, pp. 241-4.

⁷ Jo Vellacott, pp. 149-50.

⁸ *SLP*, 15 December 1916.

The German proposal arrived five days after the War Minister Lloyd George replaced Asquith as Prime Minister. There had been widespread discontent with Asquith. At issue was not peace, but the desire for a more dynamic prosecution of the war. White argues it was the food question that became the ultimate test of his leadership. Lloyd George moved to exclude Asquith - who would remain prime minister however - from a restructured war council, to be led by himself. After complicated manoeuvres between the two of them, the Tory leader Bonar Law, and their parties, Lloyd George took over at the head of a government of Conservatives; they had held only subordinate posts in the previous coalition. All the prominent Liberals followed Asquith and stayed out.¹

President Wilson intervened with a call for the belligerents to define their war aims. In early January Camberwell's ILP branch was reported to have urged the government and its allies to consider carefully the German offer and to enter into negotiations with the object of securing a just and lasting peace.²

It was too late. Lloyd George, without parliamentary discussion, had rejected the German diplomatic note, to the bullish delight of the *SLP*. Its leader quoted him as saying the Allied terms were well known: "complete restitution, full reparation, and effectual guarantees against repetition."³ The *CP Times* declared

All our sacrifices – and we all know how great they have been – all the sacrifices of our Allies - will have been in vain if Germany were now allowed terms of peace which would permit her to arise, Phoenix-like, upon her ashes ready to once more challenge us to combat. That is exactly the kind of peace which Germany is scheming to secure, and that is exactly the sort of peace we are determined not to let her have so long as the British Empire can produce a single man and a solitary shilling.⁴

How widespread were these sentiments? If they were widely shared it may be that, on balance, the failure on the Somme strengthened the resolve at home to keep fighting, rather than the opposite.

So the choice came down in favour of a fight to the finish and further hecatombs of dead. Vera Brittain asked afterwards: "Why couldn't it have ended rationally, as it might have ended, in 1916, instead of all that trumpet-blowing against a negotiated peace, and the ferocious talk of secure civilians about marching to Berlin?"⁵

It was for a combination of reasons, I suggest, that the anti-war movement, despite its efforts, did not prevail - admittedly a superhuman task. A generalised patriotism and anti-German feeling, a loyalty to soldiers both fighting and fallen, were reinforced at home by neighbourly solidarity and a sense of fatalism, and underpinned by a censored propagandistic press and combative pro-war elements in the labour movement. The true horror and futility of the fighting remained unknown.

¹ A.J.P. Taylor, *English History*, pp. 66-70; Arthur Marwick, pp. 183-6; Jerry White, p. 175.

² *CPT*, 3 January 1917.

³ *SLP*, 22 December 1916.

⁴ *CPT*, 30 December 1916.

⁵ Vera Brittain, p. 422.

Finally, while a majority of COs compromised on absolutism, the leadership of the anti-war movement failed fully to seize the moment. Failure on the Somme may even have strengthened popular resolve to fight on.

(To be continued)

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