

Opposition to the First World War in Wales

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Summary

This thesis sets the opposition to the First World War in Wales in the context of the country's tradition of activism in favour of peace and against a background of initial enthusiasm in favour of the War. It provides a critical assessment of the academic interpretation of Wales's attitudes towards War, assesses the development of opposition to the continuation of the War from Autumn 1914 onwards, and describes the range of anti-war activity and analyses the sources of political and religious opposition to the War.

It provides an analysis of the composition of opposition to the War on religious grounds in Wales, and considers the significance of the Christian pacifist organisation, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, together with a review of the extent of the opposition to the War within Nonconformist denominations. The significance of key individuals such as Principal Thomas Rees and key Welsh publications such as *Y Deyrnas* are highlighted, and particular consideration is given to the role of millenarian sects within the anti-war movement.

The politically based anti-war movement in Wales is examined primarily through an analysis of the activities of the Independent Labour Party and its impact in two of its local strongholds, in Briton Ferry and Merthyr Tydfil. It also considers the role of the National Council for Civil Liberties and the No-Conscription Fellowship and those involved in industrial agitation against conscription in south Wales, and the extent to which this featured as part of the anti-war movement.

This thesis provides an analysis of the numbers of conscientious objectors in Wales, their grounds for objection, their geographical distribution and their political and religious allegiances. It considers how the State dealt with the challenge of conscientious objection and how successful the anti-war movement was in challenging military conscription and support for the war in Wales.

DECLARATION

This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, nor is being submitted concurrently in candidature for any degree or other award

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Abbreviations

Fellowship of Reconciliation (FoR)

Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU)

Independent Labour Party (ILP)

International Bible Students Association (IBSA)

London School of Economics (LSE)

Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB)

National Archives (NA)

National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL)

National Library of Scotland (NLS)

National Library of Wales (NLW)

No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF)

Non-Combatant Corps (NCC)

South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF)

Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC)

Union of Democratic Control (UDC)

Unofficial Reform Committee (URC)

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Introduction

This thesis is the first comprehensive study of the breadth and depth of the opposition to the Great War in Wales, and much of it is based on original primary source material from archives and personal collections in Wales and other parts of Britain. Little of this documentation has been explored hitherto in previous studies of the impact of the Great War on Wales. In addition to this valuable source material, this study has made extensive use of contemporary newspapers and these include those that provided the most detailed coverage of the anti-war movement in Wales, the *Merthyr Pioneer*, *Y Dinesydd*, *Y Deyrnas*, as well as the mainstream newspapers of the period, including the *South Wales Daily Post*, the *South Wales Daily News*, *Llais Llafur* and the *Western Mail*.

The subject of opposition to the Great War in Britain is described and assessed, with greatly varying degrees of thoroughness and detail, in numerous published histories of the labour movement, histories of religion during the Great War, histories of the security services, histories of the peace movement and pacifism, and in the history of conscientious objectors. But the subject of opposition to the War in Wales has been rarely discussed in any depth in the histories that describe opposition to the War. Within the British context, attempts to quantify and assess the activities of anti-war organisations on a local level have been comparatively rare, and no study has appeared hitherto that provides a comprehensive description and analysis of the opposition to the war in Wales.

This thesis considers the literature published about opposition to the Great War in a British and a Welsh context, and is followed by an analysis of both the religious and political nature of the opposition to the War in Wales. It is then followed by a description of the extent of conscientious objection in Wales, and for the first time analyses the characteristics of the approximately nine hundred conscientious objectors from Wales.

The literature associated with opposition to the Great War in Britain is reviewed, and within that field, the literature that relates to attitudes to the Great War in Wales is examined in greater detail. Most general histories of the war in Wales have given scant attention to the prevalence of anti-war feeling and an important feature of this review of the Welsh literature is a study of those biographies and occasional local histories that have illuminated the extent of opposition to the war.

This study separates the opposition to the war into two fundamental categories of religious and political opposition to the war. Whilst there was a strong degree of fusion between these two elements, which expressed itself in a moral objection to war, these broad categories help to define the nature and extent of the anti-war movement. The opposition to the war on religious grounds was overwhelmingly Christian pacifist and opposed absolutely to all war. Political opposition was more conditional and tended to oppose the Great War in particular, rather than all wars on principle. Many left wing political leaders such as Ramsay MacDonald and Keir Hardie opposed the War and highlighted its prime cause as a diplomatic blunder. Others who opposed the war on socialist grounds such as Arthur Horner and Nun Nicholas did so on the basis that they rejected it as an imperialist war between two capitalist classes, and believed in transforming imperialist struggle into socialist revolution. The Independent Labour Party (ILP) was the most significant political organisation opposed to the war, and included a wide range of anti-war views, but ameliorated its policy with a stout defence of workers' conditions and safeguarding of the interests of soldiers' and soldiers' dependants.¹

The opposition to the war in Wales on religious grounds was initially muted and cowed by the shock of the onset of war, and the rapidity with which the treasured traditional nineteenth century ideals of pacifism were jettisoned. It

¹ R.E. Dowse, *Left in the Centre* (Longmans, 1966), 21-24

was mainly through the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FoR) and the monthly magazine *Y Deyrnas* that the pacifist movement found its unique Welsh voice and gave succour and support to those individuals within the Nonconformist denominations who disagreed with the war on the grounds of their Christian faith. The leadership of the anti-war pacifist movement, concentrated in North Wales and possessing formidable intellectual influence, proved to be effective in driving support for conscientious objectors and making the notion of 'peace by negotiation' more acceptable to members of Nonconformist denominations by the summer of 1917 at a time when the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, was calling for a 'knock-out blow' against Germany. This small group was led by the charismatic Principal of Bala-Bangor Theological College, Thomas Rees, who influenced a generation of young students, many of whom became conscientious objectors who opposed the war and refused to conform to the requirements of conscription and the Military Service Act. This community of opposition expressed itself most cogently in the pages of the unique monthly journal *Y Deyrnas*, published for three years from September 1916 onwards, which represented the most distinctive beacon of opposition to the war in Wales. In a comparatively small number of chapels, no more than about fifty ministers of religion upheld a pacifist stance and proselytised against the war, but their moral stance gave succour to conscientious objectors and those who were active in the anti-war movement.

This opposition to the First World War on religious grounds was conducted primarily by individuals within the Nonconformist denominations who held the fundamental belief that killing was an absolute sin. They felt themselves to be inheritors of Wales's pacifist tradition within Nonconformity that had commenced with the example of the Protestant martyrs such as John Penry and the persecution of the Quakers in the seventeenth century. The overwhelming motivation for opposition to the war amongst conscientious objectors in Wales was their religious pacifism and their total opposition to the taking of life. The majority of those conscientious objectors in Wales who professed an allegiance cited religious grounds, whilst only eleven per cent

gave a political allegiance. Whereas the literature of conscientious objection in the war has been dominated by accounts which have emphasized the contribution of Quakers and socialists associated with the ILP,² these only constitute approximately three per cent and eleven per cent respectively of those COs in Wales who professed an organisational allegiance.³

This thesis describes and assesses the role of the ILP in sustaining and developing anti-war activity throughout the war in Wales. In particular, the relationship between the ILP and other anti-war organisations such as the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL) and the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF) is considered, and how the membership and leadership of these organisations were intertwined. Political opposition to the war was limited and not uniform throughout Wales, but was strongest in those areas where the ILP had substantial memberships and was most influential. These areas were the Swansea and Amman Valleys, Briton Ferry, the Afan valley and Port Talbot areas, Aberdare and Merthyr, as well as the main towns of Cardiff and Swansea. The political opposition to the war was not limited to the ILP but was also expressed within the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF) by supporters of the grouping associated with the production of *The Miners Next Step*, which pursued workers' control and propagandised through 'Plebs League' classes.

The main studies of opposition to the Great War in Britain, such as those by Rae⁴ and Robbins,⁵ have concentrated on its efficacy in relation to the British State and institutional domestic and military policy, and have omitted to consider the manifestation of that opposition on a local level. The published studies of localised opposition to the war are comparatively few, and include

² John W. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience: A History 1916-1919* (Allen and Unwin, 1922); David Boulton, *Objection Overruled* (MacGibbon and Kee, 1967).

³ Cyril Pearce, *Pearce Register of Anti-War Activists in Wales* (<http://www.wcia.org.uk/wfp/pearceregister.html>, Wales for Peace, 2016).

⁴ John Rae, *Conscience and Politics: the British Government and the Conscientious Objector to Military Service 1916-1919* (Oxford University Press, 1970).

⁵ Keith Robbins, *The Abolition of War: the Peace Movement in Britain, 1914-1919* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1976).

Cyril Pearce's influential history of anti-war activity in Huddersfield,⁶ Robert Duncan's history of the anti-war movement in Dundee,⁷ which is mainly based on an analysis of local conscientious objectors and Ken Weller's description of the anti-war movement in North London.⁸ The only substantial local study in Wales is Philip Adams's *Not in Our Name*, which concentrates on the anti-war movement in Briton Ferry.⁹ These local studies emphasise the value of examining geographical, social and political differences in attitudes towards the war, and suggest that the fullest range of views and opinions towards the war can only be captured by a more detailed consideration of local conditions.

In attempting to measure the extent of opposition to the war in Wales, this study considers the correlation between anti-war activity and an influential ILP presence, and provides a local study of two of the areas where the ILP was strongest in south Wales, in Briton Ferry and Merthyr Tydfil. A distinctive aspect of the organisation of anti-war activity in south Wales was the extent to which the avowedly anti-war organisations such as the NCF combined with those trade unions and trades councils who were concerned by the extension of military conscription to industry. The National Council against Conscription, which later became the National Council for Civil Liberties, brought together these two elements. Its initial founders were the Joint Advisory Council of the NCF and the Friends' Service Committee which was formed in November 1915 to lobby Members of Parliament to oppose conscription, whilst also privately campaigning for a conscience exemption clause to be inserted in the Bill.¹⁰

This study also considers the role of the political opposition to the war in Wales beyond the role of the ILP as illustrated in the activities of the revived Unofficial Reform Committee (URC) whose influence increasingly permeated

⁶ Cyril Pearce, *Comrades and Conscience* (Francis Boutle Publishers, 2001).

⁷ Robert Duncan, *Objectors and Resisters* (Glasgow, Common Print, 2015).

⁸ Ken Weller, *Don't Be a Soldier: The Radical Anti-War Movement in North London 1914-1918* (Journeyman Press, 1985).

⁹ Philip Adams, *Not in Our Name: War Dissent in a Welsh Town* (Ludlow, Briton Ferry Books, 2015).

¹⁰ Thomas C. Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience* (Lafayette, University of Arkansas, 1981), 78-81.

the SWMF during the second half of the war. Before the war, the views of these 'advanced men' in the SWMF were encapsulated in *The Miners' Next Step*, which advocated industrial unionism and syndicalism. These men formed to create a loosely organised, essentially propagandist body until the summer of 1917.¹¹ The syndicalist/Marxist perspective, which was influential within the SWMF in particular, viewed the war as a capitalist war but argued that it was an opportunity to take advantage of the crisis to force revolutionary change and to press for greater workers' control of the mining industry in particular. The Russian Revolution, the attempt to create soviets in Britain, and the growing pressure for a peace settlement in the summer of 1917, all combined to excite a revolutionary spirit in the south Wales coalfield in particular.

The pervasive influence of these 'advanced men' within the SWMF prevented the introduction of conscription into the mining industry throughout Britain for eleven months, until November 1917. This study investigates the significance of the south Wales miners' ballot in November 1917 that led to the introduction of the 'comb-out' of the industry, with 28,000 votes cast against, and 98,000 votes cast in favour, and considers to what extent this vote was a proxy for the pro-war and anti-war factions within the SWMF.

The most obvious manifestation of the opposition to the First World War were those conscientious objectors who refused to enlist voluntarily in the military, and subsequently resisted conscription on grounds of conscience. They were a diverse group from a variety of social backgrounds and views, but most conscientious objectors either opposed the war on religious grounds, or as socialists, who did not believe they should fight their fellow workers, and in many instances, conscientious objectors professed a moral objection to war that linked their religious and political beliefs.

¹¹ David Egan, 'The Swansea Conference of the British Council of Soldiers' and Workers' Delegates, July, 1917: Reactions to the Russian Revolution of February, 1917, and the Anti-War Movement in South Wales', *Llafur*, Vol. 1.4 (1975), 36n.

Others did not accept the authority of the State to command them to take up arms and the approximately sixteen thousand men who comprised the total of objectors in Britain, of whom approximately nine hundred came from Wales, represented a crucial part of the anti-war movement. The NCF supported conscientious objectors through its branches, its visitors, its information bureau and its political pressure on politicians to bring the cause of COs to the fore. Whilst the Military Service Act of January 1916 allowed for freedom of conscience, the manner by which tribunals interpreted this provision caused confusion for many tribunal members and resentment from the anti-war movement and beyond. This study is the first attempt to quantify and identify the conscientious objectors in Wales, and to categorise them either as absolutists, who did not wish to compromise with the military authorities in their opposition to military service, or as 'alternativists', who accepted alternative service in civilian employment under the Brace Committee's 'Home Office Scheme', the Pelham Committee's scheme, or in the Non-Combatant Corps (NCC) and ambulance work. The study also considers those conscientious objectors who did not oppose the war as such but who were opposed to being subject to conscription by the Government. These groups included a number of the millenarian sects, including the Plymouth Brethren and Jehovah's Witnesses. The Christadelphians was the only religious group to receive exemption from combatant service by an order of the Army Council, and the majority of its number accepted work of national importance, including work in munition factories. Other individuals who did not register as conscientious objectors but opposed the war on religious grounds included the one hundred and fifty Welshmen who were primarily theological students, and who agreed to enlist in the Welsh company of the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), known as the 'God's Own' on condition that they were not expected to bear arms.¹²

¹² R.R. Williams, *Breuddwyd Cymro Mewn Dillad Bentyg* (Liverpool, Gwasg y Brython, 1964).

This study describes the processes by which Welsh conscientious objectors were dealt with, and how they responded to the authorities' provision of alternatives to consecutive periods of imprisonment, suffered by approximately nine per cent of conscientious objectors in Wales. It also provides an opportunity to compare the nature and extent of opposition to the war in Wales with the rest of Britain, and sets the opposition to the Great War in Wales within the broader British context.

Chapter One

Literature Review

Introduction

This study of opposition to the First World War in Wales attempts to meet the challenge set by Matthew Cragoe and Chris Williams to current Welsh historians, to interrogate the relationship between war and society and 'groups hitherto marginalised in the story of the Welsh past', including difficult issues such as the 'residual social hostility to those who were opposed to war'.¹ This study considers the extent to which opposition to the war existed, and to what extent the opposition to the war in Wales had a specific and distinctive character of its own in relation to other parts of Britain.

The subject of opposition to the First World War in Wales has rarely been discussed in any depth in the histories that describe opposition to the war. Within the British context, attempts to quantify and assess the activities of anti-war organisations on a local level have been comparatively rare, and no study has yet appeared that provides a comprehensive description and analysis of the opposition to the war throughout Wales. It is ironic that the most comprehensive recent attempt to gauge the extent of the opposition to the First World War is not a book as such, but rather a database of anti-war activists during the Great War in Britain, compiled by Cyril Pearce, a retired Senior Lecturer and Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Leeds, and author of *Comrades and Conscience* who has collated details of over seventeen thousand individuals, mostly conscientious objectors or activists within the NCF. Those on the database from Wales, numbering eight hundred

¹ Matthew Cragoe and Chris Williams (eds) *Wales and War; Society, Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2007), 11,12.

and eighty five men, have been made available on an online database. As part of the research for this study and for the Welsh element of the *Pearce Register*, valuable source material has been uncovered, including the E.K. Jones Papers in the National Library of Wales which contains the records of interviews with 456 conscientious objectors conducted by Jones in his role as an official visitor on behalf of the NCF, in Army camps in North Wales. This information for anti-war activists in Wales is accessible through the *Pearce Register 2016* interactive website but the database does not include all conscientious objectors from Wales, and includes officials of the NCF and members of the company of the RAMC raised in north Wales.²

The recent writing of Welsh history has been described as having dominated either by a labour or political/cultural nationalist tradition. As Johnes points out in relation to the growth of labour history, both traditions occasionally overlap and have contributed to a greater sense of Welsh identity,³ although that writing has often been written to 'safeguard, or justify a particular standpoint in the historian's present'.⁴ Johnes highlights the 'heroic undertone' of some labour history,⁵ and Davies warns of 'idolising the heroes of the long march of labour'⁶ but the subject of opposition to the war has not fitted comfortably into either a labour or nationalist narrative.

This thesis aims to broaden the consideration of active opposition to the war beyond the portrayal of the travails of the individual conscientious objector, by placing anti-war activists within those geographical and political communities that provided them with support and succour. This review of the literature initially considers the main studies that have dealt with opposition to the Great War in Britain and which have either concentrated on the Government's

² *Pearce Register 2016*.

³ Martin Johnes, 'For Class and Nation: Dominant Trends in the Historiography of Twentieth Century Wales', in *History Compass*, Vol. 8 No.11 (2010)1257-1274.

⁴ Russell Davies, *Hope and Heartbreak: A Social History of Wales and the Welsh, 1776-1871* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2005) 11.

⁵ Johnes, 'For Class and Nation', 1258.

⁶ Russell Davies, *People, Places and Passions: 'Pain and Pleasure': A Social History of Wales and the Welsh 1870-1945* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2015) 13.

response to anti-war activity or on the provisions made for conscientious objectors as part of the Military Service Act in 1916. It then considers the treatment of anti-war activity within this period within the context of religious, labour and local histories, before lastly reviewing attitudes towards this subject area within Welsh historiography.

i) The Historiography of Opposition to the Great War in Britain

The narrative of opposition to the First World War has focussed primarily on the perceived heroism of the conscientious objectors of the War. The tone was set by the NCF's own history of the resistance to the war from the perspective of conscientious objectors in its *The No-Conscription Fellowship: A Souvenir of its Work during the Years 1914-1919*.⁷ Whilst this provided a framework for the further study of the movement, the main historical body of literature commenced with the prominent member of the Society of Friends and pacifist, John W. Graham, whose *Conscription and Conscience: a History 1916-1919*, was published from a religious pacifist standpoint, and gave an unabashed partisan account of the fate of the objectors.⁸ He had been personally involved in defending conscientious objectors in the Manchester area, and used NCF documents and archives as the prime basis for his book, and he was the first to describe and analyse the treatment of the estimated 16,500 conscientious objectors. His book's dedication reflects this theme of martyrdom and sacrifice: 'with affectionate reverence to the young men who in the dark days of the war kept the faith and stood by their country and mankind with a courage that did not fail.'⁹

Graham's publication was followed 45 years later by David Boulton's *Objection Overruled*,¹⁰ which lionised conscientious objectors and emphasised the contribution of the socialists of the ILP and beyond. A well-

⁷ The No-Conscription Fellowship *The No-Conscription Fellowship: A Souvenir of its Work during the Years 1914-1919* (London, 1919).

⁸ Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*.

⁹ *ibid*, 7.

¹⁰ David Boulton, *Objection Overruled* (MacGibbon and Kee, 1967).

known current affairs journalist, his study has been described as marred by sensationalism and as an 'updated rendering of Graham, but with the addition of a socialist (rather than a religious) bias'.¹¹ In marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Great War, he used the personal testimonies of conscientious objectors, and attacked the Government and the Army's treatment of objectors.

The main body of work to have reflected the experiences of conscientious objectors in the period up until the 1970s were the numerous biographies and autobiographies of those war resisters and objectors who were prominent in the anti-war movement, such as Clifford Allen, James Maxton, Corder Catchpool, Herbert Morrison and Fenner Brockway.¹² The main recent works to have analysed the nature of the opposition to the Great War in Britain have been John Rae's *Conscience and Politics*,¹³ Keith Robbins's *The Abolition of War*,¹⁴ and Marvin Swartz's *The Union of Democratic Control in British politics during the First World War*.¹⁵

Published in 1970, John Rae's *Conscience and Politics* was the first major academic study of the conscientious objectors of the First World War, and is dispassionate, measured and perceptive in its understanding of the methods which the British Government deployed to treat conscientious objectors, and the failure of the architects of the 1916 Military Service Act to anticipate the extent of the problem of conscientious objection. He differentiates clearly between the beliefs of the various categories of conscientious objectors and their opposition on political, religious and intellectual grounds, but the strength of his contribution is in his analysis of the Government's shifting policy

¹¹ Thomas C. Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*, 312.

¹² Arthur Marwick, *Clifford Allen: Open Conspirator* (Edinburgh, 1964); John McNair, *James Maxton: The Beloved Rebel* (Allen and Unwin, 1955); T. Corder Catchpool, *On Two Fronts* (Allen and Unwin, 1918); Herbert Morrison, *Herbert Morrison: An Autobiography* (Odhams Press, 1960); Archibald Fenner Brockway, *Inside the Left: Thirty Years of Platform, Press and Parliament* (Hart-Davis, McGibbon, 1977).

¹³ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*.

¹⁴ Robbins, *The Abolition of War*.

¹⁵ Marvin Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics during the First World War* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971).

towards conscientious objection. In contrast to Graham's work, he shows greater understanding and sympathy with the Government's dilemma in dealing with conscientious objectors, and provides an excellent account of the development of official policy in its legal and political aspects. However, it may be argued that his sympathy for the Government's situation, and possibly the lack of available archival material, caused him to give insufficient credit to the campaigning successes of those opposed to the war.

There is no analysis in Rae of the varying regional pattern of manifestations of opposition to the War, and perhaps unsurprisingly, given the lack of archival material, there is no detailed analysis of the conscientious objectors beyond an aggregation of their number. Neither is there any consideration of the extent to which attitudes towards the war varied across the country, and there is no analysis of the motivation and influences of individual conscientious objectors beyond that of prominent individuals such as Clifford Allen, Fenner Brockway and Stephen Hobhouse, and the parliamentary lobbying of the NCF. Perhaps inevitably, the account concentrates on the drafting and passing of the Military Service Act, the resulting confused consequences for the treatment of objectors, the handling of the objectors and the British Government's role in dealing with both the absolutists and those who accepted alternatives to prison.¹⁶

Robbins gives a well constructed account of the opposition in Britain to the First World War, and deploys much primary source material for the first time, including papers of the NCF, the Quakers, the FoR and key individuals who played an important part in the Union of Democratic Control (UDC), such as E.D. Morel, Arthur Ponsonby and Gilbert Murray and within the NCF, such as Clifford Allen and Catherine Marshall. It is extremely metropolitan in focus, includes no regional or local newspapers in its list of sources, and depends for much of its argument on quotations from the papers of the key leaders of the

¹⁶ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*.

'Peace movement', as he calls it. There is only very slight discussion of the nature and significance of the 'Peace Movement' outside London, and the study is based on a close interpretation of the development of the UDC and the NCF in particular from 1915 onwards, and the Government's response to their campaigns. In describing the Peace Movement as composed of a number of 'wings' – political, religious and women's - Robbins attributes the weakness of the anti-war opposition to the lack of a 'common commander' and a fundamental lack of unity within the movement.¹⁷ He does not however address more local expressions of opposition to the War, such as the activity of ILP branches in its strongest areas across the country, and does not take into consideration the effect of the Russian Revolutions of 1917, and the effect of industrial and social discontent across areas of Britain, including south Wales, which fed the growth of anti-war activity.

Critical reaction to Robbins's work was mixed and Vellacott, for instance, was representative of those historians who accused him of cynicism towards his subject, and that his book left her with 'the uncomfortable feeling that Robbins feels so out of sympathy with his subject that he simply does not expect to understand the motives or ideas of the people he writes about, and so is led to skim through the detailed evidence.'¹⁸ She questioned whether Robbins had been able to research such a broad subject thoroughly on the basis of the primary sources available to him at the time of writing, and accused him of diving into detail to the extent that he misled his reader into believing it to be the result of thorough research.¹⁹ Morris's more generous review also highlights Robbins's concern with 'drawing-room' pacifism, and his ignorance of working-class anti-war activity. But he paid tribute to Robbins's ability to create a comprehensible narrative out of a 'complex pattern of conflicting events and personalities'.²⁰

¹⁷ Robbins, *The Abolition of War*, 96.

¹⁸ Jo Vellacott Newberry, Review of Keith Robbins's 'Abolition of War', *The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*, No.23-34, Autumn-Winter (1976), 59.

¹⁹ *ibid*, 55.

²⁰ A.J.A. Morris, Review of Robbins's *Abolition of War*, *Welsh History Review*, Vol 9 nos. 1-4 (1978-79), University of Wales Press, 112.

Swartz's history of the UDC focussed on the inter-relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy during the war, and the Government's attitudes towards the anti-war movement. It concentrated on the leadership of the UDC, its influence on the Government's war policy and charted the shift of UDC leaders from the Liberal to the Labour party. Its focus was metropolitan and London-centric, concentrating on the interplay between the Government and the UDC centrally. In common with Rae's and Robbins's approaches, there was little attempt to assess the nature of the UDC in other parts of Britain, and Wales, for instance, merits two mentions - one for a meeting in Merthyr Tydfil in April 1916 which the UDC decided not to attend because it was an unconditional stop-the-war meeting, and a further meeting of the Merthyr Peace Council in September 1916, addressed by E.D. Morel.²¹ Swartz limits himself to the struggles between campaigners and Government in Parliament and Whitehall and does not attempt to explore the nature of the varying response to the War across Britain.

Robbins, Swartz and Rae have tended to take a more academically astringent and dispassionate view of the anti-war movement, whilst those such as Vellacott, Boulton, Kennedy, and Pearce have championed the anti-war movement and concentrated on the plight of the conscientious objectors in particular. Caroline Moorehead is firmly in the anti-war camp, and in common with a number of other studies of conscientious objectors,²² the first chapters of her *Troublesome People* describe the organisations that supported anti-war activity and celebrates the bravery of individual pacifists in the First World War. She places the opposition to the war within the developing tradition of the peace movement from the Great War onwards to the nineteen eighties and the campaign against the installation of Cruise missiles at the Greenham Common air base, as an assertion of individual freedom against the power of

²¹ Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control*, 149, 151.

²² Dennis Hayes, *Conscription Conflict* (Sheppard Press, 1949); Peter Brock, *Twentieth-Century Pacifism* (New York, Syracuse University Press, 1970); Martin Caedel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945: the Defining of a Faith* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980).

the state. Her work reflects different hues of pacifism, ranging from the absolutism of certain religious sects to the conditional pacifism of those who opposed the Great War but did not oppose all war in principle.²³

Thomas Kennedy has attempted to redress what he considers to be the weaknesses of Rae's and Robbins' work in his history of the NCF, described as 'the largest and most effective anti-war-anti-conscription movement in modern British history'. In contrast with Graham and Boulton, his more judicious study of the NCF and his analysis of how the organisation operated is an important contribution to understanding the dynamic of the relationship between the varying strands of socialist, religious and moral opposition to the War, in which the NCF had a key role. Whilst Kennedy has been accused by Vellacott of downplaying the extent of persecution that conscientious objectors endured,²⁴ he concentrates his attention on the central organisation of the NCF, but does not attempt to consider the diverse regional impact of the NCF across Britain beyond London.

There has been a huge increase in books published on the subject of the First World War, to coincide with its hundredth anniversary, but there is a paucity of books and studies of those who opposed the First World War, both in a British and Welsh context. One of the few books to have attempted to convey a sense of the wider opposition to the War in Britain in the last twenty years is Adam Hochschild's biographical *To End All Wars: a Story of Protest and Patriotism in the First World War*.²⁵ He tells the personal stories of those who fought, and whilst there is no analysis of their strength, he conveys the breadth of opposition in the women's movement through descriptions of Sylvia Pankhurst's and Charlotte Despard's activities, and the concern about the response in Britain to the Russian Revolutions and the heightened pressure

²³ Caroline Moorehead, *Troublesome People: Enemies of War 1916-1986* (Hamish Hamilton, 1987).

²⁴ Jo Vellacott, review of Thomas C. Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*, in Russell: *The Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies*, Vol. 1 Issue 2, Winter (1981-82), 158-161.

²⁵ Adam Hochschild, *To End All Wars: a Story of Protest and Patriotism in the First World War* (Pan Books, 2012).

for a peace settlement in 1917.²⁶ An important component of an understanding of the dynamic of the anti-war movement has been Jo Vellacott's writings. Her *Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists in the First World War*, and re-published as *Conscientious Objectors: Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists in the First World War*,²⁷ sets Russell's activism and imprisonment in the context of the NCF and the anti-war movement. Her work on Catherine Marshall, organiser of the NCF, and prominent in the anti-war suffrage movement, shows how central Marshall was to the anti-war movement, and argues that the suffrage movement during the War was not limited to the jingoism of Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst.²⁸

Anti-war studies have tended to concentrate on the conscientious objectors and how they were treated by the State. The most original contribution to our understanding of conscientious objectors during the War is Lois Bibbings's study which deploys gender theory to examine the way conscientious objectors were viewed, portrayed and treated, and to consider how objectors were made to be 'outsiders' and demonised.²⁹ Bibbings's academic background in law provides a novel method of selecting and considering evidence which leads her to describe 'histories', rather than attempt a synthesised history of objectors. She draws different perspectives from the narratives of the same circumstances, and she selects six main categories to typify conscientious objectors ranging from the negative portrayal of them in the press of the time as deviants, cowards, shirkers, a national danger and as 'unmen' or 'unmanly', in which the objector was the very antithesis of the brave soldier, to the more positive image of them as brave and honourable men who followed the dictates of their beliefs. The conscientious objector was seen by the pro-war press and much of public opinion as:

²⁶ *ibid*, 264-265.

²⁷ Jo Vellacott, *Conscientious Objection: Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists in the First World War* (Nottingham, 2015).

²⁸ Jo Vellacott, *Pacifists, Patriots and the Vote: The Erosion of Democratic Suffragism in Britain During the First World War* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

²⁹ Lois B. Bibbings, *Telling Tales about Men: Conceptions of Conscientious Objectors to Military Service During the First World War* (Manchester University Press, 2009).

Shirking, lazy, spineless, un-Christian, unpatriotic and un-English/un-British. Moreover, sometimes he was perceived of as womanly and sexually undesirable to women or was suspected of sexual inversion.³⁰

Those who supported the objectors portrayed them as patriotic and as brave, intrepid, noble heroes, and this was reflected in objectors' belief that they were as patriotic as any soldier. Indeed this belief extended amongst a number of objectors that their experiences reflected a martyr's saintly religious experience, and an important element of Bibbings's thesis is that 'representation of the same events and characters can take very different forms'.³¹ In restricting herself to a study of conscientious objectors in England, Bibbings makes the intriguing and unsupported claim that Scottish and Welsh conscription each had their own distinct attitudes towards 'conscription' and quotes Brock, that 'Scottish pacifists, whether religious or political, did not merely imitate their anti-war colleagues in England: they developed a personality of their own'.³² In defence of her statement, Bibbings also cites Marwick's study of Scottish conscientious objectors,³³ but does not reference any Welsh studies of the subject.

Finally, a number of feminist studies have considered the significance of the Womens International League for Peace and Freedom in which Catherine Marshall and Sylvia Pankhurst played major parts,³⁴ whilst more regionally based studies of women's involvement in the anti-war movement have illuminated the differing local contexts for attitudes towards the war in Lancashire³⁵ and the North- West of England.³⁶

³⁰ *ibid*, 89.

³¹ Bibbings, 234.

³² Peter Brock, *Pacifism Since 1914: An Annotated Reading List* (University of Toronto Press, 2000), 13.

³³ William H. Marwick, Conscientious Objection in Scotland in the First World War, *Scottish Journal of Science*, 1.3 (1972), 157-164.

³⁴ Gertrude Bussey and Margaret Tims, *Pioneers for Peace: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom 1915-1965* (WILPF, 1965, reprinted in 1980); Alison Fell and Ingrid Sharp, *The Women's Movement in Wartime: international Perspectives, 1914-1919* (Basingstoke, 2007).

³⁵ Jill Liddington, *The Life and Times of a Respectable Radical 1864-1946* (London, 1964).

³⁶ Alison Ronan, *A Small Vital Flame: Anti-War Women in North West England, 1914-1918* (Scholars Press, 2014).

The overall British historiography of opposition to the war has split into two camps, those whose writing concentrates on telling the story of conscientious objectors and places them on a martyr's plinth, and those more sober histories that concentrate on the nature of the State's response to the antiwar movement and more specifically to the conscientious objectors. What is missing in both instances is an understanding of how the State's treatment of the anti-war movement was displayed on a regional and local level beyond the corridors of Whitehall and Westminster. It is the workings of central government that tends to dominate the narrative of those historians like Rae and Robbins who usefully chart the Government's policy of dealing with conscientious objectors in particular, and the response of the leaders of the NCF. But little research has been undertaken into how Government policy appeared at a local level, and how conscientious objection was one part of a wider anti-war movement across Britain and Ireland. This thesis suggests that there were important geographical and differences in attitudes towards the war, and nowhere more so than in Wales.

ii) Opposition to the Great War in Welsh historiography

Even though the Great War was one of the major transformational historical periods for Wales, it is remarkable that only recently have full-length treatments of the Great War and Wales been published, by Robin Barlow and Gwyn Jenkins.³⁷ In contrast, the Great War experiences of both Scotland and Ireland have been the subject of substantial military histories, most notably by Jeffery's military histories of Ireland and Spiers, Crang and Strickland's military history of Scotland.³⁸

³⁷ Robin Barlow, *Wales and World War One* (Llandysul, Gomer Press, 2014); Gwyn Jenkins, *Cymry'r Rhyfel Byd Cyntaf* (Talybont, Y Lolfa, 2014).

³⁸ Keith Jeffery, *Ireland and the Great War* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); Thomas Bartlett and Keith Jeffery (eds), *A Military History of Ireland* (Cambridge University Press, 1996); Catriona M.M. Macdonald and E.W. McFarland (eds), *Scotland and the Great War* (Edinburgh, John Donald, 2014);

Robin Barlow dedicates a chapter of his book to consideration of the opposition to the War in Wales, and this section represents one of the most comprehensive descriptions of this aspect of the War that has been written hitherto.³⁹ In his introduction he warns against overestimating the extent and depth of opposition, and uses Stanton's victory in the Merthyr by-election of 1915 to illustrate widespread support for the war in South Wales,⁴⁰ but also recognises that 'there is little agreement amongst historians about the strength and efficacy of the opposition to the War in Wales, except to say there was never a coherent and unified anti-war movement'.⁴¹

Barlow does not detect any significant opposition in Wales to the beginning of the War, and states that it was only from 1916 onwards that it gained 'momentum and wider support'. That opposition, he states, was 'localised, limited and largely *ad hoc*', and based largely on individual actions from committed activists within the 'Nonconformist denominations or the socialist political organizations'.⁴² He refers to the FoR, mainly active in north Wales, and briefly, to the NCF and its organisation of a speaking tour by Bertrand Russell in June and July, 1916.⁴³ In keeping with other Welsh studies of opposition to the War, he cites the activities of Principal Thomas Rees and his newspaper, *Y Deyrnas*, and the banning of the Aberystwyth student newspaper *Y Wawr*. The main narrative centres on the individual stories of the fate of eight prominent conscientious objectors, which Barlow features as examples of the differing nature of the opposition to war, ranging from the socialism of Emrys Hughes and Arthur Horner to the Christian pacifist views of George M. Ll. Davies and Thomas W. Jones (later Lord Maelor). Barlow correctly points out that the figure of a thousand conscientious objectors in

Edward Spiers, Jeremy Crang, Matthew Strickland (editors), *A Military History of Scotland* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

³⁹ Barlow, *Wales and World War One*.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, xv.

⁴¹ *ibid*, 132.

⁴² *ibid*, 118.

⁴³ *ibid*, 118-132.

Wales, used by John Davies in his *Hanes Cymru*, is not substantiated.⁴⁴ and contends that 'the torch of pacifism was kept alight in Wales by a number of prominent individuals',⁴⁵ rather than by a wider movement. He points out that each conscientious objector was driven by individual conscience, yet opposition to the war was not confined to pacifists, and included those who agreed with the use of force in certain circumstances.

Those nine objectors cited by the author includes Arthur Horner, who agreed with the use of force in certain circumstances, and indeed escaped to Ireland in 1917, where he joined the Irish Citizens' Army, and engaged in paramilitary training.⁴⁶ As in Horner's case, there were organisations that played an important part in creating a network of support for conscientious objectors, so although their actions may have brought them personal opprobrium, they did not act in a political or social vacuum. Socialism played an important part in the beliefs of Emrys Hughes and Morgan Jones, and both were amongst the highest office holders of the ILP in south Wales when they became conscientious objectors. Even Ithel Davies, although living in a remote area of Meirionnydd, was heavily influenced by ILP propaganda, and was a local organiser.⁴⁷ George M. Ll. Davies was not only one of the most well-known pacifists but also assistant secretary of the FoR, which had hundreds of its members imprisoned as conscientious objectors. Barlow does not consider the organisation of anti-war activity in Wales to be significant but whilst most conscientious objectors would have agreed with his contention that 'there was not a coherent and unified anti-war movement', yet this does not imply that there was no effective organisation or that on a number of occasions during the war, the opposition to the war, in the summer and autumn of 1917, reached a level that caused the Government of the day to worry about the dangers of social and political discontent in the south Wales mining valleys in particular.

⁴⁴ John Davies, *Hanes Cymru* (Allen Lane, 1990), 500.

⁴⁵ Barlow, *Wales and World War One*, 124.

⁴⁶ Nina Fishman, *Arthur Horner* (Lawrence and Wishart, 2010), 60.

⁴⁷ Ithel Davies, *Bwrlwm Byw* (Llandysul, Gwasg Gomer, 1984).

Barlow refers to two meetings that displayed the full force of the disagreement over the war in south Wales. First, he cites the peace meeting organised in Cardiff by the NCCL in November 1916 to oppose conscription, which was disrupted by an angry crowd of 'patriots', led by C.B. Stanton and Captain Tupper, as the local police stood by. He only briefly mentions the re-scheduled meeting was held in Merthyr the following month which was described as 'the most remarkable meeting of the war', attracting a supportive crowd of three thousand people.⁴⁸ The second meeting was that of the British Council of Soldiers' and Workers' Delegates, held in Swansea on July, 1917, to set up workers' soviets throughout south Wales. The meeting of approximately two hundred delegates was disrupted by a crowd of five hundred demonstrators, and in the absence of police, prominent activists such as Arthur Horner and S.O.Davies were physically assaulted.

The reports of these two meetings suggest a degree of anti-war activism from November 1916 onwards that is not explained by Barlow. The first meeting reflected a coalition of concern that brought together opposition to further conscription with support for peace by negotiation. Whilst not all those who opposed conscription, such as one of the speakers, the railwaymen's leader, J.H. Thomas, also opposed the war, all those who opposed the war opposed conscription, and the near unanimous vote in the Merthyr meeting for peace by negotiation reflected a coalition of those anti-war forces with those who felt threatened by the Government's growing intervention in British industry and the danger of industrial conscription.⁴⁹ This attitude amongst trade unions, trade councils and anti-war organisations is not wholly reflected in Barlow's description. The second meeting was the outcome of the Leeds conference of June, 1916, in which delegates had committed to creating regionally based 'soviets'. Although this attempt was a total failure, the delegates to Leeds and

⁴⁸ Barlow, *Wales and World War One*, 130.

⁴⁹ *Pioneer*, 16 December 1916.

Swansea from the trade unions also represented another and significant strand of opposition to the War.

Although Barlow's description of the opposition to the War refers briefly to the FoR and *Y Deyrnas*, he does not consider the role and influence of a number of other key organisations that supported anti-war activity in Wales, such as the ILP, the NCCL, the NCF or the UDC, and fails to consider the impact of the growth of the left, or the 'advanced men', within the SWMF. This growth is described by Egan as a wave of revolutionary optimism for political change caused by the Russian Revolution in February, 1917, in which the Government became concerned by the dangers implicit in the creation of soldiers' and workers' soviets in the summer of 1917.⁵⁰ This movement was strangled at birth by the disruption of its founding conference in Swansea on 29 July 1917, and the movement's inability to organise on either regional or British level. But it also marked a wider acceptance of the Russian Revolution, of peace by negotiation and distrust of capitalism in the south Wales coalfield, which was led by the left within the anti-war movement.⁵¹

Gwyn Jenkins's lavishly illustrated history of the War in Wales, *Cymry'r Rhyfel Byd Cyntaf*, while mainly focussed on the military war, uses the personal testimonies of individuals affected by the conflict. In thirty-three short chapters, he provides vignettes of ordinary soldiers mostly, but also includes a short chapter of seven pages that include a number of examples of well known conscientious objectors such as Ithel Davies, George M. Ll. Davies and Arthur Horner. He also includes the intriguing and hitherto unknown story of the persecution of Daniel Davies, a teacher in Aberystwyth County School, whom the school governors attempted unsuccessfully to dismiss because of his opposition to the war, and a large number of school pupils marched through Aberystwyth to protest against the attempt to victimise Davies.⁵²

⁵⁰ Egan, 'The Swansea Conference', 12-47.

⁵¹ *ibid*, 33.

⁵² Gwyn Jenkins, *Cymry'r Rhyfel Byd Cyntaf* (Talybont, Y Lolfa, 2014).

These most recent studies in Welsh history, by Jenkins and Barlow, provide an accessible, popular and episodic account of aspects of the War on both the home front and the trenches through the eyes of ordinary Welshmen and women. Their publication highlights the surprising dearth of writing in Welsh historiography on the subject of the Great War. David Williams's *History of Modern Wales* is considered to be the first synthesis of modern Welsh history based on archival research. This major work ranges from 1485 but stops abruptly in 1914. In Williams's epilogue he recognises that 'Life in Wales in the quarter of a century after 1914 was entirely dominated by the First World War and its consequences' but his discussion of the war comprises of no more than a couple of pages. Whilst he points to the 'vital importance of coal mining and steelmaking in warfare' and how it expanded during the war years, and created 'artificial prosperity' in rural Wales, there is no discussion of its impact on the social and political life of Wales.⁵³

Kenneth O. Morgan's pioneering work has created the framework for Welsh historiography in the second half of the twentieth century, captured in a series of classic textbooks ranging from 1963 to 2014. *Wales in British Politics 1868-1922* published in 1963, *Rebirth of a Nation 1880-1980* and *Revolution to Devolution*.⁵⁴ Morgan's technique is to consider Wales from the perspective of Westminster; 'holding Wales against the prism of the British state has given him his distinctive perspective'.⁵⁵

His description of the impact of the First World War on Wales has created the template for other historians' work and in his writing on this period in Welsh history, he has given slightly more attention to the anti-war minority within Wales over time. In *Wales in British Politics 1868-1922*, Morgan's brief

⁵³ David Williams, *The History of Modern Wales* (John Murray, 1950) 286.

⁵⁴ Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1963); Kenneth O. Morgan, *Re-birth of a Nation* (Cardiff and Oxford, University of Wales Press and Clarendon Press, 1981), Kenneth O. Morgan, *Wales in British Politics* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1963); Kenneth O. Morgan, *Revolution to Devolution; Reflections on Welsh Democracy* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2014).

⁵⁵ Neil Evans, 'Writing the Social History of Modern Wales: Approaches, Achievements and Problems', *Social History*, Vol.17.3 (1992), 481.

description of the War concentrated on the progress of Welsh national and liberal causes and described the War as the final blow to the 'radical idealism' of the Welsh national movement that had been sustained by Cymru Fydd and the Liberal Nonconformity political hegemony.

Morgan portrays the response to the war as one of whole-hearted support and in support of this, quotes military enlistment figures from Nicholson and Lloyd Williams's publication, *Wales: Its part in the War*,⁵⁶ which had been commissioned by the War Office. He uses their statistics for the total of troops recruited as a percentage of the total populations of each country within the British Isles to suggest that Wales was the most enthusiastic part of Britain in favour of the war. Their statistics stated that in Scotland, 13.02 per cent of men, as a percentage of the total population, were recruited to the armed forces, and in England the figure was 13.30 per cent, and in Wales 13.82 per cent. Morgan illustrates the passion for the pursuit of the war by the enthusiasm of miners' agents to take part in the recruiting campaigns, and following the early death of Keir Hardie, the defeat of the ILP in the Merthyr by-election in 1915. He points out that only four Welsh MPs objected to the introduction of conscription in January 1916, and the heightening enthusiasm in Wales for the war effort caused by Lloyd George's progress to being Prime Minister in December 1916, and the 'coupon election' of December 1918 cemented Lloyd George's power base, with twenty-five of the MPs supporting the coalition between the Lloyd George Liberals and the Unionists. He refers to the growth of the Labour party by 1918 with ten members elected but to the annihilation of those Labour candidates who had been anti-war.⁵⁷

In his volume, *Rebirth of a Nation 1880-1980*, Morgan interprets the enthusiastic response in Wales to the war as emanating from sympathy for the bullied small nation of Belgium and influenced by the popularity of Lloyd George.⁵⁸ Morgan regrets the 'jingo fever' that led to distasteful episodes of

⁵⁶ Ivor Nicholson and Lloyd Williams, *Wales: Its Part in the War* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), 29.

⁵⁷ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, 283.

⁵⁸ Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*.

persecution of anti-war figures such as J. Puleston Jones and the banning of Principal Thomas Rees from Bangor Golf Club, and he recognises the ‘always important minority of dissenters who did not succumb to this wanton war hysteria.’ He states that a number opposed the war privately, and points to the development of the UDC and an anti-war speaking tour of mining villages by Bertrand Russell in June-July 1916. He refers to the *Y Wawr*, Aberystwyth University’s student magazine, which was closed in 1918 because of its anti-war writing, and the creation of the anti-war journal, the monthly *Y Deyrnas*, edited by Thomas Rees, and published for three years from October 1916 onwards. Morgan highlights the dilemma for the liberal conscience in Wales of compulsory military conscription, and the ‘massive crisis of conscience’ caused for Welsh Liberals which, he suggests, ‘evaporated’ the ‘moral certainties of the pre-war years’.⁵⁹

Morgan also highlights the ILP’s growing criticism of the war and the impetus given by the Russian revolution, and states that Wales in the main, lent support to the war until at least the summer of 1917. As indicators of anti-war discontent, he points to the growth of the URC and its related adult education movement, and the growing radicalisation of the SWMF. He contends that this was buttressed by resistance to the extension of military conscription, and that by the end of the war, the initial war fervour and the needs of a war economy had given way to a total change in the nature of Wales; ‘In no part of the British Isles was the contrast between pre- and post-war conditions more pronounced,’⁶⁰

Morgan’s most recent discussion of the Great War, in *Revolution to Devolution; Reflections on Welsh Democracy*, at twenty-eight pages, is his lengthiest treatment of the war, of which eight pages paints a picture of Wales on the eve of the war. In it, he gives more attention to the opposition to the war than in his previous works, but portrays Wales again as displaying

⁵⁹ *ibid*, 163-5.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, 177.

'jingoism and war frenzy' to the same extent as the rest of Britain and again uses Nicholson and Williams's recruitment statistics to illustrate the extent of Wales's enthusiasm for war, although he admits that these figures are 'strongly contested'.⁶¹ He again describes the war enthusiasm and the significance of Lloyd George to the recruiting campaign, but he also goes further than in his previous studies in admitting that this portrayal of enthusiasm is 'a deceptive, incomplete picture', and describes 'important areas of dissent hidden by the public hysteria of wartime'.⁶² He again instances Bertrand Russell's anti-war tour of Wales in July, 1916, organised by the NCF, and refers to the resulting anxiety caused to the intelligence services.⁶³ He refers to the growth of 'humane Liberal dissent' against the War and again instances the role of Principal Thomas Rees as an early anti-war activist who created *Y Deyrnas* and the FoR in Wales.⁶⁴ Morgan argues that the Government's growing attacks on civil liberties caused many Liberals, such as Llewelyn Williams M.P. and D.R. Daniel to desert Lloyd George, and in some instances, such as that of E. Morgan Humphreys, the editor of the Methodist paper, *Y Goleuad*, to switch to the Labour party.

Morgan points to the existence of UDC branches, at Bargoed, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil and Pontardawe,⁶⁵ and 'powerful and aggressive' Labour dissent during the War. Whilst he again describes the hostility suffered by Hardie, and the 1915 Merthyr by-election in which the official Labour party candidate was defeated, he refers to the building up of 'anti-war dissent' amongst 'workers in the Valleys', especially after the coming of military conscription in January 1916.⁶⁶ He also points to the growth of left-wing bodies like the Workers' Socialist Federation, and the strengthening of the NCF with the related arrests and imprisonment of prominent socialists as conscientious objectors. Again he emphasises the growth of syndicalism and workers' power in the latter half

⁶¹ Morgan, *Revolution to Devolution*, 152.

⁶² *ibid*, 157.

⁶³ *ibid*, 158.

⁶⁴ *ibid*, 158-159.

⁶⁵ *ibid*, 159.

⁶⁶ *ibid*, 162.

of the War and the radical change in the nature of the Welsh working class by the end of the War.⁶⁷

A number of Morgan's main arguments in his interpretation of the Great War as being greeted with enthusiasm in Wales have been challenged. As Robin Barlow and Clive Hughes point out, the recruiting figures he has used to illustrate Wales's enthusiasm for War are based on an erroneous interpretation of the statistics, first used in a work published by two ex-Ministry of Information propagandists, Ivor Nicholson and Trevor Lloyd-Williams, and in turn derived from a speech by Sir Auckland Geddes, the Director of Recruiting, to the House of Commons on 14 January 1919.⁶⁸ Their figures, placed Wales as the most enthusiastic nation in Britain for volunteers, with 13.82 per cent of the population enlisting in the armed forces compared with 13.02 per cent for Scotland and 13.30 per cent for England.⁶⁹ The official statistics, however, reveal that 11.57 per cent of England's total population enlisted, compared to 11.50 per cent of Scotland's total population and 10.96 per cent of Wales's population.⁷⁰ But the mistaken interpretation of these figures and the creation of the myth that Wales was more enthusiastic than other parts of Britain has influenced historians' approach to the Great War to such an extent that it has skewed and over-simplified the interpretation of the response to War by other historians, such as Gareth Elwyn Jones, J. Graham Jones and Philip Jenkins, as Barlow has pointed out.⁷¹

In contrast, the iconoclastic Gwyn Alf Williams's combative, exhilarating and stimulating *When Was Wales?* emphasized that Wales has always lived in a permanent state of emergency. He argues that the history of Wales is a story

⁶⁷ *ibid*, 164.

⁶⁸ Barlow, *Wales and World War One*, 21; Clive Hughes, *I'r Fyddin Fechgyn Gwalia; Recriwtio i'r Fyddin yng Ngogledd-Orllewin Cymru 1914-1916* (Llanrwst, Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 2014), 277.

⁶⁹ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, 275.

⁷⁰ *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War* (HMSO, 1922), 364; Cragoe and Williams (eds), *Wales and War*, 126.

⁷¹ Gareth Elwyn Jones, *Modern Wales, A Concise History, 1485-1979* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), 256; J. Graham Jones, *The History of Wales* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1990), 135-137; Philip Jenkins, *The History of Modern Wales 1536-1990* (Longmans, 1992), 343; Barlow, *Wales and World War One*, 20.

of breaks, splits and ruptures and he characterises the war as an ‘unhingeing shock of the first order, above all to the pacifist and small-nation pieties of Welsh Liberalism. A whole sector of Liberal opinion, dismayed by Lloyd George’s performance, transferred to Labour and took its Liberalism with it’.⁷² He describes the Labour movement as split between the majority that ‘rallied to the War’ and the ‘resistance’, which was comprised of Christian pacifism and revolutionary socialism and Marxism ‘which at times fused’. In spite of Lloyd George’s pervasive influence, he points to exceptional cases, such as that of the local minister in Cwmgiedd near Swansea who reportedly stopped all recruiting with a single sermon, and baldly states, with no explanation or qualification, that there ‘was quite significant repression’.⁷³ As an example of industrial militancy, he cites the emergency conference of the South Wales Miners Federation (SWMF) in 1917 that wrote the abolition of capitalism into the rule-book of the South Wales Miners Federation. Williams estimates that while this was a ‘spasmodic and minority trend... at moments of high temper it could carry a majority’.⁷⁴

His view is in sharp contrast to Morgan’s political and cultural gradualism, his belief in Wales’s underlying sense of consensus and unity, and the onward march of Welsh nationhood. Williams’s interpretation of Welsh history as a narrative of breaks and ruptures is undoubtedly exaggerated, but his erudition and sweeping prose create a brilliant critical narrative that challenges the interpretation of the balanced and judicious Morgan. To read *When Was Wales?* seems exhilarating and precarious compared to Morgan’s judiciousness and balanced judgement. John Davies’s voluminous *Hanes Cymru* describes the full range of Welsh history from its earliest origins to the 1980s, and includes eleven pages dedicated to the Great War. Davies highlights the contrast between the peace tradition of Henry Richard before the War, and the enthusiasm with which War was met. His description of the war is similar to Morgan, and instances prominent literary figures such as T.H.

⁷² Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales?* (Penguin Books, 1985, reprinted 1991), 249.

⁷³ *ibid*, 249.

⁷⁴ *ibid*, 250.

Parry-Williams and T. Gwynn Jones who opposed the war and refers to the closure of *Y Wawr*, the role of Principal Thomas Rees and the creation of *Y Deyrnas* as the main anti-war journal.⁷⁵ He refers to the NCF's activities in the coalfield where the ILP was strongest, and makes the important point that when conscription was introduced, opposition to the war was often motivated by both religious and political concerns; 'yr oedd ffrynt unedig o grefyddwyr a sosialwyr i'w gwrthsefyll – er bod yn rhaid cydnabod mai dyrnaid bychan oedd y naill garfan a'r llall.' (There was an united front of religious people and socialists to oppose it – although it must be recognised that either grouping was a small number).⁷⁶ However, Davies's view is impressionistic and he does not offer evidence to support his view other than make the bald and unsubstantiated claim that there were a thousand conscientious objectors in Wales, which if true, would be a proportionately higher total compared to the rest of Britain. He interprets the growth of the Central Labour College classes in south Wales and the response to the Russian Revolution as evidence of a desire for peace.⁷⁷ Not surprisingly, Davies's hugely ambitious history of Wales cannot afford to dwell on the impact of the war on Wales, but emphasises the unique impact of the war on Welsh nationality and identity and the growth of labour. His interpretation of the war's effect owes more to Morgan's gradualism than Williams's emphasis on class conflict.

The focus of Goronwy J. Jones's ambitiously titled *Wales and the Quest for Peace*⁷⁸ is the history of the peace movement in Wales from the formation of the London Peace Society in 1816 until the outbreak of the Second World War. He deals with the development of the peace tradition throughout the nineteenth century, and its role in ensuring international arbitration through the League of Nations. His consideration of the impact of the Great War, at three and a half pages is extraordinarily light, given that the avoidance of War is his subject, and that the experience of the War was the motivating force for the launch of the Welsh League of Nations Union Movement in 1920. He

⁷⁵ Davies, *Hanes Cymru*, 494-496.

⁷⁶ *ibid*, 495.

⁷⁷ *ibid*, 495.

⁷⁸ Goronwy J. Jones, *The Quest for Peace* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1969).

describes the response in Wales to the outbreak of War as one in which men either responded to a crusade or to a stern duty, cites the disruption of Hardie's meeting in Aberdare on 6 August, 1914, and refers to the Merthyr by-election as an example of the extent to which the anti-war movement was cowed. He states that 'the Socialist movement was in a state of disarray during the War',⁷⁹ and notes that the War had a 'shattering effect' on the peace societies that had been active before the War. He refers to Thomas Rees's activities and his editorship of *Y Deyrnas* and refers to the conscientious objectors but without quantifying or assessing their significance. Whilst he suggests that they represented many shades of opinion against the war, yet he does not explore those opinions, and disappointingly fails to explore the extent of the influence of the anti-war element.⁸⁰

General histories of Wales that have included consideration of the Great War have inevitably concentrated either on the military aspect of the conflict or on the social dislocation caused by the War. The extent and depth of anti-war feeling has not been afforded detailed consideration, and in the case of Morgan's description of the Great War and its effect in Wales, the erroneous recruitment figures derived from Nicholson and Williams's propaganda publication *Wales: Its Part in the War*,⁸¹ has tended to minimise anti-war activity and influence other historians' treatment of this subject area to a considerable degree.

iii) Opposition to the War in 'Labour' history

Much of the historiography of the labour movement in the period of the War has concentrated on the growth of 'war socialism', the greater involvement of trades unions in the running of industries and the control of labour, and the growing influence of the Labour party in politics. Understandably, studies such

⁷⁹ *ibid*, 90.

⁸⁰ *ibid*, 91, 92.

⁸¹ Nicholson and Williams, *Wales: Its Part in the War*, 29.

as those by Winter⁸² and Horne⁸³ concentrate on the national context and focus either on a number of key strategic ideologues at the highest strategic level such as the philosophical and practical impact of the Webbs, G.D.H. Cole and R.H. Tawney, or the growth of the role of the trade unions within the context of a more centrally planned economy.

The central significance of the members of the ILP to anti-war activity in this period has been recognised by Dowse's *Left in the Centre*,⁸⁴ but their activity on a local level has been rather less considered. Dowse's detailed study of the ILP is the most thorough consideration of the party's role in opposing the war and in impressive detail traces the developing response of the party towards the war from August 1914 onwards, but again concentrates on the ILP's development in a British context, and does not enter into a fuller analysis of the impact of the ILP on a regional level. Both Dowse and Arthur Marwick's⁸⁵ seminal studies refer to the ILP's role in opposing the War but do not attempt to provide any description of it on a local or regional level.

Tanner, Williams and Hopkin's collection of essays on the centenary of the Labour party in Wales⁸⁶ provides 'rare glimpses of life and politics away from London',⁸⁷ but the treatment of opposition to the War is dealt with perfunctorily.⁸⁸ Whilst Richard Lewis states that the War split the labour movement, he states that the opposition amongst the Welsh working class was never strong, on the basis of O'Brien's interpretation of the causes of the 1915 miners' strike, and that army recruiting figures in coal mining areas in south Wales were higher than 'the average'.⁸⁹ He accepts that the anti-

⁸² J.M. Winter, *Socialism and the Challenge of War: Ideas and Politics in Britain 1912-1918* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974).

⁸³ John N.Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain 1914-1918* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991).

⁸⁴ Dowse, *Left in the Centre*.

⁸⁵ Arthur Marwick, *The Independent Labour Party 1918-1932* (B.Litt thesis, Oxford University, 1960).

⁸⁶ Duncan Tanner, Chris Williams and Deian Hopkin (eds), *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2000).

⁸⁷ *ibid*, 13.

⁸⁸ Richard Lewis, 'Political Culture and Ideology 1900-1918', in Tanner, Williams and Hopkin, *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, 102-107.

⁸⁹ *ibid*, 103.

capitalist ethos grew throughout the war, and he highlights the different emphases given by various socialist anti-war activists such as John Thomas, Aberdare and David Thomas, the organiser of the ILP in North Wales, who argued against the war on moral and religious principles, and Mark Starr, who viewed the war as capitalist and imperialist. Whilst Lewis recognises growing scepticism towards the war effort, and the growth of the revolutionary anti-capitalist movement, he contends that hostility towards an anti-war stance remained strong.⁹⁰ Lewis's assumptions are not developed or tested in his article or in the rest of the volume's key contribution to our understanding of opposition to the war within the context of the labour movement in Wales. Tanner's study of the growth of the Labour party between 1900 and 1918⁹¹ considers the impact of the First World War and whether it was responsible for quickening the pace of decline of the Liberal party and the corresponding growth of the Labour party. Tanner identifies the war as the significant event that changed the political and ideological climate of the time and cemented the 'symbiotic link' between the miners and the Labour party.⁹² But he also points to the fragmented geographical nature of this process and to the growing impact of the trade unions who 'encouraged wholesale support for the war (pushing Socialists out in the process as necessary), and reinforced Labour's social roots.'⁹³ Tanner does not develop or provide sources for these points, but his central argument, that the growth of Labour cannot be understood in this period without studying the regional and local context, is also relevant for a localised study of anti-war activity during the war.

The histories of the Marxist left in this period touch upon the importance of local membership and the divide between pro-war and anti-war factions within the Social Democratic Federation,⁹⁴ and Kendall⁹⁵ and Challinor⁹⁶ describe

⁹⁰ *ibid*, 103-105.

⁹¹ Duncan Tanner, *Political change and the Labour party 1900-1918* (Cambridge University Press, 1990).

⁹² *ibid*, p. 226.

⁹³ *ibid*, p.426.

⁹⁴ Martin Crick, *The History of the Social Democratic Federation* (Birmingham, Keele University Press, 1994).

the elements who composed those elements of the revolutionary left who became members of the Communist party after the war but do not relate it to a regional or Welsh context.

Francis and Smith's *The Fed* is the standard work on the history of the SWMF. They consider that miners' attitudes towards the War as reflected in the July 1915 strike in favour of higher rates of pay, reflected a 'growing anti-war feeling, largely at this stage unconscious'.⁹⁷ They suggest that it was only after the two Russian Revolutions in 1917 that miners took a more explicitly anti-war position, and that this was reflected in the SWMF's attempts to ascertain the views of the British labour movement on a peace settlement, as well as their refusal to cooperate in the recruitment of colliery workers into the Army.⁹⁸ This cursory consideration gives too much credence to the idea of the 1915 Strike as an example of miners' anti-war views, and whilst undoubtedly shocking for most people at the time, it is extremely doubtful if this action was undertaken to show opposition to the war, or even in some way a pro-war phenomenon, as suggested by Anthony Mor O'Brien. It is more likely that this strike was a continuation of the deep and bitter battle between the Federation and coal owners over wage levels which pre-dated the war.⁹⁹ *The Fed* does not dwell on the impact of the war in detail, and therefore does not consider the degree to which opposition to conscription and the 'comb-out' ballot of November 1917 reflected opposition to the War itself, and whether attitudes varied across different parts of the coalfield at various stages throughout the war. Studies of the labour movement in Wales during the war, by Keith Davies and Edward May¹⁰⁰, for instance, have focussed on the influence of the

⁹⁵ Walter Kendall, *The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1900-1921: The Origins of British Communism* (Littlehampton Book Services, 1969).

⁹⁶ Raymond Challinor, *The Origins of British Bolshevism* (Croom Helm, 1977).

⁹⁷ Hywel Francis and David Smith, *The Fed: a History of the South Wales Miners in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1980), 22.

⁹⁸ *ibid*, 22,23.

⁹⁹ Anthony Mor O'Brien, 'Patriotism on Trial: The Strike of the South Wales Miners, July 1915', *The Welsh History Review*, 12 (1984), 76-104.

¹⁰⁰ David Keith Davies, *The Influence of Syndicalism and Industrial Unionism on the South Wales Coalfield 1898-1921: A Study in Ideology and Practice* (Ph.D, Cardiff University, 1991); Edward May, *A Question of Control: Social and Industrial Relations in the South Wales Coalfield and the Crisis of*

syndicalist movement following the pre-war 'Great Unrest' and the publication of *The Miners' Next Step*. These studies tend to place opposition to war as secondary themes to the growing influence of the left within the SWMF during the war and into the nineteen twenties. Demont provides a stimulating portrait of the development of the local Labour party in Tredegar but does not develop an analysis of the anti-war movement in the local area.

iv) Religious Opposition to the War

The religious or mainly Christian based opposition to the War has often been identified with a number of key religious organisations, especially the Quakers and the FoR. Thomas C. Kennedy's *British Quakerism, 1860-1920: The Transformation of a Religious Community*¹⁰¹ whilst recording the contribution of the Quakers to anti-war activity also notes that a third of eligible Quaker men joined the armed forces. Evans's work on the history of the Society of Friends in Wales¹⁰² emphasises the small number of Quakers in Wales, and how polarised the community became as a result of the war. Their lack of activity, and possibly their tendency to be based in comparatively English speaking areas like Radnorshire was reflected in the lack of any content for *Y Deyrnas*, for example, from Quaker sources.

Wallis's history of the FoR¹⁰³ is the most thorough history of the organisation to date, and dedicates approximately a tenth of its content to its origins in the First World War. It focuses mainly on the founders of the organisation, and its slow development through the first half of the War, before expanding to consider the involvement of the FoR in defending conscientious objectors.

Post-War Reconstruction (Ph.D thesis, Cardiff University, 1994); Sarah E. Demont, *Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan; a Society and its Political Articulation* (Ph.D thesis, Cardiff University, 1990).

¹⁰¹ Thomas C. Kennedy, *British Quakerism: The Transformation of a Religious Community 1860-1920* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁰² Owain Gethin Evans, *Quakers in Wales and the First World War* (unpublished article provided by the author, 2015).

¹⁰³ Jill Wallis, *Valiant for Peace: A History of the Fellowship of Reconciliation 1914 to 1989* (Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1991).

While it concentrated on the organisation centrally, it also considers the regional aspect of its activity, albeit in a rather superficial manner. Wallis states that Wales, ‘proved receptive to the FoR message, a combination of a recent religious revival and acute industrial problems making the Valleys “entirely congenial” for the deliverance of FOR evangelism.’¹⁰⁴ The historiography of the peace movement in Wales during the First World War is heavily influenced by the active Christian peace movement that emerged in Wales before and during the first half of the Second World War, especially in the Welsh language, and in particular influenced by a series of pamphlets published by a number of pacifists, under the banner of ‘Cymdeithas Heddychwyr Cymru’ (Society of Welsh Pacifists), created as an active Welsh, and primarily Welsh language version of the Peace Pledge Union, with Gwynfor Evans as its main organiser in Wales.¹⁰⁵ Mainly written by nationalists who were also pacifist, they reflected the tendency within the Welsh nationalist party to eschew armed force and to support a neutral stance during the Second World War. This literature places pacifism and opposition to war solidly within the Liberal Nonconformist tradition associated with Henry Richard and Samuel Roberts, Llanbryn-mair, and this tradition was revived by the Welsh Nationalist Party during the Second World War. Gwynfor Evans, the secretary of the Peace Pledge Union in Wales, became President of the Welsh Nationalist Party in 1945 and was instrumental in ensuring that pacifism remained a core belief of the party until he relinquished the Presidency of the party 38 years later.¹⁰⁶

The first pamphlet in the series, for example, placed the example of Thomas Rees and *Y Deyrnas* within a Radical Nonconformist, pacifist tradition in Wales that was traced back to the martyrdom of John Penry in the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁷ The Welsh Congregationalists was the most active religious denomination to oppose the Second World War, and the

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, 31.

¹⁰⁵ *Pamffledi Heddychwyr Cymru* (Denbigh, Gwasg Gee, 1943).

¹⁰⁶ Rhys Evans, *Gwynfor Evans: Rhag Pob Brad* (Talybont, Y Lolfa, 2005).

¹⁰⁷ Iorwerth Peate, ‘Y Traddodiad Heddwch yng Nghymru’, *Pamffledi Heddychwyr Cymru Rhif 1*, (Denbigh, Gwasg Gee, 1942).

denomination's Peace Society published a collection of essays and poems in 1943, which drew together elements from other denominations as well, to protest against the war.¹⁰⁸ The histories of the Nonconformist denominations in Wales give scant attention to the anti-war element within their number, and the main analysis of the response of religion in Wales to the First World War is Dewi Eirug Davies's *Byddin y Brenin*, which reviews the Welsh religious press of the time, and relates the stories of a number of conscientious objectors.¹⁰⁹ A further collection of hagiographical essays based on the experiences of conscientious objectors and others active in the peace movement during the two world wars, have been produced by the FoR under the editorship of D. Ben Rees which reflect this uncritical tradition in *Herio'r Byd* (Challenging the World) and *Dal i Herio'r Byd* (Still Challenging the World).¹¹⁰

Cragoe and Williams's collection of essays on the subject of Wales and its attitude to War over two hundred years, suggest that the Welsh were more wedded to the tradition of militarism than nonconformist Wales cared to admit. The only contribution in the volume on the issue of opposition to the War in Wales is Robert Pope's assessment of the 'Nonconformist predilection for pacifism'.¹¹¹ Pope goes as far as to say that the introduction of conscription in 1916 'marked the end of both political Nonconformity and the Liberal party.'¹¹² His primary interest is in the impact of war on the Nonconformist denominations, and in common with a number of other studies, concentrates on the attitudes of certain key individuals opposed to the war, such as Thomas Rees, John Puleston Jones, George M.LI .Davies and Herbert Morgan, formerly the minister of Castle Street Baptist chapel in London and a lecturer in the University in Aberystwyth. Pope does not refer to the creation of

¹⁰⁸ Simon B. Jones, E.Lewis Evans, *Ffordd Tangnefedd: Pregethau a Barddoniaeth* (Llandysul, Gwasg Gomer, 1943).

¹⁰⁹ Dewi Eirug Davies, *Byddin y Brenin: Cymru a'i Chrefydd yn yn Rhyfel Mawr* (Swansea, Ty John Penri, 1988).

¹¹⁰ D.Ben Rees, *Herio'r Byd* (Liverpool, Cyhoeddiadau Modern Cymreig, 1980) ; D. Ben Rees, *Dal i Herio'r Byd* (Liverpool, Cyhoeddiadau Modern Cymreig, 1983).

¹¹¹ Cragoe and Williams (eds), *Wales and War ; Society , Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 4,5.

¹¹² *ibid*, 5.

the prime anti-war journal *Y Deyrnas*, and fails to recognise the contribution of those organisations who opposed the war on Christian grounds, such as the FoR and the Quakers. Instead, he is dismissive of pacifism and contends that those who opposed the war ‘had drunk deeply from the wells of Hegelian idealism and Kantian moralism’ and that their belief was that mankind was on a revolutionary path towards perfection, but that war was a regression.¹¹³

It is the attitudes of church and chapel in Wales towards the war that are explored in Dewi Eirug Davies’s *Byddin y Brenin*.¹¹⁴ He analyses the religious press of the time, the response of key religious figures such as John Williams, Brynsciencyn, and describes the response to the War of a number of the key theologians and ministers of religion, such as J. Puleston Jones and Thomas Rees. He highlights the role of the ILP in organising against the war in their strongholds of Briton Ferry, Swansea Valley and Merthyr, and locates the experiences of prominent activists such as David Thomas, the poet David James Jones (Gwenallt) and Rev. T.E. Nicholas in the context of a wider reservoir of support for their stance on a local level. In contrast with most of Wales, he highlights those ministers who gave the ILP moral succour and practical support.¹¹⁵

Densil Morgan’s *Span of the Cross* provides a gloomy picture of impact of the War as hastening the process of secularisation and marking the fault-line between religious and post-religious Wales.¹¹⁶ His consideration of anti-war activity is restricted to elements of religious pacifism and he encompasses the significant role of Thomas Rees and J. Puleston Jones, the creation of the FoR, and the tensions within Nonconformist Welsh Liberalism created by the introduction of the Military Service Act. This led eventually to the editor of the Presbyterian monthly, *Y Goleuad*, E. Morgan Humphreys, being effectively sacked because he had allowed

¹¹³ Cragoe and Williams, *Wales and War*, 174.

¹¹⁴ Davies, *Byddin y Brenin*

¹¹⁵ *ibid*, 151-176.

¹¹⁶ Morgan, *The Span of the Cross*, 46.

articles to appear that protested at Lloyd George's support for such a measure.¹¹⁷ Morgan challenges the principal intellectual weaknesses of Welsh pacifism in this period, which he defines as ;

an inability to face the implications of corporate morality and explicitly social ethics and idealism which had scant appreciation for the depths of human malignancy and evil...Lacking an adequate doctrine of structural sin and corporate redemption, no matter how vigorously pacifist Dissenters protested at the undoubted horrors of war, they failed to provide a sufficiently realistic philosophy whereby conflict could be overcome and abolished.¹¹⁸

In keeping with his avowed theological stance, Morgan does not place the anti-war movement in a context beyond that of individual conscience, and in contrast to Davies, does not locate the force of opposition to the War in a more social or political setting, either within geographical communities or communities of interest.

Finally, Gethin Evans's study of the Quakers in Wales is a valuable contribution to an understanding of this extremely small sect, that whilst influential in the shaping of provision for conscientious objection in Parliament, had very little presence in Wales beyond Colwyn Bay, Radnorshire, Swansea and Cardiff.¹¹⁹

Much of the analysis of religious attitudes towards the war has concentrated on the issues of loss of Christian faith and the impact of men's experiences of war on their relationship to organised religion after end of the war. Histories of the Nonconformist denominations in Wales have given scant attention to the impact of the War, and even less so to the opposition to the war. With the

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.60-61

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, 63.

¹¹⁹ Owain Gethin Evans, *Benign Neglect: Quakers and Wales circa 1860-1918* (Wrexham, Bridge Books, 2014).

exception of *Byddin y Brenin*, narratives of opposition to the war on religious grounds have been confined to the biographies of prominent anti-war figures such as George M.Ll.Davies, Principal Thomas Rees, Lord Maelor, and Harold Watkins.¹²⁰

With the exception of Davies's *Byddin y Brenin* and Rees's volumes on prominent pacifists, *Herio'r Byd* and *Dal i Herio'r Byd*, there are surprisingly few contributions that attempt to describe the religious anti-war movement in Wales. Much of the literature is focussed on prominent individuals and very little consider pacifism as part of a movement. Hardly any literature has appeared to describe the opposition to the war on religious grounds amongst the millenarian sects, such as the Christadelphians, Jehovah's Witnesses and Plymouth Brethren, who were a substantial proportion of the conscientious objectors who opposed the war. Even in the case of the Quakers, traditionally associated with the anti-war movement, only in 2014 has a history for the period up to end of the war appeared. The *Pearce Register 2016*, not available to scholars hitherto, provides the opportunity to analyse the extent to which the Welsh conscientious objectors were influenced by religious motivation and to what extent different sects and Nonconformist denominations were represented in their number.

v) Local studies of opposition to the War

Local studies of the response to the War provide a more nuanced and detailed analysis of the nature and impact of the war on communities.

Mansfield and Horner's collection of essays¹²¹ considers the local context of the War, and includes subjects as varied as labour patriotism in Lancashire

¹²⁰ Jen Llewelyn, *Pilgrim of Peace; A Life of George M.Ll.Davies, Pacifist, Conscientious Objector, and Peace-maker* (Talybont, Y Lolfa, 2016); Thomas Eirug Davies, *Y Prifathro Thomas Rees: ei Fywyd a'i Waith* (Llandysul, Gwasg Gomer, 1939); Lord Maelor, *Fel Hyn y Bu* (Denbigh, Gwasg Gee, 1970); Harold Watkins, *Life has Kept me Young* (Watts and Co., 1952).

¹²¹ Nicholas Mansfield and Craig Horner (ed.), *The Great War* (Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).

and London, radicalism amongst ex-servicemen at the end of the War, and the nature of commemoration after the War. Within this collection, Barlow's discussion of the operation of military tribunals in Carmarthenshire in 1916 and 1917 is the sole contribution that refers to anti-war activity, and suggests that the local tribunals in that rural area tended to exempt more men than in other parts of the country. They showed a greater reluctance to send men to war, and whilst conscientious objectors were 'treated harshly', Barlow argues that the tribunals in Carmarthenshire showed 'an underlying lack of support for the war which has been overlooked when the focus has been on the national picture.'¹²² Both Barlow and Phillips's theses studying attitudes towards the war in rural Carmarthenshire illustrate the value of investigating opposition to the war on a local level and provide a deeper understanding of the subtleties of shifting attitudes towards the war in a deeply rural area, where popular enthusiasm towards the war did not permeate until later than in urban areas.¹²³

A number of studies have surveyed anti-war activity on a local level, and the role of the ILP and other organisations in engaging in social and political activity to oppose the War. In Wales, they include McCarry's unpublished thesis on the labour movement in Swansea that provides a valuable context to the active anti-war movement in the town.¹²⁴ These local studies include Ken Weller's study of the anti-war movement in North London,¹²⁵ Cyril Pearce's study of the anti-war movement in Huddersfield,¹²⁶ Robert Duncan's study of anti-war protest in Scotland,¹²⁷ and William Kenefick's analysis of the socialist

¹²² Robin Barlow, 'Military Tribunals in Carmarthenshire 1916-1917', in Mansfield and Horner, *The Great War*, 24-25

¹²³ Robin Barlow, *Aspects of the First World War in Carmarthenshire* (Ph.D thesis, Lampeter University, 2001); Rob Phillips, *Gorfodaeth Filwrol yn Sir Gaerfyrddin yn ystod y Rhyfel Mawr* (MA, Lampeter University, 1992).

¹²⁴ Thomas John McCarry, *Labour and Society in Swansea, 1887-1918* (Ph.D, Swansea University, 1986).

¹²⁵ Ken Weller, *Don't Be a Soldier: The Radical Anti-War Movement in North London 1914-1918* (Journeyman Press, 1985).

¹²⁶ Cyril Pearce, *Comrades and Conscience* (Francis Boutle Publishers, 2001).

¹²⁷ Robert Duncan, *Objectors and Resisters* (Glasgow, Common Print, 2015).

anti-war movement in Scotland.¹²⁸ Cyril Pearce is the most influential historian within this group and he describes a war weariness and lack of enthusiasm in the community of Huddersfield, and that at least some objectors were supported by the communities in which they lived and that they were by no means outcasts. He emphasises the collective nature of the anti-war movement;

In Huddersfield the critical view of the war was not only a private personal commitment stemming from conscience but a public issue related to the conditions of daily life.¹²⁹

His major contribution has been to collate information painstakingly from a huge range of sources for an interactive web database of over eighteen thousand 'anti-war activists', and this database includes conscientious objectors, NCF organisers and supporters, and those arrested for distributing anti-war literature under the Defence of the Realm regulations. The author has worked closely with him in creating the part of the database that relates to Wales, and the database for Britain is due to be made publicly available through the support of the Wales Centre for International Affairs's *Wales for Peace* project, that was created to commemorate peace and anti-war activity in the Great War, and is published in the autumn of 2016.

Only two local studies of anti-war activity in Wales have been published, namely Philip Adams's excellent and well-informed history of the anti-war movement in the Briton Ferry area¹³⁰, and a short pamphlet by Michael Freeman and sponsored by the local Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, written to commemorate the small number of conscientious objectors in Cardiganshire.¹³¹ Adams integrates the anti-war movement with the wider

¹²⁸ William Kenefick, 'War Resisters and Anti-Conscription in Scotland: An ILP Perspective', in Macdonald and MacFarland (eds.), *Scotland and the Great War*.

¹²⁹ Pearce, *Comrades and Conscience*, 166.

¹³⁰ Adams, *Not in Our Name*.

¹³¹ Michael Freeman, *Conscientious Objectors in Cardiganshire*, Aberystwyth (published privately, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, 2015).

community of Briton Ferry and places it in the context of the supportive politics of the ILP, local trade unions and Labour councillors, and the involvement of a supportive local chapel and minister. Freeman, on the other hand, has discovered and mined the powerful individual stories of conscientious objectors in Cardiganshire, and describes a rural community where the anti-war activity was extremely small and support for it extremely limited.

Much of the history of anti-war activity during the Great War in Britain has concentrated either on the individual tales of sacrifice suffered by conscientious objectors, or by an analysis of Government provision for conscientious objection provided for in the first Military Service Act, 1916. The local and regional analysis of the anti-war movement is significant as an indication of how attitudes towards the War and objection to the War could vary substantially both in relation to location but also in relation to the period of the War, as attitudes shifted from initial support in Autumn 1914 to growing war-weariness, cynicism and greater support for the anti-war movement in 1917. The history of the Great War as it affected Wales has often been written in the context of other subject areas, and the lack of focus on the impact of the War on Wales means that its historiography is fractured and incomplete. No study has dealt solely and exclusively with the subject of the extent of opposition to the War in Wales, and in the context of Welsh historiography, this subject has not been hitherto addressed. This thesis attempts to address this historical omission.

Chapter Two

Religious Opposition to the Great War

Introduction

The opposition to the war in Wales on religious grounds was initially muted and cowed by the shock of the onset of war, and shaken by the rapidity with which the treasured traditional nineteenth-century ideals of pacifism were jettisoned. It was mainly through the FoR, established in Wales in June 1915, and the monthly magazine *Y Deyrnas*, founded in September 1916, that the pacifist movement found its unique Welsh voice and was able to give succour to those individuals within the Nonconformist denominations in particular, who disagreed with the war on the grounds of their Christian faith. The leadership of the anti-war pacifist movement, concentrated in north-west Wales and possessing formidable intellectual influence, proved to be increasingly effective in supporting conscientious objectors and made the notion of 'peace by negotiation' more acceptable to members of Nonconformist denominations by the summer of 1917 than Lloyd George's combative demand for a 'knock-out blow'.

This opposition was conducted primarily by individuals within the Nonconformist denominations who held the fundamental belief that war was a 'negation of the plain teaching of Jesus Christ that we should forgive, help and love even our enemies'.¹ They felt themselves to be inheritors of Wales's pacifist tradition within Nonconformity that had commenced with the example of the Protestant martyrs such as John Penry and the persecution of the Quakers by the State in the seventeenth century. The overwhelming motivation for opposition to the war amongst conscientious objectors in Wales was their religious pacifism and their total opposition to the taking of life. Whereas the literature of conscientious objection in the war has been dominated by accounts which have

¹ Llywelyn, *Pilgrim of Peace*, 90.

emphasized the contribution of Quakers and socialists associated with the ILP,² these only constituted approximately three per cent and eleven per cent respectively of those conscientious objectors in Wales who professed an organisational allegiance.³ The majority of those who professed an allegiance did so on religious grounds.

However, the general view was that war was inevitable, that the British cause was just and Wales was proud to play its part. Denis Morgan attributes Nonconformity's support for the war primarily to the influence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Liberal David Lloyd George. Though the initial response to the outbreak of war was one of sober regret and reluctant recruiting in strongly Nonconformist areas such as north-west Wales, this gave way to 'widespread anger and revulsion' which was supplemented by propaganda concerning German atrocities, the Zeppelin raids over the east coast of England, the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the execution of Edith Cavell in October 1915.⁴ Morgan contends that not only the Anglican Church, but the main Nonconformist denominations 'endorsed the war effort wholeheartedly' and were thought 'to have discarded all that was distinctive in the Christian faith and ethic according to the demands of the moment...institutional Christianity appeared to have become a function of the imperial cause'.⁵

Lloyd George's speech to a congregation of Free Church people and London Welshmen in the City Temple, Westminster in November 1914 emphasised that the country was at war to defend the weak, and that Belgium was like Wales, a small nation, 'a poor little neighbour whose home was broken into by a hulking bully'. However regrettable, therefore, the war was both inevitable and just: 'We are all looking forward to the time when swords shall be beaten into ploughshares but in the meantime there was no alternative but to fight.'⁶ Biblical rhetoric and allusions were used to dispel pacifist concerns and allusions to the Good Samaritan and Naboth's Vineyard, and divine righteousness and God's protection of the weak, were used to justify the decision to go to war. According to the prominent Calvinistic Methodist minister, the Revd. Thomas Charles

² Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*; Boulton, *Objection Overruled*.

³ *Pearce Register 2016*.

⁴ Morgan, *The Span of the Cross*, 42.

⁵ *ibid*, 46.

⁶ *ibid*, 43.

Williams, 'It has become our sacred calling to take up arms, he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.'⁷

A number of the leaders of the Calvinistic Methodists, such as Revd. John Williams Brynsiencyn and Thomas Charles Williams, Menai Bridge, were close friends of Lloyd George and became leading recruiters. Even the most radical of Nonconformists, such as W.Llewelyn Williams, the Liberal Member of Parliament for Carmarthen Boroughs and a prominent barrister, was persuaded of the force of the pro-war argument;

Diolchaf, er trymed fy nghalon wrth feddwl am echryslonrwydd rhyfel, i mi gael byw i weled cenhedloedd yr Ymerodraeth brydeinig yn sefyll i fyny, galon wrth galon, fel un gwr yn y rhyfel ysbrydol hon: rhyfel yw yn erbyn rhyfel; rhyfel i roddi pen bythol ar ryfel. Ni cherais rhyfel erioed ond dywedaf fod y rhyfel hwn yn gyfiawn ac anocheladwy.⁸

(I thank, in spite of my heavy heart at the horror of war, that I have lived to see the nations of the British Empire standing up, heart by heart, as one man in this spiritual war: it is a war against war: a war to end all war. I never loved war but I say that this war is just and inevitable.)

Lloyd George's contribution was critical in raising recruits for the Army, and his success in persuading Nonconformist ministers as well as Anglican prelates to become recruiting officers was key to the flow of young men from Wales into the Army from the autumn of 1914 onwards.⁹ He gained the invaluable support of Nonconformist church leaders, notably the Calvinistic Methodists' leading preacher, Dr. John Williams, Brynsiencyn, 'the idol of the preaching meetings'¹⁰ who was persuaded of the righteousness of the Allied cause and was made honorary chaplain and a Colonel in the new Welsh Army Corps:

Yr oedd yn gyfeillgar iawn a Mr Lloyd George, a derbyniodd ei dystiolaeth ef, a thystiolaeth Mr Asquith a'r Arglwydd Grey, fod y rhyfel yn annichonadwy. Os bu petruster yn ei feddwl

⁷ *Y Goleuad*, 11 September 1914.

⁸ *Y Beirniad*, October 1914, 162.

⁹ Davies, *Hanes Cymru*, 492.

¹⁰ Morgan, *Span of the Cross*, 43.

o gwbl , diflannodd hwnnw yn llwyr pan dorrodd yr Ellmyn eu cytuned ac y croesasant Belgium, a sawdl haernaidd, er mwyn cyrraedd Ffrainc. ¹¹

(He was very friendly with Mr Lloyd George, and he accepted his evidence and that of Mr Asquith and Lord Grey, that the war was inevitable. If there was any hesitation in his mind at all, it disappeared totally when the Germans broke their promise and they crossed Belgium with their iron heels, in order to reach France.)

A photograph of the Revd. John Williams, Brynsiencyn, resplendent in his clerical collar and the uniform of the 38th Welsh Division standing in the garden of 11, Downing Street, is testament to Lloyd George's power of persuasion. The 38th Division was created in order to use Welsh national sentiment as a recruiting tool and to attract Nonconformist Welshmen into the army. The appointment of an Anglesey Congregationalist, Brigadier-General Owen Thomas, as the only Nonconformist and Welsh speaker in such a senior role within the British Army gave the clear sign that it was to appeal to all and that Nonconformity and the Welsh language were recognised officially for the first time, within the Welsh Army Corps.¹² His biographer's belief that if Williams had decided to oppose the War, Nonconformist north-west Wales might have taken a very different attitude towards the War, may be speculative, but the slowness of the response to the call to arms in the first months of the war in the area generated a great deal of anxiety that was only alleviated by local recruiting efforts led by Williams and Thomas Charles Williams. In Anglesey, within the Calvinistic Methodist congregations, John Williams's leadership was unquestioned and in the quarrying town of Bethesda, for instance, a total of two hundred quarrymen were recruited in the first year, but from the middle of 1915, 'recruiting became a more difficult business.' Both the Ogwen Rural District Council and Bethesda Urban District Council refused to undertake recruiting, and when in November 1915, Bethesda UDC eventually attempted to persuade every church and chapel in the area to appoint recruitment canvassers, only the Anglican church appointed canvassers to canvass their own members. By Autumn 1915, the task of recruiting in the area was 'practically

¹¹ R.R. Hughes, *John Williams, Brynsiencyn* (Caernarfon, Llyfrfa'r Cyfundeb, 1929), 246.

¹² Hughes, *John Williams, Brynsiencyn*, 227; David Pretty, *Rhyfelwr Mon* (Denbigh, Gwasg Gee, 1989), 69.

hopeless' because, it was alleged, there was 'not enough sufficient public spirit among the leading inhabitants.'¹³

i) The Attitude of the Churches

The Established Church in Wales had almost two hundred thousand members, or thirteen per cent of the population of Wales in 1905.¹⁴ In keeping with its role as the State Church, it shared a total commitment to the war effort, but was a politically and socially divisive organization in Wales, and was regarded by the Nonconformist establishment as politically Conservative, Anglicised and serving landed interests. The most significant and influential religious institutions in Wales at this time were the Nonconformist churches and the combined numerical strength of Welsh Protestant Nonconformity in 1914 was approximately 535,000 out of a total population of some 2,450,000, representing nearly one in five who were baptized or were communicants. In a survey undertaken in 1905, the main Nonconformist denominations were the Baptists, with 142,551 communicants, the more politically conservative Calvinistic Methodists with 170,343, the Congregationalists with 175,097, the Wesleyans with 43,358, and other smaller denominations and sects with 21,876. As half a million people attended Sunday schools, who may not have been members, the total numbers of people associated with churches or chapels made Nonconformity the 'single significant institution which Wales possessed'.¹⁵

The response to the war amongst the Nonconformist denominations in Wales was overwhelmingly supportive of the Government, even amongst those denominations such as the Congregationalists and Baptists who had been associated with the Peace Society and the pacifistic movement of the nineteenth century. Koss suggests that the support of the leading Free Churchmen in England to the war was an atonement 'for their earlier pacifism and to compensate for centuries of outsidersness'¹⁶ but this view underestimates the brittleness of Nonconformity's anti-war sentiment in the nineteenth century. The doctrine of non-resistance in the Peace Society, for instance, was shattered by the war and its own newspaper lamented this change:

¹³ *Thomas Jones Papers*, folio 3192, 'Recruiting during the War, and the Attitude of Ministers and Leaders of Religious Thought towards the War', Bangor University.

¹⁴ L.J. Williams, *Digest of Historical Statistics*, Table 12, 'Communicants, by county and denomination, 1905', Volume 2 (Cardiff, Welsh Office, 1985), 353.

¹⁵ Morgan, *The Span of the Cross*, 23.

¹⁶ Stephen Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (B.T. Batsford, London, 1975), 127.

Even the most foremost pacifist leaders of the churches have surrendered. As for the rank and file of the ministers, they too are recruiting agents and their churches and schools recruiting stations.¹⁷

Although before 1914 the denominations had consistently declared war to be a barbarous act, the denominations were largely unwavering in their support for the war.¹⁸ The Welsh Radical peace tradition was closely associated with Samuel Roberts, Llanbrynmair, who had opposed the Crimean War and who campaigned for an international arbitration court, with Henry Richard, the Member of Parliament for Merthyr, known as the 'Apostle of Peace' and his leadership of the Peace Society in the nineteenth century,¹⁹ and with the anti-militarism of Keir Hardie and even that of Lloyd George in his unpopular opposition to the South African War. But in 1914, Nonconformist Wales seemed to put aside its scruples and supported the Great War almost wholeheartedly.²⁰ Although as late as 1913, the Union of Welsh Independents stated that 'every war was contrary to the spirit of Christ,'²¹ in its first annual conference after the outbreak of war in 1915, it stated whilst regretting the increasing sale of newspapers on Sundays, the denomination was overjoyed that so many young men had joined the armed forces.²² Its 1916 conference condemned the harmful influence of the cinema and the trade in alcoholic spirits, delighted in the creation of the Welsh Army under the command of the Nonconformist and Welsh-speaking Brigadier Owen Thomas, and admired the heroism of those who had joined the Army. The sole indication of any alternative view of the war was the conference's recognition that the conscience clause in the Military Service Act was not always respected by the authorities:

Gofidir am fod unrhyw swyddog gweinyddol o'r ddeddf yn ymddwyn, fel yr ymddengys i ni, yn annheg tuag at y cyfryw bersonau. Hyderwn y gwna'r Llywodraeth bopeth yn ei gallu i atal pob camwri o'r fath.²³

¹⁷ *Herald of Peace*, 1 October 1914

¹⁸ Davies, *Byddin y Brenin*, 153.

¹⁹ Jones, *Wales and the Quest for Peace*

²⁰ *ibid.*, 42.

²¹ R. Tudur Jones, *Hanes Annibynwyr Cymru* (Swansea, Welsh Union of Independents, 1966), 278, citing 'Annual Conference Report of the Union of Welsh Independents, Rhyl Meeting (1913), 636.

²² *Annual Conference report of the Union of Welsh Independents*, Merthyr Tydfil, July 19-22 1915 (Merthyr, Williams and Son, 1915), 1036.

²³ *Annual Conference report of the Union of Welsh Independents*, Brynaman June 13-16 1916 (Swansea, Y Llyfrfa, 1916), 101.

(it is regretted that any administrative officer under the act, behaves unfairly towards such people it seems to us. We hope that the Government does everything within its power to prevent any such injustice.)

In the 1915 Annual Conference, the sermon given by the eponymously named son of Samuel Roberts, Llanbrynmair compared the war to a battle between the Kingdom of God and his enemies, and D.G. Williams's keynote sermon was even more jingoistic in the 1916 conference. The denomination's annual conference in 1917 was cancelled in the hope that the country's circumstances would have improved,²⁴ and the denomination's next Annual Conference was not held until the summer of 1919.

Of the Nonconformist denominations however, it was the Independents, or Congregationalists, who proved most active in the anti-war movement, primarily through the involvement of a number of its ministers in the FoR, and through the leadership of Principal Thomas Rees and the group of theological lecturers and students based in the Congregationalist Bala-Bangor Theological college in Bangor. A social and economic study of Wales in 1922, funded by the Carnegie Trust and commissioned and organised by Thomas Jones, secretary to Lloyd George, included an analysis by the ILP organiser and former conscientious objector, David Thomas, of the nature of the Pacifist movement in Wales. He described the movement as mainly religious in North Wales, and political in South Wales and describes the state of religious leadership towards the war:

Some of them were loud in their support of the war, and travelled the country addressing recruiting meetings: others were emphatic in their denunciation of the war. Probably the majority of the ministers kept quiet, preferring not to take any side, some from sheer pusillanimity, others from a consciousness of their ignorance and lack of vision, and others because they believed that they could preserve the unity of their churches only by refraining from taking sides in any controversial matter.²⁵

Only a minuscule number of members of the small denomination of Methodist Churches opposed the war. The denomination was part of the larger England and Wales organization, and it supported the war wholeheartedly. The few included the prominent

²⁴ R. Tudur Jones, *Yr Undeb* (Swansea, John Penry Press, 1975), 392.

²⁵ *Thomas Jones Papers*, folio 19885, David Thomas, 'The Pacifist Movement', Bangor University.

novelist Revd. Tegla Davies, Oswestry, Revd. D.Gwynfryn Jones, Flint and Revd. Conwy Pritchard in the Llyn peninsula, and the lay members included the aforementioned David Thomas. In the larger Calvinistic Methodist denomination, the anti-war element was led by the blind minister for Penmount, Pwllheli, Dr. J. Puleston Jones, whose first in modern history at Balliol College, Oxford reflected his academic brilliance, who propagandized passionately in favour of peace throughout the war.²⁶ In the meeting of the North Wales Association of the denomination August 1917 meeting in Caernarfon, he brought a group of pacifists together to press for a resolution that supported an immediate peace settlement:

Fod y Gymdeithasfa yn llawenychu o blaid heddwch, ac o'r farn y dylai y llywodraeth gymeryd mantais ar bob cyfleustra i gario ymlaen drafodaeth er sicrhau heddwch.²⁷

(that the Methodist Association rejoices in favour of peace, and is of the opinion that the Government should take advantage of every opportunity to carry on the discussion in order to secure peace.)

Its significance was that this was the first time during the war that any of the Welsh Nonconformist denominations passed a motion in favour of peace. Other Methodist ministers involved in the anti-war movement were Peter Hughes Griffiths, Llywelyn Williams and D. Francis Roberts, but perhaps the most influential was the Rev. John Morgan Jones, Hope Methodist chapel in Merthyr Tydfil, whose influence in south Wales was comparable to J. Puleston Jones's influence in the north.²⁸ However, even in Merthyr Tydfil, where there was a tradition of anti-war activity dating back to Henry Richard's opposition to the Crimean War, most chapels and churches were silent on the question of the war. On February 1916, the Merthyr branch of the NCF sent forms to seventy local chapels and churches asking them to protest against the 'ethical vandalism' of conscription and calling upon the Government to repeal the Military Service Act (No.2). Thirteen replies were received, and the replies provide an interesting anthology of official Welsh religion on this most important question. In only three of the places of worship was this request presented to the worshippers and in all three the resolution was supported. In another ten

²⁶ Rees, *Herio'r Byd*, 93-103.

²⁷ Jones and Evans, *Ffordd Tangnefedd*, 27.

²⁸ E.H. Griffiths, *Heddychwr Mawr Cymru: George M.Ll. Davies* (Caernarfon, Llyfrfa'r Methodistiaid Calfaidd, 1967), 28.

cases the officials of the church decided against the submitting of the resolution and whilst the grounds were various, the general view was that it was not 'wise to lay this matter before the congregations.'²⁹ Thus even in one of the most active districts in south Wales for the anti-war movement, this response reflected a general reluctance to create conflict within the congregations, and reflected deep divisions over war policy.

Whilst most religious leaders in south Wales supported the war, Thomas considered that in north Wales, the pacifists, although in a minority, were 'powerful and influential in the churches'.³⁰ The Welsh Baptists was one of the largest denominations with over one hundred and fifty thousand adherents, and faced the war with 'no settled point of view'. Its attitude to war was that when 'the horizon was clear, it tended to emphasise the pacific message of Christianity but when the clouds of war gathered, it spoke with many voices.'³¹ The war seems to have taken the denomination by surprise and official explanations for its outbreak were accepted. In the autumn of 1914, Welsh Baptists refuted Anglican claims that most of the recruits were coming from the established Church and pointed proudly to the numbers of Nonconformists who were enlisting. Yet until August 1914 Baptists had been opposed alike to militarism and the social establishment.³² The editor of the denomination's newspaper *Seren Gomer*, D.Wyre Lewis, provided a platform for pacifism and pleaded against fomenting hatred against the German people whilst the leading figure of the anti-war element in the denomination was the Rev. E.K. Jones, Cefnmawr, who became a key member of the FoR and the NCF in north Wales. The veteran minister, Dr. Cernyw Williams was a renowned pacifist and he prayed for an early end to the conflict and adjured everyone to go down on his knees to ask for forgiveness,³³ and both ministers collaborated with the Rev. Herbert Morgan (who was to become the unsuccessful Labour candidate for Neath in 1918) and George M.LI. Davies in FoR meetings such as one held in Aberdare in February 1918.³⁴ Other prominent anti-war ministers included the Rev. Morgan Jones, Whitland and the Rev. Gilbert Jones, Llangloffan, Pembrokeshire, who supported local conscientious objectors.

²⁹ *Pioneer*, 4 March, 1916

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ T.M. Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists* (Swansea, Ty Ilston, 1977), 386.

³² Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (SPCK, 1978) 30.

³³ Bassett, *The Welsh Baptists*, 388.

³⁴ *ibid*, 391.

Of the four main Nonconformist newspapers, the strongest supporter of the War was the Congregationalist/Independent *Y Tyst* and its editor, Dr H. Michael Hughes, Cardiff, became a chaplain in the Army. The Calvinistic Methodists' *Y Goleuad* generally supported the war, but its columns were open to dissenting views and the Rev J. Puleston Jones, in his weekly column, deprecated those churches who had become part of the recruiting campaign. A correspondent replying to him said that he believed that every minister should tell the young men of his church that if they reject the appeal to enlist, they were in peril of the destruction of their souls. Jones retorted that this was 'very much like what our brothers the Tories used to call "sgriw'r saint" and that he should prefer the screw of the State to that.'³⁵ The pacifist nature of a number of the leading articles of *Y Goleuad* led to a disagreement between the editor, the respected journalist and author, Mr. E. Morgan Humphreys, and the managing committee. His criticism of Lloyd George and his support for conscription brought matters to a head and led to letters of complaint sent by Rev. John Williams, Brynsiencyn, who was also the chairman of the editorial committee. He 'protested vigorously' against the tone of the editor's comments, and stated that Lloyd George himself was taking a great interest in the paper's comments. In October, 1917, Humphreys published a letter that was critical of Lloyd George, and received another missive from Rev. John Williams;

'Rwyf wedi protestio o'r blaen yn erbyn ton y Goleuad ynglyn a'r Prif Weinidog (Lloyd George). Gofyn oeddwn am ddistawrwydd hyd y gellid. Yn awr wele "the unkindest cut of all".

(I have protested before against the Goleuad's tone regarding Lloyd George. Now, see the "unkindest cut of all'.)

Thereafter, the editorial committee decided to reduce his salary, and within the year, in December 1918, he was replaced as editor.³⁶

The Wesleyan *Gwylidydd Newydd* was edited by the future Labour candidate for Flintshire, the Rev. Gwynfryn Jones, and the Baptist *Seren Cymru*, edited by the peace activist, the Rev. D. Wyre Lewis, were sympathetic towards the anti-war movement and

³⁵ *Thomas Jones Papers*, David Thomas, 'The Pacifist Movement', Bangor University.

³⁶ *Morgan Humphreys Papers*, folios 15970-15971, Bangor University; Harri Parri, *Gwn Glan a Beibl Budr* (Caernarfon, Gwasg y Bwthyn, 2014), 167-171.

although these papers were official organs of their denominations, the attitude of each paper depended on the individual editor's personal views, they did not always represent the broader pro-war view of the membership.

A small number of prominent literary figures found their voice against the war. W.J. Gruffydd 'whose mind was especially tortured', translated into Welsh an anti-war sermon by the pacifist Maude Royden. The most public outlet for these individuals was the student paper *Y Wawr*, published in the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, which was closed down by the authorities in 1918 because of its radicalism and which had published articles in support of conscientious objectors as well as the Easter Rising in Ireland. In this magazine, T. Gwynn Jones and others spoke of their sense of moral outrage at the brutality of war and whilst Morgan suggests it was a 'powerful antidote to the war fever',³⁷ it had little influence. A more significant newspaper was the weekly *Y Darian*, originally known as *Tarian y Gweithiwr*, published in Merthyr until its office was moved to Aberdare in 1916, funded by Henry Seymour Berry and edited by the Rev. J. Tywi Jones, a Baptist minister in Glais in the Swansea Valley. He was a Nationalist, a supporter of the Welsh language, and a pacifist. He published strongly worded anti-war editorials throughout the war and whilst he recognized that advertising was lost as a result of his views, the newspaper's circulation increased from two thousand before the war to three thousand five hundred in 1921 and his readers did not abandon the newspaper:

Y Darian oedd yr unig bapur yng Nghymru a barhaodd i ddweud y gwir am bethau yn ystod y rhyfel fawr, ac oherwydd hynny y bu rhai o weithwyr Aberdar yn bygwth "smasho'r" swyddfa, a dichon mai hynny a wnaethent onibae iddynt gael allan nad Cwmni'r Darian a berchenogai'r *Darian*.³⁸

(*Y Darian* was the only paper in Wales that kept telling the truth about things during the Great War, and because of that a few Aberdare workers threatened to "smash" the office, and that would have happened if they had not understood that *Y Darian* company did not own *Y Darian*).

³⁷ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*, 164.

³⁸ *Y Darian*, 28 June 1934, cited in Noel Gibbard, *Tarian Tywi* (Caernarfon, Gwasg y Bwthyn, 2011), 123.

In south Wales, the secular Merthyr *Pioneer*, published by the ILP, was the only other standard bearer opposed to the War, but in north Wales, the only daily or weekly newspaper that opposed the War was *Y Dinesydd Newydd*, the North Wales Labour paper, which had been established in 1912 by three Caernarfon printers on strike, and described by David Thomas as ‘consistently pacifist and religious in tone.’³⁹

The denominational newspapers were readier than most mainstream newspapers, such as the *South Wales Daily News* and the *Western Mail* to give a voice to pacifist arguments against the war. This in part was due to the character of the editors involved but also reflected an unease with the challenge made to traditional Liberal Nonconformity by the introduction of conscription and the growth of the State. This tension is captured in the disagreement between Humphreys and the editorial board of *Y Goleuad*, and in the revulsion shown by relatives of fallen soldiers to John Williams, Brynsiencyn after the end of the war.⁴⁰

ii) The Quakers and the millenarian sects

Amongst the smaller religious sects, the attitude towards war was ostensibly clearer. The Quakers had traditionally opposed the taking up of arms, but were split on the issue of the war, and as a denomination on ‘the margins of Welsh Nonconformity ‘ had very little influence or impact in Wales.⁴¹ The popular assumption that members of the Society of Friends automatically became conscientious objectors was based on a misunderstanding of the Quaker position for members were inspired by a belief in the authority of the Inner light rather than an adherence to a pacifist tenet. Traditionally this inspiration had led Quakers to reject ‘all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons’.⁴² But the Society’s own statistics show that fewer than half of its members of military age became conscientious objectors during the war, while a third enlisted in the Armed Forces.⁴³ In Wales, its membership was comprised of eight Welsh Quaker congregations comprising of some two hundred and fifty attendant members with another two score scattered abroad. Four of the meetings were in mid Wales, at Aberystwyth and inland at Llandrindod, Pen-y-

³⁹ *Thomas Jones Papers*, David Thomas, ‘The Pacifist Movement’

⁴⁰ Parri, *Gwn Glan a Beibl Budr*, 179-182.

⁴¹ Owen Gethin Evans, ‘Quakers in Wales and the First World War’, *Quaker Studies* (2014), 20.

⁴² *Peace among the Nations* (September, 1915), Friends House Library.

⁴³ *Minute and Proceedings of the London Yearly Meeting of Friends* (Friends Meeting House Library, 1923), 231-232.

bont and Llanbadarn (Radnorshire) ; there were three in south Wales, at Swansea, Neath and Cardiff, and just one in north Wales at Colwyn Bay.⁴⁴

The Friends Ambulance Unit (FAU) was established in 1915 and attracted men who wished to provide practical support for soldiers in the front line, but refused to carry arms. These men were not officially conscientious objectors because they had joined the FAU before conscription was introduced, but were 'in the most part composed of those who were prepared to make a definite stand on the question of military service'.⁴⁵ Most did not return to Britain to obtain individual exemption from a tribunal and the remainder were exempted by a special agreement between the Unit's committee and the Army Council.⁴⁶ Even so, of the twenty-nine men who enlisted from Wales in the FAU, only twelve were Quakers, and the rest were seven Congregationalists, four Presbyterians, two Baptists, one Wesleyan, one Plymouth Brethren, and the other two were not categorized. There was a total of 750 Quaker conscientious objectors, of whom there were only thirteen Quaker conscientious objectors from Wales of whom only three were absolutists, namely Bernard Cudbird and his brother Horace, who attended the Cardiff Meeting and had been Congregationalists and Samuel Broomfield of Newport, who refused to take off his hat before the tribunal.⁴⁷ A fourth absolutist Quaker was Harold Watkins, from Llanfyllin, who appeared before the Ledbury tribunal in Herefordshire since he had moved to teach at Colwall Quaker school near Malvern, and was imprisoned for four terms in all.⁴⁸

Other religious sects that emphasised group rather than individual conscience produced high numbers of conscientious objectors compared to their small size. The most important of these were the Christadelphians, the Plymouth Brethren and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Their eschatological beliefs differed radically from the conventional eschatology of the majority of Christians and centred upon the expectation of the early return of Jesus Christ to the world. The Kingdom of God was one to be established on earth after the forces of evil had been defeated at Armageddon and as citizens of this future Kingdom the members of the sects could not owe any allegiance to any earthly ruler, nor could they become involved in the affairs of the world through which they were passing. Their

⁴⁴ Morgan, *The Span of the Cross*, 10.

⁴⁵ M. Tatham and J.E. Miles, *The Friends Ambulance Unit 1914-1919* (Swarthmore Press, 1920), 186-187.

⁴⁶ Arnold Rowntree Papers, Box I, letter to the members of the FAU 17 May 1916, Friends House Library.

⁴⁷ Evans, *Benign Neglect*, 89.

⁴⁸ Watkins, *Life Has Kept Me Young*, 71-92.

rejection of military service in the armies of this world was, like their disinclination to exercise the franchise, a logical consequence of their apocalyptic beliefs.

There were no fewer than 1,716 Christadelphian conscientious objectors, who represented approximately ten per cent of the total number of COs in Britain, of whom at least 155 came from Wales. The Christadelphians' successful petition to Parliament in 1915 sought exemption from military service on the grounds that they were 'conscientiously opposed to bearing arms, on the ground that the Bible, which they believe to be the word of God, commands them not to kill'.⁴⁹ Most Christadelphians were absolutists and opposed non-combatant service because of their objection to military authority, which involved real or implied oaths of loyalty to the Crown. Even in the case of the medical service of the RAMC, Christadelphians believed that it was part of an organisation which was maintained for the special purpose of fighting and that medical personnel would have to carry arms to defend the sick and wounded and for their own protection.⁵⁰ The Army Council eventually agreed to grant an unique dispensation and gave a 'special 'Christadelphian Certificate of Exemption from Military Service' to all registered Christadelphians who fell under the Military Service Act, so that from August 1916 onwards, all Christadelphian cases were referred to the Pelham Committee on Work of National Importance.⁵¹ The Christadelphians were adamant that they were not opposed to others engaging in war, and indeed went to great pains to stress that they did not oppose conscription for others. The sect's leader, Frank Jannaway, stressed that the duty of a Briton was to join the Army and fight for his country but that Christadelphians however, were 'not of this world' and were neutrals, never voted and as such, should not be liable to fight. In all other respects, he accepted that they were subject to the laws of the land, and thus, whilst not permitted by their beliefs to fight, 'will do his best in civil life to help the land of his birth in its hour of distress.'⁵² This conscientious objection to military service did not therefore necessarily constitute opposition to war itself.

The Pelham Committee on Work of National Importance operated as an employment exchange, bringing together those conscientious objectors who had been referred by the

⁴⁹ Frank G. Jannaway, *Without the Camp* (London, 1917), 32.

⁵⁰ John Botten, *The Captive Conscience* (Birmingham, Christadelphian Military Service Committee, 2002), 38.

⁵¹ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 115; Jannaway, *Without the Camp*, 199.

⁵² Jannaway, *Without the Camp*, iv.

tribunals and employers who required labour.⁵³ Three quarters of the cases from Wales before the Committee - 155 out of 207 - were from Christadelphians who were all allocated work of national importance. These appeals were from seventy-one individuals in Glamorgan, fifty-eight from Monmouthshire, twenty-four from Carmarthenshire, mainly in Pont-yates, Llanelli and Ammanford and two from Pembrokeshire.⁵⁴ Whilst little is known of the work and the size of membership of the Christadelphians in Wales during the war, an indication of their strength is that twenty-seven of their Welsh churches, known as ecclesias, sponsored the publication of Jannaway's history of their struggle to gain exemption from military service.⁵⁵

The Plymouth Brethren's position was more complex and the sect consisted of two main groups, the Open Brethren and the Exclusive Brethren, formed after the sect had split in 1849. Whilst some members of the Open Brethren joined the armed forces, their strictest branch, the Churches of God, or the Exclusive Brethren, believed that fighting was incompatible with the teaching of Christ,⁵⁶ and refused to be 'unequally unyoked with unbelievers' in the army.⁵⁷ Of the conscientious objectors in Wales, at least nineteen described themselves as Plymouth Brethren.⁵⁸

The Jehovah's Witnesses' objection to the war differed in one important respect from that of the Christadelphians and the Brethren. Known as the International Bible Students' Association (IBSA), their objection to war was based on their interpretation of scripture, although their neutrality in respect of the War meant that they were 'neither pacifist or patriot'.⁵⁹ The first IBSA branches had only appeared in Wales in 1911, amongst a group of miners in Clydach in the Swansea Valley, and by 1914, they had established a number of classes in the region - in Morryston, Abercrave, Ystalyfera and the centre of Swansea.⁶⁰ Most IBSA conscientious objectors refused to accept military service in the Non-

⁵³ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 195.

⁵⁴ Phillips, *Gorfodaeth Filwrol yn Sir Gaerfyrddin*, 93; T.E. Harvey Papers, Box 9, Draft of the Report of the Pelham Committee on Work of National Importance, Friends House Library.

⁵⁵ Jannaway, *Without the Camp*, v-vi; the ecclesias named are Aberaman, Aberdare, Abergavenny, Abertillery, Ammanford, Bridgend, Cardiff, Ferndale, Haverfordwest, Hengoed, Llanelli, Merthyr Tydfil, Mumbles, Neath, New Tredegar, Pontyates, Pontycwmmwr, Pontypool, Pontypridd, Porth, Port Talbot, Swansea, Tredegar, and Ystrad.

⁵⁶ *Report of the Conference of Representative Overseers of the Churches of God in the British Isles and Overseas* (1935, Plymouth Brethren), 24.

⁵⁷ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 75.

⁵⁸ *Pearce Register 2016*.

⁵⁹ Russell Grigg, 'Jehovah's Witnesses' in Richard Allen, David Ceri Jones, Trystan Hughes (eds.), *The Religious History of Wales* (Cardiff, Welsh Academic Press, 2014), 178.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, 176.

Combatant Corps and were imprisoned, but were prepared to accept work of national importance under the Home Office scheme. One hundred and forty five throughout Britain were registered under the Pelham Committee, and a total of ten members from Wales were registered as conscientious objectors.⁶¹ Whilst IBSA members found work of national importance acceptable, the refusal of members of the apocalyptic sects to participate in the running of work centres or to take part in political activity was an irritant to the politically active conscientious objectors.

Of the other small religious denominations, only the Seventh Day Adventists and the Pentecostal Churches produced comparatively small numbers of conscientious objectors. Both groups expressed their unswerving loyalty to the Government and were anxious that their refusal of combatant service should not be misinterpreted. In this they differed radically from those COs who emphatically rejected loyalty of this nature for political or eschatological reasons. The Seventh Day Adventists based their objection to combatant service on its literal interpretation of the Bible and that as a Christian Church, believing in the 'undiminished authority and perpetuity of the moral law, given by God himself in the Ten Commandments, we hold that we are thereby forbidden to take part in combatant service in time of war'.⁶² This fundamental tenet meant that very few joined the armed forces, whilst in the various Pentecostal Churches, rejection of combatant service was a logical consequence of membership, but it was left to the individual. In the Assemblies of God and the Apostolic Church, refusal of military service was encouraged and in all Pentecostal bodies, literal biblicism and sectarian withdrawal from the conflicts of society provided a general but not universally accepted, basis for conscientious objection.⁶³

iii) The religious anti-war movement in Wales

Key individual chapels, whose congregations included ILP members, became well known as havens for anti-war activists, such as Jerusalem English Baptist chapel in Briton Ferry, Hope English Presbyterian chapel, Merthyr Tydfil, Seion Baptist chapel in Cwmafon, Carmel, Pont-y-Rhyl (near Pontycymmer), Rev. E.K. Jones's Welsh Baptist chapel in Cefnmawr, Wrexham, and a number of chapels in the Swansea Valley including Beulah,

⁶¹ *Pearce Register 2016*

⁶² F. McL. Wilcox, *Seventh Day Adventists in Time of War* (Washington DC, Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1936), 256.

⁶³ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 76.

Cwmtwrch, Bryn Seion, Craig-cefn-parc, and the two Congregationalist chapels in Alltwen, near Pontardawe, of Llywelyn Bowyer, Dan-y-graig and W.J. Rees.⁶⁴ These individuals were public supporters of the anti-war movement and were heavily involved in the organization of the NCF and the FoR, producing, translating pamphlets into the Welsh language, distributing propaganda and providing practical and moral support for conscientious objectors and their families.⁶⁵ A number of them were the NCF's official visitors to conscientious objectors either in prison or military camps, and became the link between the objectors and the NCF's central information bureau. In North Wales, for instance, the main visitor to Caernarfon prison and the five main Army camps such as Kinmel Park and Park Hall, near Oswestry, was the Baptist minister, Rev. E.K. Jones, who was supported in his work by Rev John Clifford, Colwyn Bay, and Principal Thomas Rees. In south Wales, the visitors included the Rev. John Morgan Jones, Merthyr Tydfil, the NCF and ILP organizer Minnie Pallister, Agnes Hughes, sister of Emrys Hughes and a prominent peace activist, and the Rev. Gilbert Jones, Llangloffan in Pembrokeshire. These also served as prison visitors, and as the defendant's friend and witness in tribunals and court-martials.⁶⁶

One of the most renowned and notorious opponents of the War was T.E. Nicholas, known as 'Niclas y Glais', born in 1879 at Llanfyrnach in Pembrokeshire, who became a Baptist minister of religion in Glais in the Swansea Valley, before moving to the rural hamlet of Llangybi, near Tregaron in Cardiganshire in 1914. He was a remarkably proficient writer, poet and propagandist in the Welsh language, who specialized in poetry with a socialist message, and was renowned for his unorthodox though specifically Christian brand of socialist internationalism. He bridged the religious sphere of radical Nonconformity and the political sphere of the ILP through Christian socialism. He joined the ILP in 1905 and his influences included R.J. Campbell's *New Theology* with its liberal interpretation of the Bible and its call for a radical social policy, and R.J. Derfel's and Robert Owen's beliefs in the brotherhood of man, peace and righteousness.⁶⁷ He viewed Socialism as the practical expression of Christianity, edited and wrote the Welsh language column in Keir Hardie's paper the Merthyr based *Pioneer*, and he was the main speaker at Hardie's memorial

⁶⁴ Davies, *Byddin y Brenin*, 156, 167.

⁶⁵ Albert Davies, *Wanderings*, autobiography in private hands, 20.

⁶⁶ E.K. Jones Papers, Box 2, list of NCF visitors, 27 October 1916, National Library of Wales (NLW).

⁶⁷ Ivor Thomas Rees, 'Thomas Evan Nicholas 1879-1971', *National Library of Wales Journal*, Volume XXXV, No.1 (2010), 1-15.

service in Merthyr on 10 October 1915. As secretary of the NCF in Cardiganshire he encouraged young men to become conscientious objectors, travelled widely and spoke incessantly in anti-war meetings under the aegis of the NCF, ILP and the FoR. He was followed constantly by the police, who took detailed notes of many of his speeches and whose Chief Constable in Glamorgan, Lionel Lindsay, obsessively persecuted him but failed in his multiple attempts to prosecute him for his anti-war activity. His correspondence was constantly intercepted because he 'openly preaches sedition at his chapel, abuses the King, and does all in his power to stop recruiting, and upholds the conscientious Objectors.'⁶⁸ He was recorded as having delivered 'a most disloyal speech' at Keir Hardie's memorial service, and a local lady, Mrs Drummond, wrote to warn Lindsay that Nicholas had been involved in 'dangerous activities', that he had taken up the cause of conscientious objectors and that he encouraged 'pacifist and pro-German propaganda'. Police officers reported his speeches in ILP meetings in Aberaman and Mountain Ash, in which he excoriated the government and its religious apologists and stated that if this was a religious war, then religious men should fight these religious battles:

Our means of worshipping God is very sinful, we ask Him to save us here and destroy our enemies, but we are all God's children. We ask God to do things we would not ask a mother in Aberaman to do. If two boys in Aberaman went to fight each other, we would not ask the mothers to save one and destroy the other, but that is just what we are asking God to do.⁶⁹

Nicholas bridged the political and religious opposition to the War and was arguably the most prominent anti-war propagandist in Wales in this period. However the undoubted main centre of organized opposition to the war was the Congregationalist Bala-Bangor theological college in Bangor and its Principal, Thomas Rees. Born ten years earlier within a quarter of a mile of T.E. Nicholas's home in Llanfyrnach in north Pembrokeshire, he was the fulcrum for a group of theologically liberal anti-war professors, lecturers, ministers and students who were inspired by Rees and radicalised and alienated from Liberalism by their opposition to the war. The Congregationalists, also known as Independents, proved to be the most active of the Nonconformist denominations in opposing the War, and their activities were bolstered by the denomination's profound suspicion of military conscription. They argued that since

⁶⁸ *Security Services Papers*, KV2/1750 folio 23970, T.E. Nicholas file, National Archives (NA).

⁶⁹ *Home Office Papers*, HO 45/263275 folio 428, Report of ILP meeting at Aberaman, (NA).

Nonconformists had spent the best part of two centuries trying to win liberties for the individual believer in the face of hostile state oppression it was hardly surprising that they were deeply wary of the encroaching state with its apparent emphasis on compulsion and state action. Their traditional message of individual responsibility and individual moral regeneration made the acceptance of a collectivist creed extremely difficult, if not impossible. Rees was the most significant leader of the anti-war movement on religious grounds in Wales, who was an early voice of opposition at the beginning of the war and as Principal of Bala-Bangor inspired a generation of his students to oppose the war. His letter in *Y Tyst* on 30 September 1914 was the first anti-war broadside of an increasingly bitter correspondence which caused him to be reviled and scorned. He appealed to the Congregationalists' heroes and to its tradition of peace:

Mae gennym fel enwad draddodiadau Henry Richard, S.R. a Gwilym Hiraethog i'w cadw'n lan. Mae gennym Efengyl y Groes a'r cariad i'w phregethu; a bydd yn union fwy o angen nag erioed am bregethu tangnefedd. Ond nid hawdd fydd pregethu tangnefedd yn fuan ar ol gyrru pobl i ryfela.⁷⁰

(We have as a denomination, the tradition of Henry Richard, S.R., and Gwilym Hiraethog to uphold, we have the gospel of the Cross and Love to preach, and there is greater need today than ever before to preach peace. It will not be easy to preach peace after driving people to war.)

Rees condemned crude anti-Germanism and the propaganda about alleged German atrocities in Belgium, and his appeal to Wales's pacifist tradition aroused widespread anger and hostility. The Anglican magazine, *Y Llan*, accused Rees of treason, and the *Western Mail* accused him of performing 'a gross and unpardonable act of disloyalty' in suggesting that Britain was not guiltless in the present conflict, and of using 'baseless and inexcusable' arguments:

These ridiculous perversities would not claim a moment's attention but for the fact that they appear over the signature of a leader of Welsh Nonconformity and a burning and shining light among Welsh Congregationalists. If his statements are not publicly repudiated by those who can speak in the name of Welsh Nonconformity serious harm may be done to the national and patriotic movement in Wales initiated by Mr Lloyd George and Mr

⁷⁰ *Y Tyst*, 30 September 1914.

Asquith...The need for official action to counteract the pernicious effects of the Rev. T.Rees letter is the greater seeing that in Wales...the popular leaders are the religious leaders.⁷¹

The seriousness with which the *Western Mail* regarded his intervention was reflected in its campaign against Rees for the following months which commenced with an imaginative cartoon by Staniforth showing the Kaiser complimenting him:

Well done, Principal Rees ! Continue, my dear fellow, to pooh-pooh German atrocities, and do all you can to prevent Welsh men enlisting and later on my soldiers shall come to Wales and treat your university as they did at Louvain.⁷²

The editor accused Rees of the 'foul slander' that British soldiers were as guilty as German soldiers of massacres, burnings and looting', and called on him to cease using his influence 'as a religious leader in Wales in way which would deter recruiting on an occasion of national emergency'.⁷³ Rees's trenchant reply accepted the Government's right to wage war, but protested against the pressure being put on the Churches to support the recruiting drive:

I note that the Cardiff Tory paper, as if it were the Czar and the Kaiser rolled into one, calls upon the leaders of Nonconformity and the Congregational authorities to put me in the stocks for presuming to request newspapers to be more truthful and politicians to be honest, and for asking that religious people should have liberty. This is precisely the spirit against which I protested. The newspapers and the Government made the war without consulting the Church, and now they call upon the Church to carry it on, while the *Western Mail* commands the Nonconformist denominations to penalize whomsoever will not kneel before its idol...⁷⁴

Further letter writers to the *Western Mail*, such as W.Thomas, a Congregationalist minister from Llanboidy in rural Carmarthenshire, threatened to stop funding Bala-Bangor

⁷¹ *Western Mail*, 7 October 1914.

⁷² *ibid*, 10 October 1914.

⁷³ *ibid*, 16 October 1914.

⁷⁴ *ibid*.

Theological College,⁷⁵ and a number of chapels did withdraw support from the college, but other organisations including the ILP, were moved to support the college. Following the report of one Aberdare chapel withdrawing funding, the Garw branch of the ILP wrote to Rees of its admiration of:

the unselfish, courageous and noble stand which the Revd. Thomas Rees has made, in spite of misrepresentation and abuse, on behalf of the principles of peace and International Brotherhood, and its deep regret at the evidence of religious persecution and want of Christian charity displayed by the recent action of an Aberdare church in withholding its financial support from the College of which he is Principal. It further considers that such action is vindictive and utterly unworthy of a religious community and inimical to the highest interests of a clear political social and religious life and the interests of truth.⁷⁶

Rees's trenchant response to criticism steeled his resolve and in a letter to his friend Rev. J.T. Rhys, he expressed his wish to create a greater pacifist movement in Wales:

You see I am in open revolt ... I will join any rebellion that will come along ... I mean ... to make the anti-war position recognized and of some authority in North Wales politics and religion, but it will take some time.⁷⁷

Surprisingly, the college did not suffer financially as a result of Rees's views, and the college's annual collections in chapels throughout Wales increased throughout the war,⁷⁸ but in the wake of this controversy, Rees reached 'the pinnacle of his unpopularity':

Yn yr unigrwydd oer hwnnw y ceir ef yn broffwyd gwrthodedig. Melltithiwyd ei enw yn y cudd a'r cyhoedd. Di-arddelwyd ef o'i aelodaeth gan Glwb Golff Bangor, cyfyngwyd I raddau ar ei gyfleusterau pregethu, amheuwyd ei addasrwydd fel Pennaeth coleg, ac edrychid arno'n wir megis un i'w osgoi ymysg dynion.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ *ibid*, 20 October 1914.

⁷⁶ *Pioneer*, 6 July 1918.

⁷⁷ *Thomas Rees Papers*, letter to J.T. Rhys, 3 April 1915 University Bangor, MS 17773.

⁷⁸ Thomas Eirug Davies, *Prifathro Thomas Rees* (Llandysul, Gomer Press, 1939), 70.

⁷⁹ *ibid*, 139.

(In this cold loneliness he was a spurned prophet. His name was reviled publicly and privately. He was expelled as a member of Bangor Golf Club, his preaching opportunities were curtailed, his suitability as a Principal was questioned, and he was viewed as someone to avoid in company.)

Farcically, there was an attempt to strike him off the membership roll of Bangor Golf Club, but Mr. Vincent, the proposer for the motion that Rees be requested to resign his membership himself resigned when the executive committee refused to take the matter further after Rees had repudiated the views ascribed to him.⁸⁰ He was subsequently excluded from his club but his response was phlegmatic:

The whole thing is too idiotically absurd. One would scarcely know that we are living in a 'free country' if we hadn't a daily press that tells us so. Well, its glorious weather and even the Huns, local and universal, can't spoil the joy of it.⁸¹

His local newspaper suggested he should be treated in the same way that Professor Ethe, a University Professor who had worked in Aberystwyth for over twenty years, and who was hounded out of the town because of his Germanic name but Rees commented that although he had been 'considerably battered', he felt 'peace within and the storm without is realising that it is beating in vain.'⁸² Thomas Rees's militant pacifism arose from his profound conviction that war under any circumstances was inconsistent with the teaching and spirit of Jesus and suffered great vituperation for his anti-war views,⁸³ but his influence on the development of the pacifist anti-war movement was profound and never more so than in his involvement with the FoR in Wales.

iv) The Fellowship of Reconciliation

The opposition to the war on religious grounds in Wales was mainly organised through the FoR which was established at a conference in Cambridge in September 1914. Among those present were a number of prominent personalities, including Henry Hodgkin, an English Quaker and missionary doctor, the Member of Parliament, George Lansbury, and

⁸⁰ *Bangor Golf Club Papers*, Executive minutes, November 1914- January 1915, Bangor University.

⁸¹ *Bala-Bangor Papers*, MS 17782, Rees's letter to J.T.Rhys, 29 April 1916. Bangor University.

⁸² *ibid*, MS17777, Rees's letter to J.T. Rhys, 5 January 1916, Bangor University.

⁸³ Miall Edwards's obituary tribute to Rees, *Welsh Outlook*, July 1926, 185.

the social activist from Wrexham, George Maitland LI. Davies. Those present were drawn from the 'professional middle classes' and the individuals present shared a 'sense of deep unease and the germs of a subjective interpretation of the Christian ethic which left each largely out-of step with the 'official' line taken by his Church'.⁸⁴ The conference produced a five point statement that included express opposition to the War:

that, as Christians, we are forbidden to wage war, and that our loyalty to our country, to humanity, to the Church Universal, and to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master, calls us instead to a life service for the enthronement of love in personal, social commercial and national life.⁸⁵

For those present it was a relief that others shared their conviction that war and Christianity were not compatible but the ILP member of Parliament, George Lansbury highlighted the Fellowship's otherworldiness and was critical of its 'indefiniteness': 'We talked a lot about Christian witness, but few amongst us were willing to say 'war was murder'.⁸⁶ By February 1915, 170 people had joined the FoR and attempts were being made to set up local groups. But members were uncertain how directly political they wanted their Fellowship to be. A profound reflection of its upper middle class sensibilities was its executive committee's suggestion that:

Drawing Room classes were suggested for the upper class circles, but with regard to the other end of the social spectrum, members were warned that they should attend Independent Labour Party meetings in order to familiarise themselves with the atmosphere before speaking at working-class gatherings on the subject of peace.⁸⁷

There were strong personalities within its ranks who were in little agreement with each other except that war was always wrong.⁸⁸ The Fellowship was to prove a difficult ship to steer for the chair, Henry Hodgkin and reconciliation within its own ranks was embarrassingly hard to achieve in practice during its early years:

⁸⁴ Wallis, *Valiant for Peace*, 6.

⁸⁵ *ibid*, 7.

⁸⁶ *ibid*, 7.

⁸⁷ *ibid*, 10.

⁸⁸ Robbins, *Abolition of War*, 61.

what leading members had most in common was confidence in their own spiritual intuition and the courage to stand by it even to the detriment of their own careers.⁸⁹

Its tone was quietist and tended to take the view that pacifism was essentially for the individual conscience, and it was mainly supported by clergy and intellectuals who wished to have a 'rigorous theological and spiritual basis for pacifism'.⁹⁰ The Fellowship's first administrator was the Rev. Richard Roberts, who was born in 1874 in Blaenau Ffestiniog, and studied at Bala Theological College and ministered in South Wales before becoming Presbyterian minister in Crouch End, London in 1910. He had worked with Keir Hardie to oppose the Boer War, and in 1914 he found difficulties with his congregation because of his anti-war views. He chose temporarily to leave the Ministry to take up the post of general secretary of the FoR and became the first editor of the FoR's quarterly magazine, *The Venturer*, which sold approximately two thousand two hundred and seventy copies per month throughout Britain and Ireland.⁹¹ He left to take up a pastorate in New York in December 1915, by which time the FoR's membership had reached two thousand and was growing at two hundred a month, and was to grow to an organisation of approximately five thousand members distributed amongst one hundred and sixty five branches and groups in Britain by the end of the War.⁹² In September 1915, another Welsh Presbyterian, George M.Ll. Davies, left his prestigious post as secretary to three housing associations in the Welsh Town Planning and Housing Trust to take up his role as assistant secretary of the Fellowship with no salary, and £10 in expenses. He had already rejected an offer from the Trust's President, David Davies, by then a Colonel with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and would become Lloyd George's parliamentary private secretary, to become editor of the prestigious monthly magazine *Welsh Outlook*.⁹³ He was based in the FoR's office in Red Lion Square in London, and travelled around the country, establishing branches, writing leaflets, articles and propaganda. A frequent speaker throughout Wales, the largest anti-war meeting he addressed was a public meeting in the Rink at Merthyr Tydfil at the end of 1915 with over two thousand people present.⁹⁴ With Roberts's departure, George M.Ll.Davies became General Secretary of the Fellowship until the Rev. Leyton Richards, a

⁸⁹ Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914-1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford, 1980), 37.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*

⁹¹ *Fellowship of Reconciliation Papers*, Coll Misc 0456/4/1, Minutes of Literature Committee, London School of Economics (LSE).

⁹² Wallis, *Valiant for Peace*, 12.

⁹³ Griffiths, *Heddychwyr Mawr Cymru: G.M.Ll. Davies*, 51.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 53.

Presbyterian minister from Cheshire, was appointed to succeed Roberts as general secretary in December 1915.⁹⁵

In Wales the growth of the FoR took on a strikingly distinctive character of its own and was developed by key individuals, mostly Welsh-speaking, Nonconformist ministers of religion, although not exclusively so, and concentrated in North Wales. Whilst the proportion of the Welsh population who spoke Welsh was approximately forty-three per cent, and in Gwynedd, the proportion of monoglot Welsh speakers was thirty-six percent,⁹⁶ nevertheless it is remarkable that the evidence of FoR activity through the medium of English is very slight and extremely limited in south Wales. The founding meeting of the FoR in Wales was held in Bangor on 31 May and 1 June 1915, and was addressed by the Fellowship's administrator, the Rev. Richard Roberts, the Rev. Peter Hughes-Griffiths and E. Llywelyn Williams, all from the FoR in London. A service was held in the English-language Presbyterian church in Princes Road, addressed by Rev. Hywel Harris Hughes, minister of the local Tabernacle chapel, and Principal Thomas Rees, both of whom would become key figures in the development of the opposition movement. The congregation included scores of students, and many of those theological students in particular would become conscientious objectors. In a subsequent meeting at Thomas Rees's home, it was decided to create an organisational division for Caernarvonshire, and four branches were created - Bangor/Bethesda; Caernarfon/Penygroes, Blaenau Ffestiniog and Pwllheli.⁹⁷ The second regional division was created in the Wrexham area on 2 June, when a group mostly of ministers of religion met and held a number of peace meetings in Ponciau and Rhosllannerchrugog, which were addressed by G.M.Ll. Davies, Herbert Dunnico, secretary of the Peace Society, Revs. D. Wyre Lewis and E.K. Jones, a Baptist Minister of Cefnmawr, near Wrexham. A number of smaller branches were then established in the locality, but the membership was small. The Rev. Tegla Davies described his small sub-branch in Oswestry as ineffectual and with little public sympathy for its aims:

⁹⁵ Llywelyn, *George Davies: the Pilgrim of Peace*, 85.

⁹⁶ Davies, *Hanes Cymru*, 478

⁹⁷ Rees, *Dal i Herio'r Byd*, 116.

Pan gychwynasom ar y gwaith, caem groeso i ystafell bur dymunol, ond pan ddaeth chwaon o amheuaeth heibio ynghylch ein hamcanion, gwthiwyd ni i ystafell fwy dirwyiedig, ac felly ymlaen nes o'r diwedd gyrraedd y seler.⁹⁸

(when we started on our work, we were welcomed to a quite desirable room, but when our aims caused draughts of doubt, we were pushed to a more unsuitable room, and then onwards until we reached the cellar.)

In Merthyr Tydfil, the FoR joined an alliance of anti-war bodies, including the ILP, the NCF, the UDC and trade union lodges to form the Merthyr Stop the War and Peace Council, which attracted crowds of up to three thousand people to its meetings,⁹⁹ but comparatively few branches were formally established in other parts of Wales. By January 1918, the FoR had eleven branches scattered throughout Wales. In north Wales the branches were clustered near Bangor, in Caernarfon and Penygroes in the Nantlle Valley, and the Wrexham area, with branches in Corwen and Oswestry. In south Wales, they were distributed more widely in Cardiff, Swansea, Merthyr Tydfil, Nelson in the Rhymney Valley, and in Aberystwyth in mid-Wales, whilst Cardiff also boasted an associated students' group.¹⁰⁰ Six of the eleven branch secretaries were ministers of religion. On the basis of the FoR's distrust of organization and its belief in individual will, the extent to which these groups were organized coherently and in a disciplined manner is doubtful. It may be significant that areas in which there was substantial anti-war activity by FoR members, such as the Swansea Valley and Briton Ferry, did not boast their own branches, but worked through local peace councils with other organizations such as the ILP and the NCF. In November 1918, sympathy towards the plight of conscientious objectors was the motivation for the establishing of another branch in Trawsfynydd, with about fifty members,¹⁰¹ but this proved an exception, and FoR members' energy was mostly directed towards sustaining local peace organizations and building a relationship with local anti-war organizations such as the ILP. The FoR organization in Wales seems to have been autonomous of the formal structures of the FoR, and very few members from Wales

⁹⁸ E. Tegla Davies, 'Yr Eglwys Fethodistaidd', Jones and Evans, *Ffordd Tangnefedd*, 22.

⁹⁹ *Pioneer*, 22 April 1916.

¹⁰⁰ *The News Sheet of the FoR*, January 1918, Peace Pledge Union.

¹⁰¹ *E.K. Jones Papers*, Box 6, letters from Owen Owen, Trawsfynydd to Jones, 8 February 1918, 4 November 1918, 22 December 1918, NLW.

attended its General Council,¹⁰² whilst the relationship between the FoR in Wales and London was a very direct personal one between G.M.Ll. Davies and Richard Roberts on the one hand, and Principal Thomas Rees on the other.

The FoR centrally funded the translation and printing of pamphlets into Welsh, such as 2,500 copies of 'Faith for the new Age' and 2,500 copies of the pamphlet, 'How to Check the Spirit of Militarism'.¹⁰³ The most crucial initiative taken by the organization in Wales in the aftermath of the introduction of conscription was its decision to create a Welsh-language newspaper to oppose the war. In January 1916, Principal Thomas Rees notified the FoR's Literature Committee that the Bangor and Wrexham groups had considered creating a new anti-war magazine as being 'the only means of getting at the public in Wales was by a distinctively Welsh journal', and Rees was assured of the FoR's support,¹⁰⁴ and given a financial guarantee of twenty pounds against a loss on the new venture for the first twelve months.¹⁰⁵

In March 1916, the conference 'to consider the FoR's approach to the 'peculiar social and religious problems of Wales and to consider the creation of a newspaper to advocate pacifist views' was held at Hendre Hall, Bont Ddu near Dolgellau and its convening circular was signed by the FoR's chairman, Dr. Richard Roberts, and its general secretary, George M. Ll. Davies together with the leadership of the FoR in Wales including Thomas Rees and his fellow Bala-Bangor lecturer Rev. John Morgan Jones. They informed the invitees that:

In view of the extreme seriousness of the present political situation, and the need for expression of the growing dissatisfaction in Wales with the existing order in the political and religious world, it is felt that the Conference may be an event of very great significance.¹⁰⁶

The agenda for the two days reflected a combination of religious devotion and practical politics, and included discussions on a Welsh journal and the role of the FoR in Wales.

¹⁰² *Fellowship of Reconciliation Papers*, Coll Misc 0456/2/1, General Council Minutes, LSE; of the seven meetings between April 1915 and September 1919, which averaged seventy, only six Welsh delegates attended.

¹⁰³ *ibid*, Coll Misc 0456/4/1, Literature Committee Minutes, 13 January, 1916, LSE.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*, Coll Misc 0456/5/1, Minutes of Business Committee, 3 May 1916, LSE.

¹⁰⁶ *E.K. Jones Papers*, Box 39, circular from H.Harris Hughes, February 1916, NLW.

The prominent poet T.Gwynn Jones led a discussion on 'national affairs' and the Flintshire minister and prominent ILPer, Revd. D. Gwynfryn Jones led on international affairs.¹⁰⁷

The twenty eight people present were mostly ministers of religion and a sole woman, Eluned Morgan, a well-known literary figure from the Welsh colony of Patagonia, Argentina. The party included the Revd. J. Puleston Jones, Pwllheli, the minister of Hope chapel in Merthyr, Revd. J. Morgan Jones, four Bala-Bangor students, the Students Christian Movement secretary, and three of the most prominent Welsh-language literary figures of the day, the Revd. Tegla Davies, T. Gwynn Jones and T.H.Parry Williams.¹⁰⁸ The decision to establish the journal was the most momentous of the conference and it became the link for the Christian pacifist movement throughout Wales, although its geographical reach and its Welsh language content also marked its limitations.

This monthly journal, *Y Deyrnas*, was established in October 1916. It consisted at first of eighteen pages but then reduced in December 1917 to eight pages and had a circulation extending throughout Wales of three thousand until the end of the War, although after the Armistice it dropped to two thousand six hundred, and suffered a small financial loss on the last editions published. The chairman of the board of management was Principal Thomas Rees, the 'dynamic power behind this crusade',¹⁰⁹ its secretary was the Rev. H. Harris Hughes, the minister of Tabernacle chapel in Bangor and a former printer and the treasurer was Prof John Morgan Jones, also of Bala-Bangor. The printer and publisher Evan Thomas, Gwalia Printing Works, Sackville Road, Bangor proved a willing and enthusiastic collaborator in the venture.¹¹⁰ In its first edition, Rees stated that the magazine would examine the relevance of the principles of Christ to every department of human life, including religion, politics, commerce and labour, and explained that the journal's mission arose from a sense of shame at Christianity's failure:

am na fu Cristnogaeth Ewrob yn wrthglawdd digonol yn erbyn y rhyferthwy dinistriol. Ond o ystyried, gwelwn mai un yn unig o effeithiau ysbryd Anghrist yw y gyflafan hon; i'r un achos

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ Griffith, *Heddychwr Mawr Cymru*, 61.

¹⁰⁹ Davies, *Prifathro Thomas Rees*, 143.

¹¹⁰ Rees, *Dal i Herio'r Byd*, 118.

y rhaid olrhain drygau cymdeithasol, cenedlaethol a rhyng-genedlaethol ein hoes. Yn wyneb hyn oll, rhaid fod rhywbeth i'w dystiolaethu yn enw Teyrnas Dduw.¹¹¹

(Christian Europe had not been a sufficient bulwark against the destructive flood. But we see now that the present disaster is only one of the effects of the Spirit of Anti-Christ; all social, national and international evils of the age must be traced to the same cause. In the face of all this, there must be some message to be delivered in the name of the Kingdom of God.)

Rees wrote a third of its content and other ministers of religion wrote the bulk of the articles, while a monthly column on conscientious objectors by Rev. E.K. Jones exposed their ill-treatment. A number of the younger and most prominent poets T. Gwynn Jones and T.H. Parry Williams, both recently crowned bards, published poetry in *Y Deyrnas* as well as prominent writers such as the poet-propagandist Rev.T.E. Nicholas (Niclas y Glais) and David Thomas, Talysarn, also the North Wales organizer of the ILP and member of the FoR.

Three Liberal Members of Parliament also contributed individual articles to the magazine - Ellis Davies, the Member for Eifionnydd, E.T. John, East Denbighshire and W. Llewelyn Williams, Carmarthen Boroughs, which reflected the growing unease amongst traditional Liberals at conscription and the growing distance between Lloyd George and traditional Liberals. None could be said to be opponents of the War, but they focussed on the dangers of increasing militarism and were sympathetic to the conscientious objectors, and both Davies and John were ready to be used by the Fellowship to put down parliamentary questions about the ill-treatment of conscientious objectors and the prospects of an early peace settlement by the summer of 1917.¹¹² Most of the other contributors however, were undoubtedly 'out and out' pacifists. The print run of *Y Deyrnas* varied from two and a half thousand in December 1916, to three thousand in November 1917, before declining to two thousand, seven hundred and fifty by September 1918. This impressive level of sales was similar to *The Venturer's* circulation throughout Britain, and it was distributed openly to two hundred and nineteen outlets, including forty shops and newsagents. The agents only

¹¹¹ *Y Deyrnas*, September 1916.

¹¹² *Bala-Bangor Papers*, MSS 234, letter from Ellis Davies M.P. to Rev. J Morgan Jones, Bangor 6 July 1917, Bangor University.

included three ministers of religion, and the distribution was limited primarily to the counties of North Wales, Carmarthenshire and Glamorgan, as revealed in Table 1.

Table One - Monthly Distribution of *Y Deyrnas* to shops and agents in 1917¹¹³

Glamorgan	915
Denbigh and Flintshire	381
Caernarvonshire	371
Carmarthenshire	332
Merionethshire	278
Cardiganshire	117
Pembrokeshire	89
Anglesey	71
Montgomeryshire	60
Breconshire	6
London	26
Total:	2,646

Whilst it may not be surprising that no copies were sold in such a heavily Anglicised county as Radnorshire, the lack of sales in the western valleys of Monmouthshire suggests a lack of penetration and influence east of the Rhondda valleys and Cardiff, and that its influence was felt mainly in North Wales, Carmarthenshire and the western half of the south Wales coalfield. In North Wales, circulation was highest in the Wrexham area (124), Trawsfynydd (72) and Blaenau Ffestiniog (73), with Caernarfon and the slate quarrying centres of the Nantlle and Ogwen Valleys and Caernarfon (74), and Bangor (30). In Pembrokeshire, there was a cluster around the northern villages of Clunderwen, Boncath, Y Glog and Llanfyrnach (76 copies), and possibly related to the influence of a local minister, the Revd. Gilbert Jones, Llangloffan, and Thomas Rees and T.E. Nicholas's influence locally, given that both were from the area. The Amman Valley had a circulation of 254 copies, between Llandybie in the west through Ammanford to Brynamman and Cwmtwrch in the east, In Glamorgan, the main centres were Swansea (63) ; Swansea Valley (59) ; Merthyr and district (51) ; Aberdare (36). But the densest area of circulation in Glamorgan was

¹¹³ *ibid*, MSS 258, Circulation of *Y Deyrnas*, Bangor University.

undoubtedly the Rhondda, with its large population, with 123 copies sold, ranging from Pontypridd upwards to Tonypany, Treherbert, Treorchy, Tylorstown and Clydach Vale.

Given the nature of its content, it is remarkable that *Y Deyrnas* did not fall foul of the Defence of the Realm Act and Government censors given its trenchant criticism of Government policy, but the authorities were very slow to respond to the appearance of the paper and even then did not pursue the journal. It was only in February 1918 that the Military Intelligence officer responsible for North Wales based in the Army headquarters in Chester, identified that the magazine might be controversial.¹¹⁴ The influence of *Y Deyrnas* was broadened in 1917-1918 by those who had originally accepted the necessity for war but were increasingly alienated by the Government's illiberal support for conscription and pursuit of conscientious objectors.¹¹⁵

The onset of conscription in January 1916 proved a significant watershed for the anti-war movement, and although there was provision for a 'conscience' cause in the Military Service Act, the lack of clarity of this provision meant that 'much of its intended generosity would be frustrated'. The attitude of the FoR was that it was for the individual to decide what his conscience should do, although they urged that members should consider taking alternative service of a non-military nature.¹¹⁶ In Wales, an indication of Thomas Rees's influence was his college's response to the introduction of conscription in February 1916 and its impact on the college and its students. Although seven of its theological students had enlisted in the Army since 1914, in February 1916, eighteen of its students sought exemption on grounds of conscientious objection in the second session of the Bangor military tribunal. They had the support of the college's executive committee and these Bala-Bangor students appeared with another eleven students from the Baptists' college in Bangor, and six Bangor University students. The tribunal's members received a circular from Bala-Bangor college, which stated that the grounds on which the applicants based their claims were threefold, on grounds of conscience, that a man being educated or trained for any work should continue to be so educated and trained, and that the Christian ministry had been expressly recognized by parliament as a work of sufficient importance to

¹¹⁴ *Air Ministry papers*, AIR 1/560/15/59, Weekly Intelligence Summary General Headquarters, Great Britain, Report of Military Intelligence Officer, Chester Barracks, February 1918, NA.

¹¹⁵ Morgan, *The Span of the Cross*, 61.

¹¹⁶ Wallis, *Valiant for Peace*, 17-18.

exempt those who perform it from military service.¹¹⁷ The tribunal was informed that about one half of the Congregationalist students in the Welsh theological colleges had enlisted and there was a danger of a shortage of ministers if theological students were not exempted. The tribunal proved sympathetic despite the hectoring presence of one of its members, the same Mr. Vincent of the Bangor Golf Club who had sought Rees's expulsion, and it gave absolute exemption to four of the Bala-Bangor students, and conditional exemption to the others. Rees spoke at the tribunal on behalf of the students, and it became apparent that Thomas Rees also aided fifteen students of the Bangor Baptist College to apply for exemption, which included instructions on how to fill the relevant forms.¹¹⁸ Of the twenty-one Bala-Bangor students, six gained absolute exemption on the grounds of their vocation as theological students, whilst only one was rejected¹¹⁹

Other colleges' authorities showed little tolerance towards war resisters, and the Cardiff Baptist college, for instance, encouraged its students to enlist even though a sizeable minority of its students opposed conscription.¹²⁰ Other colleges, such as Carmarthen Presbyterian College attempted to secure exemption, and its Principal successfully appealed on behalf of three of his students who were about to enter the ministry, but a fourth was refused exemption because of the gap of sixteen months he had to wait to qualify fully as a minister,¹²¹ and Brecon Memorial Congregationalist College had at least ten conscientious objectors. Whilst the majority of theological students gained exemption there were isolated exceptions and in the case of Ben Meyrick, a Baptist minister in Anglesey and a member of the FoR, he was refused exemption on grounds of conscience, and despite a series of appeals and campaigns led by Rev. E.K. Jones and others, he was sentenced in October 1917 to two years imprisonment with hard labour.¹²²

On the home front, from November 1917 onwards, the intelligence agencies pursued the FoR with vigour, with their London headquarters raided on 14 November 1917 and their journal *The Venturer* prosecuted for the publication of a critical letter by George M.L.I.

¹¹⁷ *Bala-Bangor Papers*, folio 3169, newspaper cutting; *Henry Lewis papers*, MS 5278, Bangor University.

¹¹⁸ *E.K. Jones Papers*, Box 39, letter from Dan Jones, February 1916, NLW

¹¹⁹ *Bala-Bangor Papers*, folio 3169, notes by Thomas Rees, Bangor University

¹²⁰ *E.K. Jones Papers*, Box 29, letter from S.J. Leeke, secretary students' body, Baptist College Cardiff, 31 December 1915, NLW

¹²¹ *Carmarthen Journal*, 10 March 1916

¹²² *E.K. Jones Papers*, Box 2, 24 February 1916, NLW.

Davies to his wife which described prison conditions.¹²³ Wales was reported to be receptive to the FoR message, 'a combination of recent religious revival and acute industrial problems' thought to make the Valleys entirely congenial for the deliverance of FoR's evangelism.¹²⁴ But this rosily optimistic view of the FoR's potential in Wales was undermined by the organisation's quietist tone and reluctance to offer political guidance.

The first national Welsh conference to be organized by the FoR was held for two days in September 1917 in the Friends' Meeting House in Llandrindod. Seventy people were present for the conference, with Dr. Thomas Rees as President and D. Wyre Lewis as secretary, but attempts to persuade two of the most sympathetic Members of Parliament, E.H. John and Ellis W. Davies, who had written for *Y Deyrnas* and had opposed conscription, to attend the conference, were rebuffed. Davies responded that although he sympathized with the aim of the conference, he felt that

nothing would be gained from the intervention of MPs in such a conference where possibly extreme speeches might be delivered and which would in no way contribute to focusing public opinion on what must be the basis of an European peace. I mentioned the matter to Mr. E.T John the other day and he agrees with me in thinking that it would be better in the first instance that a small number - from six to ten - should meet in private and ascertain the points on which they are agreed.¹²⁵

This caution did Davies little good for although he had been careful to be an ultra-loyalist to Lloyd George it failed to save him from challenge by a Coalition Liberal candidate in December 1918 and he thereby lost his Eifionnydd seat.¹²⁶ John in turn deserted the Liberal party for the Labour party in the 1918 election, when he also lost his seat. In Llandrindod, resolutions called for immediate peace by negotiation, and an appeal was made to the Prime Minister to investigate how the Military Service Acts were implemented in relation to conscientious objectors, and pleaded for reform of their treatment:

¹²³ Wallis, *Valiant for Peace*, 30.

¹²⁴ *ibid*, 31

¹²⁵ *Bala-Bangor Papers*, MSS 234, letter from Ellis Davies to Rev. John Morgan Jones, Bangor, 6 July 1917, Bangor University

¹²⁶ J. Graham Jones, *David Lloyd George and Welsh Liberalism* (Aberystwyth, Welsh Political Archive, 2010), 184-185.

We are convinced that all measures of persecution cause grievous harm to the country at large, and would call your attention to the fact that many of the most loyal citizens and noblest characters are now imprisoned not for any crime, but for reasons of loyalty to conscience only. In particular we would call your attention to the practice of sentencing men to several terms of imprisonment for what is practically but one act of disobedience. We appeal to you with confidence, remembering your many fights for freedom of speech and liberty of conscience, and also knowing that you can at pleasure put an end to what is now a stain upon the character of this country.¹²⁷

A public meeting on the second evening of the conference was organized in the local Baptist church with the support of local Quakers and of Hercules Phillips, a local journalist and leading Friend. It was broken up after the opening speaker, John Davies, a prominent ILP member and miners' agent for Dowlais, struck a truculent tone in his speech which was out of step with the emollient calm of the meeting during that day.¹²⁸ The initial prayers offered by the Rev. John Morgan Jones, Bangor including supplication for the men at the front, but Davies then criticized shipowners for profiteering from the war, which led to heckling and howls of protest from a part of the audience, and the meeting was brought to an end by the church minister and his deacons.¹²⁹ It is evident that the organizers received prior warning of the interruption of the meeting earlier that day, and a feature of the conference itself was the debate between the labour and miners' federation activists and the ministers of religion on the forthcoming 'war after the war' to come between Capital and Labour.¹³⁰

The conference resolved to continue its work and organize further local conferences across Wales, and set up two committees, one for North Wales and one for south Wales, to take on the responsibility of organising further similar conferences. Thomas Rees was elected President and Professor John Morgan Jones, Bangor elected as treasurer, with two secretaries - the Revd. Wyre Lewis for North Wales and Revd. W.J. Rees, Alltwn for south Wales.¹³¹ The local committees worked to organise public meetings throughout Wales, and most of these were held in south-west Wales, in Ystalyfera, Cwmtwrch,

¹²⁷ *Y Deyrnas*, October 1917.

¹²⁸ Evans, *Benign Neglect*, 277.

¹²⁹ *Brecon and Radnor Express*, 13 September 1917.

¹³⁰ *Y Deyrnas*, October 1917.

¹³¹ *ibid*, 6.

Trimsaran, Cefneithin, Tycroes, Briton Ferry and the Tumble, where the police attempted but failed to stop the meeting addressed by four pacifist ministers of religion, Gwynfryn Jones, Flint, J.Morgan Jones, Bangor, Llywelyn Bowyer and W.J. Rees.¹³² Another two conferences and three public meetings were arranged on 23-25 January, 1918, in Briton Ferry, Glanamman and Cwmtwrch, with Wyre Lewis and E.K. Jones as the main speakers.¹³³ *Y Deyrnas* reported FoR meetings in March in Corwen, and peace meetings in Cwmaman and Gwaun-cae Gurwen were addressed by T.E. Nicholas on the subject of the peace legacy of Samuel Roberts, Llanbrynmair. Two more peace meetings held in Briton Ferry and Pontardawe were addressed by the minister of Jerusalem Baptist chapel in Briton Ferry, the Rev. Rees Powell, with Principal Thomas Rees and H.Harris Hughes, Bangor.¹³⁴

The first conference in south Wales to follow up on the Llandrindod conference was held fully six months later on 26 March 1918 in the schoolroom of the Ebeneser Independent chapel in Trecynon, Aberdare, where fifty delegates came to discuss how 'the spirit of reconciliation could be enacted by securing peace' and to protest against the treatment of conscientious objectors. Both Thomas Rees and H.Harris Hughes from Bangor spoke, and a number of local prominent ILP members, including Rose Davies and councillors Edwin Stonelake and Idris Thomas took part. That evening a 'numerous' anti-war public meeting was held in the local Baptist chapel, which was monitored by two local policemen.¹³⁵ A similar 'Peace Conference' held in Penygroes, near Ammanford, in May 1918, was addressed by J. Puleston Jones, Llewelyn Bowyer and Wyre Lewis¹³⁶ and from the autumn of 1917 onwards, there was a rapid increase in the numbers of Nonconformist organizations locally and nationally who passed resolutions in favour of peace by negotiation and protested against the treatment of conscientious objectors. In December 1917, for instance, the Bethesda Free Church Council protested against the withdrawal of the right to vote for conscientious objectors, and pacifist meetings were held in Holywell, Cwmtwrch, Pontardawe and Llanrwst against the war.¹³⁷ In January 1918, motions protesting against the ill-treatment of conscientious objectors were passed by the Free Church Councils for South-West Wales and Bangor Free Church Council, the Anglesey

¹³² Jones and Evans, *Ffordd Tangnefedd*, 17.

¹³³ *Y Deyrnas*, February 1918.

¹³⁴ *ibid*, April 1918.

¹³⁵ *ibid*.

¹³⁶ *ibid*, June 1918.

¹³⁷ *ibid*, December 1917.

and Conwy Valley Monthly Meeting, the Welsh Wesleyan circuits in Manchester, Tregarth and Beaumaris, and Corwen's group of Nonconformist ministers.¹³⁸ The North Wales League of Free Churches, in its meeting June 1918, under the chairmanship of the anti-war Revd. Cernyw Williams, passed a motion that called for a quick end to the war and for the creation of a supra-national institution to create worldwide peace so as to make war impossible: to rejoice because the ideal of a League of Nations was gaining ground, and confidence in the nations' desire to unite and agree on general disarmament.¹³⁹

On 17 and 20 July, 1918, further conferences were organized in Llandudno and Wrexham in North Wales to protest against the introduction of militarism in schools. These were organised by the National Council of Civil Liberties and its Welsh organiser, Ivor H. Thomas and the prominent ILP activist, J.E. Thomas, Penygroes near Caernarfon. The North Wales conferences reflected the NCCL's success and the FoR's contribution in combining those elements who opposed the war, with those who whilst supporting the war, opposed militarism and conscription. The Llandudno conference was presided over by Thomas Rees, and addresses were given by Principal Graham, the headmaster of the Quaker college in Manchester, and Noel Langdon-Davis representing the NCCL. These two conferences were particularly successful with three hundred and twenty six delegates representing a large number of the chapels of Anglesey, Arfon and Meirion, including two hundred and fifty churches and Free Church councils, and thirty-one Trades Unions, with a total membership of one hundred and ten thousand. Letters of support were also received by sixty other churches, who regretted their inability to send delegates. David Thomas stressed that there were many ministers and others who had supported the war who attended but wished to oppose local militarism as much as German militarism.¹⁴⁰ The following meeting in Wrexham, presided over by E.T. John M.P., was a similar delegates' conference which resolved that the 'militarization of the rising generations are a menace to the industrial freedom, the safety of the democracy, and the future good relations of the peoples of the world.'¹⁴¹

In preparation for these conferences, a list of the 'anti-war religious leaders' in north Wales, had been sent by the National Council for Civil Liberties' Welsh organizer, Ivor

¹³⁸ *ibid*, January 1918.

¹³⁹ *ibid*, June 1918.

¹⁴⁰ *Thomas Jones Papers*, David Thomas, 'The Pacifist Movement'

¹⁴¹ *Llangollen Advertiser*, 26 July 1918.

Thomas to Ethel Snowden in June 1918, but was seized by MI5 officers during a raid of the NCCL's London offices. The list confirms that these key anti-war activists in north Wales were associated with the group of activists involved with *Y Deyrnas*. Of the nineteen listed, eight were founders or involved in producing the magazine, and also included J. Huw Williams, the influential editor of the Caernarfon labour paper *Y Dinesydd*, the editor of the Congregationalist theological magazine, *Y Dysgedydd*, Rev. Pari Huws and a prominent local schoolteacher and ILP leader from the quarrying Nantlle Valley, J.E.Thomas. Perhaps the most surprising omission was that of David Thomas, who was both the ILP organiser for North Wales and a member of the FoR..¹⁴² Those names marked with an asterisk, namely Huw Williams, J.E. Thomas, Rev J.H Howard, Rev. R. Bell, Rev. Cernyw Williams, H.Parri-Roberts and Frederick Pane were considered by MI5 to be 'very active', although it is difficult to understand why Rees, for instance would not have been considered so if the intelligence services had grasped the extent of his activities.

v) 'A Soldier's Dream in Borrowed Clothes'

Concern for the fate of theological students who sympathised with conscientious objection led to the innovative solution of the creation of a company of the Royal Army Medical Corps, specifically aimed at providing an alternative for those who might otherwise have become conscientious objectors. This company was formally created by the Army's chief recruiting officer in North Wales, Brigadier Owen Thomas in Rhyl on 28 January 1916, and the company was 'consecrated' by the Rev. John Williams, Brynsiencyn. The company was nicknamed 'God's Own' and initially comprised of one hundred and eighty seven men, who were drawn mainly from the Welsh theological colleges.¹⁴³ The circular sent to prospective recruits informed them that the War Office had consented to the formation of a RAMC unit, connected to the Welsh Army Division:

This Unit will consist of 240 members, and enlistments for the unit will be confined, in the first instance, to Theological Students of Welsh Colleges and Institutions, and also to Welsh clergy and Ministers of military age.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² *Security Service Papers*, KV2/666, NCCL documents and note from Major Mathews, 6 June 1918, NA.

¹⁴³ Williams, *Breuddwyd Milwr mewn Dillad Bentyg*, vii.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid*, 2.

The circular was signed by F. Llewelyn-Jones in Mold, who wrote on behalf of Brigadier General Owen Thomas 'to whose exertions its establishment is mainly due.' He dealt on behalf of the Army with the application forms, and he emphasised that the establishment of the unit had been granted by the War Office because a large number of those engaged in the work of the Christian Ministry, or in preparation of the Ministry, had a desire to be enrolled as members of an unit of the RAMC.¹⁴⁵ These men were not enumerated or thought to be in the same category as other conscientious objectors, but the understanding that its members had was that this company had been created in order to accommodate those who might otherwise have become conscientious objectors. One of its members, the poet Rev. A.E.Jones (Cynan), explained the character of the new company:

cwmni o efrydwyr Cymreig oeddem, yn wir cwmni o efrydwyr yn siarad Cymraeg gan mwyaf, ar wahan i ychydig athrawon, rhai myfyrwyr Wesleyaidd o Golegau Handsworth a Didsbury ac eraill. Ag eithrio nifer bychan iawn a oedd eisoes yn ordeiniedig, ymgeiswyr ar gyfer y weinidogaeth gyda gwahanol enwadau Cymru oedd y rhelyw mawr ohonom, ac ar gyfer gwyr ifainc o'r fath y llwyddodd Prif Gaplan y Milwyr Cymreig, y Dr. John Williams , Brynsiencyn, gael gan y Swyddfa Ryfel gytuno i ffurfio'r cwmni arbennig hwn o'r RAMC.
Rhan o'r cytundeb sylfaenol oedd na throsglwyddid yr un aelod o'r cwmni tan unrhyw amgylchiadau o'r RAMC i unrhyw adran ymladdol o'r fyddin (my emphasis)

(we were a company of Welsh students, mostly Welsh speaking, apart from a number of teachers, some Wesleyan students from Handsworth and Didsbury Colleges and others. Apart from a small number who had already been ordained in a number of Wales's denominations, the majority of us were candidates for the ministry, and it was for such young men that the main Chaplain of the Welsh Army, Dr. John Williams, Brynsiencyn, won an agreement with the War Office to form a special company of the RAMC. **Part of the fundamental agreement was that not one member of the company would in any circumstances be transferred from the RAMC to any fighting unit of the Army. (my emphasis).**¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*, 3.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*, vii.

The company comprised of one hundred and eighty seven men, included one hundred and twenty nine theological students, of whom seventy-three came from Welsh theological colleges including fifteen Anglican students from St. David's Lampeter, thirty two students from the Calvinist Methodist colleges in Aberystwyth, Bala and Clynnog Preparatory College, eleven students from Cardiff Baptist College, three students from Brecon Congregationalist College, and four from Bala-Bangor Congregationist college. It also included twenty six theological students from the Wesleyan colleges at Didsbury and Headingley in Leeds, thirty-one students and teachers from the Normal teacher training college in Bangor, eleven ordained ministers and preachers and seven medical students.¹⁴⁷ These men felt that they could join without violating their conscience, and they considered themselves to be pacifists:

mi ddwedwn i mai cwmni o basiffistiaid oeddem ni, yn yr ystyr fod gennym wrthwynebiad cydwybodol i ladd ac ymladd, ond ein bod yn barod i gymryd ein hanfon i rywle a cario'r clwyfedigion i ddiogelwch a'u hymgeleddu, neu i weini ar y cleifion, a hynny tan yr un amodau o galedi a disgyblaeth a milwyr eraill.¹⁴⁸

(I would say that we were a company of pacifists, in the sense that we had conscientious objection to killing and to fighting, but that we were ready to be sent somewhere to carry the injured to safety and to protect them, or to serve the wounded, and to do so under the same conditions of hardship and discipline as other soldiers.)

Following its period of training in Llandrindod and Sheffield, in September 1916, approximately 150 members of the company were sent to Salonika, forty to work on hospital ships and others to France and Egypt.¹⁴⁹ More sceptical commentators have described the creation of this company as a propaganda masterstroke to prevent motivated young and idealistic intellectuals amongst those trainee ministers from becoming conscientious objectors,¹⁵⁰ but in spite of the understanding that the members of the unit had about not bearing arms, there was no such written guarantee in the original circular that set up the unit. Indeed, Williams describes the attitude towards bearing arms

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*, 4-7.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid*, ix-x.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid*, 14.

¹⁵⁰ Gareth Miles, Review of 'Cofiant David Elis', in *Taliesin*, Vol. 81 (1993), 106-110.

as becoming rather less extreme by 1918.¹⁵¹ The company's exemption from combatant duties did not last and rumours spread in 1918 that the 'strong and the able' in the company were likely to be transferred to other regiments were confirmed when an Army Order was published on 14 June 1918, stating that the War Office had no opposition to transferring men from this company to other companies and regiments.¹⁵² This volte face was probably made in order to enable three members of the company to win Army commissions.¹⁵³ The three were Cynan and David Morris Jones, who were made chaplains, and Tom Jenkins of Llanelli, who was made an officer.¹⁵⁴ Wilfred Knott was a member of a RAMC Field Ambulance Unit in Salonika in June 1918 and described how men who considered themselves 'conscientious objectors' but had joined the RAMC were forced to participate in road-making alongside Turkish prisoners of war. This group of so-called 'conscientious objectors' appeared before a military tribunal in July 1918, in which sixteen men had their objections to joining the infantry upheld and thirty-seven had their objections disallowed and were transferred to the infantry. Knott was transferred to the 1/3rd Welsh Field Ambulance along with five others in August 1918, and some of the other men, including the 'St John's Men' and other volunteers, were sent as ambulancemen to France leaving Knott to muse about 'what the boys will think who have been duped and sent into the infantry when they hear the remainder have been sent as ambulancemen to France'.¹⁵⁵

There is only one example of a man forced to leave the unit because of his objection to carrying arms, namely Herbert Lewis of Carmarthen, who was transferred to the Non Combatant Corps and subsequently died of a local disease.¹⁵⁶ This change of policy apparently caused difficulty for those in the Army charged with dealing with conscientious objectors. In June 1918, the War Office announced there would be no 'objection' to the transfer to the infantry of the Welsh Theological Students specially enlisted',¹⁵⁷ but the change in policy does not seem to have caused a major exodus from the ranks of the Welsh unit, and for almost two hundred men who would otherwise probably have become

¹⁵¹ Williams, *Breuddwyd Milwr mewn Dillad Bentyg*, 55.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, 55.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Wilfred Knott Diary*, Document 7987, 24 June 1918, Imperial War Museum

¹⁵⁶ Williams, *Breuddwyd Milwr mewn Dillad Bentyg*, 55.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*

conscientious objectors, it proved to be a satisfactory compromise between the requirements of the State and the needs of conscience.

Conclusion

It is striking that that in the pages of *Y Deyrnas* the plethora of anti-war public meetings and the momentum of the Llandrindod Wells conference of September 1917 had come to a halt by July 1918, but the journal continued to be published until the autumn of 1919, with a comparatively small drop in circulation. Much of the discussion in *Y Deyrnas* from the Autumn 1918 onwards focussed on the fate of those conscientious objectors who were still imprisoned, and the peace conditions to be imposed on the German nation and its allies in the Paris discussions that led to the Treaty of Versailles and the seeds of another war. Its edition of February 1919 was hopeful of the attempt to establish peace and permanent justice between the nations of the world but in September 1919 it traced the current industrial and social discontent to Lloyd George's wish to prolong the war unnecessarily for two years.¹⁵⁸

Morgan considers that the fundamental weakness of Welsh pacifism in this period was its failure to appreciate the 'depths of human malignancy and evil';

No matter how vigorously pacifist Dissenters protested at the undoubted horrors of war, they failed to provide a sufficiently realistic philosophy whereby conflict could be overcome and abolished. Whereas pacifism became a potent individual witness, it remained unconvincing as a political strategy.¹⁵⁹

He rightly argues that anti-militarism was chosen by very few indeed and suggests that the most substantial contribution made by the opposition to war on religious grounds may have been to prepare the ground for the creation of a consensus for an idealistic peace movement after the war. But this perspective underestimates the gradual development of the anti-war movement, including the religious pacifist movement, as disillusionment with the war effort and the jettisoning of the tradition tenets of liberalism commenced with the introduction of conscription from January 1916 onwards. At the end of the war, David

¹⁵⁸ *Y Deyrnas*, September 1919.

¹⁵⁹ Morgan, *Span of the Cross*, 63.

Thomas's cool assessment of the pacifist movement from his vantage point as a conscientious objector, a member of the FoR as well as being a prominent leader of the ILP in North Wales was that sometimes there was an element of being 'agin the Government' and of self-righteousness in thinking that 'we were not as other men'. While most pacifists believed that the immediate responsibility for the war lay mainly upon Germany, in trying to correct the patriotic bias of the majority, there was the danger of acquiring the opposite bias. Thomas believed that he and his fellow-pacifists' fundamental belief in non-violence was their outstanding legacy:

the appeal to force of any kind is futile in the long run, and that only moral suasion and education can really overcome the evil forces in the world that are destroying men's happiness, and crippling their personalities.¹⁶⁰

The religious anti-war movement in Wales gained its impetus from key individuals such as Principal Thomas Rees and Rev. T.E. Nicholas, who led an influential, although small, number of mainly Nonconformist ministers and students, primarily based in north Wales. Its unique characteristic was the influence of the monthly journal *Y Deyrnas*, which provided the organizational link for the movement. The journal reflected the activity of a key group of Welsh speaking activists, primarily ministers of religion and Welsh-language literary figures, who were organized primarily within the FoR in North Wales but collaborated with other anti-war movements especially in those areas in south Wales where the ILP had influence.

The contrast between this grouping of anti-war activists and the religious conscientious objectors is striking. Most of those conscientious objectors who professed an allegiance did so to a religious organization, and almost half of this number were members of millenarian sects such as the Christadelphians, the Plymouth Brethren and the Jehovah's Witnesses. This factor suggests strongly that the source of conscientious objection was not necessarily reflected in the level of public anti-war activity beyond the individual religious conscientious objector and indeed, as in the case of a number of Christadelphian objectors who worked in munitions, there was no automatic correlation between conscientious objectors and an opposition to the war. But other alternatives to

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Jones papers, David Thomas, 'The Pacifist Movement'.

conscientious objection, such as the opportunity to join the Welsh Students Company of the RAMC, ensured that the numbers of conscientious objectors in Wales were not swelled by over a hundred and fifty theological students, who were to all intent and purpose, pacifist in their belief.

Chapter Three

Political opposition to the War in Wales - the Independent Labour Party and the 'Advanced Men'.

Introduction

This chapter examines the significance of the various political organizations that worked together to develop political opposition to the War. In particular, it focuses on the Independent Labour Party, and explores the relationship between the ILP and other anti-war organisations such as the NCCL and the NCF, and how the aims of these organisations became intertwined. An important element of the political opposition to the war in Wales beyond the ILP was the influence of the revived Unofficial Reform Committee (URC) who increasingly permeated the South Wales Miners' Federation (SWMF) during the second half of the war. Before the war, the views of these activists in the SWMF were encapsulated in *The Miners Next Step*, which advocated industrial unionism and syndicalism. These men were organised in the URC, which had been formed to create 'a party for the purpose of propagating advance thought',¹ although Egan describes them as a loosely organised, essentially propagandist body until the summer of 1917.² These advanced men very often held no official rank, but often exercising great influence among their fellows and advocated Industrial Unionism.

Opposition to the War was limited and not uniform throughout Wales, but was strongest in those areas where the ILP had substantial memberships and was most influential. The localised study of the operation of the anti-war movement in Briton Ferry and Merthyr Tydfil exemplify how the various organized

¹ Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, 14.

² Egan, 'The Swansea Conference of the British Council of Soldiers' and Workers' Delegates', 36.

political elements of the anti-war movement combined together to greater effect, and the main organizations who combined together in this fashion were the NCF, the National Campaign against Conscription (re-named the National Council for Civil Liberties in 1916), and the ILP.

Studies of opposition to the Great War in Britain, such as those by Rae³ and Robbins⁴ have concentrated on its relation to British and institutional domestic and military policy whilst the studies of opposition to the war on a local level are comparatively few. These include Pearce's influential history of anti-war activity in Huddersfield,⁵ Duncan's history of conscientious objectors in Dundee,⁶ and Weller's description of the anti-war movement in North London.⁷ Adams's *Not in Our Name*, which concentrates on conscientious objectors in Briton Ferry,⁸ also highlights the value of examining local social and political differences in attitudes towards the war.

In attempting to measure the extent of opposition to the war in Wales, this study considers the correlation between anti-war activity and a strong ILP presence, and focuses on two of the ILP's strongest areas in south Wales, in Briton Ferry and Merthyr Tydfil. Before 1918, membership of the Labour Party was only possible through an affiliated socialist society or trade union, and for those who wished to join on an individual basis, the ILP was often the only way in which to join and participate in the party.⁹ The ILP was notably influential in the main south Wales towns of Swansea, Cardiff and Newport, the Swansea Valley and the Rhymney Valley. The areas in which the ILP was strongest in Wales was the town of Briton Ferry in south-west Wales, which had the largest concentration of ILP members in Wales, and the Merthyr Boroughs parliamentary constituency, the 'crucible and matrix of working-

³ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*.

⁴ Robbins, *The Abolition of War*.

⁵ Pearce, *Comrades and Conscience*.

⁶ Duncan, *Objectors and Resisters*.

⁷ Weller, *Don't Be a Soldier: The Radical Anti-War Movement in North London 1914-1918*.

⁸ Adams, *Not in Our Name: War Dissent in a Welsh Town*.

⁹ Edward May, 'The Mosaic of Labour Politics, 1900-1918', in *The Labour Party in Wales 1900-2000*, Tanner, Williams, Hopkin (eds.) (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2000), 68.

class political tradition',¹⁰ which included the towns of Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare, and which had been the first constituency in Britain to elect a Labour Member of Parliament, Keir Hardie, in 1900. The Merthyr area also had a high ILP membership, whilst both areas also produced a comparatively high level of conscientious objectors, had effective trades and labour councils and trade unions on a local level, and were amongst the earliest adopters of the principle of independent labour representation. A study of these two localities suggests that anti-war campaigning was a key element, rather than a marginal activity, for the ILP in this period, and that both the anti-war movement and the ILP's political and campaigning activities were closely linked.

This chapter therefore considers the development of the ILP and its relationship with anti-war activity in Wales throughout the First World War. It charts the initial impact of the war on the ILP, which led to its rapid decline during the first half of the war, but to a gradual increase in membership and income from the spring of 1917 onwards, and assesses how attitudes changed towards the ILP throughout the war. It considers this development in the context of a more detailed study of two of the ILP's strongest areas in Wales and where the party possessed its deepest roots, in Briton Ferry and Merthyr Tydfil.¹¹

i) The Independent Labour Party's attitudes towards the War

In common with the rest of Britain, political opposition to the War in Wales was led primarily by the ILP, on the basis that war could not be justified on either moral or ethical grounds. The war was also opposed on political grounds by a number of members of left-wing political organisations, including the South Wales Socialist Society, the Plebs League and many of the members and lecturers of the workers' education classes organized by the

¹⁰ Glanmor Williams (ed.), Foreword to *Merthyr Politics; the Making of a Working Class Tradition* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1966).

¹¹ Dowse, *Left in the Centre*, 5.

Central Labour College in south Wales. Many of these activists were also members of the ILP, and the ILP supplied many of the key leaders of other anti-war organizations in Wales, such as the National Council against Conscription (later re-named the National Council for Civil Liberties) and the NCF. Many of those activists within the SWMF who opposed the introduction of conscription into the mining industry in 1917 were also anti-war members of the ILP and were instrumental in postponing conscription in the British mining industry for eleven months until the 'comb-out' ballot was held in south Wales in November 1917, which finally agreed to introduce conscription to the mining industry.

Egan asserts that the ILP's role was to hold the central ground of the anti-war movement, which he describes as 'alloying the fundamental religious humanitarianism of the pacifist section to the overt political analysis of the Marxist position'.¹² As soon as Germany invaded Belgium, the bulk of the Labour party supported the Government, and on 7 August 1914, J. Ramsay MacDonald resigned his Chairmanship of the Parliamentary Labour Party, and the ILP became the most important party in opposition to the Government's war policy. On 13 August 1914 the ILP issued a manifesto condemning the war, and five of the seven ILP members of Parliament upheld the party's antiwar stance.

Dowse¹³ contends that the main themes to be discerned in the ILP's broad anti-war policy were fourfold. Both MacDonald and Keir Hardie's first objective was to maintain at least a limited arena for calm and rational discussion so that when an opportunity for negotiated peace presented itself it would not be neglected. Their analysis of the causes of the war was that it had been caused by a diplomatic blunder, and whilst they felt they should support the troops and their families, they should not support recruiting.

¹² Egan, 'The Swansea Conference', 12-37.

¹³ Dowse, *Left in the Centre*, 21-24.

The response of a second group such as George Lansbury, Philip Snowden and Dr Salter, was on Christian pacifist rather than socialist grounds and claimed that for Christians the taking of life was impermissible. A third group, including Fenner Brockway, Thomas Johnston, Clifford Allen and Bruce Glasier, held to a view that was more socialist than the previous two positions, claiming that war was simply an extension of the capitalist market economy, and that both sides were equally to blame. However, they did not advocate, as did Lenin at the time, the corollary of this theory, that socialists should endeavour to turn an imperialist struggle into a domestic revolution. The final viewpoint, maintained by the Scottish ILP, and a number of prominent activists in south Wales such as Arthur Horner, Nun Nicholas and Mark Starr, was a compromise between Lenin's 'revolutionary defeatism' and that of Brockway. This view accepted that war was a product of capitalism but that they were only willing to go to war in defence of Socialism.

Throughout the war, the ILP concentrated its attention both on remaining within the Labour party and furthering the anti-war crusade. The first impulse of the ILP was to oppose the war by every means, but that could have led to the complete isolation of the ILP from the Labour Party and the Trade Union movement. To prevent this, the ruling body of the ILP, the National Administrative Council, combined the anti-war policy with a defence of workers' conditions and a fostering of the interests of combatants and their dependants. It was inevitable that whilst the ILP proved unpopular to many in organised labour, such a policy did make antagonisms less sharp.¹⁴

The ILP did not formally declare its opposition to the war until 1916, and in the meantime, it refused to take part in recruiting campaigns. It was initially uncertain and ambivalent, being both against the war although wishing Britain to win it, and supporting the troops whilst opposing military action.¹⁵ So discomfited were Hardie and MacDonald by the barrage of criticism they

¹⁴ *ibid*, 23.

¹⁵ Keith Laybourn and David James (eds), 'Philip Snowden' in *The Centennial History of the I.L.P* (Bradford Libraries and Archive Service, 1987), 40.

endured because of their anti-war views that for a time both adjusted their views publicly to support soldiers at the front in spite of their opposition to the war, and MacDonald notoriously appeared at a recruiting meeting in his constituency of Leicester in 1915 to allay accusations that he was anti-war. Hardie's 'Gethsemane like' experience of his public meeting, disrupted by C.B. Stanton and his followers in Aberdare at the beginning of the War, affected him deeply, and he continuously strived to separate his criticism of the War from his support for the individual soldier.

Hardie was profoundly disappointed by the Labour Party's decision to take part in recruiting for the Army, and in an emotional speech in Merthyr, he stated his belief that he could not become a recruiting agent because it would violate his 'dearest and treasured principles', based on the teachings of Jesus:

If I did so, an outraged conscience would torture me for the rest of my life. I cannot do it. I shall abide the consequences cheerfully and gladly. If I go under at the next election, I shall not complain but accept it as a crowning glory of my old age.¹⁶

In meetings of ILP branches in Swansea and Cardiff that autumn, he explained the ILP National Council's continued opposition to the war, and carried the audience with him.¹⁷ In the Cardiff meeting, Hardie warned that in the present mood of the country, a big anti-war campaign was impossible and his speech reflected how shaken he had been by the breaking up of his meeting and the vitriol poured on those who opposed the war. He believed that this was unlike the Boer War:

It was hopeless to appeal to the reason of the people until war hysteria and passion had died down. We must not give the impression that we were

¹⁶ *Pioneer*, 21 November 1914.

¹⁷ *Hardie and Hughes Papers*, Dep.176. Box 8/1, *Welsh Rebel*, National Library of Scotland.

supporting German militarism or doing anything to make things difficult for British soldiers at the front. But we must watch carefully for the first opportunity to press for peace negotiations which would bring an end to the war.¹⁸

By the end of 1914, Hardie had recovered some of his equilibrium, and wrote to Emrys Hughes that there was more doubt amongst the general population about the wisdom of going to war than in the first month, and that a saner spirit was beginning to prevail.¹⁹ Hardie's health faltered in Spring 1915, and his death and funeral in Scotland in September 1915 led to numerous memorial meetings in south Wales which were turned into propaganda events against the war and the threat of conscription.²⁰

The ILP's Annual Conference in April 1916 for the first time formally agreed a policy of full opposition to the war and called on the Socialist parties in Europe to refuse to support every war entered into by any government, whatever its ostensible object.²¹ Even so, the ILP also included a substantial proportion of members who joined the armed forces and supported the war, and a split was averted by the National Administrative Council's decision to recognise the principle of individual military enlistment as a matter of conscience on the one hand, but to instruct branches not to take part in recruiting on the other.²² This policy ensured that the ILP was not riven internally, and this tentative approach to the question of war also ensured that no fatal split occurred within the Labour movement during the war.

From January 1916 onwards, inevitably the opposition to the war crystallised around the introduction of compulsory military service. The NCF's statistics for conscientious objectors at the end of the war gave a figure of 1,191

¹⁸ Emrys Hughes, *Keir Hardie* (Allen and Unwin, 1956), 233.

¹⁹ *Hardie and Hughes Papers*, 'Welsh Rebel', 241.

²⁰ *ibid*, 76.

²¹ Marwick, *The Independent Labour Party 1918-1932*, 11.

²² Independent Labour Party Report of the Annual Conference, April 1916 (Harvester Microfilms), 11.

'socialists', of whom 805 were members of the ILP, who represented approximately five percent of the total of between 16,100 and 16,500 conscientious objectors in Britain,²³ and in Wales the proportion is similar. But their influence was greater than their numerical strength. The ILP leadership took on the mantle of the campaign against conscription and the war on a local level through large parts of south Wales in particular, and they led these campaigns with other related organizations, such as individual lodges of the SWMF, trades councils and branches of the National Council against Conscription throughout Wales.

Whilst the ILP suffered in the first half of the War because of its perceived anti-war stance, its support increased markedly from Spring 1917 onwards, and its unpopular views won new supporters. In Marwick's view, the war martyred and glorified the ILP, highlighted the uniqueness of its attitude towards war and brought in hosts of new supporters, mainly from the ranks of Liberals disillusioned by the inconsistent, immoral, and undignified postures they felt their Party had assumed.²⁴

The consequent vehemence with which the ILP was assaulted both within and outside the labour movement, united the party, partly from a 'sense of persecution, and partly as a result of missionary zeal'.²⁵ Virtually alone among the Socialist and Labour parties of the warring countries, the ILP stood out against war. By 1918, many of its policies on war and armaments had been accepted by the Labour Movement, and the anti-war leaders of the ILP were amongst the most influential in the Party.²⁶ Even throughout the war, the ILP retained the loyalty of members who were out of sympathy with its anti-war policy. Prominent members such as James Winstone, who fought the Merthyr by-election in 1915, supported the war but opposed the introduction of military

²³ *The No-Conscription Fellowship*, 38.

²⁴ Marwick, *The Independent Labour Party 1918-1932*, 11.

²⁵ Dowse, *Left in the Centre*, 21.

²⁶ *ibid*, 24.

conscription on the basis that it was the pre-cursor to civil conscription, and by 1917 was calling for a negotiated peace settlement.

ii) The ILP's organisation in Wales 1914-1918

The ILP drew much of its ideological and ethical socialist roots from a 'radicalised Nonconformity'²⁷ that was associated with an ethical and moral political belief that developed into a nebulous and sometimes ill-defined 'religion of socialism'.²⁸ It also developed a communitarian ethos that was derived from the co-dependent relationships nurtured by traditions of the chapel and work place. This element led to the pre-war growth of trades unions, trades and labour councils, and the cooperative movement throughout Wales which was accelerated by the war. But the ILP developed very differently in different communities, largely because of the divergent cultural characteristics and economic nature of those communities. Egan emphasizes that the growth of the ILP before the war was in areas like 'Merthyr Tydfil, Aberdare, Briton Ferry and Swansea' and on the 'fringes' of the coalfield 'with an older and different community and political tradition to the relatively new communities of the coalfield itself.'²⁹

A well-organised ILP branch provided its members with a vibrant social, cultural and educational life as well as a political one. In Merthyr, the ILP had a shop in the centre of town, named 'Our Shop', run by a local member and close friend of Hardie, John Barr.³⁰ Hopkin illustrates the extent to which the ILP in Aberdare at the turn of the century, for instance, could be said to be represent an alternative community:

²⁷ Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party 1900-1918* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 214.

²⁸ David Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party, 1888-1906* (Manchester University Press, 1983), 392.

²⁹ David Egan, 'Noah Ablett 1883-1935', *Llafur* Vol 4.3 (1986), 27.

³⁰ South Wales Coalfield Collection, George Protheroe interview, Aud 309, Swansea University.

with its own institute, the party offered weekly meetings, regular concerts, and an ILP Band of Hope, its own football team, annual teas, a children's Christmas party, education classes, numerous committee meetings ... The ILP in Merthyr even had its own tobacconist and newsagent, whilst the Swansea Socialist Society ran a shop and boot club.³¹

Their earnest, improving moralism could set them apart from the rest of the community. In South Wales, W.J. Edwards compared the ILP to a sect, and that to be an ILP or Labour activist, was to belong to a section, and a rigidly defined section, rather than to belong to a more open group which fed into a 'wider consensus'. In these circumstances, some activists found 'great compensation' in the ILP's associational life. Entire branches became 'insular bulwarks' against the opinion of the broader community, and whilst some remained determined to preach Socialism, they received limited support from the electorate.³² But this jaundiced view underestimates the contribution of ILP members as the active core of the Labour Party in many communities, and that in peace time, the ILP branches had provided the active core of the Labour Party, both inside and outside the unions. In many areas the militancy and animation of the local party depended on the influence of the socialists of the ILP'.

The influence of the ILP was also seen in the growth of trades and labour councils throughout Wales, that helped to extend labour organization on a local level, and grew from forty representing 133,000 workers on the eve of war, to sixty-eight representing 237,000 in 1919. These were a necessary precursor to the development of independent labour politics and were an important focus for the ILP.³³ In the ten years up to 1916 it was estimated that the party had organised twenty thousand meetings in the coalfield alone. The ILP's message was propagated in north Wales by *Y Dinesydd Cymreig*,

³¹ Hopkin, Deian, 'The rise of Labour in Wales, 1890-1914', in *Politics and Society in Wales 1840-1922*, Glanmor Williams (ed.) (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1988), 132.

³² W.J. Edwards, *From the Valley I Came* (London, 1956), 103.

³³ May, 'The Mosaic of Labour Politics', 74.

launched in 1912 by striking printers, and in south Wales by the Merthyr based *Pioneer*, with a readership of at least ten thousand. On the eve of the war, at the level of town and borough council representation, Labour's most notable strongholds were Merthyr Tydfil and Swansea, with some success in Newport and Llanelli, but even in north and west Wales it had set up sixteen branches by 1910 owing to the efforts of local ILP organizers such as David Thomas and Tom Platt. Its success there in scattered farming districts, the slate quarrying areas and in Wrexham and Colwyn Bay was partly due to the party's ability to spread the word through the Welsh language and helped by its ability to attract a number of Nonconformist Ministers to the cause and to counter accusations that socialism was ungodly and alien to Wales. Between 1914 and 1918, the membership grew from 6.9 per cent of the British total to 11.1 per cent,³⁴ a growth of 70 per cent in membership in Wales in this period. This was in the context of a corresponding growth in total ILP membership across Britain for the same period of 78 per cent, at 35,717 members³⁵ but this also masked a decline in membership in the first 30 months of the War which only recovered from February 1917 onwards.³⁶

The organisational development of the ILP in the War period throughout Britain was characterised by initial decline in branches and members from 1914 until the Spring of 1917, when there was a rapid growth through to the end of the war and beyond.³⁷ In the war period, membership of the ILP in Britain declined up to March 1917, then increased - from 21,088 in November 1916 it dipped to 17,793 in March 1917, but then increased to 23,948 by September 1917 and 35,717 by February 1918. In the same period, membership in Wales also fell up to March 1917, but increased gradually to 4,201 by February 1918.³⁸

³⁴ *Independent Labour Party Papers*, ILP 3/59, LSE.

³⁵ *ibid*, ILP 10/4/3.

³⁶ Marwick, *The Independent Labour Party, 1914-1932*, 11.

³⁷ Independent Labour Party, Reports of Annual Conferences, 1914-1919, Harvester Microfilms.

³⁸ Table Two provides a breakdown of the ILP in Wales's membership affiliation fees, number of branches and membership numbers 1914-1918.

Table Two – The Independent Labour Party in Wales³⁹

Affiliation membership fees in Wales 1913-1920					
<u>1913-14</u>	<u>1915-1916</u>	<u>1916-1917</u>	<u>1917-1918</u>	<u>1918-1919</u>	<u>1919-1920</u>
£79	£61	£67	£104.9.0	£147.19.7	£158
Membership of the Independent Labour Party in Wales 1916-1918					
<u>Nov. 1916</u>	<u>May 1917</u>	<u>Sept 1917</u>	<u>Oct 1917</u>	<u>Jan1918</u>	<u>Feb1918</u>
2,355	1,745	1,988	2,769	3,499	4,201
Number of Branches					
<u>Feb 1915</u>	<u>Feb, 1916</u>	<u>March 1916</u>	<u>Jan.1917</u>	<u>March,1917</u>	<u>Feb,1918</u>
75	58	59	60	70	70

The initial decline in the number of branches in the first half of the war partly reflects the growing unpopularity of the ILP because of its attitude towards the war. But the economic and industrial impact of war also caused an inevitable degree of 'churn' in the branches in the period between January and August 1915. In the six months prior to February 1915, three new branches were formed, in Neath, Ammanford and the Rhondda but eleven branches were discontinued, including Brynamman, Clydach Vale, Cwmgwrach, Llandybie, Maesycwmmmer, Melyn, New Tredegar, and Treherbert. The reason for their fate is not given, but at least three other branches in Caernarvonshire - Caesarea, Rhosgadfan and Waunfawr, reported they were affected by the decline of the slate industry, which forced members to leave the district to seek work. The most dramatic drop in the numbers of branches happened in the six months before August 1915, when another seventeen branches

³⁹ Independent Labour Party, Reports of Annual Conferences, 1914-1919, Harvester Microfilms.

closed, including three branches in the Caernarfonshire slate quarrying areas of Port Dinorwic, Deiniolen, and Blaenau Ffestiniog, owing to the collapse of the slate trade, where ‘all members had left the district’. The party’s organiser in North Wales, David Thomas, who was also the organizer for the No-Conscription Fellowship for the region, explained that these branches were swept out of existence in the early months of the war not because members ceased to support the ILP but that owing to the severe depression in the slate industry, many had left the area, either to join the Army or to seek work elsewhere.⁴⁰

In Ammanford, the branch’s collapse was ascribed to the secretary’s decision to enlist, and the collapse of the Llanelli branch in 1915 was because it was considered to be a ‘centre of impossibilism’.⁴¹ In assessing the impact of the War on Llanelli, Hopkin ascribes the growth in Labour support throughout the war partly to improved Labour organisation, but primarily to the psychological and political impact of the War. The latter stages of the war introduced a ‘sense of profound change, a new level of political optimism’ which Hopkin attributes partly to the impact of the Russian Revolution, but also to a sense of greater power for trade unions in the workplace and the ‘growing impact’ of anti-war dissent, in which pacifists and socialists seemed to engender as much fear and hatred for the Government as the German enemy.⁴²

The ILP’s Welsh Divisional Council of about fifty representatives, meeting in February 1915, in Cardiff, was solely preoccupied with the War. The meeting was unanimously against the war, and called for an international peace conference, a reduction in armaments, the nationalisation of the manufacture of armaments and the control of exports of armaments.⁴³ Bruce Glasier described meetings on his tour, in Barry with a hundred present, Aberdare with a crowd of two hundred present, and Cwmafon, where he was

⁴⁰ *Thomas Jones Papers*, ‘The Pacifist Movement’, David Thomas, Bangor University.

⁴¹ *Independent Labour Party Papers*, ILP3/59, ‘Summaries of new and lapsed branches 1914-1918’, LSE.

⁴² Hopkin, ‘The Rise of Labour: 1890-1922’, 171.

⁴³ *Pioneer*, 6 February 1915

accompanied by T.E. Nicholas as his fellow speaker, and with six to seven hundred present, including many working women, as 'most successful'.⁴⁴ His report to Francis Johnson, organiser of the ILP also highlighted the lack of opposition he had experienced:

The meetings were well attended, some of them more so than for several years, and in no instance was there any hostile demonstration. I found too the branches in good condition - those at Gorseinon, Neath and Cwmavon especially, and I feel more my going round them will do good.⁴⁵

By the following ILP Welsh divisional conference in January 1916, the number of delegates had increased from 47 to 80, and the branches had increased from 35 to 50. Its chairman, Councillor Morgan Jones celebrated what he termed the ILP's outstanding achievement in withstanding 'all calumny, abuse, and vilification' but warned against the state's growing encroachment on the rights of the citizen:

What measure of freedom we now enjoy must not - should not - be sacrificed at the bidding of a bastard patriotism. The fair flower of liberty cannot live in the vitiated atmosphere of militarism . The crushing of Prussian militarism may be a good thing, and even a desirable thing, though an operation best left to Prussians, but the destruction of British liberties is not desirable, is not permissible, is not tolerable.⁴⁶

By February 1916, branches had been revived or re-instated in Blackwood, Nantyglo, Llanelli and Tumble, but had 'entirely collapsed' in Penarth, and had closed in the mining village of Penrhiwceiber and the slate quarrying village of Llanberis. The nadir was reached in March, 1916 with 59 branches; the branch was revived in Ammanford, and others created in Aberbeeg, Pengam,

⁴⁴ *J. Bruce Glasier Papers*, GP/1/1/1399, Glasier to Francis Johnson, general secretary ILP, Liverpool University.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, GP/1/1/1419, Glasier to Francis Johnson.

⁴⁶ *Pioneer*, 29 January 1916.

Caerau, Blaenavon, Oakdale and Blaenau but others lapsed in Abergwynfi, Coytraherne, Bedlinog, Builth Wells, Cwmaman, and Nantlle Vale. The report to the National Advisory Council described the difficulties that the war and changing industrial conditions had caused the party in Wales, especially in the larger towns, including continued overtime, lighting regulations and continued military or police restrictions. But the report also highlighted the new members attracted by the ILP's anti-war stance:

The diminution of membership caused by economic voluntary or compulsory enlistment has, however, been made good by the accession of new members who have joined not only because they believe in the attitude of the party towards the war but because they see in the Socialist principles held by the Party the only hope for the future.⁴⁷

For the period April 1917- March 1918, thirteen new branches were opened during the year, and the membership had increased almost 50 per cent year on year.⁴⁸ An additional 17 branches were created after June 1917, including Hirwain Camp, the work camp for conscientious objectors who had been prepared to accept alternative work building a reservoir. The other branches were mainly in mining areas, including Bedlinog, Clydach, Aberbargoed, Garw Valley, Taffs Well, Felinfoel, Merthyr Vale, Kenfig Hill, Ynysybwl, Garnswllt, Crumlin, and Penygraig. Llanelli's branch was revived, and two branches outside industrial south Wales were formed, in Pembroke Dock and Colwyn Bay.⁴⁹

For the year April 1917- March 1918, 71 branches paid affiliation fees of £111.11.3. The level of membership reflected by the level of paid affiliation fees was under-reported but the ILP centrally estimated that the number of members was double the declared number of members, and put the Welsh

⁴⁷ *Independent Labour Party Papers*, 3/59, Summaries of new and lapsed branches 1914-1918, LSE.

⁴⁸ *Pioneer*, 8 June 1918

⁴⁹ *ILP Papers*, 3/59, Summaries of new and lapsed branches 1914-1918, LSE.

membership at about 8,000.⁵⁰ The strongest branches, on the basis of their level of paid affiliation fees (see Table Two) were Briton Ferry, Aberdare, Merthyr, Cwmavon and Newport. These branches also raised the most money in response to the appeal for the 'Special Fund'. This fund was divided into two portions – that from friends and sympathisers for Head Office expenses, and that from the branches for election expenses. Briton Ferry's astounding total of £54 7s 3d raised for this fund was second only to Leicester and its total of £84.14s. 6d. and reflected a remarkable degree of local energy and commitment.⁵¹

The main branches marked the spread of ILP influence across south Wales and included the towns of Cardiff and Newport, and adjoining branches to Aberdare and Merthyr including Mountain Ash and Dowlais. But in North Wales, in contrast with the early war period, where ten branches had existed, only one branch survived, in Wrexham. The thirty delegates from Wales at the national ILP conference in April 1917 were considered 'a healthy sign of the progression of ILPism during the year that has passed considering the number of members arrested as conscientious objectors'⁵² and this close connection with the anti-war movement was exemplified in the person of Morgan Jones. During the war he was chairman of the ILP in Wales, the Welsh member of the national committee of the NCF, the chairman of the Anti-Conscription Council in Wales, and a conscientious objector, who subsequently became organising secretary to the Welsh division of the ILP at the end of the war. In a report written in 1920, he analysed the contribution of the ILP to the labour movement generally in Wales, and stated that ILP members were the chief officials and speakers of most of the Labour party and 'trade union lodges', and formed the executives in most instances in the

⁵⁰ ILP Report of the Annual Conference April, 1919, 51.

⁵¹ ILP Report of the Annual Conference, April 1918, 105; Table Two provides a list of branches, with affiliation fees paid and money raised for the 'Special Effort' fund.

⁵² *Pioneer*, 14 April 1917.

Table Three: Independent Labour Party Main Welsh branches April 1917- April 1918 ⁵³

Branch	Annual affiliation fees	'Special effort' Funds
	£ s d	£ s d
Briton Ferry	£11.3.7	£54.7..3
Aberdare	£ 7.16.10	£ 5.0.0
Merthyr Tydfil	£ 5.11.8	£ 4.14.0
Cwmavon	£ 5.6.2	£12. 0.0
Newport	£ 5.2.8	£ 6.11.6
Cardiff	£ 4.11.8	£ 7.10.0
Taibach	£ 3.6.1	£ 5.0.0
Dowlais	£ 3.1.2	£ 1.17.0
Bargoed	£ 2.18.7	£ 2.15.0
Ebbw Vale	£ 2.15.2	£ 3.17.0
Cathays (Cardiff)	£ 2.14.1	-----
Rhondda	£ 2.10.0	-----
Mountain Ash	£ 2.5.6	-----
Blaina	£ 1.18.11	£0.8.0
Pontypool	£ 1.15.3	£ 3.5.0
Pontypridd	£ 1.11.11	-----
Garw Valley	£ 1.10.5	£ 3.0.0
Barry	£ 1.10.0	£ 3.10.0
Gorseinon	£ 1.9.11	£ 2.0.0
Ystradgynlais	£ 1.9.6	£ 2.0.0
Swansea	£ 1.9.4	£ 2.10.0
Splott (Cardiff)	£ 1.6.4	£ 1.11.0
Wrexham	£ 1.5.9	£ 1.13.0
Neath	£ 1.3.11	£1.16.6
Maesteg	£ 1.3.10	£ 0.80

⁵³ ILP Report of the Annual Conference, April 1918, 105.

industrial areas. This would not be the case in the rural areas, but even there, he found that the leaders were 'very often men with the ILP outlook and what we might call the ILP mentality.'⁵⁴

Arguably the single event that most influenced the ILP's growth from March 1917 onwards was the impact of the Russian Revolution. Marwick states that these upheavals sent a tremendous wave of enthusiasm throughout the Party, 'momentarily carrying the whole fabric of its policy forward on its crest, then dropping into a whirlpool of new issues'. This enthusiasm led to the creation of the Convention held in Leeds in June 1917, addressed by the ILP leaders, MacDonald, Anderson and Snowden, that resolved to take the apparently revolutionary course of appointing a Provisional Committee to form local Workmen's and Soldiers' Councils. Since few attempts were subsequently made to implement this remarkable decision in favour of the Soviet pattern, Marwick suggests, however, that it should be taken rather as a symptom of the 'passionate feeling of communion with the revolution which the ILP then felt, rather than as a practical policy decision.'⁵⁵

This surge of optimism and enthusiasm was crucial to an understanding of the increase in income, members, and support for the ILP from the summer of 1917 onwards until the end of the war and beyond. This growth was aided in south Wales by the appointment of Minnie Pallister, a young and brilliant teacher, public speaker and propagandist from Brynmawr, as a full time organiser for the ILP in Wales in 1918.⁵⁶ She exemplified the close link between the ILP and the anti-war movement in that she was already well known as a propagandist and public speaker for the ILP but she was best known as the secretary and main organiser of the NCF in Wales:

her reputation was fully earned by the wholeheartedness of her propaganda on behalf of Socialism and the ILP and, in particular by her display of her

⁵⁴ *ILP Papers*, 6/9/5, Morgan Jones to Francis Johnson, LSE.

⁵⁵ Marwick, *The Independent Labour Party 1918-1932*, 13.

⁵⁶ *Pioneer*, 11 September 1918; *The Labour's Who Who 1927: A biographical directory to the national and local leaders in the labour and co-operative movement* (Labour Publishing Company, 1927), 162.

organising ability as honorary organiser of the NCF during the past two years. It is in the last sphere, rather than in the ILP that she has conspicuously won her spurs as an organiser before the eyes of the South Wales movement as a whole.⁵⁷

Known as a 'brilliant platform speaker' she later became the first Welsh woman to sit on the Labour party's National Executive, and was instrumental in Labour's organisation in Wales in the 1920s.⁵⁸

There is little unanimity amongst historians about the effect of the war on the fortunes of the ILP. Marwick suggests that the effect of the war was to martyr and glory the ILP, and that the increase in membership from February 1917 onwards, was caused by new supporters from the Liberal party, 'disillusioned by the inconsistencies, immoral and undignified postures they felt their party had assumed.'⁵⁹ May on the other hand suggests that the consequences of the War for the ILP were 'deleterious' and contends that while it regained its strength and flourished in parts of the 'increasingly militant cauldron of the south Wales coalfield', the ILP never recovered from 'the distance its attitude towards the war placed between it and the wider labour movement', and its isolation was compounded by Henderson's reforms which remove much of its previous *raison d'être*. The party was challenged later by the emergence of the Communist Party which became the natural home for many critics of the Labour Party's moderation. The First World War thus helped to shift the ILP from the centre stage of Welsh Labour politics'.⁶⁰

But May neglects the evidence of the increase in the membership of the ILP from 1917 onwards, while Marwick's fundamental argument is that the ILP had won much of its argument over peace policy and had retained its

⁵⁷ *Pioneer*, 8 June 1918.

⁵⁸ Chris Howard, 'The Focus of the Mute Hopes of a Whole Class' - Ramsay Macdonald and Aberavon, 1922-1929', *Llafur* Vol.7.1 (1996), 70.

⁵⁹ Marwick, *The Independent Labour Party 1918-1932*, 11.

⁶⁰ May, 'The Mosaic of Labour Politics', 82.

influence over Labour through the involvement of its key leaders in the management of the party. It may be argued that it was more in the trade unions that the ILP were 'not now of great account', and the demand was increasingly for skilled organizers rather than effective propagandists.⁶¹ The legacy of its anti-war policy was that the ILP gained renewed confidence through a 'baptism of common travail',⁶² but after the war, it had to adjust to a deeply changed relationship with the Labour Party. The nature and strength of the ILP varied greatly throughout Wales, and its local influence during the war is reflected in the waxing and waning of its financial health and membership numbers. As Pearce⁶³ and Duncan⁶⁴ suggest, it is only by studying the phenomenon of the anti-war movement on a localised level that it is possible to gain an understanding of how the ILP related to the different strands of the anti-war movement. In south Wales, the two areas that featured the greatest activity against the war were also where the ILP was strongest, in Merthyr Tydfil and Briton Ferry. In those and in a limited number of other localities, the ILP worked symbiotically with other anti-war organizations such as the NCF and the NCCL to broaden the extent of anti-war activity.

iii) The Independent Labour Party in the Briton Ferry area

On the eve of war, Briton Ferry, lying at the mouth of the Neath river, was a prosperous small town of 8,472 people, well-connected with its own dock and a railway network that had grown from the need to transport coal and tinsplate from Briton Ferry and south-west Wales. The tinsplate industry had developed in the area in the second half of the nineteenth century primarily because of local supplies of particular coals, of limestone and sulphuric acid, with plentiful water and coastline ports. The largest tinsplate town was Llanelli with its seven works, and then Pontardulais, Morriston and Briton Ferry with five each, Port Talbot with four, and Neath, Pontardawe, and Gorseinon with three works

⁶¹ Marwick, *The Independent Labour Party 1918-32*, 12.

⁶² Dowse, *Left in the Centre*, 34.

⁶³ Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, 21.

⁶⁴ Duncan, *Objectors and Resisters*.

each. By 1913, four out of five of the UK's tinsplate workers lived within a twenty mile radius of Swansea.⁶⁵ In common with its neighbours, Briton Ferry was a one-industry town, and shopkeepers and service industries, as well as the workers themselves depended on the tinsplate trade for their livelihood.⁶⁶

The main works were the Briton Ferry Steelworks, the Albion Steelworks, the Gwalia tinsplate works, and the Baglan Engineering and Foundry. Production of Welsh tinsplate reached its peak of 848,000 tons before the outbreak of the war,⁶⁷ and tinsplate manufacturers united with steelmakers, such as the Albion steelworks and Gwalia Tinsplate in Briton Ferry, to accommodate, rationalise and create technological advances.⁶⁸ The town developed a sense of civic identity in the late nineteenth century, and the Briton Ferry Urban District Council was formed in 1892 and a public park, and the town's Public Hall were both opened in 1911. This was accompanied by the growth of independent working class representation, and Labour was an important presence on the local council in the decade preceding the war. As early as 1905, the ILP had been active in the town when Keir Hardie had spoken under its auspices.⁶⁹

The culture and impact of the ILP varied according to physical location and relationship to the workplace, and in Briton Ferry, the ILP branch was made up mainly of tinsplaters and steelworkers, with only about a dozen miners. The leadership of the party included Albion men such as George Gethin, 'a famous Labour man ... a kind of Danton of the labour movement in the Ferry' and tinsplaters such as Joe Branch who worked in the Gwalia tinsplate works in Baglan.⁷⁰ Branch was the chairman of the party locally, was a member of the Briton Ferry Urban District Council, of which he had been chairman, had been

⁶⁵ Stephen Hughes, and Paul Reynolds, *A Guide to the Industrial Archaeology of the Swansea Region* (Aberystwyth, Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments, 1988).

⁶⁶ W.E. Minchinton (ed), *Industrial South Wales 1750-1914* (Frank Cass and Co., 1969), xxiv.

⁶⁷ *ibid*, xxvi.

⁶⁸ Adams, *Not in our Name*, 63.

⁶⁹ *ibid*, 13.

⁷⁰ South Wales Coalfield Collection, Len Williams, Aud 282, Swansea University.

an ex-officio magistrate on the Neath bench, and became the regional secretary of the Dockers' Union.⁷¹

At the end of the Great War, the 'great Briton Ferry' was the most 'virile party' of independent labour in south Wales.⁷² The membership of the ILP in the town was approximately 1 in 22 of the town's population of 8,472,⁷³ numbering approximately 367 members, and representing 6.5 per cent of the town's adult population. The branch had its own choir and had community facilities, and held debates and literary classes, and its leaders were invariably respectable and sober men of distinction who were chapel-goers, leaders of their trades unions locally, and who dominated Briton Ferry Urban District Council. The local membership of the ILP was mainly drawn from the trade union movement, rather than from amongst teachers and more middle class support⁷⁴ and Marwick attributes the 'virility' of the ILP in the town to Ivor Hael Thomas, who was an office boy in a tinsplate works at the age of 15, before becoming a tinsplate finisher. A trade union activist, he became a member of the national executive of the Dockers' Union in 1914 for two years.⁷⁵ He was a crucial figure in the organization of the Independent Labour Party, not only within Briton Ferry but throughout south Wales, and was Wales's representative on the national administrative council of the ILP for five years from the beginning of the war. In 1916, he became the organiser in South Wales and Monmouthshire for the NCCL, and there could be little doubt about Thomas's anti-war credentials for whilst a number of its founding members such as the railwayman's leader Jimmy Thomas, could be said to be pro-war, Thomas addressed and chaired anti-war meetings in Briton Ferry, took part in NCF fundraisers and celebrations,⁷⁶ and was the honorary secretary of the Defence and Maintenance fund set up when the ILP propagandist, R.C. Wallhead was imprisoned for making anti-war statements

⁷¹ Adams, *Not in Our Name*, 197-198.

⁷² *ibid*, 51.

⁷³ *Census of England and Wales 1911, County Report on Glamorgan* (HMSO, 1914), 21.

⁷⁴ South Wales Coalfield Collection, Len Williams Aud 282, Swansea University.

⁷⁵ Marwick, *The ILP 1918-32*, 51; *The Labour's Who Who*, 217.

⁷⁶ *Pioneer*, 7 October 1916.

under the Defence of the Realm Act.⁷⁷ He later took a leading part in the creation of the Aberavon District Labour Party and became its first secretary.⁷⁸

However, Marwick, in ascribing great importance to individual energy, does not give sufficient consideration to the extensive moral and practical support given by the energetic local labour and socialist movement. Whilst that opposition was a minority view, it received support from a substantial part of the population. Emrys Hughes recorded his experience of ILP political meetings in Briton Ferry as being similar to religious services:

it had a little hall, which had formerly been a nonconformist chapel, where regular Sunday night meetings were held in wintertime and which were always well-attended. They sang hymns from a Socialist hymn book and it was as much a religious service as a political meeting.⁷⁹

Briton Ferry's reputation for its anti-war activism caused it to be known as 'little Germany'⁸⁰ by its detractors and caused concern for the authorities even in the earliest stages of the war. Even in September 1914, at the height of enlistment to the armed forces, recruiting was thought to be slow in the town, and Briton Ferry was considered to be 'an exceptional place' as it possessed a 'force strongly opposed to warfare.'⁸¹

Briton Ferry was a magnet for anti-war speakers from other parts of Britain throughout the war, and the number of public anti-war meetings held there increased from only two in 1915, to twenty two in 1916, twenty in 1917, and a further twenty meetings in 1918.⁸² Speakers included the leadership of the ILP such as Ramsay MacDonald, Philip and Ethel Snowden, George Lansbury, Dick Wallhead, W.C. Anderson and Bruce Glasier, and leaders of the UDC

⁷⁷ *Pioneer*, 16 February 1918.

⁷⁸ Adams, *Not in our Name*, 204-205.

⁷⁹ Adams, *Not in Our Name*, 118.

⁸⁰ Keir Hardie and Emrys Hughes Papers, Dep.176 Box 8/1, 'Pulpits and Prisons', National Library of Scotland, 222.

⁸¹ *Cambria Daily Leader*, 8 September 1914.

⁸² Adams, *Not in our Name*, 272-278.

and the NCF, including Bertrand Russell, E.D. Morel, Norman Angell, Charles Buxton, Theodora Wilson and Herbert Dunnico. These nationally recognised speakers were joined by effective Welsh propagandists, who were invariably ministers of religion such as T.E. Nicholas (Niclas y Glais), Rev. J. Puleston Jones, Pwllheli, and the Rev. John Morgan Jones, Merthyr. Other speakers included the railwaymen's union leader Robert Williams, and the ILP and NCF activist and propagandist, Minnie Pallister.⁸³ It was an affirmation of Briton Ferry's role in anti-war activity that the meeting to set up the Wales region of the NCF was held in Briton Ferry in June 1915.⁸⁴

After conscription was introduced in January 1916, the ILP supported local conscientious objectors. The local barber shop was the town's centre for political debate and the ten year old Bill Gregory, recalls how his uncle, the barber, helped the conscientious objectors:

when they were on the run, they would come there some times and have a haircut before the shop opened. On one occasion for example, when a chap by the name of Tom Thomas, Tommy Tu'penny he was known as in Briton Ferry, was on the run, his brother came to my uncle and asked if he could cut his hair one morning say about quarter to nine before the shop opened. And I remember my uncle pulling the window of the barber's shop, half way down, taking the tools off the table and setting the table close to the window on a chair, so that if Sergeant Williams came in, Tom would make a dash for it through the window. It didn't come to that but that was the atmosphere.⁸⁵

From the beginning of May 1916, the police, who were presumably exasperated by the widespread anti-war campaigning of the ILP in the Briton Ferry area, responded robustly and started a campaign of intimidation. This approach emanated from the Chief Constable of Glamorgan, Captain Lionel Lindsay, whose confrontational attitude towards anti-war activists was not curbed until the following year, when the decision on prosecutions against

⁸³ *ibid*, 276-277.

⁸⁴ *ibid*, 273.

⁸⁵ South Wales Coalfield Collection, W.H. Gregory, Aud 289, Swansea University

anti-war activists in south Wales was taken over by Special Branch and MI5, whose approach was rather more emollient.

From early May, the police initiated a campaign to dissipate what the *Pioneer* termed the 'prevalent distrust and unrest in South Wales'.⁸⁶ In a short period, between 7 May and 16 June 1916, the police took out proceedings under the Defence of the Realm Act, against twenty ILP members in the Briton Ferry, Cwmavon and Port Talbot area, on five separate occasions, in order to cow the anti-war campaigners. The *Pioneer* accused the authorities of 'pursuing their policy of suppression with a violence that savour of vindictiveness'.⁸⁷

On Saturday, 13 May, the police raided the ILP centre in Cwmafon and confiscated anti-war written propaganda as well as the branch correspondence and minute book.⁸⁸ The following day, four prominent ILP leaders were arrested following an anti-war open-air meeting organised by the No-Conscription Fellowship, in Bethany Square, Port Talbot - Henry Davies, the leader of the ILP in Cwmavon and who was to be put forward as the ILP's candidate for the Labour nomination in Aberavon; Councillor Harry Davies, Taibach and Councillor Mainwaring - both ILP members of the Margam district council; and Councillor James Price, a miner, a member of Aberavon Town Council, and ironically a member of the local military service tribunal. The first three had been speakers at the 'anti-conscription meeting' and Price had chaired the meeting. These initially appeared in court on a charge of causing obstruction.⁸⁹ There was little difference in the personnel of the ILP and the No-Conscription Fellowship. Henry Davies was also the local organiser of the NCF in Cwmafon.

A further prosecution was then brought against four prominent local I.L.P. members who had spoken at an outdoor meeting of four hundred people, and organised by the NCF in Bethany Square, Port Talbot at an earlier meeting.

⁸⁶ *Pioneer*, 17 June 1916.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Pioneer*, May 20 1916.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

They were ‘charged with making statements and distributing circulars likely to prejudice recruiting and cause disaffection to the training and discipline of His Majesty’s Forces’. In the subsequent hearing, Councillor Taliesyn Mainwaring, from Taibach, who was the NCF organiser in the Port Talbot area, was charged with ‘making prejudicial statements’ and fined £25 with £5 costs, while Daniel Morris, secretary of the Cwmavon ILP, and Jenkin and William Williams, both members of the Cwmavon ILP, were fined £10 each with £1 costs.⁹⁰ Two local NCF and ILP activists, Garnet Waters, the chairman of the Briton Ferry branch of the NCF, and William Davies, were arrested under the DORA legislation for distributing pamphlets ‘similar to those which formed the grounds for the Cefn prosecution’, were each sentenced to one month’s imprisonment with hard labour.⁹¹

A further ten ILP members were charged at Neath Magistrates Court on 16 June under regulation 27 of the Defence of the Realm Act, with ‘distributing articles likely to cause disaffection and prejudice to His Majesty’s subjects’, namely the distribution at Easter time of the anti-war ‘Everett’ and ‘Maximillian’ pamphlets, both produced by the NCF.⁹² The Everett leaflet protested against the arrest and conviction of a conscientious objector, Ernest Everett, a teacher from St. Helens in Lancashire, who had been given the harsh sentence of two years hard labour in his army court-martial,⁹³ and the Maximilian leaflet was a historical allegory that suggested that Christ would have become a conscientious objector.⁹⁴ The ten defendants included Councillor Joe Branch, a number of prospective conscientious objectors including James Adams and William Davies, and Arthur Armstrong, secretary of the Briton Ferry branch of the NCF.

Branch, seen as the ringleader, was bound over in the sum of £50 to be of good behaviour and the remaining nine defendants then pleaded guilty on the

⁹⁰ *Pioneer*, June 17 1916.

⁹¹ *Pioneer*, May 20 1916.

⁹² *Pioneer*, June 17 1916.

⁹³ Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*, 128-129.

⁹⁴ Adams, *Not in My Name*, 210.

advice of their barrister, the Member of Parliament, Llewellyn Williams, and were bound over in the sum of £25 each.⁹⁵ On the following Sunday another protest meeting to demand the repeal the Military Service Act under the auspices of the NCCL was held at Taibach, and chaired by the ILP Councillor, Harry Davies.⁹⁶ An indication of the extent of local support given to these activists was the send-off given a week later to Councillor Tal Mainwaring, Port Talbot, and Dan Morris, secretary of the Cwmafon ILP, who had refused to pay their fines and therefore Mainwaring was therefore imprisoned for three months and Morris for two months. The columnist Afaneer described the dramatic scene:

Great waves of enthusiasm witnessed the departure of Coun. Tal Mainwaring and Dan Morris en route to Swansea Gaol from Aberavon station last Saturday evening ... they were followed to the railway station by hundreds of enthusiastic people to see them off. Some of the crowds climbed the platform palings; women weeped; and the men sang themselves hoarse and waved their headgear... the 'Red Flag' was sung - this time with renewed vigour and joined in by the Aberavon Male Voice Party, who were leaving by the same train. It was an impressive scene. The singing having ceased a voice shouted out 'Are we downhearted ? No' responded a thousand voices. Again and again this cry went up. And now silence reigned. Coun. Harry Davies had suddenly risen to speak and the few remarks he was able to make were generously punctuated with applause and 'hear, hear...and thus departed the Comrades - but the spirit remained.⁹⁷

It was to this energetic centre of dissent that Bertrand Russell, the chairman of the NCF, visited as part of a three week speaking tour of south Wales in June and July 1916. Russell was the author of the 'Everett' leaflet which had led to the numerous arrests of ILP and NCF members in May 1916, including

⁹⁵ *Pioneer*, 17 June 1916.

⁹⁶ *ibid*, 24 June 1916.

⁹⁷ *ibid*, 1 July 1916.

those of the Briton Ferry group.⁹⁸ This tour was comprised of private meetings of members of the sponsoring organisations, public indoor meetings and outdoor meetings, frequently held on village commons. Its organisation exemplified the close relationship between the various anti-war organisations, since the tour was organised by the National Council against Conscription and the NCF, with local arrangements normally being handled by branches of the NCF or ILP. Russell's account of his visit provide an outsider's eye of conditions in Briton Ferry and the state of the anti-war movement in the area.

His first meeting was a private meeting of about a hundred members of the NCF in Briton Ferry, in which he suggested, surprisingly, given the number of court cases against local NCF members, that they had not been subject to much persecution because they were all in starved industries., and that there was a 'higher than average' proportion of reserved, industrial occupations in the town.⁹⁹ He contrasted the atmosphere in Briton Ferry with other areas – 'the streets here are as full of young men as in normal times - it is very refreshing.'¹⁰⁰ But he reserved his greatest surprise for the extent of anti-war sentiment that he witnessed in the area, and in Port Talbot he felt that:

The state of feeling here is quite astonishing. This town subsists on one enormous steelworks, the largest in S. Wales ; the men are starved, and earning very good wages ; they are not suffering from the war in any way. But they seem all to be against it. On Sunday afternoon 'I had an open-air meeting on a green; there were two Chapels on the green, and their congregations came out just before I began. They stayed to listen. A crowd of about 400 came - not like open-air meetings in the South when people stay a few minutes out of curiosity, and then go away - they all stayed the whole time, listened with the closest attention, and seemed unanimously sympathetic. The man who has been organising for me here works twelve hours every day except Sunday in the steel works. Their energy is wonderful.

⁹⁸ Vellacott, *Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists in the First World War* (Harvester Press, 1980), 78.

⁹⁹ Philip Adams, *A Most Industrious Town* (Ludlow, Briton Ferry Books, 2014), 125.

¹⁰⁰ Vellacott, *Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists in the First World War*, 87.

That evening at Briton Ferry, as news of the Somme offensive filtered through, he had a 'really wonderful' and enthusiastic meeting:

the hall was packed... they inspired me, and I spoke as I have never spoken before...One needs no prudent reticences - no humbug of any sort - one can just speak out one's whole mind. I thought the great offensive would have excited them, but it hasn't. ¹⁰¹

The arrests of ILP activists and Russell's visit led to an increase in the number of anti-war meetings and demonstrations. From July 1916 onwards, regular meetings were held in Briton Ferry, Cwmavon and Port Talbot against the war. In the second week of July, for instance, four anti-war meetings were held and addressed by Russell and R.C.Wallhead speaking on the need for Peace negotiations.¹⁰² For the following years of the war, Briton Ferry became the focus point for anti-war activity. and a public meeting of over 900 people on 19 November 1916, listening to the peace activist and founder of the UDC, Charles Roden Buxton speaking of peace by negotiation was typical.¹⁰³

During the latter half of the war, other prominent national figures came to speak at anti-war rallies in Briton Ferry, including Sylvia Pankhurst, Philip Snowden, Herbert Dunnico, Director of the Peace Society, and Charles Trevelyan, a former Liberal Member of Parliament, who with Norman Angell, were both founders of the UDC. The ILP in the area also gave recognition to the conscientious objectors when they returned from prison or work camp. On 30 September 1916, three local objectors were welcomed home from prison by a tea and 'entertainment' for between 200 and 300 people.¹⁰⁴ In the same manner that returning soldiers were feted on their return from the front, the brothers John and Sidney Bamford, who were conscientious objectors from the Cwmavon area and had taken alternative employment in a local tinplate

¹⁰¹ Nicholas Griffin, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell-The Public Years 1914-1970* (Routledge, 2001), 70.

¹⁰² *Pioneer*, 15 July 1916; *ibid*, 22 July 1916.

¹⁰³ *ibid*, 23 November 1916.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, 7 October 1916.

works, were each presented with a gold pendant, a silver cigarette case and a purse of money which was paid for through subscription.¹⁰⁵

Of the thirty-three conscientious objectors identified as men from Briton Ferry, most were identified with a chapel, but religious affiliation was often not the sole motivation for their objection. Rather it was a combination of moral and ethical objection to the war and grounded in a belief in the efficacy of the principles of Christianity and the example of Jesus Christ. The *Pioneer's* report of the arrest of nine local men as conscientious objectors is significant because of the close relationship it describes between the ILP, the NCF, and the chapels of the area:

some of these young men will be missed as members of the ILP; others will be missed or workers in the churches to which they belonged, while all will be missed at the meetings of the Fellowship. Of their sincerity, we are convinced, and they will inspire us in this fight for the principles for which we all stand.¹⁰⁶

Most chapels in Briton Ferry supported the war and opposed the anti-war movement. This inevitably caused friction within congregations, and when Councillor Joe Branch and others were arrested for distributing anti-war pamphlets outside Briton Ferry's Bethel Calvinist Methodist chapel on 30 April 1916, the minister of the church and a number of its deacons gave evidence against him, even though he and some of his colleagues were members, and their actions caused Branch and others to leave the chapel.¹⁰⁷

Jerusalem Baptist Church in Briton Ferry supported the anti-war movement most enthusiastically and provided a platform for numerous ILP and Peace Society gatherings. It was led by its charismatic minister, Revd. Rees Powell, and his equally influential wife, Elisabeth Powell, a member of the women's ILP. The introduction of conscription gave an inevitable urgency to anti-war activity in Briton Ferry and Revd. Rees Powell was an active member of the town's anti-conscription

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Pioneer*, 2 December 1916.

¹⁰⁷ Adams, *Not in Our Name*, 198, 209.

council and the branch of the NCF, and his church held an increasing number of peace meetings throughout 1916.

Nicknamed the 'Kaiser's Church',¹⁰⁸ Jerusalem became the centre for anti-war meetings in the town, especially from January 1917, after the local council had made the Briton Ferry Public Hall unavailable for use by the ILP and other anti-war organisations.¹⁰⁹ The church's official history records that it chose to take what was then the very uneasy course of supporting peace, and describes a period of conflict within the congregation:

Much bitter opposition and hostile abuse was aroused by a series of peace-meetings held in the chapel ... Quite a number of the young men of the chapel and Sunday School joined the army, but others obeyed the dictates of conscience and were imprisoned. In a public meeting at the close of the war, Mr. Powell said; 'I thank God that no young man can ever say that I sent him to the war'.¹¹⁰

The influence of the church on conscientious objectors from Briton Ferry was palpable. A remarkable 42 per cent of them from Briton Ferry defined themselves as Baptist and attended Jerusalem chapel. At least thirteen of them, representing 40 per cent, were also members of the ILP. Len Williams recalled:

There was very high percentage of conscientious objectors in Briton Ferry, most of them came from the Baptist chapel, most of them moved by religious reasons, but quite a number by socialist ... the minister himself, Rees Powell, well he was a man that was ostracised in his own ... profession ... he was a most Godly type of fellow to look at. But most of them came from his chapel.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ *Pioneer*, 17 March 1917.

¹⁰⁹ Adams, *Not in Our Name*, 214.

¹¹⁰ *Centenary of the Baptist Cause in Briton Ferry 1837-1937, Souvenir Programme* (Neath, 1938), 41.

¹¹¹ South Wales Coalfield Collection, Len Williams Aud 282, Swansea University.

Powell's radicalism was reflected in his ministry and instances such as his controversial sermon when he refused to read the King's Proclamation demanding that people should make economies:

He felt that in a church where many worked only two and three shifts a week he could not ask men to economise. At the same church, the Christian Endeavour Society on Thursday last had a paper read, which was written by a conscientious objector who is a guest of His Majesty at Wormwood Scrubs. The subject was The Gift of Power, and created a good impression.¹¹²

In August 1917, the church held a first of a series of seven Peace meetings before the end of the war, and in the first meeting of the series, featured Rev. Herbert Morgan, later the Labour candidate in the 1918 election in Neath, who spoke before a 'large audience' on the subject of the futility of war to answer international questions.¹¹³

These meetings brought together peace and anti-war speakers from Wales and across Britain. In January 1918, two leaders of the anti-war movement in North Wales, Rev. E.K.Jones, Cefnmawr, Wrexham, and Rev. D. Wyre Lewis, Rhos, gave an account of their visit to an anti-war conference of eighty delegates representing sixteen churches in the Swansea Valley, and of their work as visitors to conscientious objectors in camps in North Wales.¹¹⁴

Other local chapels, such as Zion Baptist Chapel, Cwmavon, also gave opportunities to hold peace meetings. In March 1917, a meeting was held in the chapel vestry, with the Rev. John Morgan Jones, Merthyr, as main speaker, to call for Peace by Negotiation, and attempts were made to break up the meeting by 'local jingoos and conservatives'. At first they demanded it should be held in English rather than Welsh and the crowd quietened them and the meeting continued. The meeting resolved to urge the Government to

¹¹² *Pioneer*, 9 June 1917.

¹¹³ *ibid*, 18 August 1917.

¹¹⁴ *ibid*, 2 February 1918.

‘promote negotiations with the object of securing a just and lasting peace’, but as soon as the people began to depart, in ‘rushed a dozen sordid, drunken, brutes, singing the National Anthem, who had probably just emanated from the adjacent public house’.¹¹⁵

This incident had an effect on other chapels and churches and their readiness to provide meeting places for the anti-war movement. Rev. T.E Nicholas had been booked to speak at the Bethania vestry in Cwmavon the following week but ‘with considerable religious prejudice and police pressure’, the minister and the deacons altered their previous decisions and therefore cancelled the loan of the vestry’, and the meeting was consequently held at the ILP centre.¹¹⁶

Other tensions were also developing between local chapels and the ILP. ‘Democritus’, an ILP member writing from Cwmavon, stated that the Sunday meetings organised by the ILP had become very popular and although they were timed so as not to clash with religious services, the churches were doing their best to prevent the attendance of the youths by prolonging the religious services to an unusual extent:

The result of this policy has been that the young people have kicked over the traces and most of them now leave for the meetings in good time, despite the insidious opposition of the church leaders. This narrow-mindedness, vindictiveness and intolerance of the elders of the church is alienating the thoughtful young men from the chapel, especially since it is obvious that opposition to the ILP is mainly due to the disrespect shown by this organisation to the fetishes of Liberalism.¹¹⁷

The anti-war movement in Briton Ferry was probably the most significant and effective of any area in Wales. It combined the political and cultural strength of the ILP with the dynamism of the opposition to conscription and the self-

¹¹⁵ *ibid*, 17 March 1917.

¹¹⁶ *ibid*, 24 March 1917.

¹¹⁷ *ibid*, 8 September 1917.

sacrifice of those conscientious objectors who emanated from the town. In spite of the town's involvement in manufacturing arms and serving the war effort, attitudes towards the war remained divided, and both of those who went to war, and those who refused to do so, were given succour by their different communities. The role of Jerusalem chapel and the influence of its minister, Rees Powell, on the town's conscientious objectors was critically important in bolstering and giving courage to those objectors who were reviled by many. The ILP provided a critical political and moral case against the war, and gave practical support and a sense of community to those objectors who might otherwise have felt ostracised and marginalised.¹¹⁸

v) The Merthyr Tydfil anti-war movement

Merthyr Tydfil was the cradle of the industrial revolution and the birthplace of democratic politics in Wales. On the eve of war, Merthyr was a prosperous town of 83,808 inhabitants. Its growing civic pride was reflected in its elevation to the status of a county borough in 1908, and its economic and civic confidence was built on the pre-war boom in coal and steel production in which 1913 saw the peak of production of coal in south Wales with 56.8 million tons of coal, of which three million tons were mined in the Merthyr area.¹¹⁹ The largest single employer was the Guest Keen and Nettlefold Dowlais iron and steel works which also owned numerous coalmines in the area. Forty three per cent of the electorate of Merthyr Boroughs worked in the small and scattered mines of the borough and the unemployment rate was a paltry 1.4 per cent.¹²⁰ Merthyr miners' militancy was exemplified by their lonely

¹¹⁸ *ibid*, 12 April 1919. A significant post-script to the war was the municipal election to Briton Ferry Borough Council in March 1919, and the electorate's verdict on the ILP in Briton Ferry after the profoundly difficult and divisive period of war. In spite of a strong campaign against them by Discharged Soldiers' and Sailors candidates, two of the three ILP candidates, George Gethin and D.L. Mort, were re-elected on the top of the list.

¹¹⁹ Merthyr Tydfil Teachers' Centre, *Merthyr Tydfil: A Valley Community* (Merthyr, 1981), 330.

¹²⁰ K.O. Morgan, 'The Merthyr of Keir Hardie', in *Merthyr Politics: The Making of a Working-Class Tradition*, Glanmor Williams (ed.) (Cardiff, University of Wales Press 1966), 61.

opposition to a resumption of work in the south Wales coalfield after the Minimum Wage strike of 1912.¹²¹

The Merthyr Tydfil and Aberdare area, which together constituted the Merthyr Boroughs parliamentary borough, was the cradle of the socialist movement and Labour party in south Wales. The labour movement in the area combined the ILP's network of branches with active trades and labour councils and an energetic co-operative movement. This co-operative movement was an significant addition to the quality of life of many, and on the eve of the war, there were four cooperative societies in the area, in Dowlais, Treharris, Troedyrhiw and Merthyr, with a total of over two thousand members and a remarkable sales volume of £116,063 in 1911. The party's growth in the town before the War occurred in the context of greater industrial militancy and the locally produced Souvenir of the ILP national conference, held in Merthyr in 1912, looked forward confidently to the combining of these different facets locally:

the unification of the great parallel movements of the labour world, the trades unions, political and socialistic movements and the gradual conversion of the present Co-operative movement into a real collection effort is to be the greatest accomplishment of the near future.¹²²

The constituency returned J. Keir Hardie as its first Member of Parliament to be elected as an unequivocal socialist and member of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, and his political philosophy suffused the labour movement locally with his radical commitment to workers' rights, his fealty to a 'working-class cooperative tradition' and his belief in anti-militarism, which found expression in his opposition to the South African War and subsequently his objection to the Great War.¹²³ Much of his local appeal lay in his ability to translate socialist ethics into the imagery of popular

¹²¹ *ibid*, Joe England, 'The Merthyr of the Twentieth Century', 83.

¹²² *Souvenir ILP 20th Annual Conference Easter 1912* (Merthyr, 1912), 49-50.

¹²³ Morgan, 'The Merthyr of Keir Hardie', 70.

Nonconformity.¹²⁴ Hardie's anti-war stance reflected the pacifist heritage of one of his predecessors, the Liberal Henry Richard, Member of Parliament for the Merthyr Boroughs, whose leadership of the Peace Society and his work for an international system of peace arbitration earned him the sobriquet of 'Apostle of Peace', and Hardie's opposition to war set him firmly in this political tradition of radical Liberalism and anti-militarism.¹²⁵ Hardie was a 'voice of sanity' and 'pacific tolerance' at the outbreak of the War,¹²⁶ but he was shattered and crushed by his experience in a peace meeting in Aberdare, where his meeting was disrupted by angry pro-war demonstrators led by the charismatic miner's agent, Charles Stanton. He reflected that he now understood the sufferings of Christ at Gethsemane.¹²⁷ The Labour organisation in Merthyr was henceforth divided between those who agreed with the official Labour leadership in supporting the war and the pacifist supporters of Hardie and the ILP who stood out against the 'passions of the time',¹²⁸ but 'Merthyrism' became synonymous with anti-war activity that was allied to industrial militancy and opposition to conscription.¹²⁹

Merthyr's ILP branch was based on Keir Hardie's strong personal influence in the seat, and, even in the early part of the war, the Merthyr and Aberdare Valleys could report the 'surprising fact' that branches which had fallen away before the war were now increasing in membership and activity.¹³⁰ By 1918, the ILP's Merthyr and Aberdare Federation area had eleven branches in the Merthyr and Aberdare area; at Merthyr, Aberdare, Abercanaid, Abercynon, Bedlinog, Dowlais, Hirwain, Merthyr Vale, Mountain Ash, Troedyrhiw and Ynysybwl. During the war, Aberdare ILP's affiliation fees and membership were second only to Briton Ferry in south Wales. In 1917-1918, for instance, Aberdare's paid affiliation fees reflect a membership of approximately 260, with another 160 in Merthyr. These two branches were part of a Merthyr

¹²⁴ *ibid*, 67.

¹²⁵ *ibid*, 80.

¹²⁶ *ibid*, 262.

¹²⁷ *ibid*, 266.

¹²⁸ *ibid*, 77.

¹²⁹ *The Times*, 23 November 1916.

¹³⁰ *Pioneer*, 22 May 1915.

division that included another nine branches, and would probably have included at least three hundred other members in the area.¹³¹

The local ILP newspaper, the *Pioneer* was one of the ‘most interesting of the official provincial ILP papers at this time’¹³² and its ownership by over eight hundred local subscribers was testament to the vigour of the ILP in the Merthyr area. Created in June 1911, it fulfilled a need for a local journal to express an ‘unofficial but constitutionally orientated militancy of which Hardie himself was the supreme symbol’. It lent new momentum to the flagging ILP in the Welsh industrial valleys,¹³³ and the list of subscribers included a high proportion of teachers but the overwhelming majority of subscribers were associated with the mining industry.¹³⁴ The *Pioneer*’s circulation was calculated at ‘usually in excess of ten thousand’,¹³⁵ and its policy was to support the rank and file of the SWMF, especially the emergent leaders of the militant left like Vernon Hartshorn, Charles Stanton and George Barker. But from the beginning of the war, it supported the ILP in taking a strong and uncompromising anti-war stance.

At the end of the week when war was declared, the *Pioneer* called on the workers of south Wales to unite with the trade unionists and socialists of Europe to oppose the war:

Workers, don’t fail your comrades at this great moment. Stand by your fellow-workers here. Stand by your follow-workers in Europe. Whoever else deserts the ranks, whatever you have to face, stand firm. The future is dark, but in the solidarity of the workers lies the hope which shall, once again, bring light to the peoples of Europe.

¹³¹ Annual Report of the ILP, 1917-1918 (Harvester Press), 105.

¹³² Marwick, *The Independent Labour Party 1918-32*, 51.

¹³³ K.O. Morgan, *Keir Hardie, Radical and Socialist* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), 237; Deian Hopkin, ‘The Membership of the Independent Labour Party, 1904-10 : a spatial analysis’, *International Review of Social History*, Volume 20 (1975), 185.

¹³⁴ *ibid*, 193.

¹³⁵ *ibid*, 60.

Down with the war-mongers. Up with the Banner of peace.¹³⁶

The UDC, founded by middle-class radicals such as E.D. Morel, C.P. Trevelyan M.P., Arthur Ponsonby and Norman Angell, attempted to define the means by which international peace could be established and maintained once the war ended. Its strength lay amongst London radicals and intellectuals,¹³⁷ but its first meeting in Wales was held in January 1915, at Shiloah chapel, Merthyr, in order to set up a branch. The speaker was C.B. Trevelyan, who addressed 'an attentive and appreciative audience'¹³⁸ and UDC pamphlets were made available from the ILP shop in the High Street.¹³⁹ Later in 1915, the Aberdare ILP mandated its delegates to affiliate to the UDC, and in the first meeting of the General Council of the UDC, with Ramsay MacDonald in the chair, there were delegates from Cardiff, Merthyr and Newport, representing a tenth of the UDC's branches.¹⁴⁰ At the beginning of 1916 the Merthyr Tydfil Trades and Labour Council, representing ten thousand unionists, affiliated to the UDC. But an indication of the tension between the UDC and the anti-war movement in Merthyr Tydfil in April 1916 was the Union's Executive Committee's refusal to send a speaker to a meeting in Merthyr because it appeared to be part of an unconditional 'stop the war' campaign.¹⁴¹ By September 1916 however, the UDC's views on Merthyr's anti-war movement seem to have changed, and one of its founders, E.D. Morel, spoke at a rally of three thousand people organised by the Merthyr Peace Council, the umbrella group for the anti-war movement in the town.¹⁴²

Regular anti-war meetings were usually organised in the Olympia Skating Rink, which was the largest public meeting hall in Merthyr. These meetings of up to 3,500 people were organised by the ILP, the local Peace Council, the

¹³⁶ *Pioneer*, 8 August 1914.

¹³⁷ Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Politics*, 89.

¹³⁸ *Pioneer*, 30 January 1915.

¹³⁹ *Pioneer* 9 January 1915.

¹⁴⁰ *Pioneer*, 6 November 1915.

¹⁴¹ Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control*, 149-150.

¹⁴² *ibid*, 151; *Pioneer*, 9 September 1916.

NCCL and other anti-war and anti-conscription bodies and the frequency of these meetings reflect the increasing momentum of the anti-war movement throughout this period. An indication of the shock with which the outbreak of war was greeted was that the first meeting was not held until 25 October 1914, fully ten weeks after the outbreak of War. Only two big anti-war meetings were held in 1915, and it was only in the second half of 1916, that they increases noticeably. Four meetings were held in the first half of 1916, and a further four in the second half. In 1917, a total of eleven meetings were held in the Rink, and a further six meetings in 1918 prior to the Armistice.

George Protheroe, a local ILP member recalled the anti-war feeling in the town during the war:

there was a bigger spirit of anti-war in Merthyr, I think it was recognised at the time, than in any other town in the country. And some of the greatest speakers had been over there, which the ILP were organising peace meetings for. I attended practically everyone of them, which were held in the Rink...and there were between three and four thousand people in those peace meetings on a Sunday evening.¹⁴³

The prominent peace activist, George M. Ll. Davies, assistant secretary of the FoR and based in London in 1915, was delighted at the large size of his audience and the respectful silence with which he and other anti-war speakers were greeted:

Yn y dyddiau hynny (1915) arfer heddychwyr oedd cyfarfod mewn ystafelloedd o'r neilltu...er fy syndod, aeth a mi i neuadd mwyaf y dref. Pan welais gynulliad o ddwy fil yn disgwyl amdanom tybiais eu bod am ein gwaed ... Cawsom wrandawriad astud a chefnogaeth i syniadau a fuasai'n tynnu'r dorf am ein pennau yn Llundain.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ South Wales Coalfield Collection, George Protheroe Aud 309, Swansea University.

¹⁴⁴ M.R.Mainwaring, 'John Morgan Jones 1861-1935', in Rees, *Herio'r Byd*, 64.

(in those days (1915) pacifists used to meet in private rooms...to my surprise we went to the largest hall in town. When I saw a crowd of two thousand waiting for us i thought they were for our blood ... We were given an attentive hearing and support for ideas that would have caused a crowd to attack us in London.)

At the end of the war, Alderman Frank James, formerly military representative for the Merthyr Borough drew the attention of the Merthyr Watch committee to the reputation of the Rink as one of the 'most seditious parts of the country' and challenged the Chief Constable to take action. The town mayor absolved the police of blame for the lack of action against the ILP activists and 'socialists' and blamed the Home Office for its reluctance to allow prosecutions:

Speakers are brought here from all over the country every Sunday, and it gives the borough a reputation it does not deserve. The audience is drawn from Aberdare, Pontypridd, Bedlinog etc., but it gives Merthyr an opprobrious name, and results in its being stigmatised as the hot-bed of Bolshevism and Socialism of the broadest and most violent type.¹⁴⁵

The first meeting, at the end of October 1914, was held with a crowd of between two and two and a half thousand who congregated to hear two of the leaders of the ILP, Ramsay MacDonald and Bruce Glasier, as well as Keir Hardie himself:¹⁴⁶

The meeting held at the Olympia Rink on Sunday afternoon last must have been a grievous disappointment to the Jingoese. Merthyr people have again shown during this crisis, as during the South African War, that whilst other

¹⁴⁵ *Pioneer*, 13 February 1919.

¹⁴⁶ *Pioneer*, 31 October 1914.

towns may not be prepared to give a fair hearing to the “other side of the question”. Merthyr is always prepared to do so.¹⁴⁷

The speeches reflected the uncertainty of the ILP at the time and Macdonald denied he was anti-war though he stated his refusal to embark on recruiting campaigns with his political enemies, but Glasier was more forthright in his condemnation of the war:

I hope that you don't believe in an possible alliance between Christ and the sword - that civilisation cannot advance but by the sword (Applause). I am proud to be here with Keir Hardie to stand for the great principles of peace for which our movement stands.

Keir Hardie closed the meeting in an unscheduled speech in which he railed at diplomatists and warned against militarism:

It is not enough to denounce war, men. It is not enough to preach peace, we must change the conditions which make war inevitable. (Applause) Richard Cobden and John Bright, and that man who brought honour to Merthyr, Henry Richard. (Cheers). They were hated and lied about, but they stood true to their principles, and when the war of madness was over, the country turned to honour the men who had held to their principle.¹⁴⁸

The next rallies were not held until almost a year later, in the autumn of 1915. Hardie's memorial meeting in the Rink on 23 October, 1915 gave the opportunity to celebrate his life and his anti-militarism. A further rally of three thousand people in November 1915, supported an Anti-Conscription Demonstration with Robert Williams of the Transport Workers' union, which declared 'its strongest opposition to compulsory military service', and the

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

‘utmost opposition to any proposal to impose upon the British people a yoke which is one of the chief curses of Prussian militarism.’¹⁴⁹

The first public meeting of the ‘Merthyr Stop the War and Peace Council’ which brought together the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the ILP, the NCF, the UDC and trade union lodges,¹⁵⁰ was held there on 20 April 1916 with two thousand people present. A further meeting organised by the Merthyr District Peace and Anti-Conscription Council, with an audience of sixteen hundred people, highlighted the plight of the conscientious objectors,¹⁵¹ and a meeting sponsored by the Peace Society, on 25 June 1916 attracted a reported crowd of five thousand people to listen to Philip Snowden.¹⁵² The Rink meetings increased in frequency with another four large rallies held between July and December, 1916, and in the following year, meetings were inaugurated on an approximately six weekly basis from January 1917 onwards and sustained until the end of the War. Most of these meetings were held on Sunday afternoons, and they attracted crowds from a ten mile radius of ‘Aberdare, Bargoed, Bedlinog and elsewhere’,¹⁵³ but their timing could affect church or chapel attendances. At least half of the Rink audiences were reported to be regular attendants of chapels and churches.¹⁵⁴

The only chapel to support the anti-war movement consistently in Merthyr Tydfil was Hope Methodist chapel, under the ministry of Rev. John Morgan Jones, a distinguished scholar and theologian:

he was...about the only one, if I can remember rightly, that preached against war. And he was holding his services there and the place started to fill and over-fill as the war went on...Then of course after the Peace meetings, well

¹⁴⁹ *ibid*, 1 December 1915.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid*, 22 April 1916.

¹⁵¹ *ibid*, 24 June 1916.

¹⁵² *ibid*, 31 July 1916.

¹⁵³ *ibid*, 25 January 1918.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid*, 11 January 1918; ‘if a man from Abercanaid, Cefn or Dowlais, attends a Rink meeting which commences late, and afterwards wants to go to church or chapel, he has hardly any time for his Sunday tea. Among the Rink audiences are people from Pant, Caeracca and Dowlais Top, all of which are very far from Merthyr.’

there would be a rush home to tea and then it would be to Hope Chapel for another anti-war sermon...And that kept on well practically the whole duration of the war.¹⁵⁵

Another enthusiast compared the spiritual journey from the Rink to most chapels with 'like going from the glorious sunshine to a thick fog. There is, I understand, one grand exception to this; at the chapel (Hope)I have in mind, there is a continuation of the Rink meetings spirit there.'¹⁵⁶ In addition to the regular public meetings to oppose the war, the local ILP played an important part in supporting conscientious objectors. The secretaries of the NCF in Aberdare and Merthyr were both members of the ILP, and the Rev. John Morgan Jones's daughter worked in the Conscientious Objectors Information Bureau in the NCF's head office in London. A total of thirty two objectors appeared before the local tribunal in its first hearing on 13 March 1916,¹⁵⁷ and at least seventy-one conscientious objectors in total were to emerge from the Aberdare and Merthyr area. Of the thirty-six objectors who declared an allegiance or affiliation, fourteen men declared themselves as members of the ILP, and sixteen declared themselves members of the No-Conscription Fellowship.¹⁵⁸

By the end of 1916, because of its anti-war meetings in the Rink, and the militancy of the ILP locally, Merthyr had become synonymous with the anti-war movement. The term 'Merthyristm' was fashioned by the special correspondent of the *Times*, who warned of the peril of the confluence of an anti-war movement in south Wales with the possibility of a strike in the coalfield in December 1916, unless the men's claim for an increase in wages was met.¹⁵⁹ This concern was heightened by the ongoing controversy over the disruption of a conference organized by the NCCL in the Cory Hall in Cardiff in November, 1916, which was then re-convened for December in the Olympia

¹⁵⁵ South Wales Coalfield Collection, George Protheroe Aud 309, Swansea University.

¹⁵⁶ *Pioneer*, 25 January 1918.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid*, 18 March, 1916.

¹⁵⁸ *Pearce Register 2016*.

¹⁵⁹ *The Times*, 23 November 1916.

Rink in Merthyr, and which is considered in greater detail in the section on the NCCL in Chapter Four.

A report, written in August 1916 by an intelligence officer for the Ministry of Munitions, reviewed attitudes in Merthyr towards the war, and stated that although miners individually showed no wish to 'hamper Imperial efforts', nowhere else in the mining industry had he encountered such distrust between coal owners and their employees. He found that 'tacked on' to the trades unions' organisation were 'combinations' such as 'a Council for Civil Liberties, a Council for Peace and the like.' He warned that although there was no secret about the objective of these organisations, 'they are slowly but surely bringing about an attitude which to a certain extent is bound to become prejudicial to major interests.' He highlighted the failure of local prominent figures including Labour Members of Parliament, to support the war effort and to 'help the average man to keep in the right frame of mind':

At the moment, Socialists with whom the ILP is identified, and a section of the Welsh clergy, are out to either mould new ideas or disturb fixed ones, and thus divert essential enthusiasm. I do not think that very much assistance need be expected from Labour members in Wales; it seems to me they are the slaves of local dictation.

He identified local 'juveniles' as slackers and most ready to cause trouble. But amongst the causes of 'considerable irritation' locally were the increasing high cost of living, and the tendency for shopkeepers and merchants to raise prices, so that whilst miners were not so affected because of their rates of pay, others like railwaymen, municipal employees and shop assistants, could not keep pace. He warned that 'the agitators are out to engineer difficulties' and referred to the representation of 116 representatives of trade unions,

together with political and religious organisations at a recent meeting of the NCCL in the area.¹⁶⁰

One of the leaders of the local anti-war movement, the miners' agent for Merthyr and Dowlais, John Williams, led the local opposition to conscription within the industry:

South Wales was quite clear that there was to be no more cooperation with the Government, in order to secure their young men, and he knew that the men of Merthyr would be prepared to take any measure, however drastic, to protest against this damnable thing.”¹⁶¹

Whilst the 'comb-out' of men for the armed forces was supported by a margin of 77 per cent to 23 per cent across the coalfield, the margin of the vote in Merthyr and Dowlais was the closest for any Federation division in south Wales at 44 per cent opposed to the comb-out, to 56 per cent in favour.¹⁶² This tradition of militancy was affirmed by the appointment of John Williams's successor as miners' agent for Merthyr in 1918, the brilliant stormy firebrand whose name was indelibly associated with the URC and *The Miners' Next Step*, Noah Ablett.¹⁶³ He had been the only member of the SWMF executive in August 1914 who had held out for an International Miners' Strike to end the developing War,¹⁶⁴ and although he had broken with the ILP in 1910, the readiness of Merthyr miners to employ him suggests an appetite amongst them for a transformation of the Miners Federation into a means for striving for miners' ownership of the mines.¹⁶⁵ The new agent for Dowlais, S.O. Davies had been a checkweighman in the Great Mountain colliery in

¹⁶⁰ *Addison Papers*, Dep c88, folio 44-46, Report by 'A.B.', an intelligence agent, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Whilst the note is anonymous, his further report, Security Services Papers KV/2/663/20444, 13 November 1916, suggests that an 'A. Barker' was the likely author.

¹⁶¹ *ibid*, 21 April 1917.

¹⁶² *Western Mail*, 16 November 1917.

¹⁶³ Morgan, 'The Merthyr of Keir Hardie', 78.

¹⁶⁴ Minutes of Executive Council of the SWMF; August 1914 passim, South Wales Coalfield Collection, Swansea University.

¹⁶⁵ Egan, 'Noah Ablett 1883-1935', 25.

Tumble, was a prominent ILP member and anti-war activist,¹⁶⁶ and shared Ablett's radicalism.

Merthyr Tydfil was one of the main centres for the opposition to the war in south Wales because of its radical and anti-war tradition, and the development of a widespread labour movement through the labour and trades council, its cooperative movement, and its propaganda through the *Pioneer*, which gave the anti-war tendency an important degree of communal support. The Olympia Rink was the location for the greatest anti-war demonstrations in south Wales from the autumn of 1916, and whilst many of its audiences were drawn from outlying districts, the size of these congregations of many thousands suggest strongly that attitudes towards the war in the town were more oppositional than in other parts of south Wales.

Merthyr and Briton Ferry were the most significant centres of opposition to the war, and the organisation of these local anti-war movements was umbilically linked with the ILP's activities, that orchestrated anti-war and anti-conscription protests, leafleted, and gave practical support to the families of imprisoned conscientious objectors. Whilst these were unquestionably the two strongest ILP branches in south Wales, and took part in the most anti-war activity locally, other areas also had both strong ILP branches and anti-war activity. These included Aberdare, the Swansea Valley and Swansea town itself, and the Rhymney Valley. In the 'new communities' of the coalfield, such as the Rhondda and Monmouthshire's eastern Valleys, the vanguard of the anti-war movement was the grouping of 'advanced men' that emanated from the URC and who propagated industrial unionism and workers' control within the mining industry. This grouping led the opposition to the introduction of conscription within the mining industry for a full eleven months in 1917 until they were finally defeated in the 'comb-out' ballot of miners in November 1917.

¹⁶⁶ Robert Griffiths, *S.O.Davies - A Socialist Faith* (Llandysul, Gomer Press, 1983), 34-40.

vi) The influence of the ‘Advanced’ Men¹⁶⁷ in the Anti-War Movement

South Wales was the centre for the ‘advanced men’ who supported the amalgamation of all labour within one union and believed in industrial unionism at the point of production. In no part of the country was this belief so widely held, and especially amongst its miners.¹⁶⁸

The mining industry dominated the economy of south Wales. Its output, at fifty seven million tonnes of coal, peaked in 1913 and it employed an annual average of 212,000 men throughout the Great War, approximately two-thirds of whom were members of the SWMF.¹⁶⁹ Before the War, the influence of the militant element within the rank and file of the Federation had grown substantially and had seen expression in the Cambrian Combine dispute in 1910-1911 and the publication of *The Miners’ Next Step*, which spurned conventional electoral politics, and emphasised the power of industrial unionism and the ‘syndicalist virtues of direct industrial action’.¹⁷⁰ This element was reflected in the increasing power of its delegate conferences, although not by the composition of the SWMF’s Executive Council, and the URC was moribund in the first year of the War until the July 1915 Miners Strike, in which the rank and file of the Federation forced the leadership of the SWMF to take action for the implementation of agreements over wage structures made before the War. Whilst this militancy affected the war effort, this grouping of ‘advanced men’ did not possess the confidence at this stage to take action explicitly opposed to the war until the campaign against conscription developed from January 1916 onwards.

David Egan contends that the extent of the anti-war movement in south Wales during the Great War has been underestimated by historians, and that by the end of 1915, there had occurred ‘a regroupment and strengthening of anti-war

¹⁶⁷ *Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest, No. 7 District - Wales and Monmouthshire*, Command Paper 8668 (HMSO, London, 1917), 17.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, 508.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 10.

tendencies within the movement'.¹⁷¹ Paul Davies states that the growing anti-war feeling among the South Wales miners should not be minimised in 1915 and 1916, and he argues that after February 1917 this sentiment took off and became a mass movement.¹⁷² Advocates of this 'advanced' tendency did not oppose the war on pacifist grounds, but wished to take advantage of the circumstances afforded by the war to further a social and industrial revolution. J.L. Williams, a miner and anti-war activist, considered that Noah Ablett, one of the leaders of the URC, typified this approach:

he was against it but not in the way that the ILPers were...there was a tendency I would say amongst the more revolutionary to regard the war as more or less inevitable and the war has to be accepted as a stage in the development of capitalism. So we shouldn't be concerning ourselves unduly with opposing the war but rather take advantage of the war situation.¹⁷³

Chris Williams describes this strand of thinking as a 'fierce burst of intellectual endeavour'¹⁷⁴ and traces industrial unionism and syndicalism to the 'common, socialist culture of mining communities.'¹⁷⁵ Political action was seen as an ineffectual means for gaining working-class emancipation and Noah Ablett was one of the most vocal and effective spokesman for this belief during the War:

In politics things were done for the workers; in industrial matters they were, from the bottom up, beginning to do things for themselves. The weapon of political action was a speech, its end hot-air in a gas-house on the way to become a dung-heap...The industrial union did not need the backing of a

¹⁷¹ Egan, 'The Swansea Conference', 28.

¹⁷² Paul Davies, 'The Making of A.J. Cook: His Development within the South Wales Labour Movement 1900-1924', *Llafur*, Vol.3 (1978), 47.

¹⁷³ South Wales Coalfield Collection, J.L. Williams, interview, Aud 396, Swansea University.

¹⁷⁴ Chris Williams, *Democratic Rhondda: Politics and Society, 1855-1951* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1996), 6.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid*, 7.

political organisation, therefore it was foolish to swim the river to fill the bucket on the other side...¹⁷⁶

The security services described Ablett as a 'well-known Socialist agitator and avowed Bolshevik', and indeed, he campaigned to prevent recruiting and urge class revolution.¹⁷⁷ Although he had called for an international miners' strike to prevent the War in August 1914,¹⁷⁸ he considered that the war 'was of no concern or interest to South Wales miners other than they should use the strong bargaining power, it presented them with to wrest as much as they could from their employer and the State.'¹⁷⁹ Egan describes this burgeoning critique of the war as one that worked through the rank and file of the trade union movement, the ILP, 'and other minuscule socialist organisations in South Wales, such as the Rhondda Socialist Society, along with the No Conscription Fellowship and the Union of Democratic Control.'¹⁸⁰ The first eighteen months of the war saw patriotic support given to the war effort, and prominent 'advanced men' and supporters of *The Miners' Next Step* such as Noah Rees and Ted Gill spoke on recruiting platforms. Forty thousand South Wales miners had joined up by the summer of 1915, but the combustible nature of industrial relations in the coalfield led to the coal strike in July 1915, declared by the SWMF executive against the terms of the Treasury agreement, for a new and higher standard wage rate. It was only due to the intervention of Lloyd George, the Minister of Munitions, with two other Government Ministers, Walter Runciman, Minister of the Board of Trade, and Labour's Arthur Henderson that further industrial action was averted, and the miners won their main demands.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ *Pioneer*, 10 November 1917.

¹⁷⁷ *Security Services Papers*, KV3/327, 'Revolutionary Tendencies behind the Labour Unrest', 6 April 1919, NA.

¹⁷⁸ South Wales Coalfield Collection, Minutes of the SWMF Executive, August 1914, passim.

¹⁷⁹ Egan, 'Noah Ablett', 25.

¹⁸⁰ Egan, 'The Swansea Conference', 28.

¹⁸¹ *ibid*, 174.

Francis and Smith assert that this strike was the expression of a 'growing anti-war feeling, largely at this stage unconscious',¹⁸² whilst Mor O'Brien argues to the contrary that the 1915 Strike was due to 'the intense patriotism of the south Wales miners'.¹⁸³ For most contemporary newspapers, this strike was viewed as a display of anti-war feeling, but more considered observers viewed it as a display of frustration at the behaviour of the coal owners, and this ill-will and bitterness continued and intensified up to the Government's takeover of the mining industry in December 1916, and beyond.¹⁸⁴ The influential syndicalist *Plebs Magazine* argued that the strike was not an anti-war protest but rather an attempt to stop 'the profiteers who, organised politically as 'the State', have done their utmost, under cover of a real national crisis, to rob labour of practically every safeguard it had won for itself during the long struggle against exploitation.'¹⁸⁵ The strike comprehensively flouted the Government's attempted imposition of the Munitions Act, and one of the most prominent of the 'advanced men', W.H. Mainwaring, one of the authors of *The Miners' Next Step*, argued that whilst the miners had not won everything demanded, yet the strike could be described as 'a great defeat of Capitalism' and 'one of the greatest victories in the history of Trade Unionism'.¹⁸⁶

W.F. Hay's pamphlet, *WAR! and the Welsh Miner*¹⁸⁷ is the most coherent and explicit expression of the thinking of the anti-war 'advanced men' on the question of the War. A miner at the Standard Colliery, Wattstown, Rhondda, he became a member of the industrial Syndicalist League and wrote before the war for the *Rhondda Socialist*.¹⁸⁸ His pamphlet described the War as a 'cyclone of death' created by militarism and high finance. He urged his readers to understand that the coalminer's duty in the first place was to

¹⁸² Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, 22.

¹⁸³ Edward May, 'Charles Stanton and the Limits to 'Patriotic' Labour', *Welsh History Review*, Vol 18.3 (1997), 498; Anthony Mor-O'Brien, *A Community in Wartime : Aberdare and the First World War* (Ph. D thesis, University of Wales, 1986).

¹⁸⁴ Davies, *The Influence of Syndicalism and Industrial Unionism*, 174.

¹⁸⁵ *Plebs Magazine*, August 1915, 146.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid*, 150.

¹⁸⁷ W.F. Hay, *War! And the Welsh Miner* (Tonypanydy, 1914).

¹⁸⁸ Egan, 'The Swansea Conference', 18.

himself to get the best possible conditions under the ‘ slave system’ and that the only patriotism he had any use for was class patriotism.’

Hay advocated the State should take over food supplies with a scale of maximum prices, and that workers should insist on better rates of pay. This strategy would also hasten the end of the war by ‘squeezing the pockets of the Capitalist’.¹⁸⁹ Ness Edwards, a working miner and a later historian of the SWMF, considered in retrospect that ‘the tone laid down in Hay’s pamphlet was quietly permeating the rank and file of the organisation’.¹⁹⁰ The 1915 Strike reinvigorated the young militants within the SWMF, and in August of that year, they re-grouped in the ‘Aberystwyth’ restaurant in Tonypany.¹⁹¹

The radicalising effect of the War quickened this shift of emphasis to a proletarian internationalism in which patriotism was challenged by a belief in international brotherhood and a conviction that the war was caused by the expansionary needs of imperialist capitalist powers. This analysis developed into an active anti-war position as military conscription was introduced and civilian conscription was feared in 1916, and was further inspired by the February 1917 Russian Revolution to press for ‘peace by negotiation’. The ‘advanced men’ worked to resist the introduction of conscription into the mining industry, and although this campaign was to lead to failure in the ‘comb-out’ ballot in November 1917, the extent of the vote against conscription, at thirty per cent of the total of votes cast, alarmed contemporary commentators,¹⁹² and gave added momentum to the revived URC.

The *Commission of Inquiry into Industrial Unrest* identified the influence of the ‘advanced men’ as one of the underlying reasons for industrial unrest in the coal industry in the summer of 1917:

¹⁸⁹ Hay, *War! And the Welsh Miner*, 7.

¹⁹⁰ R. Page Arnot, *The South Wales Miners 1914-1926* (Cardiff, Cymric Federation Press, 1975), 94.

¹⁹¹ Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, 24.

¹⁹² *Welsh Outlook*, December 1917. The result of the ‘comb-out’ ballot was 98,948 in favour to 28,903 opposed.

they see in the strengthening of the union a means of forging a firmly-welded weapon which will ultimately be sufficiently powerful to overcome and reorganise the capitalist forces ranged against them. To these men political action is of temporary and deluding value; to them legal enactment is but a means either of oppression or of stupefaction... In no part of the country is this creed so widely held and constantly preached as amongst the miners of Glamorganshire and Monmouthshire.¹⁹³

As Egan suggests, some of the 'big battalions' of labour were won over to the anti-war movement by the summer of 1917, especially so within the SWMF where growing pressure for a peace settlement from key districts and numerous lodges were forcing the SWMF's Executive to reluctantly adopt a peace programme.¹⁹⁴

The broader significance of the 'comb-out' ballot lay in its implications for the image of south Wales as part of the Empire at war. This study suggests that the controversy over the ballot was a proxy for attitudes towards the War, and while not all those miners who voted against the 'comb-out' were necessarily opposed to the War, the campaign certainly portrayed them as such. The most garish and apocalyptic language was employed by many contemporary newspapers and commentators, to reflect a sense of crisis and the critical importance of a favourable decision in the 'comb-out' ballot for the future supply of coal for the Empire's armed forces.

The *Welsh Outlook's* editor argued that the URC was not only anti-capitalist but also 'to a large extent anti-war', and that it was primarily due to their influence that the 'comb-out' ballot was held in November, 1917:

The opposition (to combing out) comes from the pacifist organisations, whose influence is increasing very rapidly in the mining towns and villages. The men

¹⁹³ *Commission of Enquiry into Industrial Unrest*, 17.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid*, 28.

who dominate the pacifist movement are the same men who dominate the political and industrial movement. Their propaganda is perfectly legitimate but they wield power beyond their numerical strength.¹⁹⁵

He argued that these activists had influence beyond their numbers, and were permitted by the majority of the Federation's members to dominate its business so that it was 'transacted by the few'.¹⁹⁶ The URC was revived in Pontypridd at a meeting on 13 April 1917, with Noah Tromans in the chair and W.H. Mainwaring as secretary.¹⁹⁷ This body of men had formed a coherent network of activists across the south Wales coalfield before the war and many of those who had taken part in the drafting of *The Miners' Next Step*, such as Noah Rees, George Barker and Ted Gill, had become members of the SWMF's Executive Council, but now passionately supported recruiting and the war effort.¹⁹⁸ It was only in the second half of the war that the introduction of conscription and support for the Russian Revolution gave urgency to the anti-war movement. The 'advanced' men who resurrected the URC were linked both within the URC and in an inter-connected web of relationships, between the anti-war organisations and the 'advanced' men who were active within the SWMF. The Rhondda miner, W.H. Mainwaring exemplified these relationships for in addition to his role as secretary of the URC, he was also secretary of the local NCF, the chairman of the Rhondda anti-conscription committee, a member of the ILP, a late student of Ruskin College and Central Labour College, a leading light of the Plebs League and supporter of the Russian Revolution.¹⁹⁹

Apart from their involvement in the Federation, a number of the URC activists, including George Dolling, Nun Nicholas and George Phippen were

¹⁹⁵ *Welsh Outlook*, November 1917.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Nina Fishman, *Arthur Horner: A Political Biography 1894-1944* (Lawrence and Wishart, 2010), 506.

¹⁹⁸ David Egan, 'The Unofficial Reform Committee and the Miners' Next Step: Documents from the W.H. Mainwaring Papers', *Llafur*, Vol.2.3 (1978), 79.

¹⁹⁹ *Security Services Papers*, KV3/327, 'Revolutionary Tendencies behind the Labour Unrest', NA.

also members of the ILP²⁰⁰ and others such as Noah Ablett, S.O. Davies and A.J. Cook were influential miners' agents. A small number of its supporters, such as Ness Edwards and A.E. Cook from Cardiff were members of the British Socialist Party and the Socialist Labour Party respectively. A young member of the URC, Will Cockrill, from Pontnewynydd in Monmouthshire, encapsulated these men's beliefs:

we weren't pacifists or anything of that nature. But on the other hand we believed that it was being waged by the imperialists, either by the German imperialist and our imperialists, because our history was just as bad as theirs. So the attitude was that we would fight to defend but we believed that they ought to negotiate and come to a settlement.²⁰¹

In the charged atmosphere of the war, many failed to understand this nuanced approach, but in Cockrill's view, the Russian Revolution inspired anti-war activists. Only a handful of those conscientious objectors from Wales appealed on the grounds of their political beliefs as Marxists and revolutionary socialists and the miners amongst them only became objectors after the 'comb-out' was introduced into the mining industry in November 1917. David John Davies from Aberdare, in his statement to the court martial explained that his refusal to conform to the Military Service Act was because of his belief that the war was fought 'in the interests of Capital and not the workers':

the workers are being used as pawns in the game of the ruling classes and it is only when the workers of all Countries realise that their interests are alike that they have in common the same enemy i.e. Capitalism to fight and overthrow, then only will war become a thing of the past. Believing so I therefore refuse to participate in war and obey military commands.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Davies, 'The Making of A.J. Cook', 44.

²⁰¹ South Wales Coalfield Collection, Will Cockrill, Aud 339, Swansea University.

²⁰² *Sheila Parry private papers*, David John Davies court martial speech, 28 August 1918.

Mark Starr's explanation for his conscientious objection was rooted in an analysis of the war as a product of Imperialism and Militarism:

I disobey military orders: - because one section of militarism can never by threatening and menacing another section remove the thing itself. The helpless pawn can never destroy the game. Because I put class before country, and thus refuse to kill my fellow class-member at the bidding of fellow countrymen...Because I thus oppose that section of militarism which is nearest to me despite the high sounding phrases with which, aided by the mighty press, it cloaks its real aims in every country. Because I desire to advance another cure for all war – the education of the workers.²⁰³

The defence given by Arthur Horner, a leading member of the URC, for his opposition to the war was that since war mainly benefited the 'capitalist class', he could not consent to 'take the life of my fellow workers, or sacrifice my own'.²⁰⁴ In retrospect, he explained his uncompromising attitude against the War because 'I saw in the coal owners and the Government that supported them a nearer enemy than the Kaiser'.²⁰⁵

An important factor that developed the confidence and influence of the 'advanced men' was their link with the Central Labour College, founded by students disillusioned by Ruskin College, Oxford, which 'they considered to be propping up the existing capitalist social and economic system, instead of challenging and overthrowing it on Marxist lines'.²⁰⁶ The *Commission of Inquiry into Industrial Unrest* identified this link as the dynamic spirit in the lodges of the SWMF and the trades councils, in which they had become 'centres of educational work and potent social and political activity'. This independent working class movement, primarily delivered through Central Labour College and Plebs League classes, reached its height in 1917-18 and

²⁰³ *Pioneer*, 19 August 1918.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Arthur Horner, *Incorrigible Rebel* (MacGibbon and Kee, 1960), 9.

²⁰⁶ Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation 1880-1980*, 149.

was 'without doubt the most formative influence in the coalfield and did much to instil a deep antipathy towards capitalism'.²⁰⁷ By November 1917, some 1,200 students were members of forty classes in south Wales,²⁰⁸ and Wales had the highest concentration of classes for any part of Britain.²⁰⁹ The largest number of classes were in the Rhondda, with eighteen branches, and most were sponsored by either the SWMF or the ILP.²¹⁰

The main tutors were identified with the anti-war movement throughout the coalfield, and included those who became anti-war activists, conscientious objectors, or both, such as A.J. Cook, a miner in the Lewis Merthyr colliery in Trehafod in the Rhondda, a member of the ILP before the war and who spent a year at the Central Labour College. He became a leading member of the URC and a lecturer on economics and industrial history for the Plebs League and was arrested on a charge of sedition in the spring of 1918 and given a three month sentence. He was elected agent for Rhondda No. 1 district in June 1919.²¹¹ Nun Nicholas, a checkweigher at a colliery in the Swansea Valley, became a conscientious objector, was 'one of the most charismatic of the Marxist lecturers',²¹² and revived 'Plebs' classes by the end of 1917 in the Swansea Valley. Other classes held in Garnant and Gwaun-cae-Gurwen were run by David Rees Owen, a checkweigher from Garnant, and the first person from the area to enter the Central Labour College.²¹³ He and another tutor, Jack Griffiths, Cwmtwrch, held classes on economics and Marxism under the aegis of the CLC, in the 'White House' in Ammanford. This centre, styled a 'Communist Hall' by the local newspaper,²¹⁴ had been bought by George Davison, a colourful and prosperous businessman who had made his fortune in the Kodak company. A socialist supporter of the ILP, he took a close

²⁰⁷ Richard Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers: Adult Education and the Challenge of Labour in South Wales, 1906-1940* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1993), 122.

²⁰⁸ *Welsh Outlook*, November 1917.

²⁰⁹ *Plebs Magazine*, December 1917, January 1918.

²¹⁰ *ibid.*

²¹¹ John Saville and Ralph Desmarais, 'A.J. Cook', *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. 3 (Palgrave Macmillan, 1976), 38-45.

²¹² Lewis, *Leaders and Teachers*, 97.

²¹³ *Amman Valley Chronicle*, 9 February 1956.

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, 13 October 1913.

interest in anarchist thought and funded the 'White House' as a library and meeting place.²¹⁵ Of the fifty or so attenders of the Ammanford group, for instance nine became conscientious objectors, and the White House became the 'home of those who were opposed to the war'.²¹⁶

A network of Independent Working class education classes was also established in the West Monmouthshire valleys, in Risca, Tredegar and Abertillery which were described as a 'hotbed of political activity and dissent'²¹⁷. These 'advanced men' included Sam Fisher of Wattsville, the young Aneurin Bevan of Tredegar, Bryn Roberts, Ness Edwards and Will Hewlett of Abertillery and were led by Ted Gill of Abertillery and Sidney Jones of Blackwood.²¹⁸ As the War drew on, although Gill joined in the recruiting campaign, most of this group became anti-war activists and involved in the campaign against the comb-out in the mining industry.²¹⁹ These classes were seen as centres of Bolshevism and pacifism, and the Glamorgan Constabulary 's assessment was that A.J. Cook's classes constituted an 'insidious campaign against law and order.'²²⁰ The CLC classes played an 'important role in the militant and revolutionary groundswell which made South Wales, ideologically, the most advanced area of Great Britain'²²¹ and a reflection of its influence was the amendment of the objects of the South Wales Miners' Federation in June 1917 to include the revolutionary aim of the 'complete abolition of capitalism'.²²²

The success of the URC in 1917 lay in the agitation against conscription within the mining industry, and its achievement in postponing the combing-out

²¹⁵ T. Brennan, 'The White House', *Cambridge Journal* (1954), 243-248; James Griffiths, *Pages from Memory* (J.M.Dent, 1969) 20-1.

²¹⁶ Griffiths, *Pages from Memory*, 20-21.

²¹⁷ Alun Burge, 'Labour, Class and Conflict', in Chris Williams, Andy Kroll, Ralph A. Griffiths (eds.), *Gwent County History - the Twentieth Century*, Volume 5 (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2013), 320.

²¹⁸ *ibid*, 323.

²¹⁹ Harold Finch, *Memoirs of a Bedwellty MP* (Risca, Starling Press, 1972), 33.

²²⁰ *Home Office Papers*, HO45/10743, 'A.J. Cook' folio, J. Williams to Chief Constable Lindsay, 9 February 1918, NA.

²²¹ Davies, 'The Making of A.J. Cook', 49.

²²² South Wales Coalfield Collection, Minutes of SWMF Special Conference, 12 June 1917, Swansea University.

of men in the mining industry for eleven months after the War Cabinet had initially proposed that twenty thousand mine workers who had hitherto been exempt, should be conscripted.²²³ This marked the high point of its political and industrial influence during the War, but its influence, as reflected by the result of the 'comb-out ballot' in November 1917, whilst significant, also reflected its limitations.

vii) The Impact of the Russian Revolution

Smith and Francis view the Russian Revolutions of 1917 as the catalyst to more widespread 'conscious and open hostility to the war', which hitherto had been confined to small local Socialist Societies and individual conscientious objectors.²²⁴ Whilst this interpretation ignores the evidence of anti-war activity led by the ILP throughout late 1915 and 1916, the first Russian Revolution in February 1917 excited a new militancy and gave added vigour to the anti-war movement. The first report of the Ammanford and Llandybie Trades Council, presented by its young secretary, Jim Griffiths, captures the excitement and enthusiasm with which the Revolution was greeted:

the Russian Revolution burst upon the vision of an oppressed Democracy like the streaks of a dawning day...The Russian Revolution, despite its recent apparent failure, gave new life and hope to the Democratic movement in Europe...Its influence was felt in all parts of the world, reviving the spirit of Revolt...a silent revolution has taken place in our midst. The mental outlook of the people has changed ; an atmosphere has been created that is responsive to the kind of progress we of the Labour movement desire.²²⁵

²²³ Arnot, *South Wales Miners*, 131.

²²⁴ Francis and Smith, *The Fed*, 22.

²²⁵ South Wales Coalfield Collection, SC 118/1 Annual Report of the Ammanford Trades and Labour Council, 1917-1918.

The first display of support for the Revolution in Wales was a mass public meeting organized by the Merthyr ILP and held in the Rink in Merthyr in April 1917.²²⁶ Further mass 'Russia Free' meetings were held in Merthyr and Bargoed in May and a meeting in Gwaun-Cae-Gurwen, addressed by Noah Ablett and J.L. Rees, a local miners' leader and an 'advanced' man, passed a motion that congratulated the Russian Revolution and demanded international action to end the war.²²⁷ The call for a Convention of labour, socialist and 'democratic' organisations to 'Follow Russia', to be held in Leeds, appeared in May 1917 and charged its supporters to 'work for a complete and real international peace based upon working-class solidarity and therefore calculated to be honourable and enduring'.²²⁸ It was intended to be a pacifist rather than a revolutionary event, and 'reflected an opposition to the continuation of the war for a 'knock-out blow''.²²⁹ In June 1917, the Western District of the SWMF, representing seven thousand miners, approved of Russia's demand for an Internationalist Socialist and Labour conference in order to end the war.²³⁰ The subsequent adoption of similar motions by the Merthyr and Dowlais Districts and others forced the Executive to put forward a resolution to a coalfield conference that passed overwhelmingly a motion that required the SWMF to:

take such action with the view of ascertaining the opinion of the organised labour movements of this country on the question of Peace, so as to offer to the labour movements of this country on the question of Peace, so as to offer to the labour movement of the belligerent powers the British working-class view of a peace settlement...and to take such action as will compel their respective Governments to adopt it.²³¹

²²⁶ *Pioneer*, 7 April 1917.

²²⁷ *ibid*, 26 May 1917.

²²⁸ *Labour Leader*, 17 May 1917.

²²⁹ Stephen White, 'Soviets in Britain: The Leeds Convention of 1917', *International Review of Social History*, Vol.19 (1974), 166.

²³⁰ *Pioneer*, 16 June 1917.

²³¹ South Wales Coalfield Collection, minutes of SWMF Special Conference, 2,3 August, 1917, Swansea University.

The Leeds Convention had over a thousand delegates, of whom half came from the trade unions, trades councils and constituency Labour parties. A total of 294 delegates represented ILP branches, and 88 came from the less influential British Socialist Party.²³² There were only twelve delegates from Wales including representatives of the Western, Merthyr and Dowlais districts of the SWMF, one SWMF lodge, four ILP branches and the South Wales Socialist Society. The conference also received a message from James Winstone, President of the SWMF, although its content was not reported.²³³

The Convention was called jointly by the ILP and the BSP but their aims were divergent. Whereas the ILP sought to propagate peace by negotiation, the BSP interpreted the conference as a revolutionary act.²³⁴ Hinton suggests that the attitude in the shop stewards' movements in Scotland and England was one which saw a parallel with the Russian soviets, but in contrast the URC showed no interest in making comparisons between conditions in south Wales and Soviet Russia.²³⁵ Four substantive motions were passed, first congratulating the Russian revolution on their revolution, and expressing the hope that it might quicken peace, secondly calling for international negotiations to end the war on the basis of no annexations or indemnities, thirdly to call on the British Government to present a charter of liberties, and lastly, to set up Councils of Workmen and Soldiers delegates.²³⁶ This last motion would be interpreted as the most revolutionary, but the dissonance between its mover and seconder betrayed a fundamental difference of emphasis between the revolutionary and gradualist interpretation of the purpose of the motion.

The proposer, the ILP M.P., W.C. Anderson, emphasised this was not a subversive organisation and that its main purpose was to unite working-class

²³² John Slatter, 'Learning from Russia: A History of Soviets in Britain', *Labour History Review*, Vol. 61.1 (1996), 16.

²³³ Egan, 'The Swansea Conference', 15.

²³⁴ *The Call*, 14 June 1917.

²³⁵ James Hinton, *The First Shop Stewards' Movements* (Allen and Unwin, London, 1973), 307.

²³⁶ *What Happened at Leeds* (Council of Workers and Soldiers Delegates, Pelican Press, 1917).

soldiers and civilians, but the seconder, the transport union leader, Robert Williams called for the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Noah Ablett, who was present as a representative of the Maerdy lodge of the SWMF, had been mandated to vote for all four motions but complained at the Convention's failure to offer practical advice of how to set up these local Councils of Workmen and Soldiers.²³⁷ Indeed, the motivation of most of those in the conference was not revolution but the 'banner of pacifism'.²³⁸ The Convention agreed to set up a committee to establish thirteen 'district councils' of workers and soldiers' deputies, including one in Wales, and significantly, the address given for this provisional Committee was that of the NCF's offices in London.²³⁹ The first district meetings were held on 28 July 1917 in six locations including Swansea for the Welsh district. On the two weekends following the Convention, mass meetings to hear reports back and to celebrate the Russian Revolution were held in Merthyr Tydfil, Taibach, Clydach, Cimla, Porth and Ynysir. Tom Mann spoke in meetings of two thousand people in Merthyr and Ynysir, in which the crowd voted to support the decisions made in Leeds. A meeting of a thousand in Porth supported a resolution proposed by Ablett and seconded by A.J. Cook that echoed the Leeds motions and demanded an immediate peace conference 'to negotiate an immediate cessation of hostilities on the lines of the Russian manifesto, of no annexations, no indemnities'.²⁴⁰

The conference in Swansea to establish a district council for Wales was organised for 29 July 1917, whilst north Wales was allocated to the Lancashire district and the Newport Labour party sent its delegates to the West Country conference in Bristol.²⁴¹ The delegate list for the conference gives an indication of the breadth of support within the labour and trade union movement in Wales for the aims of the Leeds convention. It included twenty-six trades and labour councils, which constituted the majority of TLCs in

²³⁷ White, 'Soviets in Britain', 176.

²³⁸ *The Times*, 5 June 1917.

²³⁹ *Catherine Marshall Papers*, folio 24, 21 June 1917, Cumbria Archives.

²⁴⁰ *Pioneer*, 7 July 1917.

²⁴¹ Egan, 'The Swansea Conference', 17.

Wales; sixty-six lodges of the SWMF, which included a large proportion from the Rhondda, thirteen branches of the National Union of Railwaymen and another forty-six assorted trade union branches, the Maesteg ILP branch, the SWMF's Anthracite District and the South Wales Socialist Society.²⁴²

Whilst those meetings in Leicester, Bristol and Norwich passed peacefully, the meetings in London and Newcastle were disrupted and abandoned, as were later meetings in Glasgow and Manchester. The Swansea meeting was targeted by members of the Naval and Military Pensions and Welfare League, a government-sponsored organisation of discharged soldiers and sailors (known as 'bit-badge' men), and a crowd of five hundred, including munitions workers, attacked the delegates and invaded the Elysium hall, where the meeting was to be held. With no police presence, Arthur Horner, for example, 'had his teeth punched out of his head and his eye and upper face badly bruised' and the *Cambria Daily Leader* reported that the delegates who remained were 'bleeding profusely and half-stunned. Fire extinguishers were turned on them, and with their faces half covered with blood, and the water streaming down their clothes, they appeared deplorable specimens'.²⁴³

The organisation quickly lost momentum as only four districts succeeded in meeting and its National Council met only once. The October Russian Revolution undermined the 'somewhat shaky coalition of Socialists of varying hues which February's blurring of political differences had made possible.'²⁴⁴ A postal ballot was subsequently held for a Wales representative to sit on the central Provisional committee. The list of candidates reflect an impressive range of talented advocates across the range of trade union and party political activity, most of whom were anti-war activists, and the vote was won by the President of the SWMF, James Winstone, who although not considered as an anti-war candidate, yet spoke forcefully in favour of a peace settlement from

²⁴² *ibid*, 24, 25.

²⁴³ *ibid*, 22, 23.

²⁴⁴ Slatter, 'Learning from Russia', 24.

the summer of 1917 onwards.²⁴⁵ The first –and only – meeting of the full National Soldiers and Workers Council was held in the third week of October 1917 and adopted a seven-point statement of the Council's aims, which stressed that it was to be a propaganda body with no intention to supplant existing organisations. It would campaign for a people's peace', the defence of civil liberties, the protection of soldiers and sailors' rights and the elimination of profiteering,²⁴⁶ but when the Government banned the holding of further district conferences, the enthusiasm for the councils dissipated. By mid-October 1917, Basil Thomson, the head of the Special Branch could report that the 'Workers and Soldiers Councils were moribund'.²⁴⁷

The momentum in south Wales was sustained by the activists within the SWMF. A 'host of lodges'²⁴⁸ called for the Central Executive Council of the SWMF to support the Leeds Convention and to 'ascertain the opinion of the organised labour movements of this country on the question of Peace, so as to offer to the labour movement of the belligerent powers the British working-class view of a Peace settlement...and to take such action as will compel their respective Governments to adopt it.' This resolution was adopted by a south Wales coalfield conference on 2 August 1917, by 212 votes to 43,²⁴⁹ but in the late summer and early autumn of 1917, anti-war activity was directed increasingly towards frustrating the conscription of miners in the 'comb-out' ballot.

viii) The 1917 'Comb-Out' Ballot

In the wake of the Leeds Convention and the disrupted District Committee in Swansea, the anti-war element within the SWMF deployed the Special

²⁴⁵ *Cambria Daily Leader*, 30 July 1917; the candidates were George Barker (Miners' agent, SWMF), Harry Davies (Cwmavon ILP and NCF), D.R. Grenfell (Miners' agent, SWMF), George Gethin, (Briton Ferry ILP), H. Hiles,(Cardiff Trades and Labour Council), Rev. John Morgan Jones (Merthyr ILP), T.C. Morris (Rhondda organiser, NUR), Noah Tromans (Mountain Ash ILP), James Winstone, David Williams (Swansea ILP) and John Williams (Miners' Agent, SWMF).

²⁴⁶ *The Call*, 25 October 1917; *Pioneer*, 27 October 1917.

²⁴⁷ *Cabinet Office Papers*, CAB 24/22, Basil Thomson, 'Bolshevism in England', 1917.

²⁴⁸ *Pioneer*, 21 July 1917.

²⁴⁹ South Wales Coalfield Collection, Minutes of SWMF Special Conference, 2,3 August 1917.

Conference of the 2 and 3 August 1917 to reject the attempts of the Government and the Executive Council of the SWMF to introduce a scheme for 'combing-out' for military service of those men in the industry who had entered mining after August 1914. Prior to the conference, the URC had been campaigning for its motion on the basis that the scheme should be opposed as an 'act of rejection of the war itself'.²⁵⁰ The resolution rejecting the advice of the Executive had been proposed by the URC and circulated beforehand to lodges,²⁵¹ and although this scheme had been accepted by the MFGB and was recommended for acceptance by the Federation's executive, a conference of SWMF delegates meeting on 2 August 1917 overwhelmingly rejected the proposal by 236 votes to 25. The Conference then decided to hold a coalfield ballot to establish whether the membership would support strike action if the Government attempted to impose the scheme.²⁵²

The 'comb-out' ballot was a proxy for anti-war and pro-war sentiment, and a significant litmus test of attitudes towards the war within the South Wales Miners' Federation and beyond. The Marxist historian Page Arnot interpreted the holding of the ballot as a manifestation of the spreading of 'the widespread longing for peace' in the coalfields following the Russian Revolution,²⁵³ and Matthews's study of the Anthracite district also suggests that the vote demonstrated the existence of a strong lobby for a termination of hostilities.²⁵⁴

In 1917, south Wales was the area of greatest opposition to conscription in the mining industry in Britain. May argues that the comb-out controversy, combined with an increasing sense of war weariness and the radicalising effect of the Russian revolution, produced a more militant anti-war attitude within the South Wales coalfield, and this provided the spring board for the re-emergence of a revolutionary unofficial rank and file movement. This

²⁵⁰ Egan, 'The Swansea Conference', 29.

²⁵¹ South Wales Coalfield Collection, Lady Windsor Lodge, SWMF, Minutes of General Meeting, 30 July 1917, Lady Windsor Lodge,; Blaenavon Lodge, Minutes of Committee Meeting, 1 August 1917.

²⁵² Egan, 'The Swansea Conference', 28.

²⁵³ Arnot, *South Wales Miners*, 133.

²⁵⁴ Ioan Matthews, *The World of the Anthracite Coal Miner* (Ph.D thesis, Cardiff University, 1995), 290.

movement was able to canalise this anti-war mood and launch a serious challenge to the co-operation of the state's war effort.²⁵⁵ He points out that there were also other aspects to miners' conditions which came to the fore in the controversy over the 'comb-out':

it raised momentous questions with regard to industrial conscription, civil liberties, equality of sacrifice, and the relative importance of the working class to the war effort – the impact of this had been delayed by the initial exemption of the mining workforce from military conscription – but the combout brought this to a fore.²⁵⁶

Most contemporary newspapers and commentators interpreted the 'comb-out' controversy as an indication of anti-war or 'pacifist' feeling and the very fact that the ballot was held was interpreted as evidence of the existence of a strong anti-war current amongst the South Wales miners. The Government felt so apprehensive about the result of the ballot that a succession of pro-war 'War Aims' public meetings were held throughout the coalfield.²⁵⁷ John Thomas, active in the anti-war and the adult education movement, explained that the growing anti-war movement within the SWMF was strengthened by the impact of the Government's control of the mining industry from December 1916 onwards, the growing strength of the ILP, the revival of the Unofficial Reform Committee from 1917 onwards, the spread of the Central Labour College classes, the impact of the Russian Revolution and a more general sense of war weariness. He believed that the report of the *Enquiry into Industrial Unrest in South Wales*, had underestimated the strength of anti-war feeling in south Wales in the summer of 1917:

in many official Conferences of the SWMF, speeches of an Anti-War character were often made and applauded by the delegates. Often at these Conferences speeches were made directing fierce criticism, and expressing

²⁵⁵ May, *A Question of Control*, 94.

²⁵⁶ *ibid*, 99.

²⁵⁷ Egan, 'The Swansea Conference', 28-29.

resentment against prominent Miners officials appearing on recruiting platforms, when they as officials were specially exempt from Military Service.²⁵⁸

Other more recent studies have played down the significance of anti-war feeling. O'Brien considers that the 1915 Strike displayed the miners' patriotism and he dismisses the 1917 'comb-out' ballot as showing that pacifist and anti-war sentiment remained a minority response.²⁵⁹ Yet he also accepts that the vote against the 'comb-out', which was taken to represent the size of the peace movement in south Wales, was sufficiently large to be worrying for the authorities.²⁶⁰ Whilst Keith Davies has emphasised the limits of syndicalist influence, he argues that the 1915 Strike, far from representing a desire for recognition of their patriotism, entailed the beginnings of a rejection of the social consensus. He argues that this seemed to be subsequently corroborated by the growing 'anti-conscription, indeed anti-war, movement' in the South Wales coalfield.²⁶¹ May's examination of changing working-class attitudes to the war in south Wales concludes that whilst anti-war feeling was exaggerated by certain historians, it was clear that attitudes to the war in the coalfield changed over its duration and that the interpretation of the combout controversy as an expression of an increasingly militant mood of rejection of the war effort in the coalfield is valid:

conscription was one contributory factor to the emergence of a class based view of the war and which meant that politicians and Government officials, journalists and observers, found it difficult to comprehend and successfully respond to the prevailing mood within the coalfield.²⁶²

²⁵⁸ John Thomas, *The South Wales Coalfield under Government control 1914-1921* (MA thesis, Swansea University, 1925), 81-83.

²⁵⁹ Anthony Mor-O'Brien, *A Community in War-time: Aberdare and the First World War* (Ph.D thesis, Swansea University, 1986).

²⁶⁰ Anthony Mor-O'Brien, 'Patriotism on Trial: the strike of the South Wales miners', *Welsh History Review*, Vol. 12.1 (1984-85), 100.

²⁶¹ Davies, *The Influence of Syndicalism and Industrial Unionism*, 177.

²⁶² May, *A Question of Control*, 96.

As evidence for the link, May cites the two motions passed by eight hundred men of the Blaenavon lodge in July 1917, which melded opposition to the war with opposition to the comb-out:

- i) that this meeting of eight hundred men request an immediate conference for considering the best ways and means of bringing an end to the terrible slaughter which is going on in various parts of Europe today, and
- ii) we protest against any further comb out on the ground that is a scandalous waste of human life and because we firmly believe that the time has come when negotiations should begin.²⁶³

But some local lodges could give confused signals, and resistance to the 'comb-out' was not always synonymous with opposition to the war. The Coegnant lodge opposed the 'comb-out', but in July 1917 supported the action of Havelock Wilson's seamen's union in refusing to take British Labour delegates to the Stockholm peace conference. Yet two weeks later, the Coegnant lodge voted in favour of moves to secure an early end to the war.²⁶⁴ Ness Edwards, an union activist, a member of the ILP, a supporter of the URC, and a conscientious objector, emphasised that opposition to conscription did not necessarily mean opposition to the War:

It was an easy attitude to adopt among the miners, and found many adherents in the organisation, especially among those who believed in the War but preferred that others should do the fighting. The cowards and the courageous, the pacifist and the class conscious, all coalesced in this anti-conscription agitation.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ South Wales Coalfield Collection, UCS Blaenavon lodge minutes, 25 July 1917.

²⁶⁴ South Wales Coalfield Collection, UCS Coegnant lodge minutes, 7, 26 July 1917, quoted in May, 98.

²⁶⁵ Ness Edwards, *History of the South Wales Miners' Federation* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1938), 93.

The result of the ballot was a substantial victory for those who opposed a strike against the proposed comb-out²⁶⁶ and the King welcomed the patriotism of the majority.²⁶⁷ An explanation for the result amongst those newspapers who supported the comb-out was that the number who voted for strike action approximated to the 27,000 who had entered the industry since 1914. It was these men, described as ‘refugees from the recruiting officer’²⁶⁸ who would be selected in the comb-out process from amongst the unmarried men in Class A between the ages of 18 and 41. Clement Edwards, the Member of Parliament for South Glamorgan and scourge of the URC, estimated that three out of every five who voted were of military age and thus liable to the ‘comb-out’ and had a personal interest in its rejection.²⁶⁹

This factor must have played some role in the minority vote against the comb-out vote, yet the ballot was fought publicly by both sets of combatants on the grounds of whether the miners were anti-war or supportive of the war effort. The propaganda engendered by both local and British newspapers turned on the ‘sinister’ motives of those who agitated for the ballot. The editor of the conservative *Western Mail*, for instance, accused those opposed to the ‘comb-out’ of being disloyal ‘pacifistics’ and unpatriotic:

certain men are attempting to use the Federation for the purpose of achieving objects of a grossly unpatriotic and seditious character, which if carried out, would plunge the country and its Allies into difficulties, would endanger the fleets and armies and would cause the Welsh miner to be excoriated all over the world....Let everyone, therefore, who values his country and his good name, and who is loyal to his relatives and comrades in the trenches, give a vote against this infamous and dastardly proposal to make the Welsh collier the ally of the Hun.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ *The Times*, 16 November 1917.

²⁶⁷ *ibid*, 19 November 1917.

²⁶⁸ *Western Mail*, 16 November 1917.

²⁶⁹ *The Times*, 12 November 1917.

²⁷⁰ *Western Mail*, 1 November 1917.

Although the Coal Controller had wished to impose conscription in the mining industry in April 1917, and the Miners Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) Conference had agreed to his proposals in May, the 'comb-out' was only enacted throughout Britain on 15 November 1917, after the South Wales Miners Federation, the only part of the mining industry hitherto opposed to the 'comb-out', voted to support it. On 2 August 1917, a SWMF Special Conference at Cardiff rejected the 'comb-out' scheme by the overwhelming margin of 236 votes to 25, and the Executive Council on 8 August resolved to hold a ballot for strike action if the Government took steps to compel the four thousand unmarried men between the ages of 18 and 25 required for Military Service from the South Wales collieries under the 'Comb-Out' Order, agreed between the Government and the MFGB.

The Miners' Federation of Great Britain conference held on 7 September 1917, considered two motions to oppose the comb-out. The proposition that the MFGB take no part in assisting in the recruitment of miners for the Army, was put forward from the South Wales, Somerset, and the Forest of Dean areas. Both representatives from the Forest of Dean and Somerset complained that their mandate to oppose the comb-out and to ballot for strike action had been influenced by 'an influx into my district of other men from some other county, who got among our young men and started the flame.'²⁷¹ Whilst they did not refer to south Wales by name, it resembled the modus operandi of the URC. In a stormy Special Conference of the SWMF on 8 October, the Executive Council's attempt to prevent the ballot was defeated by 1,712 to 897, and the business committee subsequently prepared a motion that the 'comb-out' ballot be taken and that the question asked should be:

the South Wales Miners Federation take no part in assisting in the Recruitment of Colliery Workers for the Army and Navy.

²⁷¹ South Wales Coalfield Collection, Miners Federation of Great Britain Special Conference minutes, September, 1917.

Are you in favour of a down tools policy in South Wales in the event of the Government proceeding with their comb-out scheme in the mines ?

Yes/No".²⁷²

Tom Richards, the general secretary, whilst regretting the necessity for the ballot, hoped that the loyalty and patriotism of the Welsh miner would not fail:

I shall be very astonished and grieved if it is not found to be above reproach. I am glad that the leaders, at least, have been convinced that it is their duty in this great crisis to act their part and perform the functions which they have been elected by their fellow-workmen to discharge; and they have given... their recommendation regarding downtools policy.

He warned that a rejection of the 'comb-out' would not lead to peace negotiations:

The only effect of a down-tools policy by the South Wales miners, assuming it spread to other parts of the country, would be to bring about a similar debacle here, and to deprive our kith and kin in the various battlefields of the necessary means of fighting against the devastating German hordes.²⁷³

At the beginning of the campaign, the *Pioneer's* editor had no doubt about the link between the ballot and peace. He saluted the South Wales miner for having 'so often and unmistakably expressed himself as the enemy of Militarism':

In South Wales he [the miner] is actively attached to the advanced Socialist wing of that [Labour] party. In that position, he is a vigorous exponent in peace time, as in war time, of the economic doctrine of a class war....²⁷⁴

²⁷² Page Arnot, *The South Wales Miners*, 133.

²⁷³ *Western Mail*, 24 October 1917.

²⁷⁴ *Pioneer*, 13 October 1917.

The campaign itself was ill-tempered and immoderate, and was portrayed by the mostly belligerent press as a battle between pacifists, 'shirkers', and pro-Germans on the one hand, and patriots and supporters of the war effort on the other. The *Western Mail* encouraged the belief there were malign influences at work behind those opposed to the comb-out. It welcomed the authorities' investigation of the 'origin of pacifistic propaganda...for the purpose of discovering the authors and the source of the financial assistance with which they appear to be lavishly endowed.' It criticised the Government for being too lenient to 'these peculiar people', and accused 'pacifist agents', who appeared to be more numerous in south Wales than elsewhere of having captured the trade union machinery on a more extensive scale. It attributed the refusal of miners to support the 'comb-out' to a 'physical or moral cowardice, and in part to a selfishness of a most odious kind, and that many of the SWMF's delegates were men of military age'.²⁷⁵

The SWMF Executive Council issued a manifesto to the workmen urging them to vote and support the combout,²⁷⁶ and in meetings in the coalfield, the virulently pro-war Miss E. Bowerman of the Women's Social and Political Union added to the allegations that German financiers were behind the agitation against the comb-out:

pacifists were assisting international financiers of German origin who desired a compromised peace, and she advised Trades Unionists to attend their lodge meetings so that the views of the pacifist minority should not go out as the convictions of the patriotic majority of the workers.²⁷⁷

The Liberal *South Wales Daily News* blamed the ballot as having been engineered by a small minority bent on wrecking the Federation:

²⁷⁵ *Western Mail*, 9 October 1917.

²⁷⁶ *Western Mail*, 20 October 1917.

²⁷⁷ *South Wales Daily News*, 24 October 1917.

They have rarely missed the opportunity of flouting their leaders in recent controversies, and their attitude has been determined largely by this perverse disposition and by the intrigues of a small pacifist group.²⁷⁸

Vernon Hartshorn, a leading member of the SWMF Executive and a scourge of the URC, described the ballot as one that had been ‘forced upon us through the pro-Kaiser policy of peace-at-any price extremists’²⁷⁹ and became increasingly vitriolic towards the URC and denounced it as a secret caucus scheming to usurp the authority of the SWMF with the aim of ‘inducing a chaotic coalfield strike for the purpose of forcing a German inspired surrender peace on the allies’.

Thomas Richards had also lost his customary forbearance by the end of the ballot campaign. After being heckled at the end of a miners’ meeting by a ‘prominent pacifist section of the audience... many described as being young men holding extreme views’, he replied that every man who voted ‘Yes’ for strike action would be voting in favour of Germany.²⁸⁰ As the campaign wore on, more lodges supported the comb-out. The *Pioneer* reported resolutions passed by seven lodges against down-tools with only the Merthyr District and Cilfynydd, passing a resolution in favour of a down-tools policy. Even those miners leaders such as the President of the SWMF, James Winstone, who had spoken out previously in favour of a negotiated peace and against conscription, campaigned in favour of the comb-out. Although he deplored the hysteria and prejudice in the coalfield over the ballot he warned that a vote for strike action would ‘lead to nothing but disruption and anarchy’ and he believed that its effect on the war would be disastrous, although paradoxically he disagreed with those who said it would benefit the enemy.²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ *ibid*, 20 October 1917.

²⁷⁹ *ibid*, 24 October 1917.

²⁸⁰ *ibid*, 27 October 1917.

²⁸¹ *Western Mail*, 23 October 1917.

The *Western Mail* trumpeted that pacifists were getting so alarmed at the probable result of the miners ballot that on the last Saturday before the ballot, members of the URC held ‘unofficial conferences’ in Cardiff, Swansea and Newport to gather their supporters. The ferocity with which newspapers and Executive members of the Federation targeted the activists of the URC caused Noah Tromans to criticise the ‘vigorous press campaigns’ and the attacks by miners’ leaders that had been carried on during the past fortnight against active men in the organisation.²⁸² During the month leading up to the ballot, the ‘War Aims’ Committee organised a series of eight meetings to drum up support for the War. The last meetings in the series, in Cardiff and Tonypany, were addressed by the South African war leader, General Jan Smuts. The meeting was chaired by the William Brace, the Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office and miners’ leader, who was appalled by those who demanded the ballot for strike action and who believed that ‘the name of the South Wales miner was stinking all over the country...and the ballot should not come off because if we were in Germany, we would not even be allowed to talk of a ballot’.²⁸³ On the day of the vote, the *Western Mail* issued a rousing clarion call:

the eyes of the Empire are turned on the Welsh coalfield to-day, and anxious hearts in the trenches are waiting to know the results of the voting. Let it be an emphatic and overwhelming repudiation of the wreckers of the Empire...Fill up every ballot paper. Mark your cross against the word NO, and send that reply crashing into the eyes of those who would shelter the pacifists, the disloyalists and the cowards.²⁸⁴

The overall result of the ballot (see Table Four) was that 77 per cent had voted against the down-tools policy and less than 23 per cent in favour. Each one of the twenty districts of the SWMF had voted for the comb-out, but the size of the majority varied widely.

²⁸² *ibid*, 29 October 1917.

²⁸³ *Pioneer*, 3 November 1917.

²⁸⁴ *Western Mail*, 2 November 1917.

Table Four: The Vote of the SWMF districts in the ballot to down tools in the event of the Government proceeding with their comb-out scheme in the mines²⁸⁵

SWMF Districts	For 'down tools'	Against
Anthracite	4,588	6,000
Aberdare	2,079	3,633
Afan Valley	1,189	4,864
Blaina	1,183	2,148
Dowlais	1,033	1,848
Eastern Valley	894	4,823
East Glamorgan	477	4,136
Ebbw Vale	362	3,428
Garw	707	4,048
Maesteg	1,031	4,563
Merthyr	1,116	1,382
Mon. Western Valley	1,753	5,752
Ogmore and Gilfach	332	3,262
Pontypridd and Rhondda	1,166	5,591
Rhondda No.1	5,563	23,392
Rhymney Valley	909	7,141
Saundersfoot/Reynoldston	54	236
Taff and Cynon	466	4,129
Tredegar Valley	946	5,462
Western	3,056	3,308
Total	28,903	98,946

The greatest percentage of those who opposed the 'comb-out' came from the two western-most areas of the Anthracite District (43 per cent) and the

²⁸⁵ *Western Mail*, 16 November 1917

Western District (48 per cent) and in the Merthyr, Dowlais and Aberdare districts (44 per cent) of the coalfield. Whilst the 5,563 who opposed the comb-out in the URC's heartland in the Rhondda was a substantial number, it only represented 18.5 per cent of the total vote of 29,955 in the district.²⁸⁶ The total turnout of 127,849 was 87 per cent of the possible turnout of 147,089.²⁸⁷ The *Western Mail* alleged that this majority may have been even greater if miners in districts such as Risca had not refused to participate in the ballot in protest, because they believed that the war effort should be supported unconditionally.

The explanation given for the comparatively high minority vote in the Western and Anthracite districts was that these districts had suffered more than any other area from the impact of the War in which local coal production had been diverted from commercial to war work, and 'the better judgement of the men had been overborne by a settled cause of grievance.'²⁸⁸ Two weeks after the ballot, a *South Wales Daily News* newspaper reporter travelled the coalfield in order to assess whether the opposition to the comb-out was indeed caused by German bribery. He found that in the Western coalfield, many collieries had been working on short time and that the want of employment had made the men 'restless and dissatisfied' and that while there was 'obvious pacifist feeling', he believed it could be countered by 'fairly regular work'. He thought the URC was responsible for this tendency, which, he believed was founded primarily on industrial discontent:

I found that the leaflet of the URC, which works with somewhat secret methods within the ranks of the Federation had been sent to various lodges and distributed among the men. The members of the URC however, contend that this leaflet was not in any sense a peace manifesto, but one which had purely an industrial object in view. The leaflet itself was vaguely worded. It

²⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 16 November 1917.

²⁸⁷ South Wales Coalfield Collection, Miners Federation of Great Britain, Special Conference Credential Committee report, 8,9 August 1917, Swansea University.

²⁸⁸ *ibid.*

asked the workmen to 'read between the lines' but it certainly does not contain any definite reference to peace... It is not the cause of pacifist feeling, such as it is, but it may have given a form of expression to some unrest previously existing.²⁸⁹

Frank Hodges, miners' agent for the Garw valley, had supported the 'comb-out' but felt that the pressure for the ballot emanated from an 'embittered political outlook' and 'industrial resentment' which 'finds its expression in a pacifist movement'. The reporter ascribed the miners' unofficial manifesto, to the influence of the URC and he interviewed two of the local Rhondda leaders of the campaign to oppose the comb-out, George Dolling, checkweigher, Ynyshir, the chairman of the Standard Colliery Lodge and A.J. Cook, checkweigher, Trehafod, chairman of the Lewis Merthyr Workmen's Joint Committee. Both were members of the URC, which Cook explained to the reporter, was a sort of 'ginger group' within the Federation. They emphatically denied receiving any money for peace propaganda and denied that the policy of the URC was pacifist. Cook emphasised that the URC would accept the ballot result and take no further action in the matter if the vote was lost.²⁹⁰

J.L. Rees, a prominent official of the Trebanos Lodge in the Swansea Valley, a member of the URC and involved in the local Plebs League classes, suggested that anti-war feeling and the impact of the Russian Revolution were the most significant factors in the high vote against the comb-out locally:

Down in the West great meetings have been held during the last two years at which the impossibility or at least the costliness of the 'knock out blow' has been advocated. The mass of miners in this district have had that lesson driven into their minds and they realise that some other way than conquest must be found from the impasse of war. The way a large number of us think has been found in the Russian formula of peace, and it cannot be doubted

²⁸⁹ *South Wales Daily News*, 21 November 1917.

²⁹⁰ *ibid*, 19 November 1917.

that this formula has seized the imagination of thousands of miners down in the West.²⁹¹

He denied that the reason why six of the seven lodges in his area returned a majority for 'down tools' was because of the influence of 'German gold' and welcomed any inquiry into the campaign's expenses that had been contributed by various Trade Unions in the locality.²⁹² Matthews considers that the ballot result in the anthracite district demonstrated 'the existence of a strong lobby for a termination of hostilities'.²⁹³ The reasons for the opposition of other lodges to the comb-out could also be traced to the influence of prominent URC members and active ILP branches. The only lodge in the Tredegar valley district that voted in favour of striking over the 'comb-out' was one of the smaller pits and its lodge chaired by Sidney Jones, a prominent URC member, and 'the foremost exponent of independent working class education in the Sirhowy Valley'.²⁹⁴

The *Western Mail* pressed the SWMF's Executive Council to take advantage of its victory to show greater moral fibre:

the recent episode should stiffen the backbone of the council; it provides it with every justification to withstand the efforts of the extremists and to appeal to the general body of the miners should the delegate conference once be guilty of treacherous conduct.²⁹⁵

Following the vote, Clement Edwards MP made scurrilous and extravagant accusations of venality, corruption and bribery by 'German gold' against 'various syndicalists and pacifists' in their campaign to defeat the proposals for the comb-out:

²⁹¹ *ibid*, 23 November 1917

²⁹² *ibid*.

²⁹³ Matthews, *The World of the Anthracite Coal Miner*, 263.

²⁹⁴ S.E.Demont, *Tredegar and Aneurin Bevan*, 158.

²⁹⁵ *Western Mail* 16 November 1917.

Secret conclaves have been held in different districts of the coalfield with the utmost regularity, and there has been wholesale canvass by professors of pacifism and advocated of syndicalism in favour of voting for down-tools. There has been money spent in great streams in South Wales, the likes of which we have not had with the ordinary syndicalist propaganda of the four or five years preceding the war...

Treating has not always been in the form of intoxicants – that is not suggested – but expensive cigars and expensive meals at well-known Cardiff restaurants have been a form of entertainment by ‘Comrades’ from colliery villages up the valleys. Railway fares have been paid, motor-cars have been hired, and all apparently out of the modest earnings of young day wagemen and very subordinate agents of syndicalism and pacifism from afar. ... there has been carried on within the last 18 months or two years more active syndicalist propaganda than ever before.²⁹⁶

In Parliament, he questioned why not more prosecutions had been made in Glamorgan against those who had made ‘seditious utterances’.²⁹⁷ But criticism of the activists who campaigned for strike action was not confined to the opponents of the URC and the ‘advanced’ men within the Federation. The *Pioneer* blamed the press and the ‘official coterie’ of the SWMF for a ‘campaign unsurpassed in the virulence of its abuse of opponents, in its hysteria and in its misrepresentation; a campaign so entirely one-sided as to give the lie to all idea of British fair-play and justice’.

Perhaps surprisingly, the *Pioneer’s* editorial declared for the first time, its fundamental disagreement over the holding of the ballot, because it disagreed with using industrial means for political ends. The editor had failed to share his concern before the ballot was conducted:

²⁹⁶ *Western Mail*, 15 November 1917.

²⁹⁷ *ibid.*

Personally we have all along felt that the ballot was a huge mistake from every point of view, and we have exhibited only regret that the industrial organisation of the miners should have been subjected to such a very risky experiment as its use for purposes quite outside of its legitimate activities; an experiment calculated to introduce the seeds of anarchy quite irrespective of the final result of the ballot.

The *Pioneer* believed the ballot had shown that whilst only a minority favoured the 'out-and-out policy' of opposition to the war, this number would add 'tremendously' to the number of conscientious objectors, and the Federation would take a more direct and active interest in the treatment of conscientious objectors. For the editor, the ballot had displayed the limitations of industrial unionism and 'even the most advanced unions are, outside of a few well-defined lines of action, floating aimlessly on an unchartered sea'. However he also warned that those who portrayed the result as a 'patriotic answer to the German-gold-bought Pacifists of the SWMF is too superficially informed... His very belief that the ballot gives the quietus to pacifist effort on the part of the federation, and commits it to a Jingoist policy shows his inability to grasp the issue. An inability that will have a rude awakening in the very near future.'²⁹⁸

Another critic from the left, the revolutionary socialist, J. Walton Newbold, a supporter of the British Socialist Party, an ILP candidate in the 1918 General Election and a close friend of W.H. Mainwaring,²⁹⁹ concluded that the result of the ballot should not have been a surprise given public feeling about the war, and warned that the 'advanced' men should not waste their efforts in an ineffectual peace movement, comparing it to 'trying to stop the Flying Scotchman in full career by throwing one arm's round the smokestack.' The opponents of the 'rank and file' movement, in his view, constantly confused the public in South Wales as to the identity and aims of this school,

²⁹⁸ *Pioneer*, 10 November 1917.

²⁹⁹ Robert Duncan, 'John Turner Walton Newbold', *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. X (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000) 150-156.

representing them as Pacifists and at one in spirit and thought with the NCF, the UDC, and other similar 'individualist' organisations:

let us hope that it will teach our pacifist friends that their tactics and their ideas have no attraction for the working class, and that they are alien to the minds of the proletariat, however proper they were to those of the small traders and their kind.

Newbold's opinion of the strength of the anti-war movement in south Wales was influenced by his knowledge of the large ILP branch in the Merthyr and Aberdare areas, and compared it with other areas of the coalfield such as the Rhondda, where the tradition of independent working-class organisation was less rooted:

It would be strange if all the work of the ILP and the Hardie tradition, the great Rink meetings, and the years of literature and lectures had had no effect. In other areas, where customary ILP methods of propaganda have been in vogue as long as those of the CLC classes system in the Rhondda, the results have not justified any such confidence in the efficiency of the former. Merthyr, Aberdare and Dowlais have historic traditions and a Radical tendency which go far to explain matters. The size of the minority vote is by no means disconcerting to those who know the ground and who recognise that great and enthusiastic audiences are often a mixed lot and comprise a very small proportion of the whole population.³⁰⁰

The delay of eleven months in the introduction of the comb-out in the mining industry across Britain at the height of the War in 1917 was due to the intransigence of the South Wales miners. The factors that contributed to the ballot being won in favour of a comb-out include the patriotism of the majority of South Wales miners, and their conviction that the miners should be seen to be supporting their comrades in the trenches. The immediate impact of the

³⁰⁰ *Plebs Magazine*, December 1917.

ballot result was that approximately eleven thousand additional miners were conscripted into the Army. In January 1918, the government again asked for a further 50,000 men from the mining industry, and the MFGB supported a resolution moved by south Wales that a ballot should be taken to ascertain whether the Federation should assist the Government in combing out more men. The Government went on regardless, and whilst the ballot on 22 March 1918 produced a small majority against the comb-out it did not reach the two thirds majority threshold for the MFGB to reject the scheme.³⁰¹ This suggests that the support for the 'comb-out' as shown in the November ballot, had waned by the following Spring whilst May considers that although the vote for industrial action was lost, it 'nonetheless popularised the concept throughout the coalfield'.³⁰²

The comb-out ballot campaign gave added momentum to the URC and in April 1918, it held a special conference at the Cory Hall in Cardiff to consider the further comb-out and the implications of the recent ballot. The delegates represented nearly 100,000 of the South Wales miners and the chair was occupied by Noah Tromans who demanded the Executive should call an official conference to give an explanation to the rank and file why their decision on the comb-out question should 'be diverted to a channel which the men never intended'. Several delegates alleged that the policy of the Executive was 'directed by outside influence'.³⁰³ This demand was treated with contempt by Vernon Hartshorn who described the URC as a 'set of nincompoops without the intelligence of tom tits', who had attempted unsuccessfully to dragoon the executive into action:

The result of the November 1917 ballot had put them in their place, and they did not possess any intellectual honesty. They had their cronies on the E(executive)C(ommittee) and had come to know that a conference was to be called in the proper constitutional manner. So they met and decided to hold an

³⁰¹ *Pioneer*, 30 March 1918.

³⁰² May, 'A Question of Control', 106.

³⁰³ *South Wales Daily News*, 2 April 1918.

unofficial conference and passed resolutions and appointed a deputation to meet the Executive Council that day (Friday) to bring the necessary pressure to bear upon the E.C. to force a conference, and then they would turn round and say, 'We made (the E.C.) call the conference.' But they were told by the E.C. to go home, and were not allowed an interview (Cheers).³⁰⁴

The immediate effect of the 'comb-out' in south Wales was a reduction in the number of working miners, and such a reduction in total output that it led to the rationing of coal. The comb-out of men was effectively reversed by the summer of 1918 when the demand was for 'as many miners as possible as the military could spare should be brought back into the mines.'³⁰⁵ The early post-war years would see the URC 'gain disproportionately large influence as circumstances changed in their favour'³⁰⁶ but the effect of the 'comb-out' ballot was to energise the URC and the anti-war movement within the SWMF, and to radicalise the ordinary membership of the SWMF. Prominent URC members and anti-war activists such as Noah Ablett, S.O.Davies, and W.H. Mainwaring gained posts as miners' agents and the prominence of activists such as Arthur Horner and A.J. Cook reflected the Federation's greater industrial militancy. As Smith and Francis suggest, the Great War strengthened the pre-war processes, in which the anti-war views of many of the 'advanced' men developed into support for the Bolshevik Revolution and an international perspective 'rooted in the direct and indirect experience of the South Wales miners.'³⁰⁷

³⁰⁴ *Pioneer*, 13 April 1918.

³⁰⁵ Page Arnot, *South Wales Miners 1914-1926*, 148.

³⁰⁶ Burge, 'Labour, Class and Conflict', 320.

³⁰⁷ Smith and Francis, *The Fed*, 28.

Chapter Four

The organization of opposition - the National Council for Civil Liberties and the No-Conscription Fellowship

Introduction

A distinctive aspect of the organisation of anti-war activity in Wales was the extent to which those trade unions and trades councils who were concerned by the extension of military conscription to industry combined with avowedly anti-war organisations such as the ILP and the NCF. The National Council against Conscription, later re-named the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL), brought together these two elements, and its initial founders were the Joint Advisory Council of the No-Conscription Fellowship and the Quakers' Friends' Service Committee, formed in November 1915 to lobby Members of Parliament to oppose conscription. In doing so, they also privately campaigned for a conscience exemption clause to be inserted in the Bill and in order to deal with the dilemma of both opposing conscription but also lobbying for exemption within the framework of the Bill.¹ The NCCL in Wales was the most successful part of the organization in gaining trade union support for its aims and for mobilizing trades councils and trade unions to oppose the extension of conscription.

The failure of the 1915 Derby scheme's canvass of eligible men for voluntary enlistment led to conscription in the form of the Military Service Act which conscripted all unexempted single men and childless widowers between the ages of 18 and 41. The ILP's *Labour Leader* threatened that if the government continued 'its foolish attempts to impose military servitude upon the people of this country, it will meet with a resistance which may easily develop into revolution.'²

¹ Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*, 78-81.

² *Labour Leader*, 6 January 1916.

i) The National Council for Civil Liberties

The NCCL's objectives were to work for the repeal of the Military Service Act, to prevent conscription from becoming a permanent part of British life, and to safeguard all civil liberties. It attempted to broaden its support beyond the ILP, the NCF and the UDC and one of the UDC's paid organisers, Bernard Langdon-Davies, became its first secretary whilst Robert Smillie, the anti-war President of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, became President of the NCCL and its executive included the NCF chairman, Clifford Allen, Dr Henry Hodgkin of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the ILP leader George Lansbury, and the trade unionist leader, Robert Williams. It included both pro and anti-war campaigners, and was initially created as a body of some fifty people, most of whom were prominent in labour or civil libertarian politics.³

The Government regarded the NCCL as dangerously subversive and consisting of active opponents of the war 'who have not raised a finger to help their country in her hour of need.'⁴ The NCCL's first meeting in Wales, in February 1916 in Briton Ferry, illustrated the balance the new organisation attempted to achieve between those who opposed the war, and those whose sole purpose was to oppose conscription. Its organiser in South Wales and Monmouthshire, Ivor Hael Thomas was at pains to state that the NCCL was not an anti-war movement as such and insisted that its object was to 'protect the democracy, and if possible to prevent the Conscription Act being placed on the Statute Book or to secure its repeal'. He refuted the accusation that the campaign was aimed at discouraging men to join the Army, but the chairman disallowed a question as to whether Thomas and the organisers had done anything to encourage voluntary recruiting. The vote to create a branch was passed, but the division between those who supported the war effort and those who opposed was clear in the debate.⁵

But although Thomas may have wished to convey the impression that the NCCL welcomed pro-war elements, he was personally firmly anti-war. His role as Wales's representative on the ILP's National Advisory Council and his activity in the Briton Ferry NCF placed him in the engine-room of the anti-war movement in south Wales. His links

³ Keith Robbins, *The Abolition of War*, 75.

⁴ Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*, citing MI5 report, HO45/10801/307402, 78-81, NA.

⁵ *South Wales Daily Post*, 24 February 1916.

with the labour movement were crucial to his effectiveness, and whilst before the war he had been a member of the national executive of the Dockers Union, after the war he became the Labour party agent for Ramsay MacDonald in Aberavon. Another key figure in the anti-Conscription campaign was Morgan Jones, who was elected President of the South Wales Council against Conscription, as well as chairing the ILP in Wales, and also served as Wales's representative on the National Committee of the NCF.⁶ The national organiser of the NCCL was Catherine Marshall, who had headed the political campaigning of the NCF and was its secretary.⁷ She recognised that the NCCL was more successful in Wales than any other part of the country in attracting the trade unions and trades councils to its anti-conscription message. She described Ivor Thomas as an 'extremely effective organiser', and how, in the autumn and winter of 1917, he organised a 'raging, tearing campaign' in south Wales in order to persuade miners' lodges and divisions to affiliate to the NCCL, in the face of the growing threat of conscription within the coal industry. His work mainly consisted of circularising industrial and other bodies, visiting and corresponding with individuals with a view to addresses at trade union branches, arranging for the sale and distribution of literature, organising special meetings chiefly in connection with the ILP, addressing industrial organisations and arranging large conferences on such matters as Industrial Conscription and Militarism and Education.

Marshall considered that the NCCL's success in Wales in attracting 195 organisational affiliations by July 1918, was due 'from 80 to 90% to Thomas's efforts'.⁸ She stressed that each affiliation meant not merely that 'our propaganda has spread to that organisation but that something of what we stand for has gone to a number of other organisations at the same time'. She emphasised the value of Thomas as a local organiser and compared it to those other areas of Britain with no organiser:

the fact of these affiliations being due to a local organiser is perhaps shown by the comparison of the affiliations of Wales and London on the one hand, in both of which we have a local organiser, and of Scotland and Lancashire, where we have not on the other.

⁶ *The Labour's Who Who*, 217.

⁷ Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscience*, 95, 107-111.

⁸ *Catherine Marshall Papers*, D/MAR/4/95, 'Report on the organisation of the NCCL in Wales, 1 July 1918', Cumbria Record Office.

They are Wales 195; London and Home Counties 468; Lancashire 92; Scotland 142.⁹

Significantly, Marshall also noted that whilst the affiliations for Lancashire and Scotland were mainly branches of overtly anti-war organisations, the affiliations in Wales and London were predominantly industrial and less focussed than in other districts on the membership of the ILP, NCF and UDC, and Wales's fundraising record for the NCCL was markedly better than other districts.

The NCCL accounts for 1917 showed 1,105 affiliated organisations in Britain exclusive of Wales contributing £322 each, an average of 5s/9d per organisation. In Wales 195 organisations contributed an average total of £128 each, an average of 13s/2d. per organisation, contributing over double on average for each affiliate. Ivor Thomas received £200 per year salary and about £80 of expenses and whilst this represented about one sixth of the total spent on salaries, he had collected considerably more than one third of the total affiliation fees.¹⁰ Thomas's work resulted in the rapid growth of anti-conscription councils throughout the region in the first half of 1916. Anti-Conscription Leagues were set up in the Rhondda, Briton Ferry, Swansea Valley, Aberbargoed, Merthyr and Aberdare, Rhondda and Briton Ferry in the first five months of 1916.¹¹

The anti-conscription campaign in Wales was led in key industrial areas such as the Rhondda and the eastern Monmouthshire Valleys by members of the Unofficial Reform Committee.¹² The creation of the Rhondda Anti-Conscription Committee, for instance, was heralded by the Merthyr *Pioneer* not as another 'cranky pacifist organisation' but as a 'determined corporate body of Trade Unionists, Industriots (sic) and Socialists who carry with them the huge masses of the workers'. If conscription was implemented, this organisation, it was said, would take around 'a fiery cross' to 'awaken the proletariat in the coalfield to a determination such as it has never seen even in its historic resistance in industrial warfare.'¹³ The Committee's manifesto concentrated on the danger of conscription being introduced into the mining industry in particular, and warned against the resultant undermining of the trade unions:

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *Pioneer*, January-May 1916.

¹² Burge, 'Labour, Class and Conflict', 323.

¹³ *Pioneer*, 1 January 1916.

The menace of conscription is upon us. It is creeping on such an insidious form that most of the trade unionists of the country seem to be unaware of its proximity...We are therefore justified in assuming that there are ulterior motives in the minds of those who promote the scheme. It is being pushed and advertised by powerful section of capitalists, who, by means of their great influence with the press, use every opportunity to further the agitation.¹⁴

The *Pioneer* reflected that the alliance of miners, railway, engineering and transport workers, who were mostly exempt at the time, could soon come under the 'tyranny' of conscription.¹⁵

An early example of the NCCL's attempt to collaborate with trade union and labour organizations was the conference in January 1916, called by the Rhondda Anti-Conscription League. A joint anti-conscription conference in Cardiff of all trade union lodges, branches of the ILP, the NCF and socialist societies was attended by 112 delegates from trade union organizations from the South Wales area. The conference attracted 'all the revolutionary and fiery spirits in South Wales' such as Noah Ablett and A.J. Cook,¹⁶ and unanimously adopted a radical resolution that went much further than any action being considered by the anti-conscription movement elsewhere, in calling for a 'down tools' policy to be initiated on the day of Conscription becoming law and to start a propaganda campaign against it. The meeting also concluded that if England refused to take part in industrial action, that South Wales should go it alone. The meeting included some of the younger Marxist miners' leaders who had been at Ruskin College, Oxford and opposed to the war on revolutionary grounds, including Noah Ablett, and A.J. Cook. But whilst Hughes recalled a good attendance there, with many delegates from the Valleys in particular, and whilst he felt it represented an undoubted growing anti-war feeling, he questioned whether there was popular support for a strike against conscription at the time:

two or three delegates (were) quite insistent that it would be successful, and when I doubted it, I met with some criticism. But it was quite evident that apart from a few districts,

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ *Hardie and Hughes Papers*, Dep 176, Box 8/1, 'Welsh Rebel', 78; 'Pulpits and Prisons', 85, National Library of Scotland

there was absolutely no prospect of the rank and file of the miners being prepared to strike on that issue.

The conference agreed to send a deputation to visit Clydeside to assess rumours that there was a strike there against conscription. But when the deputation reported back, it was evident that no such event had occurred, and the leaders in Clydeside held out no hopes of any effective action against the Government's policy.

In fact, things were very much the same in Glasgow as they were in south Wales.... There would be no popular revolt against conscription, the Derby scheme had paved the way well enough to safeguard against that. Individuals who intended to fight conscription would have to go out alone.¹⁷

An undated list of the 179 NCCL's branches throughout Britain, obtained by the security services, included a total of twenty branches in Wales, mostly located in those areas where the ILP was at its strongest. They were concentrated in Swansea, Swansea Valley, the Afan Valley, the Western Monmouthshire Valleys, Cardiff, and Merthyr and the only branch outside the proximity of the south Wales coalfield was in Caernarfon.¹⁸

From the summer of 1916, the NCCL attempted to organise large conferences in south Wales to oppose the extension of conscription into civilian life. The first, held in Swansea in August 1916, went off without incident and the delegate list exemplifies the coalition of groups that came together to oppose conscription. There were delegates representing a total fifty-eight trade unions, eleven trades councils, three co-operative societies, in addition to eight NCF branches, twenty-one branches of the ILP and three of the Women's Labour League, one women's cooperative guild and eleven 'religious societies' (mostly chapels). The chairman, Swansea-based John Twomey, General Secretary of the National Amalgamated Labourers' Union, described the campaign's 'uphill fight', as its active supporters had been gaoled, their homes raided, and had been forced to become

¹⁷ *Hardie and Hughes Papers*, Dep. 176, 'The Journal of a Coward', 25, National Library of Scotland.

¹⁸ *Security Services Papers*, KV 2/665, NA. The NCCL branches were Ystradgynlais, Aberavon, Gorseinon, Glais, Port Talbot, Swansea, Maesteg, Cardiff, Splott, Barry, Bargoed, Troedyrhiw, Merthyr, Rhondda, Tredegar, Nantyglo, Brynmawr, Blaina, Brithdir, Pontypool and Caernarfon.

conscientious objectors. The formal resolution passed in the meeting emphasised the inseparable link between military and industrial conscription:

this conference, holding that Military Compulsion cannot be separated from Industrial Compulsion, and that this form of compulsion in the workshops endangers the whole standard of industrial conditions and places the men in the mines, the factories, railways, docks, etc., practically under military or semi-military law, and that this puts a weapon of great power in the hands of private employers working for their own profits and dividends, pledges itself to offer unrelenting opposition to any such proposals.

The speakers were all recognised anti-war activists. Twomey was joined on the platform by W.C. Anderson M.P., Councillor Stan Awbery of the Swansea ILP, Harry Thomas, representing the National Amalgamated Labourers' Union, and Councillor David Williams J.P., who would become the Labour MP for Swansea East in 1922.¹⁹

The second large scale meeting to be organised by the NCCL in Wales in 1916, was due to take place in Cardiff at the Cory Hall, on 11 November. It was to be chaired by James Winstone, the ILP leader, miners agent, and President of the South Wales Miners' Federation, and J.H. Thomas, the railwaymen's leader and Labour M.P., and Ramsay MacDonald M.P. were scheduled to speak. The speakers reflected the breadth of opposition to conscription and was not limited to anti-war speakers. Thomas, whilst actively supporting recruiting for the Army, viewed compulsory Military Service as the inevitable pre-cursor to industrial compulsion. Whilst Winstone would gradually develop a view in favour of peace by negotiation in 1917, he was certainly not opposed to the conduct of the war at the time. The meeting had an audience of nine hundred, including 445 registered delegates, representing 290 trade union branches; thirty seven trades and labour council delegates, representing a total of eighty one thousand affiliated members; a hundred representatives of Socialist and Peace Societies and two adult school delegates, representing 7,375 members; thirteen religious organisations, representing a total of one and a half thousand; sixteen Co-operative delegates, representing a membership of twenty three thousand; and Women's societies sent twenty nine delegates, representing 687 members.²⁰

¹⁹*Pioneer*, 26 August 1916.

²⁰*Pioneer*, 18 November 1916.

However, the meeting was disrupted by a mob organised by Captain Atherley Jones, a 'one-time National Service League organiser, a failed recruiting officer and semi-professional rabble rouser'²¹ and led by C.B. Stanton and Captain Tupper of the Seamen's Union. Millman exaggerates the impact of this disruption, termed 'The Battle of Cory Hall' to illustrate the conflict between pro-war and anti-war elements in south Wales and states that 'ultimately it put paid to the effort to consolidate dissent into a combination capable, in 1916, of shifting the national agenda'.²² His judgement is coloured by his failure to examine the aftermath, and to even mention that the meeting was subsequently re-arranged in Merthyr the following month, and displayed an impressive unity of purpose.²³

The more sober assessment by the intelligence services of the events surrounding the disruption of the Peace meeting in the Cory Hall highlighted the strength and potential of the anti-war movement rather than the success of the 'patriots' in disrupting the conference. The meeting was rapidly re-scheduled to meet in the Olympia Rink in Merthyr Tydfil on Saturday 9 December, 1916. The crowd of over 2,500 people were drawn from all parts of south Wales, and individuals from as far as London and the Midlands. In comparison with the Cory Hall conference, there was an increase of 25 per cent in registered delegates. The number rose in comparison to the aborted Cory Hall conference from 445 to 593. These delegates represented an aggregate membership of 324,767, as against the 445 delegates representing 220,000 people in Cardiff. These included 307 trades union delegates representing 89,000 members ; sixty two Labour Parties and Trades Councils with an affiliated membership of 197,684 ; twenty co-operative societies representing 27,410 ; twenty-nine women's organisations representing 785 members ; thirty-one church organisations representing 2,100 members, 139 socialist Peace societies, representing 7,120 members, and fifteen 'unclassified' delegates.²⁴

The meeting drew together a wide cross-section of opinion that went beyond the anti-war movement, and included those opposed to the further encroachment of the state in extending conscription. The spirit of Merthyr was possibly more militant than that of Cardiff, and the delegates' torrid experience of the mob may have steeled the Merthyr delegates.

²¹ Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London, Frank Cass, 2000),150.

²² *ibid*, 138.

²³ Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in Britain*, 138-166.

²⁴ *Pioneer*, 16 December 1916

The *Pioneer's* editor argued that the destructive tactics of the disruptive 'patriots' had encouraged more delegates to attend:

I spoke with several delegates before the meeting who did not see eye to eye with me on the pacifist position, but their determination to preserve the right of free speech, of open discussion, was something to remember...I believe that it was the opposition of the rank and file of democracy to these that had determined many of the lodges and unions who were not represented at Cardiff to send delegates to Merthyr, and thus was explained the great increase in the delegates.²⁵

Whilst never a pacifist, Winstone set out his opposition to industrial conscription and the present conduct of the war, and supported 'peace by negotiation'. He condemned the Government for its insistence on fighting the war 'to the finish', and its lack of clarity on its war aims. He was glad to see, he said that there was 'growing up in every country involved in this terrible war a peace party which is growing in strength from day to day'. Ramsay MacDonald then moved a motion expressing alarm at the reduction in civil liberties and the pacifist Mrs. Swanwick's motion demanded peace by negotiation. The conference then called on the Government to review and correct what was termed the disastrous administration of the Military Service Act, in relation to conscientious objection, domestic hardship, and to any further extension of the Act.

J.H. Thomas avowed he was not anti-war, but he was certainly anti-conscription, and to large cheers, lent support to MacDonald, who, although they disagreed on their attitudes to the war, yet defended his right to state his views:

I am not going to stand by and allow a man like MacDonald, because he is temporarily unpopular, to be hounded out of public life by men who are today enjoying what he is responsible for.

The motion that military compulsion should cease, was moved by Thomas and seconded by the local miners' activist, Noah Tromans, Mountain Ash, who warned ominously that industrial action was inevitable, and that 'in all probability, in the event of a struggle for industrial freedom

²⁵ *ibid.*

coming, the brunt would fall on the south Wales miners'.²⁶ This show of unity against the extension of conscription into civilian life and against the operation of military conscription, reflected the NCCL's strategy of bringing together the anti-war movement with the wider labour movement, and the impressive array of sixty-two local Labour parties and labour and trades councils represented a significant 'achievement for the NCCL's organizers, and for Ivor Thomas in particular. From December 1916 onwards, the NCCL concentrated on developing the opposition to the extension of conscription in the essential industries, and within the mining industry in particular.

The influence of the NCCL can be traced in Ivor Thomas's activities in this period, and his energetic attempts to secure the support of Federation lodges and districts. He reported on the first of November, 1917, on the eve of the momentous coalfield ballot on the 'comb-out' of men in the mining industry, that he had only received only one refusal among fourteen districts of the Federation he had requested to affiliate, and on the fourth of November, he reported that out of the nineteen districts, comprising 417 lodges of the SWMF, a total of ten districts, comprising 201 lodges had affiliated.²⁷ This spate of activity coincided with the virulent and highly charged campaign conducted in south Wales over the 'comb-out' ballot.

Marshall highlighted the advantage of having a local organiser for such a large area as Wales 'as the geographical and other conditions are exceedingly difficult', and she cited Thomas's organisation of conferences on the theme of militarism in schools in North Wales in support.²⁸ This North Wales conference in Llandudno was described by the *Pioneer's* editor, perhaps with some exaggeration, as one in which 'the whole weight of North Wales Nonconformity will join in with the Labour elements in the area in setting about the establishment of a first line of resistance to the most sinister and dangerous movement that Militarism has yet made in this nation.'²⁹ Its ostensible aim was to oppose the introduction of military education into schools, but in addition to the involvement of the NCCL, the conference also included a number of prominent anti-war activists in north Wales, including Principal Thomas Rees, the Reverend H.Harris Hughes, Bangor and

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *Security Service Papers*, KV/665, seized NCCL papers following a police raid by Scotland Yard on its offices, NA.

²⁸ *Catherine Marshall Papers*, D/Mar 4/95, 'Report on the organisation of the National Council of Civil Liberties in Wales to the Executive committee of the National Council for Civil Liberties, 1 July, 1918', Cumbria Archives.

²⁹ *Pioneer*, 22 June 1918.

Principal John Graham, Manchester and it was addressed by a number of religious and trade union leaders including the Revd. H. Barrow Williams, Llandudno and S. Rowlands from the National Union of Railwaymen. The conference secretary, J.E. Thomas, Penygroes, a prominent member of the ILP, informed delegates of the aims of the NCCL and asserted that the conference represented most Nonconformist chapels in Meirion, Arfon and Anglesey. Present were 173 church and chapel representatives, twelve representatives of local Free Church Councils, and ten Labour and Trade Union Councils, and letters had also been received from a further fifty-nine churches supporting the conference.³⁰

This conference reflected the NCCL's attempt in north Wales to unite the anti-war movement with those elements who were concerned with the militarisation of schools, and the unanimous vote for the motion that opposed military exercises for children under 18, reflected a consensus that went beyond the anti-war movement. Speakers such as the Reverend H. Barrow Williams were anxious to assure listeners that they did not wish to inhibit the Government's efforts to win the war:

ond yr oeddynt am i'r Llywodraeth brysuero i'w chael i ben gyda sefydliad heddwch cyfiawn, anrhydeddus a sefydlog.³¹

(but they wanted the Government to bring it (the war) to an end with the creation of a just, honourable and stable peace)

An indication of the broadening influence of the NCCL in Wales after the end of the war were the anti-conscription protests held on the fourth anniversary of the Military Service Act, on Sunday 2 March, 1919. Meetings to call for the repeal of the Act were held in sixteen towns across Wales and included speakers, such as Vernon Hartshorn, newly elected Member of Parliament for Ogmere, who months earlier may have balked at sharing a platform with the NCCL. In Maesteg before 1,200 people, he joined with the NCCL and the local labour and trades council to call for the end of conscription. Similar meetings were met throughout south Wales, and in Merthyr for instance, two thousand people at the Rink heard John Bromley, secretary of the Amalgamated Society of

³⁰ *Y Dinesydd Cymreig*, 24 July 1918.

³¹ *ibid.*

Locomotive, Enginemen and Firemen, and the local miners' agent, Noah Ablett call for the repeal of the Military Service Act.³²

The significance of the NCCL during the war lay in its ability to provide a bridge between the anti-war movement and the trade union movement and the trades and labour councils. It stoked the fear of the further extension of military conscription and the creation of civilian conscription within vital industries such as coal, steel, tinsplate and transport. Whereas the NCCL gained most support in other parts of Britain from predictable sources of opposition, such as the ILP, NCF and the UDC, the particular strength of the NCCL in Wales, as in London, lay in its ability to gain support from trade unions and trade councils to campaign against the extension of conscription. In doing so, it also broadened the extent of anti-war activity in Wales from the end of 1916 onwards to include support for the Russian Revolution, demands for a negotiated peace, and opposition to conscription within the mining industry. The personal connections and influence of its organiser, Ivor Thomas, within the labour movement and the ILP in Wales were crucial, and he embodied the symbiotic relationship between the NCCL, the trade union movement, trades and labour councils (often dominated by the ILP), and the anti-war movement.

ii) The Organisation of the No-Conscription Fellowship in Wales

From the outset, a 'conscience clause' was included in the Military Service Act in January 1916, which provided that those with a conscientious objection to military service could be granted various forms of exemption from conscription by applying to a tribunal system. The new Act created a category of men who were described as conscientious objectors and defined as men whose bona fides was established by a tribunal, or who, having failed to satisfy or appear before a tribunal, or who, having failed to satisfy or appear before a tribunal, still refused combatant service on conscientious grounds.³³

The military were ill-equipped and increasingly unprepared to deal with this novel phenomenon. Those conscientious objectors who were prepared to work under the authority of the Army joined the Friends' Ambulance Unit, the Non-Combatant Corps, or in certain circumstances, the Royal Army Medical Corps, and from the summer of 1916,

³² *Pioneer*, 8 March 1919.

³³ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 14-21, 70.

opportunities to engage in 'work of national importance' were provided, primarily through the Home Office Scheme, whilst a comparatively small number were directed to the Pelham Committee's schemes for employment. There were almost six thousand conscientious objectors who either refused to accept the tribunals' decision or failed to apply to a tribunal on the ground of conscientious objection and after initial periods in prison for these men, from July 1916 onwards, they were subsequently offered alternatives to military service.³⁴ Most accepted the Government's alternative schemes, and only approximately one twelfth of the total of conscientious objectors, including approximately eighty men from Wales, brooked no compromise and became 'absolutists'.

To the extent that such a varied group of independently-minded and wilful men could be organised, it was the NCF who supported conscientious objectors through its branches, its visitors, its information bureau and its political pressure on politicians to bring the cause of COs to the fore. This section considers the organisation of the NCF, its activity in Wales, and its significance to the wider anti-war movement in Wales.

The NCF was created in the Spring of 1915, following an appeal by the editor of the *Labour Leader*, A. Fenner Brockway, and described itself as an organisation of 'men created to refuse from conscientious motives to undertake military service and bear arms and that it would oppose every effort to introduce compulsory military service into Great Britain'.³⁵ This call to action attracted and united thousands of young men whose religious and political beliefs were 'as various as the nation's religions and political theories'.³⁶ Its first Convention in April 1916 attracted fifteen hundred delegates, representing ten thousand members,³⁷ and the majority of members resisted the war on religious grounds, and drew inspiration from the Christian tradition of pacifism. Only about a tenth of conscientious objectors described themselves as socialists, but it was they, and specifically the young members of the ILP who invariably led the work of the NCF and composed its officers and activists.³⁸ Brockway became its secretary and Clifford Allen, a member of the ILP's City of London branch, was appointed chairman. The political background of most of its leaders was overwhelmingly that of the Independent Labour

³⁴ *Ministry of Health Papers*, 47/3, 'Report of the Brace Committee's Central Tribunal' (February, 1919), 24, NA.

³⁵ *The No Conscription Fellowship*, 8.

³⁶ *ibid*, 8.

³⁷ Kennedy, *The Hound of Conscripton*, 280.

³⁸ *ibid*, 9,10.

Party and on its executive committee the ILP members included C.H. Norman, James H. Hudson, a Lancashire schoolmaster, William J. Chamberlain, a journalist on the *Daily Citizen*, and South Wales's representative, Councillor Morgan Jones from Bargoed in the Rhymney Valley.

In mid-May 1916, most of the NCF's national executive committee, including Morgan Jones, were arrested under the Defence of the Realm Act for publishing the leaflet *Repeal the Act* that the authorities thought to contain material prejudicial to the recruitment and discipline to His Majesty's forces.

Fined a hundred pounds in common with the majority of the NCF's executive, Councillor Morgan Jones was imprisoned in May 1916 for circulating subversive literature before then being arrested and imprisoned for his conscientious objection to military service in June, 1916. His combined responsibilities illustrate the close links between the various anti-war and anti-conscription organisations in south Wales in this period and he was president of the South Wales Council against Conscription, Wales's representative on the National Committee of the NCF³⁹ and subsequently became the first conscientious objector to be elected as a Member of Parliament, in the 1921 Caerphilly by-election.⁴⁰

This close relationship with the ILP is illustrated by D.H. Jones, the secretary of the NCF branch in Aberdare's correspondence with Percy Wall, an imprisoned conscientious objector from the area:

Your stand as an Absolutist is much appreciated by the Branch Percy...the Branch members are anxious to welcome you back to the District...today you are a Comrade and friend of the Aberdare NCF and ILP who will never be forgotten. Keep the flag flying Percy.⁴¹

This symbiotic relationship developed through organised lectures, addresses and meetings during the war and was expressed both independently and jointly between both organizations, who were established in Aberdare and in other parts of south Wales where the ILP had a presence. At the end of the War, the *Welsh Outlook* described Aberdare as

³⁹ *Llais Llafur*, 3 June 1916.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, 57.

⁴¹ *Percy Wall Papers*, 86/53/1, 14 April 1918, Imperial War Museum.

an area where 'speakers who were bitterly assailed in other parts of the country, received attentive audiences in the Aberdare area.'⁴²

In the British context, the NCF allied with two organisations of Christian pacifists, the Young Men's Service Committee of the Society of Friends, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. The former represented those Quakers of military age who adhered to the Society's traditional rejection of military service whilst the latter united Christian pacifists from many denominations although both organizations were small in numbers. This alliance helped to co-ordinate resistance to conscription, though for some members of the NCF 'the sanctity of human life was a flag of convenience rather than a banner of faith,'⁴³ but in Wales, the Quakers were numerically insignificant. Whilst the Fellowship was weak or non-existent in south Wales, it was an important presence in North Wales in particular, where it was centred on the Bala-Bangor Theological College and the influence of its charismatic Principal, Thomas Rees.⁴⁴ Much of the NCF's energy was directed towards blending its diverse elements into an united anti-conscription and anti-war movement but much of its weakness lay in the political, religious and moral diversity of its membership. Percy Ogwen Jones from Anglesey, a prominent journalist, compared his fellow conscientious objectors to threads of a rope in which not all were similar:

Rhaff ac iddi amryw geinciau oedd mudiad heddychwyr 1914-1918. Ar un ystyr nid oedd yn fudiad o gwbl: yn hytrach damwain a chyd-ddigwydd a ddug y ceinciau hyn at ei gilydd yn un rhaff, a Deddf Gorfodaeth 1916 a wnaeth y rhaff.⁴⁵

(the pacifist movement in 1914-1918 was like a rope with many strands. In one respect it was not a movement at all; rather that accident and co-incidence that brought these strands together into a rope, and it was the Conscription Act 1916 that made the rope.)

In Briton Ferry the first South Wales branch was set up in June 1915, and local groups were also set up for Monmouthshire, Cardiff, Mid-Glamorgan and the Swansea area.⁴⁶ The

⁴² *Welsh Outlook*, 'Aberdare 1910-1920 – a Social Study', January 1922.

⁴³ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 12.

⁴⁴ Davies, *Prifathro Thomas Rees*, 70.

⁴⁵ Percy Ogwen Jones, *Ceinciau Cymysg*, 6 November 1964 (BBC Radio Talk), 3.

⁴⁶ *Llais Llafur*, 19 June 1915.

Fellowship's manifesto appeared on 11 September 1915 on the *Pioneer's* front page and Emrys Hughes, Abercynon, one of the most prominent members of the ILP in south Wales, and an early member of the NCF, reported on the national convention of the movement in London and set the resistance to conscription in the context of pre-war labour unrest and struggle in industrial south Wales:

if the Bill becomes law, there will be resistance and determined resistance throughout the country, and south Wales will again do its share. In the Valleys we have seen the cavalry clattering up the hills to intimidate the strikers of Tonypany and Aberdare. These facts are not easily forgotten.⁴⁷

If the Government was to introduce conscription, he warned the NCF would fill the prisons:

we will not be Conscripts. The South Wales Valleys have seen many struggles for liberty and freedom ; Keir Hardie is dead but the idea is alive, and when the time comes we will be true to the memory of Hardie and fight conscription whatever the consequences may be.⁴⁸

By October 1915, over fifty branches had been formed throughout Britain with a membership of over five thousand. NCF membership was initially only open to young men who were liable to be conscripted but it then agreed to accept women and older men as associate members and during the first six months of 1915, the NCF leaders established a network of autonomous local groups and shadow officials that would be proof against police action.⁴⁹ The decision to admit associate members seemed to be incidental at the time, but eventually it proved to be momentous for the viability of the organisation. The authorities kept a close eye on the NCF from March 1915 onwards and the Attorney General was warned by intelligence services that the 5 August 1915 edition of the *Labour Leader* had contained a direct incitement by the NCF not to obey the Munitions of War Act 1915 and that this 'mischief' had been 'gravely enhanced by the success' of Mr. Clifford Allen's proselytising efforts in South Wales.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Pioneer*, 15 December 1915.

⁴⁸ *Pioneer*, 1 January 1916.

⁴⁹ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 12.

⁵⁰ *Home Office Papers*, HO45/10786/297549/10, NA, cited in Kennedy, *Hound of Conscience*, 64.

Due to its belief that the Government was keen on crushing the NCF, the national committee created a 'complex and clandestine infrastructure' with safe methods of communication and a system in which every official would have a shadow or replacement who would automatically assume his position if he was arrested or otherwise neutralised.⁵¹

Table Five - No-Conscription Fellowship branches and secretaries in Wales - May 1916

Briton Ferry	H. Armstrong
Cwmavon	J. Morris
West Glamorgan	W.J. Roberts Gorseinon
Port Talbot	Councillor T. Mainwaring
Swansea	Miss M. Harris c/o Swansea Socialist Centre, the 'Bomb Shop'
Swansea Valley	Tom Evans Ynismudw
Aberdare	J. Thomas B.A. Aberdare
Abercynon	J.R. Taylor
Bargoed	Moses Price
Cardiff	E.F. Williams
Mid Glam	T. Mainwaring
Maesteg	A. Jones
Merthyr	A. Brobin
Pontypridd	D.J. Williams
Tonyrefail	T.J. Williams
Abertillery	Henry Gale
Bedlinog	J.M. Williams
Blaenavon	F. Marchant
Newport	R.H. Ley
Nantyglo	J.E. Jones
Risca	G. Dardis
Pembrokeshire	B.T.L Jones, Boncath
Cardiganshire	Rev TE Nicholas

⁵¹ Kennedy, *Hound of Conscience*, 65,66.

At NCF's first national convention in November 1915, each branch was advised to set up a committee of 'six energetic and able' associate members who would henceforth meet with the regular branch committee to become familiar with the activity of the branch.⁵²

By May 1916, Wales had twenty-three branches of the NCF, primarily in West Glamorgan, Cardiff, Swansea, the Aberdare and Merthyr areas, and the Western Valleys of Monmouthshire (see Table Five). The administrative office for south Wales was located in Cardiff, and its secretary, Ieuan Peter Hughes, coordinated the NCF's activity between local branches and the NCF centrally, before he was imprisoned in May 1916. Most of the branch secretaries were also prominent local ILP activists and at the end of May, the secretaries for West Glamorgan, Merthyr and Risca branches had to be replaced after each was imprisoned as conscientious objectors.⁵³ At least a quarter of these secretaries became conscientious objectors or were arrested for offences under the Defence of the Realm Act, related to sedition and circulating materials thought to be prejudicial to recruitment.

The NCF's Welsh Divisional Conference, held in June 1916 in Cardiff reflected its concerns for the increasing numbers entering the prisons and as if to amplify this challenge, Henry Davies, a prominent ILPer from Cwmavon was required to take the chair, since the officeholder, Morgan Jones, had been taken into military custody. The NCF's secretary Fenner Brockway addressed the meeting where seventeen NCF branches, and a number of ILP branches were represented.⁵⁴ The following day, the NCF national committee was held in Cardiff and agreed to ask the Welsh MP, the barrister, W. Llewellyn Williams, to act on its behalf in appealing against the South Wales police's recent prosecutions against NCF for circulating anti-war leaflets. The committee also considered the growing issue of supporting the families of those men who had been prosecuted in South Wales and it was agreed that the main office should forward to the Welsh Divisional secretary a sum of money which could be used as a reserve to be drawn upon by the dependants of these men through their Branch if local effort did not realise the necessary funds.⁵⁵

⁵² *Clifford Allen Papers*, NCF circular letter, 7 December, 1915, cited in Kennedy, 66.

⁵³ *Catherine Marshall Papers*, D/MAR/4/4, 'List of NCF branches, May 1916', Cumbria Archives.

⁵⁴ *Pioneer*, 17 June 1916.

⁵⁵ *Catherine Marshall Papers*, D/MAR/4/6, Cumbria Archives.

The introduction of conscription divided communities in south Wales, as reflected in debates, often initiated by the NCF, in council chambers, trades councils and miners' lodges. For instance, in January 1916, a meeting of Mountain Ash Council considered a request from the Aberdare branch of the NCF for the council to oppose conscription and the Military Service Bill before Parliament. A motion to effectively ignore this demand, by 'laying it on the table', was only carried by seven votes to five, in spite of protests by the ILPer councillor and pacifist, Rev. George Neighbour.⁵⁶ The Bargoed and District Trades Council resolved to oppose conscription and the NCF's Merthyr branch lobbied the local district of miners successfully to oppose the Military Service Act. The first quarter of 1916 for the NCF was taken up by a series of public protest meetings against conscription in collaboration with trades councils and miners' lodges. These meetings were held mainly in ILP strongholds such as the Swansea and Amman Valleys, the Aberdare and Merthyr area, and Pontypridd, and the speakers included the Marxist educationalist Nun Nicholas and prominent local officials of the Miners' Federation such as J.L.Rees, Pontardawe.⁵⁷ NCF branches such as Pontypridd were opened in the Spring and the NCF's East Glamorgan branch meeting in Cardiff in February, was addressed by its national chairman, Clifford Allen.⁵⁸

The NCF organised sessions to prepare conscientious objectors for their experience of tribunals and such an event was held in Glais in February 1916, to advise young men how to fill their exemption forms and to explain procedures regarding tribunals. The Reverend T.E. Nicholas gave introductory words of encouragement, and the secretary of the NCF in Pontardawe and an ILPer, Tom Evans gave a brief history of the NCF.⁵⁹ New branches were created in the Swansea Valley and mass anti-conscription meetings were held in Cwmtwrch, Gwaun-cae Gurwen, Pontardawe, with two thousand present and Clydach, with fifteen hundred present, during March 1916.⁶⁰ The anti-conscription campaign, organized by the NCF and ILP, gathered momentum across the south Wales coalfield with large-scale meetings in Swansea,⁶¹ Blackwood, Aberbargoed, Aberaman and Merthyr, where the first public meeting of the Merthyr 'Stop the War and Peace Council', jointly

⁵⁶ *Pioneer*, 29 January 1916.

⁵⁷ *ibid*, 26 February 1916.

⁵⁷ *ibid*, 4 March 1916.

⁵⁸ *ibid*.

⁵⁹ *ibid*.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, 4, 11, 25 March, 1 April 1916.

⁶¹ *ibid*, 22 April 1916.

organized by the NCF, ILP, UDC, FoR and trade union lodges was held with two thousand present and followed by another mass meeting in May.⁶²

From the end of February onwards, conscientious objectors started appearing before the tribunals. In two sessions of the Bangor Tribunal, a total of thirty-five students appealed as conscientious objectors⁶³ and thirty-two conscientious objectors appeared before the Merthyr tribunal on 13 March, individual COs appeared before Ystradgynlais and Tregaron tribunals⁶⁴ and on 21 March, sixty-two conscientious objectors, who would be the largest number of COs to appear before a tribunal at a single sitting in Britain, appeared before the Pontardawe tribunal. In the Glamorgan appeal tribunal, most appellants who were COs were members of the NCF and ILP and their solicitor Edward Roberts, Dowlais came into immediate conflict with a number of tribunal members who were easily provoked and inflamed by the NCF. In his appeal to the West Glamorgan Appeal Tribunal for instance, Albert J. Lewis, chairman of the Neath Trades Council and the Neath Socialist Society appealed against non-combatant service, and stated that he was a member of the NCF. One of the tribunal members, Alderman Davies responded violently:

then you belong to one of the most pernicious bodies in the country. Its members are going all over the place distilling poison, and are greater enemies to Britain than the Germans.⁶⁵

The creation of the 'shadow' system for replacing those officials who had been arrested and imprisoned, in the second half of 1916 and by 1917, maintained the NCF's activity, albeit under difficult circumstances. In Wales, the leadership of the NCF was increasingly entrusted to women supporters, and Emrys Hughes's sister Agnes became its divisional organiser in south Wales.⁶⁶ As soon as conscientious objectors began to be arrested, the NCF was re-organised and divided into ten departments, including the Conscientious Objectors Information Bureau (COIB) which kept the history of each conscientious objector, including the grounds of objection, the details of his appearances before courts, and of the Prison or Home Office settlement in which he was placed. The press and

⁶² *ibid*, 15, 22 April, 13 May 1916.

⁶³ *North Wales Chronicle*, 3 March 1916.

⁶⁴ *Pioneer*, 18 March 1916.

⁶⁵ *The Tribunal*, 6 April 1916.

⁶⁶ *Pioneer*, 1 December 1917.

literature departments produced propaganda, and the political and campaigning departments focused on lobbying in behalf of conscientious objectors in Parliament, and in agitating for the release of conscientious objectors. The Visitation department had representatives in each region who informed the NCF's Conscientious Objectors Information Bureau of the whereabouts of conscientious objectors in military camps and prisons, and reported on their progress through the court martial and prison system.⁶⁷

Thirteen of the 232 visitors who reported to the COIB covered Wales. They included Minnie Pallister, Agnes Hughes, and Revd. John Morgan Jones, Merthyr, who mainly visited south Wales prisoners,⁶⁸ whilst the Revd. Gilbert Jones, Llangloffan in Pembrokeshire visited objectors in the Pembroke Dock military barracks, and Carmarthen Prison. In North Wales, the sprawling military camps outside Rhyl and Park Hall outside Oswestry were mainly visited by the Revd. E.K. Jones, Cefnmawr, and he was aided by the Principal of Bala-Bangor, Principal Thomas Rees, Revd. Wyre Lewis, and two Quakers from the Deganwy area - Watson Webb and Frederick Payne.⁶⁹ Jones visited and kept meticulous records of over four hundred and sixty seven conscientious objectors in five Army camps in Kinmel Park, near Rhyl, and the Park Hall camp near Oswestry.⁷⁰ His prodigious activities on their behalf were unpaid and included letter writing to relatives and their families, attending tribunal hearings of COs in which he acted as a friend and witness, appearing as character witnesses at military court martials, and interviews with conscientious objectors, which he then reported back to the NCF's Conscientious Objectors Information Bureau.⁷¹

Other supporters who liaised with conscientious objectors' families in Wales included the Jewish novelist, Lilian Tobias, living in Rhiwbina, who supported the mother of two Cardiff COs – Thomas and Robert Bassett – in complaining about the conditions in which Robert had endured at Llanddeusant camp, where he had been working under the Home Office scheme.⁷² Tobias was part of a small group of Jewish intellectuals in south Wales, originally from Ystalyfera in the Swansea Valley, who was a member of the Zionist movement and co-founded the Cardiff and Swansea branches of the Daughters of Zion.

⁶⁷ *The No Conscription Fellowship*, 24-26.

⁶⁸ *Catherine Marshall Papers*, D MAR 4/95, Cumbria Archives.

⁶⁹ *E.K. Jones Papers*, Box 29, 'Goss to E.K. Jones, 27 October, 1916', NLW.

⁷⁰ *ibid*, Box 2, 'Conscientious Objector case files', NLW.

⁷¹ E.K. Jones, *Atgofion am Dri Rhyfel*, Wales Peace Pamphlets, No. 9, Series 2 (Denbigh, Gwasg Gee, 1944), 22.

⁷² *Catherine Marshall Papers*, D/MAR/4/55, 'letter from Lily Tobias to Miss Rinder', Cumbria Archives.

Her brothers were conscientious objectors, and she had been secretary of the Swansea branch of the ILP before the war, when she became active in the NCF. Fenner Brockway described her as a 'young, battling, aggressive socialist pacifist' and praised her 'daring challenges to authorities'.⁷³ She helped the families of Jewish COs in particular, of whom about half a dozen were COs in south Wales. Other local ILP activists such as Councillor Tal Mainwaring of Port Talbot raised the case of individual conscientious objectors such as Richard Mainwaring, who was ill at home, and was forcibly given a medical examination there by a military doctor.⁷⁴

The NCF supported conscientious objectors and their families and raised money to help those dependants who had been victimized by court appearances and police prosecutions against them, such as the ten Briton Ferry members fined for distributing 'seditious material'. Minnie Pallister appealed for money to support conscientious objectors and their families and recalled the support given to Councillor Tal Mainwaring and his family during his imprisonment and subsequent illness.⁷⁵ An appeal by Agnes Hughes for funds for the dependants of conscientious objectors at a meeting of the ILP in Maesteg in November 1917 for instance, raised eleven shillings and a penny.⁷⁶ Support for conscientious objectors was displayed by a number of labour and trade union organizations and the South Wales division of the Cooperative Wholesale Society, for instance, passed a resolution by a 'large majority', demanding that the same allowances be made to dependants of members who were conscientious objectors as were made to the dependants of members of the armed forces.⁷⁷ The NCF branch in Gorseinon supported the dependants of conscientious objectors by making weekly collections and raising money though picking coal from tips and selling, gathering cast-off lumps of wood and selling, trudging five miles to a wood and cutting pea and bean sticks and selling them, and raffling a 'white duck'. The branch circulated an appeal leaflet to every church in the neighbourhood and in six months, it was reported that Gorseinon had raised one hundred and fifty pounds, 'in spite of the fact that many of their members are in prison and camp'.⁷⁸ The NCF was an intense social grouping of like-minded and principled young men but whose effectiveness as a campaigning organization was curtailed by the rapid increase in

⁷³ Lily Tobias, *Eunice Fleet*, foreword by Jasmine Donahaye (Dinas Powys, Honno Classics, 2004), xi-xiii.

⁷⁴ *Catherine Marshall Papers*, D/MAR/4/66, letter to Miss Rinder, 26 March 1917, Cumbria Archives.

⁷⁵ *Pioneer*, 8 December 1916.

⁷⁶ *ibid*, 1 December 1917.

⁷⁷ *ibid*, 15 December 1917.

⁷⁸ *ibid*, 22 December 1917.

the arrest and incarceration of its members from the Summer of 1916. As in the case of other branches scattered throughout south Wales, its Gorseinon branch for instance included a 'small but committed' group of COs and their supporters and the branch was not ostracised by the community, although the majority of the local population was pro-war. The Western District Miners' Association responded positively to its appeal for money to assist the dependents of imprisoned conscientious objectors:

it was decided to vote a sum of £10 'without prejudice' to the fund, the District meeting making it quite clear that they would not express any opinion upon the conduct of the conscientious objectors, but from a humanitarian point of view wished to relieve such dependents as may be suffering want of the necessities of life through the internment or imprisonment of their men.⁷⁹

This jaunty description of an excursion to Mid Wales by members of the Gorseinon branch imparts the sense of joy and comradeship in the group:

Bip,Bap ; Bip, Bap !

Last Saturday the No-Conscription Fellowship took their outing by open-top bus to Llanwrtyd Wells. The drive was magnificent. During the day, sport of many kinds was indulged in best of all being the sculling competition for the men...Tea was provided at the Carlton, after which excellent speeches were made by fellows Stanley Rees (Glasgow), Mansel Grenfell, and MacGinnes; and a most encouraging speech by the vicar (Revd. Richard Jones). He said that success would surely follow the Fellowship; possibly they could not agree on some things, but that we were as one banded together to save humanity. Many thanks are due for such an enjoyable day to Herbert Rees and Mansel Grenfell.⁸⁰

Later that summer, the NCF members of the four branches covering the Dare, Merthyr and lower Rhondda valleys converged in Abercynon for a joint ramble over the hill to Llanfabon:

⁷⁹ *Cambria Daily Leader*, 2 July 1917, cited in David Cleaver, 'Conscientious Objection in the Swansea area', *Morgannwg*, XXVIII (1984), 53.

⁸⁰ *Pioneer*, 15 July 1916.

a 'spread' had been arranged. The mountain walk served to have given them a good appetite, for as soon as they arrived at the appointed place they fell to. After tea they all entered the Parish Room, where Mr. Brobyn (Merthyr) was appointed chairman for the evening. He made a nice little speech on the present position and our duty to our comrades in prison. Guardian Noah Tromans and Miss Agnes Hughes followed with short addresses. Then Mr. Warren sang one of his favourite songs. After singing the 'Red Flag' and giving cheers to the International and boys in prison they started to journey home. Everybody seemed to enjoy the ramble, and it has been decided to hold another within a month's time. It is worthy of note that the four branches represented were at one time all combined in one branch called the Aberdare and Merthyr Branch, of which Comrade Emrys Hughes is secretary.⁸¹

A central activity of the NCF branch was to support imprisoned COs and their families in prison and after release. In October 1916, Briton Ferry's NCF branch held a large social gathering to welcome back three of the men who had imprisoned in Swansea Prison for distributing leaflets:

we welcome back into our midst three of our gallant comrades, who after having the pleasure of being the guests of his Majesty the King, have returned to civilian life for a time which his Majesty's Ministers think fit... After tea, a short entertainment was provided with Florrie Lambert who sang "There is a long, long train". Arthur Armstrong, chairman of the branch, followed with a short speech ; another song by Miss Thomas 'A Canadian Boat Song' in splendid style. Councillor Henry Davies (Cwmavon), the South Wales and Monmouthshire Divisional representative on the National Executive, followed by a short but lucid speech referring to the suffering of COs. The entertainment concluded by singing the 'Red Flag'. Dancing followed, in which I perceived Comrade Ivor Thomas skipping about well to the front, as he always is in great progressive movements. The Briton Ferry Cooperative Society catered for the Social.⁸²

The same evening, the *Pioneer's* Cwmavon and Port Talbot correspondent reported an event where two conscientious objectors, John and Sidney Bamford, were presented with

⁸¹ *ibid*, 26 August 1916.

⁸² *ibid*, 7 October 1916.

a gold pendant, a silver cigarette case and a purse of money, subscribed by a number of friends. Both had accepted alternative service and were now employed by the Copper Miners' Tinsplate Company. Another social event, to welcome Tal Mainwaring, following his release from Swansea Prison, was held in Taibach with 200 people present, and it was reported that 'thanks to the ILP element in the local branch', the branch of the British Steelsmelters Union, had decided that conscientious objectors should be accorded the same welcome as soldiers returning from the front.⁸³ The NCF's Pontypridd branch held a tea and social evening, with a recitation by Miss Rowlands, the Rev. George Neighbour, Mountain Ash, following with a short speech, 'humorous yet redolent with propaganda'. A song was sung by Miss Thomas, and a few remarks were made on the influence of the NCF by Mr. Ted Williams. Mr Tom Rowland recited 'The Red Dawn' and the meeting closed to the strains of the 'Red Flag' and cheers for the International,⁸⁴ and the NCF also organised events to raise the spirits of CO prisoners by organizing singing outside the prisons, and especially so outside Wormwood Scrubbs.⁸⁵

From the summer of 1916 to the summer of 1918, the 'honorary' organiser, albeit part-time, of the NCF in South Wales was Minnie Pallister. She worked in the main office in London for a short time in the summer of 1916, and Catherine Marshall had found her contribution useful. It seems they may discussed the creation of a full-time organiser's post for the NCF in south Wales, for Marshall thanked her for her work but thought that the position in south Wales did not merit such an appointment:

after carefully considering the S. Wales position, in relation to the work in the Divisions, we have come to the conclusion that we should not be justified at present in putting a whole-time organiser then. We would however very much like you to undertake to carry on the maintenance work so far as you are able to do so.

However, the relationship seems to have been of value to Marshall:

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 22 June 1918.

⁸⁵ *The Tribunal*, 17 May 1917.

I am so glad you enjoyed your brief sojourn in London and felt it worth while. I am always keen on keeping the work in the provinces and the work of headquarters in close touch. Both sides need it.⁸⁶

Pallister was appointed the ILP's organiser for South Wales in June, 1918 and in a slightly catty comment in the *Pioneer* she was complimented for her organisational ability with the NCF: 'it is in the last sphere rather than in the ILP that she has conspicuously won her spurs as an organiser before the eyes of the South Wales movement as a whole.'⁸⁷ But the patronising *Pioneer* warned that she should concern herself more with organisation than propaganda:

Miss Pallister always has been a successful platform propagandist, probably the best of her sex that we have in Wales, and we must not overlook the fact that the intoxicating effects of the great meeting possesses a charm that might seduce even one of her level-headedness and cool sanity to occasionally forget that organisation is a genius for taking pains in the little things of the movement.⁸⁸

The organising secretary of the NCF in south Wales was Agnes Hughes, sister of Emrys Hughes and much of their work was in spreading propaganda and raising money for conscientious objectors and their dependants.⁸⁹ Another important link between the NCF's head office and the NCF in Wales was the daughter of the Revd. John Morgan Jones, Merthyr, Margaret Morgan Jones, who worked in the NCF's office in London in the Conscientious Objectors' Information Bureau, and helped to compile the case files of conscientious objectors.⁹⁰ By May 1917, the NCF had twenty-six branches of the NCF and one Sunday school in South Wales but because of what Pallister referred to euphemistically as the 'migratory character' of the population of conscientious objectors 'it has been found beneficial in some cases to change the Branch centres in this Division',⁹¹ and by the end of the year the number had declined to twenty (see Table Six);

⁸⁶ *Catherine Marshall Papers*, D/MAR/4/9, correspondence between Pallister and Marshall, 29 August 1916, Cumbria Archives.

⁸⁷ *Pioneer*, 8 June 1918.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 1 December 1917.

⁹⁰ *Catherine Marshall Papers*, D/MAR/4/53, letter from Marshall to Minnie Pallister, Cumbria Archives.

⁹¹ *The Tribunal*, 24 May 1917.

Table Six - NCF branches in December 1917

Division 1	Scotland	15
Division 2	North West of England	20
Division 3	North East of England	10
Division 4	Yorkshire	13
Division 5	Midlands	15
Division 6	South of England	24
Division 7	London area	31
Division 8	Wales	20

This was in the context of a total of 150 branches across Britain, split into seven divisions of which the strongest division was the London area with thirty-one branches. There was no formal branch presence in north Wales and the NCF primarily covered the south Wales industrial districts whilst only two branches, Cardiganshire and Pembrokeshire, were located beyond those areas. There was a close correlation between the location of the NCF's branches and the ILP's strongest membership in Wales. Most of the twenty NCF branches in Wales in 1917 were in those areas where the ILP had its strongest branches, based on their financial contribution to the party in 1917-18.⁹² A number of the NCF's branches had been amalgamated to create regional branches by 1917 but the low turnover of branch secretaries between May 1916 and the end of 1917 reflects a surprising stability to the NCF's organisation, in spite of its inherent weakness as its young members were increasingly arrested and sent to prison or to undertake alternative work as conscientious objectors.

iii) Policing and the Persecution of the NCF

An inevitable concern for the NCF was the extent to which its activity was monitored by the security services and the police. From March 1916 onwards, the Glamorganshire Police increased their activity markedly against the NCF. Two members of the NCF, and subsequently conscientious objectors, D.J.Evans and T. Thomas, were arrested and fined ten shillings with one month's imprisonment with hard labour under the DORA legislation

⁹² *Pioneer*, 26 August 1916.

for distributing NCF literature at Cefn, near Merthyr, on Good Friday,⁹³ and four of the Briton Ferry and Port Talbot NCF branch were fined and imprisoned following an anti-conscription public meeting in Port Talbot on 7 May. By the end of the month, twenty five of the NCF's members in Wales had either been imprisoned or were in military barracks awaiting court martial. Two more NCF and ILP activists, William Davies and the chairman of the Briton Ferry NCF Garnet Watters, were arrested under the DORA legislation for distributing pamphlets and sentenced to one month's imprisonment with hard labour.⁹⁴

In May 1916, the police raided the offices of the NCF in the ILP centre in Cwmavon and confiscated all the branch propaganda literature and the branch's correspondence and minute book. The secretary of the Briton Ferry branch of the NCF, A.H. Armstrong, wrote that day to NCF headquarters, warning that police action locally imperilled the organisation's effectiveness:

I suggest that the distribution of future leaflets should be seriously considered or we shall all be imprisoned, not that we fear imprisonment, but our services, and the services of many many men we cannot afford to lose will be lost to us. Our ILP premises here was raided by the Police, a Superintendent, Inspector, two sergeants, and a constable, we were holding a branch meeting in the small room over our shop, discussing matters concerning our two comrades who were summoned. When the police arrived, they said they did not want to disturb everything in our little shop (stationery, sweets, literature, tobacco) if we would show them and produce for them, all our publications on the War, we willingly complied of course, they then took the names and addresses of the chairman, secretary and treasurer. So we are awaiting events. The fact is that any matter published in the war can be held to be "prejudicial to training and discipline in His Majesty's Forces" we are under the Iron Heel.⁹⁵

In the next week a branch meeting at the ILP office in Briton Ferry was raided by five policemen again led by Superintendent Ben Evans, and they took away leaflets and pamphlets. The NCF's paper *The Tribunal*, reflected on the intense police activity in the Briton Ferry area and warned against the bullying of the NCF's solicitor in south Wales,

⁹³ *ibid*, 29 April 1916.

⁹⁴ *ibid*, 20 May 1916.

⁹⁵ *Catherine Marshall Papers*, D/MAR4/95, letter from Armstrong, 13 May, 1916, Cumbria Archives.

Edward Roberts, a 'small pale faced solicitor from Merthyr', who was a well known socialist, a regular attender at Merthyr's Sunday anti-war meetings and who represented Emrys Hughes in his first court-martial in Cardiff Barracks:⁹⁶

The police are very busy in South Wales just now, especially in the Neath Division. Raids have been made on ILP and NCF centres in search of literature "prejudicial to recruiting" and one expects an outburst of political intelligence from the man in blue in this Division. Over a dozen summonses under the Defence of the Realm Act have been taken out in Briton Ferry, Port Talbot and Cwmavon, secured by the police, and the military representative for the Aberavon Borough Tribunal (Mr F.B.Smith) paid a personal visit to the solicitor engaged for the defence of the Port Talbot and Cwmavon cases and warned him that if he appeared in any of the Defence of the Realm cases he would immediately apply for a variation of his certificate of exemption and get him arrested as an absentee ! One wonders what the Incorporated Society of Law Servants has to say in reference to this grave interference with the privileges of its profession.⁹⁷

In Wales, the raids continued and the ILP rooms in Bargoed were raided by police on 29 May: 'fresh faces were seen in these premises. They left with a good deal of convincing Socialist literature. The raid was carried out in the best of spirits'.⁹⁸ More prosecutions were brought against a second group of Briton Ferry ILP members who were accused of 'distributing articles likely to cause disaffection and prejudicial to His Majesty's subjects'.⁹⁹

The *Pioneer's* editor described this police activity as the pursuit of a 'policy of suppression with a violence that savours of vindictiveness' which caused distrust and unrest in community and contrasted it with the series of 'moving Democratic conferences' against conscription and for Peace by negotiation.¹⁰⁰ Large anti-conscription meetings continued to be held in Merthyr, Swansea Valley, Bargoed, and Cwmavon throughout the summer, and invariably included a motion that opposed the Government's treatment of conscientious objectors. The Merthyr Anti- Conscription meeting supported a motion to protest against the 'persecution of men who had conscientious objection to military service'

⁹⁶ *Hardie and Hughes Papers*, Dep 176, box 9, *Welsh Overture*, National Library of Scotland; *Pioneer*, 6 May 1916.

⁹⁷ *The Tribunal*, 8 June 1916.

⁹⁸ *Pioneer*, 3 June 1916.

⁹⁹ *ibid*, 17 June 1916.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*.

and Bargoed, Aberbargoed and Brithdir Councils against Conscription called for an inquiry into the methods of dealing with conscientious objectors, and was reportedly attended by representatives of twenty thousand people. Anti-conscription meetings in the Swansea Valley attracted crowds of a thousand in Ystradgynlais, fifteen hundred in Pontardawe, and a 'large crowd' in an open-air meeting in Glais. All three meetings passed a motion that urged the Government to open for 'a just and lasting peace' and to protest against the 'harsh treatment meted out to conscientious objectors',¹⁰¹ and these meetings increased in size throughout the summer and autumn of 1916. A peace meeting addressed by Philip Snowden in Abertillery reportedly drew an audience of three thousand people and a meeting of the Merthyr Peace Society, with his wife, Ethel Snowden speaking drew an audience of five thousand, demanding that persecution of conscientious objectors by the Government should come to an end.¹⁰²

Bertrand Russell, the acting chairman of the NCF, entered the febrile atmosphere of south Wales in July 1916 and conducted a three-week speaking tour of the south Wales valleys, where he contrasted the difficulty of conducting anti-war activity in London with the enthusiastic support he received in Wales:

I spent three weeks in the mining areas of Wales, speaking sometimes in halls, sometimes out-of-doors. I never had an interrupted meeting, and always found the majority of the audience sympathetic so long as I confined myself to industrial areas. In London however, the matter was different.¹⁰³

In addition to the crowded meetings described in Chapter Three's section on the ILP in Briton Ferry, he addressed further meetings in the Swansea Valley and the Merthyr area, at the Rink in Merthyr, Abercanaid, Troedyrhiw and Dowlais, and in Pontypridd, Abertillery and Cwmavon.¹⁰⁴ At the last meeting of his tour, at the Friends Meeting House in Cardiff, for the first time he was greeted by hecklers. As a result of that meeting, at which its audience was denounced as a 'lot of miserable, pro-German, sentimental traitors' by Captain Atherley Jones, the Home Office took legal action against him later that summer. His speech led to him being prohibited by military decree on 31 August 1916, forbidding

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, 24 June 1916.

¹⁰² *Pioneer*, 1 July 1916.

¹⁰³ Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell 1914-1944* (George Allen and Unwin, 1968) 24, 25.

¹⁰⁴ *Pioneer*, 15 July 1916.

him from entering any 'prohibited area' and stopping him from making public speeches. The Minister for Munitions, Lloyd George, accused Russell of preparing lectures that would lead to 'weakness, inefficiency, and if tolerated, would hamper us in the prosecution of the War.'¹⁰⁵ Significantly, his reception in Cardiff was in stark contrast to the supportive and thoughtful response he had received in the south Wales coalfield.¹⁰⁶

Russell subsequently felt that perhaps he should have gone to more hostile districts because south Wales was 'merely a picnic' but his observations suggest that the presence of such a level of support for the anti-war movement in south Wales, in contrast to his unhappy experiences elsewhere, impressed him deeply.¹⁰⁷

Throughout the summer of 1916, the NCF worked with other anti-war organizations to create 'Peace Councils' in industrial areas such as Aberdare and Gorseinon:

Yes ! A real spiritual revival was held at the Institute last Thursday...Here were Liberals, Conservatives, Labour men, ILPers, UDC, FOR, NCF, Socialists and those with no policies at all...to form a Peace Council at Gorseinon. There were people there 'from all parts of Wales'. One young minister said 'he knew men that evening, who were Liberals, and had been staunch Liberals but like himself, had set aside everything to work for peace. There was no time for politics. What a set-back for democracy of the world, this war had been...it was not an easy thing to be a Pacifist, because it was an uphill fight.'¹⁰⁸

The police raids on NCF officials continued in the autumn of 1916 and during the first week of September, twenty seven homes and offices were searched, including eight homes in south Wales, in Pontypool, Swansea Valley, Port Talbot, Taibach, Pengam and Cardiff.¹⁰⁹ These included the home of the mother of the Gorseinon NCF secretary, D.J. Williams, in Pontarddulais, where literature was seized and he was summoned to court.¹¹⁰ The secretary of the Swansea Valley branch of the NCF, Tom Evans, appeared in Pontardawe before a 'packed court', and was fined £35 for contravening Regulation 29 of the Defence of the Realm Act, for being in possession of certain documents likely to 'prejudice the

¹⁰⁵ *House of Commons Papers*, Hansard, Oral answers column 533,534, 18 October 1916, HMSO.

¹⁰⁶ Vellacott, *Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists*, 88-89.

¹⁰⁷ Griffin, *The Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell*, 67.

¹⁰⁸ *Pioneer*, 29 July 1916: 12 August 1916.

¹⁰⁹ *The Tribunal*, 7 September 1916.

¹¹⁰ *ibid*, 11 November 1916.

recruiting, training, discipline or administration of His Majesty's Forces'. The prosecution accused Evans of 'having a hindering effect of the anti-war movement on the Army', and Evans refused to pay his fine.¹¹¹

The first conventions of the South Wales and Wales Divisions of the NCF were held on the first weekend of November 1916, presided over by Councillor Harry Davies. They were followed by a public meeting in which Minnie Pallister presided, and addresses were given by Revd. George Neighbour and Fenner Brockway, who gained the disdain of the south Wales newspapers by his statement that if Britain really wished to inaugurate permanent peace after the war, she should 'sink her navy and disband her army'.¹¹² As conscientious objectors were imprisoned in greater numbers, the NCF continued to attempt to broaden the base of protest against conscription and the treatment of conscientious objectors. In July 1917, protest letters were sent by twenty trades councils and eighty-nine trade union and Labour branches against the ill-treatment of conscientious objectors. These included Aberdare, Pontardawe and Treherbert trades councils, the Maesteg and Oswestry branches of the National Union of Railwaymen, the ASLEF branch at Landore. Swansea, four Miners' Federation lodges at Tylorstown, Cwmdru, Abertridwr and Tillery, and two mass meetings of miners in Cwmavon and Afan Valley District, and the Llanelly Labour Association.¹¹³ This attempt to broaden the base of support for the NCF was also reflected in the organisation's close relationship with the National Council of Civil Liberties and its attempts to oppose the extension of conscription into the mining industry in particular. In the summer of 1917, the NCF's attitude towards the creation of workers and soldiers 'soviets' or councils, following the Russian Revolution in March, reflected a tension between those such as Morgan Jones, who believed that the NCF should confine itself to opposing Conscription and preserving the right of conscience, and the majority of the NCF's national committee who decided to be represented in the first workers and soldiers conference in Leeds.¹¹⁴

As the war progressed, the NCF's attention was increasingly drawn to campaigning against the conditions under which many conscientious objectors were held. In February 1918, East Glamorganshire branches met in Newport and decided to commence a

¹¹¹ *ibid*, 2 December 1916.

¹¹² *ibid*, 9 November 1916.

¹¹³ *Catherine Marshall Papers*, D/MAR/4/21, Cumbria Archives.

¹¹⁴ *ibid*, D/MAR/4/25, letter to branch secretaries, 17 July 1917, Cumbria Archives.

‘vigorous propaganda to secure the release of our tortured comrades’,¹¹⁵ but the organization suffered its own internal crisis early in 1918. In January 1917, Morgan Jones had returned from prison as the NCF’s representative on the national committee, replacing his substitute, the 48 year old Henry (or Harry) Davies, Cwmavon. According to *Llais Llafur*, no Socialist in south Wales was better known¹¹⁶ and in addition to his role as chair of the Cwmavon branch of the ILP and a leader of the NCF in south Wales, he was highly regarded in labour circles, had been the county councillor for Cwmavon and had been selected by the local ILP branches as their nominee for the new Aberavon division at the General Election to be held at the end of the war. He had been employed as assistant overseer and collector of rates for a local parish for thirteen years, as well as serving as clerk to the Cwmavon Parish Council and he was a member of the Board of Managers for the Port Talbot Group of Schools,¹¹⁷ But his arrest on charges of embezzlement of one thousand pounds in January 1918 caused a seismic shock for the ILP and NCF in south Wales. His supporters compared him to a highwayman who had robbed from the rich to give to the poor and Davies received a sympathetic note from Catherine Marshall, who, even though his disgrace would have been profoundly damaging for the ILP and the NCF locally, hoped they could work together again:

I have just heard that you have been charged with embezzling money, and have pleaded guilty. I know no more than that – but this I do know, that if it is true you must have been through – terrible tortures of mind and spirit.¹¹⁸

He was imprisoned for fifteen months in the second division. Surprisingly and curiously, Davies’s main character witness was the arresting police officer, Superintendent Ben Evans, who had previously pursued and prosecuted NCF and ILP activists successfully in Cwmavon and the Briton Ferry area, including Davies. In court he described Davies as a man of ‘sober habits and good moral character’ but that his motivation for the embezzlement had been his political activism and in an unhelpful assessment he concluded:

¹¹⁵ *Pioneer*, 9 March 1918.

¹¹⁶ *Llais Llafur*, 26 January 1918.

¹¹⁷ *Pioneer*, 12 January 1918; 26 January 1918.

¹¹⁸ *Catherine Marshall Papers*, D/MAR/4/16, letter from Marshall to Henry Davies, Cumbria Archives.

that to a certain extent it (the money) has gone in propaganda to the Socialist party, of which he is a member, and has taken a very prominent part during the past four years. The prisoner addressed meetings in the district, and he had reason to believe that he had done great harm to the young men of the community.

In mitigation, the defending barrister, Llewellyn Williams K.C.,M.P., gave a more prosaic explanation, that Davies got into financial trouble and borrowed money to pay his debts. When he failed to borrow more he succumbed to the temptation of using some of the public moneys which he collected but his political career lay in ruins.¹¹⁹

What he had done in fact was..given it to some poor bugger in distress and this poor chap couldn't hand it back to him in time to cover it up,you know...but he went down the drain socially at once when he had¹²⁰.

By the last year of the war, the momentum of the NCF's activity had inevitably slowed and whilst many branches continued to campaign for the release of imprisoned conscientious objectors, membership declined and it was 'both physically and psychologically a badly depleted organisation'.¹²¹ Even the Military Service (No.2) Act of 1918 raising the age limit to fifty-one and the extension of conscription to Ireland failed to attract new members and the NCF directed its energy towards the release of the two thousand conscientious objectors still imprisoned. A campaign was started to release objectors in January, and a memorial signed by 162 prominent people, with Principal Thomas Rees as the sole Welsh signatory.¹²² On 8 April 1919, the first absolutists were set free but only those who had served at least two years were released and others were only released at the end of their current sentences or after two statutory years, whichever came first. It was finally on 30 July 1919 that the last absolutist conscientious objectors were released, but ironically, a number of the conscientious objectors who had followed the Army's advice and joined the Non-Combatant Corps were not released until late 1919 or even 1920.

The NCF was brought to an end in its concluding Convention in November 1919 'since it had fulfilled its particular work' but it appointed three committees, to guard against

¹¹⁹ *South Wales Daily News*, 6 March 1918.

¹²⁰ South Wales Coalfield Collection, W.H. Gregory interview, Aud/289, Swansea University.

¹²¹ Kennedy, *Hound of Conscience*, 262-263.

¹²² *The Tribunal*, 9 January 1919.

Conscription, to provide a link for pacifists, and to oppose military training in schools. Its final resolution highlighted its altruistic and utopian hope that it was not through bloodshed that 'freedom could be won or militarism destroyed', but that 'through its long and bitter suffering mankind must yet come into the way of love.'¹²³

The NCCL in Wales succeeded in bringing together those in the trade union movement and trades councils who feared the imposition of conscription in civilian life, and especially in those industries such as coal, steel and the railways, that were essential to the country's war effort. In Wales, its organizer, Ivor Thomas, succeeded in uniting this concern with opposition to the war, and ensured that the voice was amplified to such an extent that the authorities came to view the anti-conscription lobby as a branch of the anti-war movement. Whilst all who opposed the war opposed the extension of conscription, not all who opposed conscription, opposed the war. But as the NCCL's meeting in Merthyr Tydfil in December 1916 shows clearly, the two elements could combine to form a powerful lobby that gave Government and its intelligence agencies pause for thought. The NCF was rather more directly involved in organizing conscientious objectors and giving practical support to them and their dependants. The local organizers of the ILP, the NCCL and NCF were often closely associated or often the same people, as is exemplified by a study of the anti-war movement in Briton Ferry and Merthyr Tydfil. This depth of support provided a reservoir of passive and active support for anti-war activists that sustained them even as many were arrested and imprisoned as conscientious objectors from May 1916 onwards.

¹²³ *The No-Conscription Fellowship*, 85, 92.

Chapter Five

Conscientious Objectors in Wales

Introduction

This chapter analyses the extent and nature of conscientious objection in Wales during the Great War and describes the provision made for them as they responded in different ways to the choices given to them by the Government. The conscientious objectors were a diverse group with vastly different backgrounds, views and politics and their consciences covered a range of motivations, ranging from those Christians who took the commandment prohibiting killing to mean they could take no part in the military, to those who embraced international socialism and refused to fight their fellow workers.¹ A minority of conscientious objectors such as the Christadelphians were 'not conscientiously opposed to bearing arms' as such, but were rather opposed 'to fighting in the armies of the world', and became the only grouping of men to be recognised formally by the Army as conscientious objectors on the basis of their faith.² The view of the military and of the vast majority of tribunals, was that conscientious objection should be limited to religious grounds and the refusal to recognise conscientious objection on political grounds was reflected in the new system. The Labour pro-war newspaper circulating in the Swansea Valley, *Llais Llafur*, for instance, imparted this prejudice:

persons who have a conscientious objection grounded in religion, to military service have a right of total or partial exemption. It is not clear how far the same exemption extends to political objectors. The justification for the indulgence shown to the Quaker is that non-resistance is with him a life-long

¹Bibbings, *Telling Tales about Men*, 4,5.

²Jannaway, *Without the Camp*, 32-35.

creed...The political objector has no such claim as the Quaker on the public indulgence. Local tribunals will have to use their own judgment as to how far they will exempt political objectors from combatant service, but we hope they will not err on the side of leniency.³

Those men who were granted conditional exemption by a tribunal, or had failed in their appeals, were 'deemed...to have been duly enlisted' by the Military Service Act and were liable for service for the period of the war. If they failed to comply with a notice paper calling them to the colours, they were arrested by the civil police and charged as deserters, then a court of summary jurisdiction fined them and placed them in military custody.⁴ Once in military custody, usually in the Area Headquarters of the Army, conscientious objectors would soon make it clear that they were determined to resist all attempts to make them soldiers by refusing to undergo medical examination, to sign documents or put on uniform. In Wales, the main Army Area headquarters was Maindy Barracks in Cardiff, and most conscientious objectors were transferred to the Army camps in Kinmel Park near Rhyl, or Park Hall near Oswestry, where they were subsequently courtmartialled if they had not been already courtmartialled in the Area Headquarters in Cardiff.

But there were also examples of leading military figures such as Brigadier Owen Thomas, responsible for the Army camps in North Wales who showed compassion to conscientious objectors in Army custody. His treatment of COs was reported by George M.Ll. Davies to be 'quite exceptional in its moderation, though some of the sentences have been very severe ones.'⁵ He also received a letter from Revd. John Williams, Brynsiencyn, in which he described Thomas's ready understanding of the conscientious objectors' stance:

³ *Llais Llafur*, 12 February 1916.

⁴ War Office, Registration and Recruiting, August 1916, 13-15, cited in Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 66.

⁵ *E.K. Jones Papers*, Box 29, letter from George M.Ll.Davies to Jones, 26 June 1916, NLW.

I am now staying with the Brigadier (Owen Thomas) and I had a chat with him last night re the contents of your letter. You have heard I am sure how kind and sympathetic he has been towards the conscientious objectors who are in the camp, so much so that they have written to thank him for his great kindness. He says that there will be no objection whatever for ministers and others to visit them.⁶

The creation of the Brace Committee's 'Home Office' Scheme and the Pelham Committee's provision of 'work of national importance' was a belated response to the growing political and moral dilemma for the Government and Army's dilemma of what to do with the conscientious objectors. In the summer of 1916, the 'Home Office' Scheme was established under a committee under the chairmanship of the south Wales Member of Parliament, former President of the SWMF (1912-15), and Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office, William Brace.⁷ This determined the conditions for conscientious objectors to be offered work and created what were considered appropriate work camps.⁸ The Pelham Committee was also created to provide advice to tribunals as to 'what service of national importance an applicant for exemption on the ground of conscientious objection should undertake'⁹ and attempted to operate as an employment exchange for conscientious objectors, bringing together young men referred by the tribunals and employers who needed labour, especially in agricultural work, and men of more mature age and poor physique in clerical employment or light manual labour.¹⁰

While these alternatives suited many COs, the 'work camps' proved increasingly unpopular with COs in 1917, and those who protested or rebelled were often handed back into military custody and civilian prison. The minority

⁶ *E.K. Jones Papers*, Box 29 letter from George M.Ll.Davies to E.K. Jones, 24 May 1916, NLW.

⁷ John Williams, 'Brace, William (1865-1947)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁸ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 161.

⁹ *ibid*, 125.

¹⁰ *T.E. Harvey Papers*, Box 9, Pelham Committee Report, 1919, Friends House Library.

of intransigent absolutists continued to frustrate the authorities and refused to compromise in any way with the authorities.

Conditional exemption was given to those objectors who expressed a willingness to accept alternative service on the basis that they undertook work or continued to be employed in work that was deemed to be 'of national importance'. Absolute exemption completely absolved men from any service but the tribunals were invariably reluctant to grant more than partial exemption and a number disputed whether conditional exemption or absolute exemption was available in cases of conscience.¹¹ The Bangor Tribunal in February 1916 was a rare exception in granting absolute exemption to eight out of twenty-three students from Bala-Bangor theological college who were in the midst of their studies.¹²

The local tribunals created to enact the Military Service Act and to hear appeals for exemption, were organised on the basis of the local government boundaries of town councils, metropolitan borough councils and urban and rural district councils in England, Scotland and Wales. Its members were 'civilian, middle class and public-minded'¹³ and nominated by local authorities. Whilst containing a majority of councillors, tradesmen predominated particularly in urban areas, whilst in rural areas, they were dominated by landowners and farmers. Most consisted of a lawyer and a representative of the labour interest.¹⁴ In theory, the applicant and the Military Representative had an unrestricted right of appeal against the local tribunal's judgment, if they so wished but, as Rae points out, the approach of individual appeals tribunals differed wildly, and the interpretation of what constituted conscientious objection varied hugely across the country.¹⁵

The Local Government Board's early guidance to the tribunals stated clearly

¹¹ *ibid.*, 117-120.

¹² *Bala-Bangor Papers*, folio 3169, Bangor University.

¹³ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 57.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 52-61.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 97.

that ‘the man who honestly and as a matter of conscience objects to combatant service is entitled to exemption’ and tribunals were enjoined to interpret the Act in a ‘impartial and tolerant spirit’.¹⁶ This provision for exemption was qualified by the statement that every consideration should be given to the man whose ‘objection genuinely rests on religious or moral convictions.’ But most tribunals interpreted this clause as meaning that no exemption should be given to a politically-based application for exemption on the grounds of conscientious objection. Neither did many consider that absolute exemption could be granted, and the clerk to the Denbigh Appeal Tribunal for instance, wrote that the majority of members were not aware that they had the right to give absolute exemption.¹⁷

The tribunals’ members had difficulty in dealing with their role as arbitrators of conscience, and members included those who had enthusiastically championed the voluntary Derby Scheme which had invited prospective recruits to attest their intention to enlist. Their role in the military recruiting organisation, the uncompromising policy advocated by the NCF, the pressures of time, and the limitations of the Government’s provisions, all made it hard for the members to avoid coming to decisions that were unacceptable to many applicants.¹⁸

i) Enumerating Conscientious Objectors in Wales

There was no central database or definitive list of named conscientious objectors collated during the Great War and in 1921, the Ministry of Health, which took over responsibility for tribunal records, ordered that all personal papers relating to exemption on the grounds of conscientious objection, and all minute books with the exception of the Central Tribunal, the Lothian and Peebles tribunal in Scotland and the Middlesex tribunal in England, should be

¹⁶ *Ministry of Health Papers*, Class 10, Local Government Board Circular, ‘Relating to the Constitution, Functions and Procedure of local Tribunals’, February 1916, NA.

¹⁷ *War Office Papers*, 32/2051, 3319, NA.

¹⁸ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 133.

destroyed.¹⁹ However, a number of these local records survive and in Wales, the records have been retained in local county archives for the Monmouthshire and Cardiganshire Appeal Tribunals, the Cardiff Rural district tribunal, the Chirk local tribunal in Denbighshire and the Laugharne local tribunals in Carmarthenshire. Most appellants appeared in order to be released from being recruited on the basis of their family circumstances or business need, and these local records confirm that there was an extremely small number of appellants who came before them as conscientious objectors. The Cardiganshire Appeal Tribunal, for example, heard only eight appeals from conscientious objectors amongst the hundreds of appeals it heard in its fifty-nine meetings,²⁰ but one major difficulty in measuring and assessing the numbers of conscientious objectors lies in the fact that men could appeal for exemption on numerous grounds, and that individuals who appeared before tribunals were not always named.

The main attempts to quantify the number of conscientious objectors in Britain hitherto have been made by John Graham who estimates the number of COs as 16,100, and John Rae as 16,000-16,500. Graham recognized the difficulty of providing reliable figures for the actual number of conscientious objectors²¹ and based his figures for COs primarily on the basis of the reports of the NCF's Conscientious Objectors' Information Bureau, the FAU, and the Report of the Pelham Committee. He suggested that the number of COs would have been greater if many had not been influenced by their family circumstances:

It was not uncommon to hear men say that the prospect of leaving mother or wife nearly destitute prevented them taking the stand they would otherwise have taken, and one must admit, if not the validity, at least the force of this plea.²²

¹⁹ *ibid*, 259.

²⁰ Cardiganshire Appeal Tribunal Records, CTB 2,3, NLW: Hubert H. Vaughan, 'The Cardiganshire Appeal Tribunal March 1916-November 1918', *Wales* 25 (Spring 1947),177.

²¹ Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, 344.

²² *ibid* 345.

The number was also substantially reduced because of those men employed in trades that were exempted for most of the war, such as the coal, metal and the railway industries in particular, in which the majority of the Welsh working population were employed (see Table Seven below):

Table Seven - Conscientious Objectors - John Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*²³

Arrested	6,261
Pelham Committee cases	3,964
Friends' Ambulance Unit	1,200
War Victims' Relief Co.	200
Working directly under Tribunals	900
Non-combatant Corps	3,300
Royal Army Medical Corps	100
Evaded the Act	175
Total	16,100

Rae recognises that the lack of a central method of collating information about conscientious objectors makes it difficult to provide a definitive total,²⁴ but his calculation of the numbers of conscientious objectors was informed by newly available Government sources in the nineteen sixties, including the report of the Home Office Scheme's Central Tribunal and its statistical appendices, which were not available to Graham. He suggests that the number of those who were exempted from combatant service is between a thousand and fifteen hundred men and his total therefore is a similar number to Graham, at between 16,000 and 16,500 (see Table Eight below). This number represents approximately 0.66 per cent of the recruits after January 1916, which

²³ *ibid*, 349.

²⁴ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 70.

demanded a disproportionate amount of the military and the civilian authorities' attention at the time.²⁵

Table Eight - Conscientious Objectors in Britain - John Rae, Conscience and Politics²⁶

1. Exempt from all military service	
a) Absolutely or conditionally	5,111
b)'From combatant service only conditional on being engaged on work of national importance	1000-1500
2. Exempt from combatant service only	
a) Served in the Non-Combatant Corps	2,919
b) Refused to serve and court-martialled	1,969
3) Refused exemption by the tribunal	2,425
Number of COs subject to tribunal decisions approx.	13,700
Others-	
a) Conditionally exempt by the Army council (Christadelphians)	1,400
b) Did not apply for exemption on the grounds of conscientious objection	1,234
c) Miscellaneous (cases heard after December 1919)	224
	2,858
Total number of all conscientious objectors:	Approx 16,000-16,500

Although historians such as Boulton, Moorehead and Hochschild²⁷ have tended to emphasise the role of the absolutist conscientious objectors, Rae calculates that the tribunals granted conditional exemption to over eighty per cent of conscientious objectors before them. Neither Rae or Graham

²⁵ *ibid*, 71.

²⁶ *ibid*, 132.

²⁷ Boulton, *Objection Overruled*; Moorehead, *Troublesome People*; Hochschild, *To End All Wars*.

attempted to identify individual conscientious objectors, to identify the geographical distribution of objectors in Britain, or to identify the grounds for their conscientious objection. Both Rae and Graham accepted the official definition of a conscientious objector and the main differences in their two total figures lie in the interpretation of the outcome for those who enrolled in the NCC. Graham over-estimated the number of COs in the NCC because serving officers were included in his total, but he specifies that a further 1,969 refused to serve and were courtmartialled, thus providing more detail, than Graham's general description of 'arrested'. Revd. E.K. Jones, a visitor on behalf of the NCF, who worked in North Wales and the Marches, writing at the end of the War, recognised the difficulty of estimating the correct number of conscientious objectors:

Some to my knowledge appealed to the Tribunal on more than one ground (including conscientious objection) and got exemption. Many others would not be called up at all. Some escaped the bands that scoured the country for men that had not reported themselves. These bands searched houses and attended public meetings, examining all doubtful persons and arresting many. Some COs would start as absolutists and break down under hard treatment ultimately seeking NCC work. Who, knowing what they had to undergo, can blame them ?²⁸

The *Pearce Register* has captured the details of over seventeen thousand anti-war activists in Britain during the First World War, including the majority of conscientious objectors.²⁹ The database not only includes conscientious objectors, but also those who were arrested as anti-war activists and includes members of the Welsh company of the RAMC raised in north Wales, who joined on condition that they would not have to bear arms, and who were for all purposes regarded as conscientious objectors. However, the definition of a 'conscientious objector', on the basis of the Military Service Act excludes these

²⁸ *E.K. Jones Papers*, Box 29, NLW.

²⁹ *Pearce Register*, 2016.

individuals from the recognised list of objectors, and the definition of a conscientious objector deployed in this study is the official one described in the Military Service Act and deployed by Rae and Graham.

The total number of men identified as conscientious objectors in Wales during the First World War is approximately nine hundred and this analysis of conscientious objectors in Wales is primarily based on the *Pearce Register* of anti-war activists in Britain in the First World War. The main sources for this database are the records of the Brace Committee's Central Tribunal,³⁰ reports of military court martials,³¹ local newspapers and conscientious objectors' archives. In Wales, the primary sources are the reports of the most prominent anti-war newspaper in Wales, the *Pioneer*, and other archive collections, including the contemporary reports of the NCF's Conscientious Objectors' Information Bureau, the NCF's weekly paper, *The Tribunal* and individual archive collections such as those of Rev. E.K. Jones, Cefnmawr, who was the NCF's official visitor to the Army camps in North Wales and Shropshire. Many of Wales's recruits, including at least a sixth of all conscientious objectors from Wales, were held in those Army camps, and his records detail information of the 159 objectors from Wales on whom he reported.³² The Pelham Committee's final report also provides information about the 207 conscientious objectors from Wales who were employed to do 'work of national importance' as part of the Scheme, including a total of 151 Christadelphians, although most are not identified by name.³³ The personnel files of the FAU also reveal another twenty eight COs from Wales of whom half were Quakers, and the other half were Nonconformists³⁴ whilst the Friends War Volunteer Relief organisation included eight members from Wales.

This total of approximately nine hundred represents approximately 5.6 per cent of the total number of British conscientious objectors. In comparison to

³⁰ *Ministry of Health Papers*, 47/1, Records of the Brace Committee's Central Tribunal, NA.

³¹ *War Office Papers*, 363, Reports of Military Court Martials, NA.

³² *E.K. Jones Papers*, Box 2, NLW.

³³ *T.E. Harvey Papers*, MSS 835/9, Friends House Library.

³⁴ *Friends Ambulance Unit Papers*, Personnel records, 588-601 POS, Friends House Library.

the 127,609 recruited into the armed forces from Wales under conscription from January 1916 onwards, it represents 0.7 per cent of the total of men available to be recruited in that period, and their average age was 26. Over half declared an allegiance to a political or religious organization and thirty-five per cent declared it to the NCF. Of that total, almost a third (forty-nine) declared their allegiance to both the NCF and the ILP, and another thirty-five declared their allegiance both to the NCF and either a religious denomination or the FoR. The NCF essentially provided the organizational framework for conscientious objectors, and its members pledged allegiance to a myriad of causes. An example of the breadth of allegiance was the objector who defined himself as an ILPer, a Socialist, Congregationalist and member of the NCF, and another declared his allegiance to the NCF, FoR and the UDC and described himself both as a Baptist and Quaker.³⁵

Of those conscientious objectors enumerated in Wales, a total of at least four hundred and seven conscientious objectors professed a religious allegiance when they appeared before military tribunals, and this number reflected a wide range of attitudes amongst religious groups towards the war. These conscientious objectors included at least thirty theological students who succeeded in gaining exemption from military service by pleading that they were in the process of being trained for the ministry and were due to be ordained. Whilst the majority of theological students gained exemption there were isolated exceptions such as the case of Ben Meyrick, a Baptist minister in Anglesey and a member of the FoR. He was a conscientious objector but was refused exemption, and despite a series of appeals and campaigns led by Rev. E.K. Jones and others, he was sentenced in October 1917 to two years imprisonment with hard labour.³⁶

Of those who declared an allegiance in their tribunal, or in information provided to the NCF, approximately half of COs in Wales declared an

³⁵ *Pearce Register*, 2016.

³⁶ *E.K. Jones Papers*, Box 2, 24 February 1916, NLW.

allegiance to a particular religious or political organisation, and of those who declared an allegiance, over seventy per cent did so in relation to a religious organisation (see Table Nine below).

Table Nine - Stated Religious Allegiance of Conscientious Objectors

Christadelphians	155
Quakers	51
Baptists	46
Congregationalists	58
Fellowship of Reconciliation	31
Methodists	21
Jehovahs Witnesses	7
Plymouth Brethren	17
Wesleyan	7
Church of England	8
Jewish	7
Unitarian	1
Church of Christ	1
Catholic	1
Salvation Army	1
Total	412

The largest single group of religious conscientious objectors was the Christadelphians, who did not oppose the war as much as oppose the Government's attempt to impose its will on the church's members. Of all the religious organizations, only the Christadelphian church succeeded in obtaining a general dispensation during the war that gave exemption to its members of military age on the basis that they would accept work of national importance under the control of the Pelham Committee.³⁷ In Wales, one hundred and fifty five men, or twenty seven per cent of the total number of

³⁷ Jannaway, *Without the Camp*, 198-203.

objectors from Wales who expressed an allegiance, agreed to accept this condition.

Most of those who gave a political organisation as their main allegiance (see Table Ten below) gave it to the ILP, but the statistics that refer to organisational allegiance should be treated with caution however and they understate the number of political conscientious objectors. For example, no political allegiance is noted beside the names of known members of the ILP such as Mansel Grenfell, David James Jones (Gwenallt), and Evan Parker, Aberdare. The NCF calculated that 1,191 of conscientious objectors in Britain had been 'socialist' (approximately 7.2 per cent of the total).³⁸

Table Ten - Stated organisational allegiance

No-Conscription Fellowship	154
Independent Labour Party	87
Fellowship of Reconciliation	31
British Socialist Party	2
'Christian Socialist'	1
Socialist Labour Party	1
Total	246

Of the Welsh COs who identified any allegiance, eighty-seven of them, or ten per cent, described themselves as members of the ILP. But many conscientious objectors declared multiple loyalties to a religious organisation as well as a political body, and of the ILP members for example, a number described themselves also as members of the NCF and of Nonconformist denominations.

Some men appealed on more than one basis, and the habit at the tribunals of giving initial temporary exemption and compelling the men to come up again

³⁸ *The No-Conscription Fellowship*, 37-8.

before the tribunal adds to the complication of enumerating the fate of conscientious objectors. According to Graham, the men who were exempted were nearly all men engaged in religious work but not strictly in holy orders including secretaries of religious societies, local preachers, and a few well-known Quakers. Exemptions were also granted to the members of the FAU whilst working at the front. These numbered six hundred and forty in Britain,³⁹ including twenty-nine from Wales.⁴⁰ A characteristic of the Welsh conscientious objectors was that the occupational profile of this cohort of men tended to be that of the skilled working class or lower middle class. Of the 533 men in Wales who gave their occupation to the tribunals, the most substantial group was that of the thirty-nine schoolteachers, and the seventy-nine students, including fifty-six theological students. Fifty-eight coal miners, who were conscripted from the end of 1917 onwards, formed one of the largest groups, followed by thirty-five clerks, thirty objectors who had worked in the metal trades of tinsplate, iron and steel, twenty grocers, sixteen agricultural workers or farmers, eleven insurance agents, and eight boot makers or merchants.

The geographical distribution of the conscientious objectors (see Table Eleven below) broadly reflected Wales's distribution of population with two main exceptions. The number of student conscientious objectors in Bangor inflated the Caernarvonshire total to sixty-five conscientious objectors, and the statistics for Glamorgan and Monmouth mask a concentration of conscientious objectors in areas where the ILP was notably influential such as the Neath-Briton Ferry-Port Talbot area (ninety-six), Merthyr-Aberdare-Mountain Ash (seventy), Cardiff (ninety-six) and Swansea (fifty-three). Newport, the largest town in Monmouthshire, also had the largest concentration of conscientious objectors in the county, with thirty-nine objectors.

³⁹ Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, 346.

⁴⁰ *Friends Ambulance Unit Papers*, Personnel Records 588-601 POS, Friends House Library.

Table Eleven - Geographical distribution of identifiable COs in Wales by county⁴¹

County	Number of COs	As % of COs in Wales	% of total male Population in Wales
Anglesey	5	0.6	2.0
Breconshire	16	2.0	2.4
Cardiganshire	31	4.0	2.18
Carmarthenshire	64	8.0	6.49
Carnarvonshire	65	8.0	4.8
Denbighshire	33	4.0	6.0
Flintshire	15	2.0	3.7
Glamorgan	448	55.0	47.26
Merionethshire	13	1.6	1.7
Monmouthshire	114	14.0	17.0
Pembrokeshire	9	1.0	3.5
Radnorshire	9	1.0	1.0
Montgomeryshire	4	0.5	2.0
Total of identifiable Co's in Wales	810		

Llanelli had the largest concentration of COs in Carmarthenshire with approximately thirty eight COs, a third of whom were Christadelphians. Wrexham, the largest town in North Wales, had the comparatively small number of twenty-four conscientious objectors.

ii) How the State dealt with the Conscientious Objector in Wales

By the beginning of May 1916, the number of conscientious objectors in Britain had already reached a hundred and increased rapidly to almost seven

⁴¹ *Pearce Register*, 2016.

hundred by 26 May 1916.⁴² This sharp increase caused Lord Kitchener to warn the Cabinet that conscientious objectors within the Army could only be treated in the same way as all other soldiers were treated:

it is the clear duty of every commanding officer to do his best with the legitimate means at his disposal to make every man who is handed over to him an efficient soldier.⁴³

The detention barracks and military prison had been designed to 'deter the brute elements of a regular army'⁴⁴ and since COs refused to cooperate they accumulated punishments and existed on poor food. After his court martial, Ithel Davies, from Mallwyd in Merionethshire, was moved from Kinmel Park Military Camp to Park Hall Military Camp, and then transferred to Mold Military Prison in North Wales where, on his first day, he refused to work sewing mailbags, and he was assaulted and placed in a strait jacket for six hours. The following day, when he refused to dig a hole, he was assaulted twice, punched and beaten with the head of a pick-axe and had his nose broken. Davies's case was raised by the Member of Parliament, Llewelyn Williams⁴⁵ and parliamentary scrutiny of Ithel Davies's ill-treatment contributed to the decision to send objectors to civil prisons from that autumn.

A reflection of how little the position of the CO had been considered was that they were subject to military law, which included the death penalty for disobedience. Asquith and his Liberal colleagues had wanted to place conscientious objectors under civilian control whilst Conservative Ministers such as the Local Government Minister Walter Long opposed this concession.⁴⁶ The Army also wished to be rid of its responsibility to deal with conscientious objectors and proposed that the Government should establish a civilian organisation to employ conscientious objectors 'under conditions as

⁴² *The Tribunal*, 4 May, 1 June 1916.

⁴³ *Cabinet Papers*, CAB 37/147/35, NA.

⁴⁴ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 148.

⁴⁵ Davies, *Bwrthwm Byw*, 62-67.

⁴⁶ Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5 HC 82 col. 94-95, 3 May 1916.

severe as those of soldiers at the front'.⁴⁷ Major-General Sir Wyndham Childs's main role in the War Office in 1916, was to deal with the time-consuming issue of the conscientious objector:

it is sad to recall that at least fifty per cent of my own time and energy, and that of a fairly extensive staff, was expended in securing justice in accordance with the Law for people whose sole object seemed to be to desert their country in its time of peril.

Childs found himself torn between his contempt for the conscientious objector in the main, and 'intense sympathy which I could not keep within bounds when I came across specific cases of conscientious objectors who were brutally treated'.⁴⁸ He formed an unlikely liaison with the NCF to take action when cases of brutality came to his attention and there is little doubt that the military detention centres and military prisons were ill-suited to dealing with conscientious objectors. Many of the conscientious objectors were sorely mistreated, and the NCF's assessment was that the military prisons, whilst more lax in rules concerning visits, letters and food, were much more brutal than their civilian counterparts.⁴⁹ By the end of May 1916, the Army persuaded the Government to place the genuine conscientious objector under the civil power,⁵⁰ and subsequent Army Orders directed that a conscientious objector found guilty of an offence against discipline should be sentenced to imprisonment and not detention, and that after court martial he should be committed to the nearest civil prison.⁵¹ The men would not be formally discharged from the army, but transferred to section W of the Army Reserve which was created for 'all soldiers whose service is deemed to be more valuable to the country in civil than military employment'.⁵² Asquith agreed that the case of all conscientious objectors committed to civil prison should be

⁴⁷ *Cabinet Papers*, CAB 37/147/35, NA.

⁴⁸ Major-General Wyndham Childs, *Episodes and Reflections* (Cassell and Co., 1930), 149.

⁴⁹ *The No Conscription Fellowship*, 53.

⁵⁰ Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5 HC 22 col. 14, 22 May, 1916

⁵¹ Army Order 179, 1916, NA.

⁵² Army Order 203, 1916, NA: Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 155-158.

reviewed by the Central Tribunal and those deemed to be genuine should do work of national importance under the Home Office. But in a decision that presaged the difficulties of the Brace Committee in accommodating those who opposed the war on political grounds, Childs drew a sharp distinction between the treatment of men who were inspired by ‘religious sincerity’ and those who, in his view, were not genuine.⁵³

Most Welsh conscientious objectors accepted the alternative options provided by the State, and either accepted employment under the ‘Home Office’ scheme, the Pelham Committee or the Non-Combatant Corps, or in a small minority of cases accepted service with the RAMC or the FAU (see Table Twelve below). The 201 conscientious objectors from Wales who served in the

Table Twelve - Conscientious Objectors in Wales

Scheme	Number of conscientious objectors	% of total
Pelham Committee ⁵⁵	207	23%
Friends Ambulance Unit	28	3%
Friends War Volunteer Relief ⁵⁶	8	1%
Non Combatant Corps ⁵⁷ (of whom 74 courtmartialled)	201	22%
‘Home Office’ Scheme ⁵⁸	258	28%
‘Absolutists’	70	8%
RAMC	5	1%
YMCA	2	0.0022%
Others (including absolute exemption) ⁵⁹	122	14%
Total	900	100%

NCC, is a lower percentage of the Welsh COs compared with the British percentage of 29.5 per cent of the total of 16,500. The 207 COs from Wales

⁵³ Childs, *Episodes and Reflections*, 148.

who joined the Pelham Committee scheme constituted the same percentage of the British total at 24 per cent. The 258 who joined the 'Home Office' Scheme constituted 30 per cent of the Welsh total, in contrast to the slightly lower British percentage of 27 per cent. The most extreme of conscientious objectors were the 'absolutists'. Graham assessed the total proportion of absolutists to the total of conscientious objectors at circa 1,350, or eight per cent of the CO population,⁵⁴ and Wales's seventy 'absolutists' is an equivalent percentage of the total.

Most members of the 'Home Office' scheme experienced at least one term of imprisonment before appearing before the Central Tribunal and being allowed to progress to a work centre. Of those who eventually accepted the Home Office scheme, 224 were imprisoned once; 65 twice, and 20 imprisoned three times. The only other significant difference in the comparison with the British-wide statistics is the lower percentage of conscientious objectors in Wales who joined the FAU and the Friends War Voluntary Relief, and this may reflect the comparatively weak Quaker tradition in Wales.

iii) The Non-Combatant Corps

The War Office had already created an alternative for conscientious objectors within the Army as early as March 1916, with the creation of the Non-Combatant Corps (NCC). Although these men wore khaki uniform, they were not armed and were employed in road-making, timber-cutting, loading and unloading ships⁵⁵ stretcher-bearing and hospital portering.⁵⁶ Although they became popularly known as the 'No-Courage Corps'⁵⁷ its members attracted

⁵⁴ Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, 351.

⁵⁵ Childs, *Episodes and Reflections*, 149.

⁵⁶ War Office, WO293, Army Council Instruction No.456, 4 March 1916, NA; *The Times*, 14 March 1916.

⁵⁷ Philip Snowden, *British Prussianism : The Scandal of the Tribunals* (Manchester National Labour Press, 1916), 8.

admiration from unlikely sources such as *The Times*, whose description of their work in France categorised them as

men who are rendering what service they conscientiously can to their country in her need, just like any other patriotic Britons.⁵⁸

Significantly, Graham hardly mentions their role in his otherwise detailed volume,⁵⁹ and this may reflect his and the NCF's view that the experience of absolutists and imprisoned members were more deserving of attention. The NCF's review published at the end of the war described many of the conscientious objectors in the NCC as showing great courage and 'withstanding most brutal efforts to make them perform services to which they were opposed.'⁶⁰ The training for the NCC was carefully prescribed and men were trained in squad drill without arms and in the use of various forms of tools used in field engineering. Once trained, the companies were posted to camps in England and France; they could not be employed in the firing line, and they were normally confined to army chores such as building roads, erecting hutted camps, loading and unloading ships and railway wagons and burning excreta.⁶¹ But confusion as to the meaning of 'non-combatant' caused great difficulty when objectors were occasionally asked to handle munitions or other military supplies, and many objectors found it an unsatisfactory option and refused to take further orders. Forty per cent of those COs who joined the NCC were subsequently court-martialled, and in the instance of Welsh conscientious objectors, the slightly higher proportion of forty-five per cent of the 201 who joined the NCC were court-martialled.⁶² This high level of rejection reflects the extent to which this option failed to satisfy the requirements of the conscientious objectors. In spite of the refusal of almost half of those conscientious objectors to continue in the NCC this rarely led to much trouble to the Army, according to Childs:

⁵⁸ *The Times*, 19 May 1916.

⁵⁹ Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, 349.

⁶⁰ *The No-Conscription Fellowship*, 78.

⁶¹ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 192.

⁶² *Pearce Register*, 2016.

sometimes we used to get sporadic outbreaks of disobedience, such as once occurred when some of them were required to load barbed wire. The disobedience was confined to a few, however, who were punished in the ordinary way, and obtained no sympathy.⁶³

The NCC provided an unsatisfactory answer to the moral dilemmas of many conscientious objectors, and was rejected by the NCF and the Quakers when its creation was announced:

the men for whom we speak can, under no circumstances, become part of this corps, which we observe will be under the control of the War Office, and in every sense part of the military machine.⁶⁴

Conscientious objectors within the NCC did protest when they were asked to manhandle munitions of war, and in a number of instances, their protests led to court-martials and subsequent imprisonment. The earliest and most serious instance was the transfer of thirty-seven men from the Eastern NCC who had refused to obey orders and who on being shipped to France, had thirty of their number condemned to death. The Army's intention was to frighten the men, and on 9 June 1916, the death sentences were formally read out to the men, but were commuted to ten years' penal servitude. The numbers of COs in the NCC rose quickly from seven hundred in May 1916 to 3,181 by the end of the year,⁶⁵ and many of those who joined were members of religious sects such as the Seventh day Adventists and Plymouth Brethren.⁶⁶ Many objectors had difficulty in coming to terms with the discipline of the NCC. For example, T.J. Gwilym, a Bangor theological student in Bangor, opposed the war on religious grounds and was given conditional exemption by the local tribunal in May 1917 on condition that he performed work with the Royal Medical Army Corps.

⁶³ Childs, *Episodes and Reflections*, 150.

⁶⁴ *The Tribunal*, 16 March 1916, letter from NCF and the Quakers to Asquith.

⁶⁵ *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire in the Great War 1914-1920* (HMSO, the War Office, 1922), 226.

⁶⁶ Childs, *Episodes and Reflections*, 149-150.

He found the RAMC to be inappropriate to his needs given that he was expected to carry arms:

being of a profoundly sympathetic disposition, I could not stand aloof, while the cream of the country's youth shed their blood...on the request of the tribunal I joined the RAMC at Cardiff, but was informed by the officer in command that every member of the RAMC was now expected to bear arms for the purpose of protecting themselves and the wounded, if necessary.

In consequence, he declined to join the RAMC and was sent to the NCC at Henlle, which was part of the Park Hall complex of military camps near Oswestry, where he was informed that the work of the NCC was sanitary work and the general tidying up of the camp. However, on 6 December 1917, with fourteen other COs, he refused an order to repair training trenches,⁶⁷ and in spite of representations by the M.P. for East Denbighshire, E.T. John, on their behalf, they were subsequently courtmartialled, and Gwilym was sentenced to six months with hard labour in Wormwood Scrubs prison. Another conscientious objector on religious grounds, William Griffiths from Tirydail, near Ammanford, sought advice from E.K. Jones about his pacifism and how he could accommodate his conscience as Christian pacifist with military service in the NCC:

nid oes busnes ar un cyfrif i ladd neb naill yn uniongyrchol neu yn anuniongyrchol; ac fel mae yn wybyddus i chwi fod yma rywrai am ein gorfodi i wneuthur peth felly yn y dyddiau nesaf yma, carwn yn fawr pe buasech yn rhoddi i mi gair o gyfarwyddyd. Mae fy nghariad i at Grist a'i egwyddorion yn ddigon i farw drostynt. Mae hyn yn beth mawr i ddywedyd, ond credaf yn cydwybod y caf nerth yn ol yr achos.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *E.K. Jones Papers*, Box 29, letter T.J. Gwilym to Jones, undated letter, 1918, NLW.

⁶⁸ *ibid*, letter from William Griffiths to Jones, 26 February 1916 .

(it is not acceptable on any grounds to kill anyone directly or indirectly: and as you know there are those who will make us do so in the next few days, I would be very grateful if you could give me a word of advice. My love for Christ and his principles are enough to die for. This is a big statement but I believe in my conscience that I will get the strength to do so.)

Having joined the NCC in North Wales, Griffiths could not come to terms with its requirements, and wrote to his commanding officer to declare that he could not remain in it any longer.⁶⁹ He was courtmartialled on 20 February 1917, and two weeks later was sentenced to two years' hard labour. A month later, his father wrote that William's brother, John, had been killed on active service in France but that in spite of his deep sorrow and grief, he supported his conscientious objector son:

yr ydym yn lawenychu yn y ffaith mae carcharor dros egwyddorion crefydd Crist Iesu ydyw. Mae duwolion yr oesau wedi bod yno o'i flaen.⁷⁰

(We rejoice in the fact that he is a prisoner for the religious principles of Jesus Christ. The god-fearing people of the ages have been there before him.)

It is ironic that although the conscientious objectors within the NCC had compromised most with the requirements of the military, they were also the last of the conscientious objectors to be released from military control. Whilst all the objectors in the Home Office camps were released by April 1919, and all absolutist objectors released by July 1919, it was not until the beginning of 1920 that those conscientious objectors in the NCC, many of whom were still stationed in France, were finally released.⁷¹

⁶⁹ *ibid*, letter William Griffiths to his commanding officer, 5 February 1917.

⁷⁰ *ibid*, letter from father of William Griffiths to Jones, 13 August 1917.

⁷¹ *The Tribunal*, 24 April 1919; Parliamentary Debates (Commons), Vol.5 HC col. 118, 2001 – 2, 30 July 1919.

iv) The Brace Committee's 'Home Office' Scheme

The Brace Committee's implementation of the 'Home Office' scheme betrayed the failure of the Government's initial provisions and probably caused more frustration for those involved than any other aspect of provision for conscientious objection.

By June 1916, many hundreds of conscientious objectors were wilfully disobeying orders and had entered military detention barracks and prisons. In order to implement the work of the Brace committee, they were ordered to appear before a Central Tribunal to assess whether they might be ready to undertake an alternative to prison and engage in what was termed 'work of national importance'. From 27 July 1916 onwards, the Central Tribunal met in Wormwood Scrubs Prison at least twice a week for the duration of the war, and personally interviewed every conscientious objector serving a sentence of imprisonment or detention for refusing to obey orders. Most men dealt with by the Committee were then released from prison and transferred to the Army Reserve and distributed in work centres set up throughout the United Kingdom. The majority of conscientious objectors were thus accommodated, although the 'absolutists' remained as an intractable problem for the authorities.⁷² Those conscientious objectors who continued to disobey, appeared before a court martial, and received sentences ranging from a short period of confinement in barracks to hard labour for two years, which was invariably commuted to 112 days by the Army Council. The majority of conscientious objectors faced a 'net' sentence of between 28 and 112 days, usually in a Military Detention Barracks or Military Prison.⁷³

The Army's policy towards conscientious objectors was that whilst this provision should act as a deterrent to those who saw conscientious objection as a safe alternative to active service, at the same time it wished to be

⁷² Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 162-167.

⁷³ *ibid*, 148.

relieved of the thankless task of trying to make soldiers of men who did not wish to cooperate with the authorities. The Central Tribunal took the advice to heart that it should not adopt the same standard as applied to the statutory appeals for exemption, with the result that the extraordinarily high proportion of ninety per cent of those reviewed cases were recommended for release from prison in the belief that 'many of the men were of no use to the Army; their presence in military units was a hindrance to the performance of military duties at a time when all officers were fully employed in training new levies'.⁷⁴

As it started its work in relation to conscientious objectors, the Tribunal categorically rejected any conscientious objection that was based on socialist or overtly political grounds and refused to accept that any socialist was a genuine conscientious objector under the terms of the Military Service Act. However it allowed for the broader nature of a moral objection to war to be sympathetically considered.⁷⁵ The Central Tribunal interviewed a total of 5,944 applicants who were consequently allocated into five categories, and categories A and B included the ninety per cent of the men who should either be treated as having a conscientious objection to all military service or whose convictions appear to be so uncertain as not to warrant a distinct finding and these men were allowed to join the Home Office scheme. Men in Categories C and D tended to have a strong objection to war in general, but would fight in a war for a purpose of which they approved, and they were returned to prison. The men classified in Category E were absolutists, who either refused absolutely to appear before the Central Tribunal or refused to accept the conditions of the Tribunal's enquiry.⁷⁶ The number of Welsh COs who accepted the Home Office scheme was approximately 258, or thirty percent of the total number of Welsh COs, which was slightly more than the twenty five per cent of the COs throughout Britain who had accepted the Home Office scheme.⁷⁷ The total number of absolutist COs in Britain was 985 or six per

⁷⁴ *Ministry of Health Papers*, 47/1, 'Report of the Central Tribunal', 23.

⁷⁵ *ibid*, 'Minutes of the Central Tribunal, 24 July, 1916'.

⁷⁶ *Ministry of Health Papers*, 47/3, 'Report of the Central Tribunal', 24.

⁷⁷ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 190.

cent of the total, and in Wales the number was seventy, and at eight percent, a slightly higher proportion of the Welsh population of conscientious objectors.

The high level of acceptance for the 'Home Office' scheme was a fatal blow to the NCF's attempts to destroy the Military Service Act through a policy of uncompromising non-cooperation and the principal achievement of the Central Tribunal was not to separate the sincere and the humbug, but to separate those prepared to accept the HO scheme, and those who refused to make any compromise. The Brace Committee subsequently agreed not only that men should be employed in large groups but also set as a matter of principle that the conditions of employment 'should not be appreciably better than those applying to non-Combatants on Home Service'⁷⁸ and that those who were granted exemption on the grounds of taking up work of national importance were required to make some sacrifice, such as not remaining within the neighbourhood of their own homes.⁷⁹

The number of appellants interviewed by the Central Tribunal lessened from 2,288 in 1916 to 1,165 in 1918 and the changing composition in the population of conscientious objectors during the last year of the war reflected the combing out from those industries of those who had wished to avoid military service, and the increased knowledge amongst younger recruits of the advantages of the Government's schemes to accommodate objectors.⁸⁰ Over a fifth of the men who appeared before the Central Tribunal had not appeared before a lower Tribunal, often because they had been protected by various authorities such as Colliery Recruiting Courts, War Agricultural Executive Committees, and Munitions Area Recruiting Courts. Whereas in 1916, the proportion of men before the Tribunal who had not made any application to any other tribunal on the grounds of conscientious objection was only four per cent, in 1918 it had increased to thirty percent. This change illustrated the impact of 'combing-out'

⁷⁸ *Ministry of Health Papers*, 47/3, 'The Home Office and Conscientious Objectors: a Report prepared for the Committee for Imperial Defence, 1919 ; Part I The Brace Committee', 3, NA.

⁷⁹ *Ministry of Health Papers*, 47/3, 'Report of the Central Tribunal', 12.

⁸⁰ *ibid*, 26.

in key industries where men delayed making applications for exemptions until it was too late and they were arrested. Of the remainder, a number escaped to Ireland to escape military service.

The Central Tribunal's final report highlighted that after May 1918, conscientious objectors from areas where peace organisations were known to be extremely active such as the south Wales coalfield and Lanarkshire, did not apply to the local tribunal for exemption but elected either to be taken into custody and imprisoned or to accept work of national importance. The proportion of men from Glamorgan who appeared before the Central Tribunal in 1916 was four per cent, but increased to six per cent in 1918, after the commencement of the 'combing out' of the coal industry, metal trades and agriculture.⁸¹ This, in the opinion of the Tribunal, was explained by a greater knowledge of the tribunal system, 'with the result that 50 per cent of the men seen from these areas did not apply to Tribunal for exemption on the ground of conscientious objection, but preferred to serve a term of imprisonment'.⁸²

The Home Office scheme was based on a fundamental contradiction that whilst in law those who joined the Scheme were technically soldiers for the period of the war, on the Scheme they were classified as conscientious objectors to all military service.⁸³ Bertrand Russell, the chairman of the No Conscription Fellowship, excoriated the new scheme:

it was launched with the usual flavour of good intention, and was sincerely intended as a relief, but it was baffled by lack of comprehension of the minds of the men dealt with and by the dull penal instruments employed, incited, always by the baying of newspapers, and relying on an abnormal inflammation of public opinion.⁸⁴

⁸¹ *Ministry of Health Papers*, 47/3, 'Report of the Central Tribunal', 27.

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ Rae, 190.

⁸⁴ *The Tribunal*, 17 August 1916.

But in March 1917, Morgan Jones, the Welsh representative on the NCF's national committee, rejected 'absolutism' as 'not useful', and defended the scheme:

The Home Office scheme suffers deplorably by comparison with conditions in a trade like mining – as far as pay is concerned. But in so far as helping the war is concerned I am prepared to state categorically that the Home Office seems to be extraordinarily free from it. This scheme does not constitute the kind of alternative service which appeals to me. But then, what is one to do when he has to choose between two kinds of alternative service ? The one is performed in prison and might, and does help to make material directly for the war under conditions of perpetual silence and repression, and where no useful service is done for the community. The other is performed outside prison with complete immunity from military service, outside army control, and under conditions of greater freedom. It should be evidence of 'human frailty' that I should have chosen the latter, particularly as I found the principle of 'Absolutism' logically untenable.⁸⁵

The first conscientious objectors in the Scheme started work on 12 August 1916, and most of the men released for employment were transferred to work centres where they were employed in the repair of main roads, in quarrying, timber felling and agriculture.⁸⁶ The Road Board had been persuaded to employ up to one thousand objectors on roadmaking and quarrying, and the government-sponsored Home Grown Timber Committee had agreed to occupy gangs of thirty to forty men on felling trees. In addition the Board of Inland Revenue and Llanelli Rural District Council offered to take some men, the former for clerical work and the latter for the repair and maintenance of the waterworks, in Llannon near Tumble.⁸⁷ The first camps for men who accepted the scheme were set up in August 1916, at Haverhill in Suffolk, at Newhaven in Sussex, at Dyce, near Aberdeen in Scotland, and at Llangadog in

⁸⁵ *Pioneer*, 10 March 1917.

⁸⁶ *Ministry of Health Papers*, 47/3, 'Report of the Central Tribunal', 23.

⁸⁷ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 171.

Wales. The work involved was chiefly navvying work on roads, quarries and waterworks, or timber cutting and from the end of 1916 the Home Office took over Wakefield, Warwick, Dartmoor and Knutsford Prisons.⁸⁸

The Dyce camp, near Aberdeen, was opened in high summer yet within three months the camp was closed and abandoned because 'the results as regards discipline and return for labour had been so bad'.⁸⁹ Their work consisted of back-breaking work in the stone quarries, and the men managed to negotiate a reduction in working hours. The men were forced to live in old army tents that were not waterproof, and the squalid living conditions led to unsuccessful protests to Parliament. In September, one of their number, Walter Roberts, a conscientious objector from Birkenhead, although originally from Hawarden, was taken ill and died after a short illness. Dyce became 'unmanageable', the men were in revolt against the work offered to them, and rules were widely ignored.⁹⁰ Dyce was closed as a result at the end of October and its conscientious objectors there were given a week's leave, and ordered to return to work centres in Wakefield and Warwick prisons.

By April 1917, there were twenty-eight 'Home Office scheme' camps that contained over two thousand conscientious objectors and the largest number objectors were placed in Wakefield (579) and Dartmoor Work Centre (582). Wakefield prison was transformed with locks taken from the doors of the cells, as warders acted as instructors and although the work was sowing mailbags, when work stopped at five in the evening, the six hundred men could spend their evening in or out till nine thirty in the evening. This state of affairs lasted until Whitsun 1918, when objectors were attacked by a local crowd, and the work centre was closed.⁹¹ An objector from Gorseinon, W.I. Thomas, described the atmosphere as one that resembled an university rather than a place of confinement:

⁸⁸ *The No-Conscription Fellowship*, 69.

⁸⁹ *Ministry of Health Papers*, 47/3, 'The Home Office and Conscientious Objectors', 5.

⁹⁰ Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, 232-233.

⁹¹ *ibid*, 233.

Here we find hundreds of COs talking and arguing as COs always did. Just inside the reception hall we find stalls where the revolutionary Communist would be selling his literature, likewise the Anarchist, ILP and another stall with its religious tracts. Each section zealously pushing what it had to sell. I could hardly believe my eyes. Was it all a dream ? I soon found that the whole prison was run by the COs with only one or two warders acting as instructors. To crown everything I found that it was a sympathetic Quaker who, having offered his services, was the Governor who acted as the Home office Agent.⁹²

The new work centre was opened in Dartmoor Prison in March 1917 and re-named the Princetown Work Centre. It took rather less than one-third of the total number of men under the Home Office scheme,⁹³ and between April and the Autumn 1917, the number grew from 856 to one thousand two hundred men. The work involved quarrying, reclaiming land for the Duchy of Cornwall, gardening, carpentry, blacksmithing and ordinary prison industries.⁹⁴ Such a concentration of conscientious objectors also highlighted the range and variety of their religious and political views, which often came into conflict. George M.LI. Davies, a Christian pacifist, described a Babel of political and religious beliefs:

Er Corinth ni bu erioed gymaint o gymysgedd credoau ac opiniyniau – Eglwyswyr. Pabyddion, Presbyteriaid, Methodistiaid, Christadelffiaid, ‘Plymouth Brethren’, Marxian Socialist, Anarchists, Gwyddelod, Saeson, Scotiaid, Cymry, Iddewon, Rwsiaid, arlunwyr⁹⁵

(Since Corinth, never was there such a mixture of creeds and opinions Church people, Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, Christadelphians, Plymouth Brethren, Marxist Socialists, Anarchists, Irishmen, Englishmen, Scots, Welsh,

⁹² Cleaver, ‘Conscientious Objection in the Swansea Area’, 52.

⁹³ Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, 240.

⁹⁴ *Ministry of Health Papers*, 47/3, ‘The Home Office and Conscientious Objectors’, 5.

⁹⁵ *Y Dinesydd*, 5 May 1918.

Jewish, Russians, painters...)

Objectors sang the 'Red Flag', walked out of church when the National Anthem was played, and distributed subversive leaflets.⁹⁶ There was also constant unrest in the camp, and when an inmate, Harry Firth, died of diabetes in February 1918, his friends accused the prison doctor of negligence and called for a public inquiry into the circumstances of his death.⁹⁷ The Brace Committee's inquiry found that 'on the very smallest foundation they build a superstructure of oppression and improper conduct on the part of officials'.⁹⁸ Welsh conscientious objectors were in the vanguard of the protests in Princetown, and the Anglesey inmate, Percy Ogwen Jones complained publicly that in spite of Firth's diabetes and poor health, he had been given heavy work to break stones in the quarry. A general meeting of the men decided to strike in protest against the treatment of Firth and against the ill-treatment of conscientious objectors in prisons and camps,⁹⁹ and its so-called 'ringleaders', the chairman of the men's committee, Dan Griffiths from Llanelli, and Ieuan.P. Hughes, its secretary and former secretary of the NCF in Wales, were taken to Exeter to be court martialled and returned to prison.¹⁰⁰

An indication of the Government's frustration with the working of the committee was the replacement of most members of the Brace Committee in July 1917 by new members who had a military or penal background.¹⁰¹ R.T. Holloway from Penderyn, was released from Wormwood Scrubs in March 1917 and sent to Dartmoor which had now become far more notorious than ever as a result of the conscientious objectors being resident there:

I may say that the work here is very hard indeed being navvying at a Reservoir and the hours are very long from 6.30 am to 5.30 pm with half an

⁹⁶ *Daily Mail*, 23-30 April 1917.

⁹⁷ *Pioneer*, 1 March 1918.

⁹⁸ Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5 HC vol. 103, col.1628-31, 28 February 1918.

⁹⁹ *Morgan Humphreys Papers*, A/16196, letter from Percy Ogwen Jones, NLW.

¹⁰⁰ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 188.

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, 186-187.

hour for breakfast and half an hour for dinner. We are trying to obtain an 8 hour day if possible. As things develop I will let you know from time to time...We are in all 60 and about 30 to 40 being Welshmen living near here.¹⁰²

George M. LI Davies described conditions in Dartmoor, and the deep divisions between political objectors of various persuasions:

Y mae'r Sosialwyr wedi rannu'n gyffelyb : un ysgol a blediant y Rhyfel Dosbarth – Gweithiwr yn erbyn Meistr – yn gwawdio a chondemnio Sosialwyr yr ILP y rhai a gredent nad yw ennill y feistrolaeth ar gyfalaf yn Alpha ac Omega pob ymgais llafurawl. Y mae yr Anneddfwr (Anarchist) yn ysgwyd ei ben arnynt ill eu dau ac yn gofyn paham y talent y fath wrogaeth i lywodraeth a cheisio ennill a defnyddio ei awdurdod, yn lle argyhoeddi y werin mai mewn Llywodraethau – a'r gallu a roddir iddynt ormesu gwerin gan y werin – y mae'r drwg gwreiddiol yn dechreu.¹⁰³

(The Socialists are divided similarly; one school favours the Class War – Worker against Master – that ridicules and condemns the ILP Socialists, who believe that winning mastery over capital is not the Alpha and Omega of every effort by labour. The Anarchist shakes his head at both and asks why they pay such fealty to Government and try and win and use its authority, instead of convincing the people that it is in Governments – and the ability given to them to oppress people by people – that the original evil starts.)

The overwhelming mentality of Princetown was one that challenged the military and authority. The effect of prison was to stiffen opposition and he detected an intolerance in 'Atheistic Socialists', who held hellfire religionists in contempt, and who condemned and resented other Socialists who had wider loyalties than their love for the working class.¹⁰⁴ The Brace Committee was

¹⁰² *E.K. Jones Papers*, Box 29, letter from R.T. Holloway, 2 May, 1917, NLW.

¹⁰³ *Y Dinesydd*, 5 May 1918.

¹⁰⁴ *Y Dinesydd*, 5 May 1918.

openly contemptuous of the beliefs and physical character of the men who came before them:

Many of the men were feeble in physique, weak of will or unstable of character. Nearly all were cranks, incapable of sustained collective effort, and cohering only to air their grievances or to promote queer and unusual ends.¹⁰⁵

By the end of 1916, the Committee had exercised its power to recommend a return to prison for ninety-two of the worst offenders¹⁰⁶ and after objectors were attacked in the village of Princetown, they were confined to the prison grounds.¹⁰⁷ From April 1917 the Brace Committee attempted to impose stricter discipline and there was a sharp increase in the number of men sent back to prison for breaking the rules. By the autumn of 1917 however, new rules were brought in, that gave men the opportunity to have 'exceptional employment' which allowed men who had shown 'industry and good conduct' for 12 months to work for a private employer. But this also implied that most of those left in Princetown were 'neither industrious or well-behaved'.¹⁰⁸

As part of the Home Office Scheme, four work camps were created in Wales, namely Llanddeusant near Llangadog, which held eighty five men, and which involved vegetable growing, painting and whitewashing; Llannon Reservoir, Tumble near Llanelli, which employed thirty two men in repair work and closed in August 1917; Penderyn Waterworks, near Mountain Ash, which employed twenty three men, and Talgarth in Breconshire, where a small group of men worked in the hospital grounds.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ *Ministry of Health Papers*, 47/3, 'The Home Office and Conscientious Objectors', 9.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*, 5.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Committee on the Employment of Conscientious Objectors: Additional Rules, Command Paper 8884, HMSO, cited in Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 188.

¹⁰⁹ *The Tribunal*. 5 April 1917.

a) Llannon and Llanddeusant Work Camps

The first Home Office work camp in Wales was created by Llanelli Rural District Water Works, who needed labour to work on the building of a reservoir above Llannon since its contractors had had difficulty in attracting sufficient men to work on the site. Work on the reservoir had progressed very slowly and the answer to the shortage of labour was found in making conscientious objectors from Llanelli and Cardiff prison work at the reservoir and spend their time 'up on the bleak top of the hill'.¹¹⁰ The local newspaper considered it to be a fit use for conscientious objectors:

there is no reason why they should not serve their country in some other way, and this way seems to me to be excellent, as they are helping to supply the great want of good water which prevails in Carmarthenshire and thereby making the people much healthier than they were before.¹¹¹

The work of the men at Llanddeusant was at the waterworks at Llyn-y-fan near Llangadog in the east of Carmarthenshire. A visiting journalist from the Liberal *South Wales Daily News* waxed lyrically about the work camp at Llanddeusant:

The scheme seems to have been an unqualified success, for the men under expert supervision, have brought about a complete transformation of the sense of desolation and disaster, which met their eyes on their first arrival.¹¹²

He reported that most in the camp were from Lancashire and the Midlands but included no Welshmen:

presumably the policy is to send men right away from the districts with which they were familiar. There seemed to be almost as many professions and

¹¹⁰ *Llanelli Chronicle*, 7 December 1916.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

¹¹² *Pioneer*, 21 October 1916.

trades represented as men in the camp. I found many religious denominations represented in the camp. There are Friends (Quakers), Plymouth Brethren Church of England, Congregationalists, Christadelphians, International Bible Students..and others. A considerable section of the men are Socialists, and their objection to war is moral and economic rather than religious.¹¹³

This slightly rose-tinted perspective contrasted with complaints of ‘slacking and malingering’ against the conscientious objectors in the Llannon and Llanddeusant camps. Two representatives of the NCF, W.J. Roberts and E.E. Hunter, visited the camps in March 1917 and reported Llanddeusant as being a ‘sea of mud’ and so isolated that visitors, such as the Gorseinon members of the NCF who came to hold a concert, had to abandon their car and walk the last two miles, and then obtain a permit to remain, so the concert had to be held two and a half miles away in the church hall in Llanddeusant.¹¹⁴ The small number of IBSA members there were only allowed out to attend their closest meetings twenty-two miles distant in Clydach with no transport available.¹¹⁵ The inspection by Roberts and Hunter highlighted the halving of the camp’s rations, and the effect of new regulations which reduced their opportunities for rail travel from such a remote location. During their inspection of the camp, the same issues of alleged slacking, agitation and substitution were raised with them, together with the men’s concern about low rates of pay for overtime which they worked in order to make up for time lost through bad weather. They reported the works inspector as being complimentary of the men:

of course, the work was strange to the boys at first, and one could hardly expect any more from them and there was a tremendous difference between the Pen and the Pick. But now he could make no complaint.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ *Llais Llafur*, 24 March 1917.

¹¹⁴ *Pioneer*, 21 October 1916.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Bertrand Russell Papers*, W.J. Roberts, ‘Report to the National Committee on South Wales Home Office Camps’, COIB Report 45, McMaster University, Ontario.

They described the warm welcome afforded to men of the Llannon camp by the local villagers of Tumble:

I was extremely gratified to learn that the boys are highly respected by the whole of the villagers. Invitations to tea, etc., are freely given, and freely accepted. Industrially it is a mining village, and the miners who support by weekly contributions, the local Institute and library, decided on a referendum, with only four dissentients, that both institute and library be placed at the disposal of the C.O.'s.¹¹⁷

This impression was reinforced by one of those objectors, E.P. Jones, Pontypridd:

oedd y Tumble yma yn neilltuol, yn neilltuol fel 'na. Oe chi'n cael mynd i de efo nhw ar ddydd Sul a phopeth, i bobman, pob enwad ac yn garedig, efo popeth, menthyg y library a chwbwl, oedd ma library yma y pryd hynny. Wel fedre chi ddim cael mwy o garedigrwydd.¹¹⁸

(the Tumble was special like that. You would go for tea with them on Sunday, and everyone, everywhere, every denomination, were kind with everything; they let us borrow books from the library and all. There was a library here then. You could not get more kindness.)

As for allegations of slacking in Llannon, Roberts highlighted a recent incident, when a policeman came to the camp, armed with a warrant for the arrest of two COs, Selwyn Jones, Port Talbot for 'slacking and insolence', and Charles H. Pett for 'slacking' only. Neither had the opportunity to defend themselves and were taken to Cardiff Prison. Whilst Roberts accepted that in Jones's case there may have been just a 'little room' for the charge of slacking, the charge of insolence was said to be totally unfounded. A letter from one of the

¹¹⁷ *Bertrand Russell Papers*, MX-3801-N, undated letter to the National Committee of the NCF, McMaster University Papers, Ontario.

¹¹⁸ South Wales Coalfield Collection, Interview with E.P. Jones, Audio 82, Swansea University.

objectors in the camp, Gwilym Rees to E.K. Jones, who was also Selwyn Jones's uncle, gave a more detailed explanation for his arrest.¹¹⁹ He had been taken ill in November 1916 and although confined to his bed, was reported by the agent for insolence and unsatisfactory workmanship. He was given two days to respond, in which he denied the allegation, and he and Pett was arrested and taken to Cardiff Prison on the basis that he had refused work. Rees described a 'rousing send-off' by the people of the village 'whose sympathy has now been commanded', and on the following Monday, the men went on strike and left the settlement in protest against the management and have written the Committee to that effect:

it may help you restore to liberty your noble nephew who when the occasion arised to bear testimony to his faith in Christ never cowards nor compromised his gospel truth to the economic whims of a selfish community.¹²⁰

But their biggest concern was the arrests of men in the camp and up until early March 1917, there had been nineteen arrests of men who had then been returned to prison, including the arrest of the chairman of the men's committee.¹²¹ From these camps, one objector, Frank Davenport from Rochdale, was sent back to prison for refusing to go to his work during a snowstorm, and another fled back to prison because of the 'callous neglect' he had suffered in the Llannon camp, after he had suffered a serious illness.¹²²

b) Penderyn

The third camp in south Wales was in Penderyn, near Hirwaun, where sixty-one conscientious objectors worked to build a reservoir for Mountain Ash local authority. While most similar projects came to an end in 1915 because of a

¹¹⁹ *E.K. Jones Papers*, Box 29, letter from Gwilym Rees, 10 March 1917, NLW.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ *Bertrand Russell Papers*, MX 3801, Macmaster University, Ontario.

¹²² Graham, *Conscience and Conscriptio*n, 16.

lack of labour, this scheme continued 'at a lethargic rate' by the employment of conscientious objectors to war service, who were quartered nearby. Sometime during the war the contractor relinquished the contract and the council administered it direct.¹²³ The daily routine of working with puddle clay to build the foundations of the dam was the type of work that disillusioned many of the men. A number left the scheme in protest, and the camp resolved in a general meeting of its members on 28 August, 1917 to protest against their treatment:

We regard the rules issued by the H(ome O(ffice) C(ommittee) as being penal, unnecessary, and in their nature petty; designed to make the position of men working under the scheme unbearable, and we hereby call upon all members of H.O. camps to link up and unitedly repudiate them.¹²⁴

This disillusionment increased as the scheme developed and more men entered the camps. Even the mildest and quietist conscientious objectors who attempted to make the scheme work but became disenchanted:

the lack of purpose and the sense of frustration it engendered encouraged some to return voluntarily to prison and drove others to sympathise with the methods of the militant Marxists and anarchists who had never had any intention of cooperating with the (Brace) Committee'. Only the quietist Jehovah's Witnesses, and Plymouth Brethren stood to one side as the protests mounted.¹²⁵

Whilst a number were returned to prison, the scheme's administrator, the Home Office agent, Sammy Heap, turned a blind eye to those conscientious objectors who disappeared home on their bikes over the weekends as far as Swansea and the Amman Valley, and some of the Welsh COs hosted the English and Scottish COs in the camp 'on a sort of rota' for an occasional

¹²³ Harold D. Bowtell and Geoffrey Hill, *Reservoir Builders of South Wales: Dam Builders in the Age of Steam* (Malvern, The Industrial Locomotive, 2006), 64.

¹²⁴ *Committee on the Employment of Conscientious Objectors: Additional Rules*, Command Paper 8884, HMSO.

¹²⁵ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 175.

weekend.¹²⁶

c) Talgarth

The fourth camp to be opened in south Wales in July 1917 was in Talgarth, near Brecon, and contained sixty men, who were involved in helping to supply water and drainage to a new sanatorium erected by the Welsh National Memorial Association. Their work lay in digging trenches of various depths, to lay a water main for the purpose of carrying water from a stream some one and a half miles away to the sanatoria. This hard, laborious work meant working for ten hours per day in two five hour shifts and the food was considered to be 'quite inadequate' for the nature of the work. After a letter writing campaign and protests, some small improvement were gained:

On Saturdays they are expected to work six hours without rest or food. This is a physical impossibility, and after the agent fining the men two weeks' pay on two occasions for ceasing work at twelve o'clock (the usual dinner hour), the H.O. allowed the men 8 ozs of cake for Saturday mornings only. The agent by his actions appears to be making things as uncomfortable and unpleasant as he possibly can. The men are very unhappy and discouraged."¹²⁷

Their accommodation was often 'hopelessly inadequate', and the men slept in tents, old cottages and disused barns.¹²⁸

A number of objectors ran away from the Home Office work camps and flouted the Scheme's rules, although many were caught and recalled to the Army. The prominent Marxist and lecturer, Nun Nicholas, was granted four days leave by authorities at Wakefield Work centre, but extended his leave to six weeks duration before being arrested. He used his freedom to continue his

¹²⁶ Albert Davies, *Wanderings*, unpublished autobiography, undated.

¹²⁷ *NCF News sheet for the Home Office Centres and Camps*, Acc 13388, Autumn 1917, National Library of Scotland.

¹²⁸ *ibid.*

propaganda:

He received a warning commanding him to return otherwise he would be arrested. He ignored the warning and ten days later he was arrested and taken to Cardiff Prison, where he now is. Whilst at home he was not inactive in the Labour movement. He delivered two brilliant lectures before the Swansea Industrial History Class on 'The Tribal System in Wales'. He also spoke at the inaugural meeting of the Clydach Trades Council. Also he delivered the opening lecture for the Clydach Industrial History Class. At Glais he gave a most humorous account of his experiences at Kinmel Park and Wormwood Scrubbs.¹²⁹

The escapees from the Home Office scheme tended to be socialist COs, who had utter contempt for the system, and Welsh COs who escaped and went on the run included Ness Edwards, who went into hiding in the East End and later in a cave above his home town of Abertillery before giving himself up because of the tough conditions.¹³⁰ Approximately twenty-two of the Welsh conscientious objectors were either fugitives from the Army or the Home Office schemes, and Henry Riding, an ILP member from Newport who worked as a clerk in the local council, escaped from Dartmoor to Bristol and to Southern Ireland where he worked as a farm hand until he travelled to Liverpool and then on to Huddersfield, where he worked until the end of the war.¹³¹ William Duncan from Cardiff went absent without leave from Princetown in March 1918 and was recalled to his military unit in January 1919. When he refused to return, he was declared a deserter, but the authorities failed to trace him. Prominent socialist activists such as Arthur Horner avoided conscription by escaping to Ireland where he lived under an assumed name and under the protection of the Irish Citizens' Army. When he was caught in Holyhead on his return, he was accompanied by two brothers who were also deserters, George

¹²⁹ *Pioneer*, 24 February 1917.

¹³⁰ Wayne David, *Remaining True - a biography of Ness Edwards* (Caerphilly History Society, 2006).

¹³¹ *Pearce Register* 2016.

and Frank Phippen, both ILP members from Pentre, Rhondda.¹³² Tom Gale, from Penygraig in the Rhondda escaped from custody on his way to Princetown from Cardiff Prison, and reached Southern Ireland, where he was also given shelter by the Irish Citizens' Army and together with a number of other Welsh fugitives trained with them in the Wicklow Hills outside Dublin, before departing to New Jersey in the United States where he engaged in Socialist propaganda against the war.¹³³ Bryn Roberts, a miner and ILPer from the Swansea Valley, escaped from prison in Northumberland.¹³⁴ Even after the end of the war, the authorities pursued the recalcitrant objectors. The unconventional forty year old Alfred Goodman Dunn, Merthyr, escaped in 1917 and went to live in disguise as a woman in Bristol.¹³⁵

In total, at least twenty-two conscientious objectors became fugitives from the authorities and the overwhelming number of these cases involved men on the Home Office schemes arising between the summers of 1918 and 1919. The Central Tribunal continued its work until April 1919, at which point the Government authorized the discharge of all conscientious objectors on the Home Office scheme. On 19 April 1919, the last man was released officially and the Scheme ceased to exist, but those who had absented themselves from the scheme and who had therefore been recalled to the Army, were still pursued. A Swansea Valley CO, William Howells, a coal merchant from Trebanos, went absent without leave from the work camp in Knutsford alleging that he had been posted to a work centre in south Wales. In March 1919 he was deemed to have deserted and he was arrested at home in August 1919 and subsequently courtmartialled and given a six month sentence but had his sentence remitted and dishonorably discharged for misconduct.¹³⁶ When the Armistice was announced, Albert Davies from Pontardawe abandoned his work in Penderyn and went on the run, joining a 'band of CO fugitives', who changed their names and worked on tree felling in the Brecon Beacons, where

¹³² Fishman, *Arthur Horner*, 58-61.

¹³³ South Wales Coalfield Collection, Interview with Tom Gale, Aud/49, Swansea University.

¹³⁴ *Pearce Register* 2016.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

the forest owners knew but did not reveal their identities.¹³⁷

v) The Pelham Committee

The Pelham Committee was appointed in March 1916 by the Board of Trade, to 'provide advice as to what service of national importance an applicant for exemption on the ground of conscientious objection should undertake' under the chairmanship of the Hon. T.H.W. Pelham, an Assistant Secretary at the Board of Trade. The majority of those referred to the Scheme were married, and half were over thirty, and so were much more likely than their younger comrades to provide little trouble.¹³⁸ Of the four thousand conscientious objectors who came under the Pelham Scheme, one thousand four hundred were Christadelphians who had been granted certificates of exemption by the Army Council,¹³⁹ many of whom went to work in Controlled Establishments or for government contractors. Others were assigned to welfare work with the YMCA, the Red Cross, and the General Service Section of the FAU, to hospitals, asylums, to the railways and the docks, some to the mines, and the manufacture and distribution of food.¹⁴⁰ The Committee attempted to ensure that it responded to the differing views of tribunals about where objectors should be offered work, either in the immediate vicinity of the tribunal's district, or if they should be employed at a distance from their home.¹⁴¹ The total of men from Wales who came under the Pelham Scheme was 207 (see Table Thirteen below), and of those, 155 were Christadelphians. The percentage of those Christadelphians as a proportion of those who came under the Committee in Wales, at 75 per cent, is a much larger percentage of the total than the equivalent total for England at 42 per cent. Of the total number of 3,964 who came under the Pelham Committee, 5.2 per cent of the total came from Wales. Fully three quarters of that total – 155 - were Christadelphians,

¹³⁷ Albert Davies, *Wanderings*, 30.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁴⁰ *T.E. Harvey Papers*, Box 9, Pelham Committee Report, Appendix H.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, 4.

primarily based in Glamorgan, Monmouthshire, and in the Llanelli and Ammanford areas of Carmarthenshire.

Table Thirteen - Welsh Conscientious Objectors under the Pelham Committee

Wales			
County	Others	Christadelphians	Total
Glamorgan	28	71	99
Monmouth.	3	58	61
Carms.	2	24	26
Cardigan.	6	----	6
Carnarvon.	6	----	6
Denbigh.	5	----	5
Brecknock	2	----	2
Pembroke	----	2	2
Total Wales	52	155	207

The Christadelphians were a millenarian Christian group, with an unique alternativist position in that they were prepared to work directly for the prosecution of the war, even in a munitions factory, and they secured exemption from military service by the Army Council in August 1916, when they were brought under the Pelham Committee's scheme.¹⁴² They were customarily greeted with respect in tribunal hearings. Writing about his experience of serving on the Cardiganshire Appeal Tribunal, Herbert Vaughan only dealt with a small number of CO cases:

we were fortunate in having remarkably few of such cases brought before us. ...one of these applicants interested me greatly...he described himself as a Christadelphian, and he was the only member of that religious sect I have come across. He was a nice young fellow, and I am sure his abhorrence at the

¹⁴² Jannaway, *Without the Camp*, v-vi, 198-203.

mere notion of having to kill his fellow-men, even his enemies, was deep-rooted and genuine...after some arguments we offered to have him allocated to a labour battalion at the front, which would only be equipped with spades and other trenching tools, and with this decision on our own part this young objector seemed fully satisfied.¹⁴³

A breakdown of the men who came under the authority of the Pelham Committee included a total of 124 men out of the 3,964 who were university students, including ten from the University of Wales. Of those men who professed a religious leaning, the next biggest religious groups were the Plymouth Brethren (145) and Quakers (140).¹⁴⁴ Those from Wales who undertook work under the Pelham Committee were varied in their background and skills. The son of a prominent Conservative industrial family who owned quarries in Carnarvonshire, H.C. Darbshire, was moved to work on a farm in Benson in Oxfordshire; work was found for a John Davey of Swansea, who had been a mariner, to work as circular sawyer with a local company. W.A.W. Pope, a coal trimmer, was found work with Tharsis Sulphur and Copper Co., but a Tredegar collier, Evan R. Price had disappeared and the colliery company had been asked for his whereabouts.

The Committee's attempt to ensure that conscientious objectors were not given work within travelling time of their homes was reflected in the experience of a R. Morgan, who had appeared before Gelligaer local tribunal and was employed by a local company of timber merchants in Bargoed. The committee directed that he should find work on a farm or in a controlled establishment away from the town. Commercial companies were asked if they were prepared to keep men who were conscientious objectors, and Powell Duffryn agreed, for instance, to retain the service of an I.J. Powell, Pontlloftyn as a miner.¹⁴⁵ John Thomas, a well known teacher in Aberdare, a member of the ILP and secretary of the local NCF branch, an anti-war activist and prominent in the

¹⁴³ Vaughan, 'The Cardiganshire Appeal Tribunal', *Wales*, 177.

¹⁴⁴ *T.E. Harvey Papers*, Box 9, Pelham Report Schedule.

¹⁴⁵ *T.E. Harvey Papers*, Box 9, Pelham Committee minutes, 1 February to 1 March 1917.

Workers' Education Association, was granted exemption from service in May 1916, providing he was engaged in work of national importance. He was required to obtain market garden work which had to be at a distance of at least fifty miles from his home and he wrote to one of the committee's members, T.E. Harvey, alleging that forcing him to live so far away was 'no more than deportation' and that he felt victimized both by the Pelham Committee's attitude and by his local tribunal, who he felt had 'prejudiced' his case and who were biased against him because of his political activities:

the Clerk and the chairman of the local tribunal have done their best to prejudice my case – that is evident or they would have mentioned that I am the only son at home helping a widowed mother and a little brother 12 years old. I stated all these facts of domestic responsibility to them in my original appeal...They are anxious to penalise me for the uncompromising attitude I have taken up on the Militant question on platforms, and in the press...

I hate this insidious way the Local Tribunal hope to exile or deport me... I am not prepared to go fifty miles from home merely to satisfy the spite and retaliatory spirit of a Chairman and clerk of a Local tribunal who think that as a CO and a secretary of the N.C.F. branch and a Public speaker against Militarism I ought to be hounded out of the place. I'll go the whole hog and face the trials of prison before I'll do that. You can rely upon my keeping absolutely confidential all you have told me in your last letter.¹⁴⁶

This letter suggests a degree of collusion and sympathy between the two correspondents. On 4 June, he wrote to Harvey again to thank him for the Committee's agreement for him to accept the offer of agricultural work in the Cowbridge area within the permitted radius.¹⁴⁷ Thomas later moved to the Swansea area, and was publicly active in the ILP and anti-war movement throughout the rest of the War.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*, Temp MSS 835/T1, letter Thomas to Harvey, May 28 1916.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid*, Temp MSS 835/T1, letter Thomas to Harvey, 4 June 1916.

The Pelham Committee considered that whilst a number of conscientious objectors had caused ‘an extraordinary amount of trouble’, in the main they had worked with ‘some fair degree of discipline’ and in ‘a considerable amount of cases they received the commendation of their employers.’¹⁴⁸ The Committee viewed its task as keeping the conscientious objectors at work, under supervision, and preventing as far as possible any harm to recruiting or to the efficient prosecution of the war. The Committee’s view of the character of the conscientious objector, however, was so uncharitable that the committee’s Quaker member, T.E. Harvey insisted on withdrawing his signature from a paragraph of the final report because he could not agree with its malevolent sentiment that ‘taken as a whole COs seemed to be abnormal in their general outlook on life, as well as in the matter of military service, and a substantial number of them were found to suffer from some form of physical disability.’¹⁴⁹ By February 1919, all those doing work under the Pelham Committee had been allowed to go home

vi) The ‘Absolutists’

The ‘absolutists’ believed that any kind of service that was an alternative either to military service or to their ordinary employment was unacceptable. In their opinion any compromise would only help in the organisation of the country for war and therefore refused to accept anything but absolute exemption.¹⁵⁰ A divisive debate arose within the No Conscription Fellowship between ‘alternativists’ those such as Morgan Jones, the South Wales representative, who believed that the alternative schemes such as the Home Office Scheme should be accepted, and ‘absolutists’ such as the NCF’s chairman, Clifford Allen, its founder, Fenner Brockway, and individuals such as Mansel Grenfell, Gorseinon, who believed that no conscientious objectors should compromise with the State. This discussion was conducted mainly through the pages of

¹⁴⁸ *T.E. Harvey Papers*, Box 9, Pelham Committee Report, 7.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *The No-Conscription Fellowship*, 65.

The Tribunal where Fenner Brockway argued that the Home Office scheme served the military machine:

it is in reality a form of slavery the acceptance of which is a denial of that sense of the worth of human personality which is the foundation of all we are doing. The positive contribution which the NCF is making is its insistence on the value of individual liberty. What will history say of us if we only resist military service to fasten upon ourselves and our successors a vicious scheme of indentured labour ?¹⁵¹

The absolutists argued that by doing work of national importance, one was doing work considered important for war, and thereby liberating some one else to go to the front, who would otherwise have been considered essential at home so that the absolutist was attempting to make conscription impossible.¹⁵² Ithel Davies described his sense of betrayal towards those who accepted alternative service:

teimlem ni a wrthododd fod y lleill wedi ein bradychu braidd ac wedi ei gwneud yn haws i'r llywodraeth ein cadw yng ngharchar. Teimlem, petai pawb wedi gwrthod ac wedi hawlio rhyddid diamodol, y byddai'n anos i'r llywodraeth ein cadw yng ngharchar.¹⁵³

(We felt as those who had refused alternative service that the rest had betrayed us somewhat and that it made it easier for the Government to keep us in prison. We felt that if everyone had refused and had demanded unconditional freedom, it would have been more difficult for the Government to keep us in prison.)

This argument was replicated in the pages of the Merthyr *Pioneer*, in a debate between the alternativist position, represented by Morgan Jones, and the

¹⁵¹ *The Tribunal*, 7 September 1916.

¹⁵² Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, 214.

¹⁵³ Davies, *Bwrlwm Byw*, 72,73.

absolutist position, represented by Emrys Hughes and Mansell Grenfell. This principle was the main difference between Jones and Hughes in an election for the Wales representative on the NCF's national committee in the autumn of 1916. Jones's response reflected the challenge set for conscientious objectors by the Government. He was imprisoned initially in May 1916, and re-imprisoned in July 1916 and although initially an absolutist, accepted the Home Office scheme,¹⁵⁴ but his experience in prison convinced him of the pointlessness of the absolutist position:

most absolutists like myself went into gaol in the early days under the spell of that wondrous dictum that we must do the work there because we were not fighting the civil authorities but the military only! We did the work – some made mailbags ; some (absolutists and alternativists) have actually been making ship's fenders for the Admiralty, other of us more fortunate than the rest got some fresh air working in the gardens... To my mind the whole pitch was queered for the absolutist immediately.¹⁵⁵

He withdrew his acceptance of the Home Office Scheme and returned to prison before apparently suffering a nervous breakdown. In Wormwood Scrubs, he felt he was:

imposing unnecessary worry upon those most dear to me and possibly by ruining my physical and mental powers, I might be prejudicing my future usefulness in the great fight that would have to be fought later when Europe returned to sanity. I therefore re-accepted the scheme with the same proviso as before so long as my conscientious convictions were not violated.¹⁵⁶

Ironically Morgan Jones again fell foul of the recruiting authorities. When he was released on furlough because of poor health, he re-commenced his anti-

¹⁵⁴ *Pioneer*, 3 February 1917.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 10 February 1917.

war activity, and was re-arrested in April 1919, accused of being a deserter, which he vehemently denied, and he was imprisoned until August 1919.¹⁵⁷ The authorities also had to deal with the shifting population of men returned to prison for disobeying the rules of the Home Office Scheme under the Brace Committee. These different groups presented the prison authorities with a particularly difficult problem for the absolutists refused to obey some prison rules on the grounds of conscience and the militants who had left the Home Office scheme often set out to undermine the system, by calculated disobedience and contempt for authority.¹⁵⁸ Of the conscientious objectors from Wales, seventy men, representing eight per cent of the total of Welsh conscientious objectors, were absolutists. Of the Welsh COs, Emrys Hughes received the greatest number of court martials and imprisonments, and was amongst the handful of COs in Britain who were imprisoned on five separate occasions for a total of three years. Another five conscientious objectors were court-martialled four times, and fifteen COs were court martialled three times.¹⁵⁹

Whilst an analysis of these objectors suggest a wide range of reasons for their absolutism, membership of the ILP was an important motivating force. Emrys Hughes was the son of a minister of religion and a schoolteacher from Abercynon who had trained in Leeds Technical College and was one of the most prominent leaders of the ILP in South Wales. He was a friend and disciple of Keir Hardie, and would later marry Hardie's daughter, Agnes. He was one of the founding members of the NCF and active in the anti-conscription movement. He disliked the term 'conscientious objector', and preferred to describe himself as a Socialist, an anti-militarist or as anti-war.

His experience as an absolutist conscientious objector is the most extreme of the Welsh conscientious objectors in terms of the number of prison terms he

¹⁵⁷ John Sheaff, *Morgan Jones, educationalist and Labour politician: a biographical study*, CO/051, Liddle Collection, Leeds University; Dylan Rees, 'Morgan Jones, educationalist and Labour politician', *Morgannwg*, Vol.31 (1987), 66-83.

¹⁵⁸ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 202.

¹⁵⁹ *Pearce Register 2016*.

served, and his treatment reflects the difficulty the military and civil authorities had in dealing with uncompromising objectors. His first incarceration was in Devizes Military Prison, after he had been court-martialled and sentenced to two years hard labour, commuted to nine months' detention. Taken there in handcuffs and forcibly dressed in a soldier's uniform, he was 'knocked about' by non-commissioned officers and fed at various intervals on bread and water for refusing to do work of a military nature. After seven weeks, he was again court-martialled for refusing to drill, sentenced to a further twenty-one months hard labour (commuted to nine months' detention) and transferred to the Shepton Mallet civil prison, and from there taken in chains to Cardiff, from where he was transferred to Wormwood Scrubs to appear, briefly, before the Central Tribunal which came to the conclusion that Hughes could not possibly possess any conscientious scruples to military service.¹⁶⁰

Hughes's absolutism was anathema to the Central Tribunal and he was sent back to complete his sentence of nine months in Cardiff Prison. He was released from Cardiff Prison in March 1917 and immediately returned to the Kinmel Park barracks, court martialled again, and sentenced to hard labour for another two years, to Caernarfon prison.¹⁶¹ Released on 9 January 1918, he was escorted to join the 3rd Welsh Regiment in Redcar and sentenced to another six months hard labour at North Allerton Prison in North Yorkshire. After four months he was sent back to the regiment in Redcar and was there when the war ended after which he was sentenced to two years hard labour and returned to North Allerton Prison. He was eventually released in 1919 more than three years from the day of his first arrest.¹⁶²

At his fifth court martial at Redcar in July 1918, having described himself as an 'abandoned and unrepentant criminal', he set out his principles as an absolutist:

¹⁶⁰ *Pioneer*, 10 March 1917.

¹⁶¹ *Ministry of Health Papers*, 47/3, Central Tribunal minutes, 25 August, 1916, NA.

¹⁶² *Hardie and Hughes Papers*, Dep 176, Box 8(1), 'Welsh Rebel', 102-213, National Library of Scotland.

I am (also) opposed to taking part in any alternative war service or in any of the industrial efforts to solve the problem of the conscientious objectors, by first of all compelling them to work under degrading conditions in penal settlements, and then allowing them to find other work if they promise to agree from propagating their opinions...

I think the greatest service I can render to the people of this country is to oppose the military institutions which have been introduced and established during a time of panic and terror and by which thousands of men have been forced to submit to a loathsome routine of military discipline and then sent to be miserably butchered in a bloody, futile and foolish war, in which their rulers have involved them. The greatest menace to the liberty of the people is the Conscription Law; the greatest duty of the intelligent citizen is to oppose it at all costs and to continue such opposition and defiance until it is overthrown.¹⁶³

In contrast, Ithel Davies was brought up in rural Montgomeryshire and became one of a small number of conscientious objectors in Britain who were court-martialled four times. Already a well-known writer and poet at the beginning of the war, Davies was a socialist and a farmer's son, whose elderly father farmed an upland farm with 1,500 sheep with the aid of his two sons. He had been raised in a Nonconformist and Radical tradition, and influenced by the ILP and socialist newspapers such as the 'New Leader', which his father received at home. He was an active NCF member and supported a number of young men locally to apply for exemption from the tribunal to the extent that he believed that the authorities had targeted him because of his anti-war activity.¹⁶⁴ After his beating in Mold military prison, the ensuing public outcry ensured from the late summer of 1916 that all conscientious objectors were henceforth placed in civilian prisons.¹⁶⁵

Ithel Davies was gaoled in another three prisons following his period in Mold

¹⁶³ *Pioneer*, 3 August 1918.

¹⁶⁴ Davies, *Bwrlwm Byw*, 61.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid*, 68.

military prison, in Shrewsbury Prison, Winston Green Prison in Birmingham and Armleigh prison in Leeds.¹⁶⁶ The other Welsh COs who were court-martialled four times reflected the extent to which the religious, moral and political attitudes of individual conscientious objectors were fused together. John Christopher Morgan from Hendy, near Pontarddulais was an active trade unionist in the Transport union and described himself as a Congregationalist and a member of the NCF. He was first arrested in May 1916, and remained in prison until January 1919.¹⁶⁷ Pryce Brown, from Guildsfield near Welshpool in Montgomeryshire, aged 29 in 1916, described as a student and a cowman on a farm, was first court martialled in May 1916, and was not released until the summer of 1919.¹⁶⁸ E.D. Mort was a well-known political activist and trade unionist in the Dockers Union in Taibach, near Port Talbot, who had agreed initially to join the Home Office scheme on the Llannon Reservoir scheme before he was 'rejected' by managers and returned to prison.¹⁶⁹ Philemon James Edwards, from Tongwynlais was a coalminer, a member of the ILP, a Baptist, a Quaker, and a member of the NCF. He was arrested in June 1916, and although he was given conditional exemption by the Central Tribunal and required to join the NCC, he was charged as an absentee and imprisoned for the first time in September 1916, before being released after his fourth imprisonment on medical grounds in June 1918.¹⁷⁰ Edgar Davies from Abergavenny, described himself as a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a Baptist, and an attender in Quaker meetings. He was also a member of the NCF and the UDC and had been employed as bank clerk and as a teacher in a Quaker school in Greater Malvern.

The War Office was content for the civilian prison system to have everyday care for the men, although they were still military prisoners.¹⁷¹ In common with the general population of imprisoned objectors, those from Wales tended to be

¹⁶⁶ *ibid*, 64-79.

¹⁶⁷ *Pearce Register 2016*.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid*.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid*.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid*.

¹⁷¹ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 203.

distributed anywhere in England or Wales to serve their prison sentences. Men court martialled in Kinmel Park tended to be imprisoned in Walton Gaol in Liverpool, or at other prisons in the North of England and the Midlands. Those from Mid Wales who were court martialled at Park Hall near Welshpool, could be taken to Shrewsbury Prison and Ithel Davies recalled a group of Welsh conscientious objectors there that included Harold Watkins from Llanfyllin, the Marxist propagandist Nun Nicholas from the Swansea Valley, two brothers from Briton Ferry, Hwyrnos and Cynwawrddydd Jones, and Jimmy Hudson, the future Scottish MP.¹⁷² The prisons used in Wales to accommodate conscientious objectors were Cardiff, and smaller local prisons in Carmarthen and Caernarfon. There is no evidence that conscientious objectors were accommodated in Swansea or Brecon Prison.

Carmarthen was an exceptionally small prison and held a total of thirty-one conscientious objectors as prisoners between June 1916 and July 1919, whilst Caernarfon held no more than ten conscientious objectors at any one time. In prison conscientious objectors were subject to the rules of the 'Third Division' in which they were sentenced to imprisonment with 'hard labour', which meant that prisoners were kept in isolation for 28 days, then worked in association, and after two months, were allowed to receive visits from relatives and 'respectable friends'. By the end of 1917, the government agreed to release objectors because of their poor state of health¹⁷³ and in the next 18 months, over three hundred absolutists were released under this War Office concession.¹⁷⁴ The Home Office's final attempt to resolve the problem of the absolutists was in August 1918, when they created a special establishment in an empty Wakefield Prison where they would be granted the maximum freedom consistent with their status as prisoners. Between two and three hundred of those who had been in prison for more than two years, were brought there and they were given freedom to wander anywhere within the prison complex, and the cells were left unlocked. They were allowed to wear

¹⁷² Davies, *Bwrlwm Byw*, 73.

¹⁷³ Parliamentary Debates (Commons) 5 HL Vol. 27, col 53-6, 4 December, 1917.

¹⁷⁴ *The Tribunal*, 8 January 1920.

their own clothes, mix and smoke freely after working hours, and enjoy generous privileges with regard to letters and visits.¹⁷⁵ But the absolutists were dubious of the Government's motives, and refused to cooperate, which led to the abandonment of the experiment in September 1918.¹⁷⁶

The delay in the release of conscientious objectors after the Armistice led to a succession of hunger strikes in the first three months of 1919, when 130 conscientious objectors had to be temporarily released under the 'Cat and Mouse' Act after periods of forced feeding. Childs's method of dealing with those of the 'die-hards' who were hunger-strikers, was to deal with them under the 'Cat and Mouse' Act, namely the 'Prisoners Temporarily Discharged for Ill Health Act', of 1913, which had been introduced initially to deal with the suffragette movement.¹⁷⁷ The only example of this policy operating in Wales was in Carmarthen when Arthur Horner together with another half a dozen objectors were released after conducting a hunger strike and at the end of March 1919, the Home Office issued instructions that forcible feeding should be abandoned. The militants amongst the conscientious objectors promoted unrest and disruption and Wandsworth became the centre of activity, where there were over a hundred conscientious objectors, described as 'extreme anti-authoritarians', who had been turned down by the Central Tribunal or had been sent back to prison from the Home Office scheme. On 3 April 1918, the Secretary of State for War, Winston Churchill agreed to release all objectors who had served twenty months with time spent in military custody or on the Home Office Scheme being allowed to count towards the total.¹⁷⁸ This enabled the Home Office to release the majority of conscientious objectors from prison by the end of May, and the remainder by the end of August 1919. The absolutists were discharged for 'misconduct' and other conscientious objectors still within the Army were discharged on demobilization:

¹⁷⁵ Davies, *Bwrlwm Byw*, 74-75.

¹⁷⁶ *The Friend*, 20 September 1918.

¹⁷⁷ Childs, *Episodes and Recollections*, 151.

¹⁷⁸ *Cabinet Papers*, CAB 23/10/553(I), 3 April 1919, NA.

none of them received any bounty on discharge, and that was about the only difference we made between the fighting man and the 'conchy'.¹⁷⁹

vii) The Ultimate Price : the deaths of conscientious objectors

In 1921, the Conscientious Objectors Information Bureau published a final list of seventy-three men who had died as a direct result of the treatment they had received in prison or at military hands, of whom ten had occurred in prison, twenty-four in the Home Office work centres, six in military custody and the rest shortly after release.¹⁸⁰

The NCF alleged that these men died as a result of their treatment by the military or in the conditions of the prisons or the Home Office scheme. Graham alleged that these men's deaths were characterized by emaciation caused by want of exercise and nourishment and by mental and physical suffering, so that they were unable to resist the 1919 influenza epidemic or related illnesses such as bronchitis or pneumonia or consumption.¹⁸¹ Rae disputes this interpretation and argues that many of these deaths were caused by illnesses contracted before conscription or by illnesses contracted while working on the Scheme.¹⁸² It is undoubtedly the case that many conscientious objectors were either physically unsuited or incapable of hard manual work in the inhospitable climate of work camps such as Llanddeusant or Llannon, and the scars of their experiences affected the health of many conscientious objectors for many years. Morgan Jones's health broke in prison, for instance, and was never fully restored,¹⁸³ and numerous conscientious objectors, such as Alfred Major, Pontypridd and George Neale, Blackwood were released early on medical grounds because of their ill-health. Others such as Maurice Andrews, Aberaman, were released on grounds of ill-health after suffering brutal treatment after refusing an order to put on an uniform:

¹⁷⁹ Childs, 'Episodes and Recollections', 154.

¹⁸⁰ Boulton, *Objection Overruled*, 266.

¹⁸¹ Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, 313.

¹⁸² Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 190.

¹⁸³ Sheaff, *Morgan Jones M.P. 1885-1939, A Biographical Study*, (1986), 16.

He was forcibly stripped and left in a cold cell in singlet and pants for eight days. The military authorities refused to return his civvies, forced him into khaki, and put him into a padded cell, and in addition to this strapped his hands behind his back for four hours every day, a proceeding which caused him unspeakable agony.¹⁸⁴

The first conscientious objector to die as result of his experiences was Walter Roberts from Flintshire, who contracted high fever from being constantly wet and sodden in the rotten and condemned tents on the muddy hill-side at the first work centre in Dyce near Aberdeen.¹⁸⁵ A total of six Welsh objectors are thought to have died as a result of their experiences - Hal Beynon from Swansea, George Dardis from Risca, Albert Rudall from Newport, Alfred Ernest Statton from Wrexham, Glyn Evans from Pontardawe, and John Evans from Cardiff.

John Evans's death highlighted how ill-suited he was for the work given to him as part of the Home Office scheme. A 24 year old former clerk and a student who was studying for the ministry, he was not politically inclined. He refused to join the NCC and during his initial imprisonment at Cardiff Prison he was offered and accepted the 'Home Office scheme', but his health was affected by the prison diet, and at the work camp in Newhaven, where he worked as a navvy on road making, the winter conditions and his accommodation in a tent without heating apparatus, was hardly likely to suit a man who had become emaciated from prison life. Evans's health gradually declined and after six months at Newhaven, he was sent to Wakefield centre, where the Medical officer certified him to be in an advanced stage of consumption.

In Easter 1917, his mother came to know for the first time of his serious condition, and her application to the Home Office resulted in permission being

¹⁸⁴ *E.K.Jones Papers*, Box 2. NLW.

¹⁸⁵ Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, 312.

given to him to return home and he was discharged. He died on Whit Sunday, 1917. *The Tribunal* castigated those authorities who had let him decline so rapidly:

those who are left behind may be pardoned for a less saint-like attitude towards certain authorities – the men who have maladministered the Military Service Acts, and those who under the pretence of furnishing work of national importance, have imposed injurious and penalising conditions of labour.¹⁸⁶

Albert Rudall of Newport, died in October 1918 after a few days' illness. He had been a prominent 'Socialist with a strong belief in internationalism' and had left Dartmoor two months previously for Newport on the promise of 'exceptional employment' in tree-felling. This work did not materialise, and in order to get employment within the time limit imposed by him by the Home Office scheme, undertook work on the blast furnaces at the Dos Steel works, Newport. Previous to his arrest in 1916 he had had bouts of rheumatic fever and he was far from robust and to *The Tribunal*, it seemed clear that his death has been caused by the unsuitability of his work.¹⁸⁷ George Dardis, a schoolteacher from Risca, a member of the ILP and the local branch secretary of the NCF, died at home after his release from Wakefield Prison in the autumn of 1917. Twenty year old Hal Beynon of Swansea succumbed to a severe bout of pneumonia at Gloucester in October 1918 where he worked under the Home Office scheme. He had been arrested in Swansea in January 1918 and after serving part of his sentence in Wormwood Scrubs, he accepted the Home Office scheme and was transferred to Dartmoor and then to Gloucester where he died.¹⁸⁸ Glyn Evans of Cross Inn, Pontardawe was arrested in the summer of 1916, and was one of the first group of men to be sent to Dyce Camp in August 1916. In early 1918, he went from the Princetown work camp to Swansea, where he had obtained work as a dentist

¹⁸⁶ *The Tribunal*, 27 June 1917.

¹⁸⁷ *ibid*, 17 October 1918.

¹⁸⁸ *ibid*, 7 November 1918.

under the Exceptional Employment Scheme, but died of pneumonia in October 1918. A friend wrote of him:

He was a quiet and unassuming man and he was twenty eight years of age. He called to see me and I noticed then that he had suffered from physical and mental exhaustion and I have no doubt that his sufferings in prison and in the Home Office camps are responsible for his death.¹⁸⁹

Alfred Statton from Cardiff, a married wood sawyer and machinist, and member of the NCF, had joined the Home Office Scheme in the Wakefield Work Centre. He was reported to be suffering from mental illness and delusions, and he was taken to Wakefield Asylum, and then to Shrewsbury Prison being removed to Hereford County Asylum in July 1917, where he eventually died in 1919.¹⁹⁰ Statton was only one of a number of objectors who became mentally ill and physically ill as a result of their experiences. The COIB gave the final number of those who had ‘lost their reason’ as thirty-one’, although, as Boulton points out, it is impossible to verify that figure.¹⁹¹ Aneurin Morgan, for example, a young draper and hosier from Cwmavon, who had been in Walton Prison, was taken to Rainhill Asylum in Liverpool, where he was reported to be suffering from ‘delusional insanity’ and believed he was Jesus Christ. He had to be fed through a test tube, and his case was taken up by Catherine Marshall, and the NCF’s Wales organiser, Henry Davies, Cwmavon.¹⁹² A letter from one of the NCF’s prison visitors to Aneurin’s father described his solitary and obsessively religious demeanour,¹⁹³ and his brother, Tal, wrote following a visit to Aneurin in the hospital:

I found him to be quite normal in conversation, in manner and behaviour; in short I saw no trace of insanity in him. He was however, piteously reduced

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Pearce Register*, 2016.

¹⁹¹ Boulton, *Objection Overruled*, 258.

¹⁹² *Catherine Marshall Papers*, D/MAR/4/53 file on Aneurin Morgan, letter from Superintendent of County Asylum to Henry Davies, 9 February, 1917, Cumbria Record Office.

¹⁹³ *ibid.*, letter from Newbold to Morgan, 1917.

physically, being extremely thin and weak as a result of his policy of hunger-striking. He adopted this plan of refusing food and work in Walton, he told me, so that he might precipitate matters towards his re-trial by the Central Tribunal.... I saw no trace of his suffering from religious mania...I was keenly on the look out for any sign of mental aberration in him, and I together with an elder brother who accompanied me failed to find anything wrong with him.¹⁹⁴

Catherine Marshall was pressed to see General Childs and secure Morgan's discharge from the Army or to appear before the Central Tribunal¹⁹⁵ and Davies echoed the brother's fear that that if Morgan was returned to Walton Gaol, he would resume his policy of hunger striking in which case a second break down was almost inevitable and might have more serious consequences. Morgan was discharged from the Army in June, 1917 as no longer physically fit for service.¹⁹⁶

viii) The Legacy of the Conscientious Objectors

The concluding convention of the NCF was held in November 1919 and it considered its success to have been to break the spell of the 'military machine' and to bring together the two main wings of the conscientious objectors - those pacifists who believed all war to be evil and those who, whilst believing that war was necessary in certain circumstances, also believed that engaging in war should be left to the individual conscience.¹⁹⁷

At the end of the war, the Christian pacifist E.K. Jones idealised the experiences of the conscientious objectors as a 'golden chapter' in his recollection of three years of persecution:

¹⁹⁴ *ibid*, letter from Tal Morgan to Henry Davies, 13 April 1917.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid*, letter from Henry Davies to Catherine Marshall, Spring 1917.

¹⁹⁶ *Pearce Register 2016*.

¹⁹⁷ *The No-Conscription Fellowship*, 88-95.

The prayer meeting in that locked cell: the spiritual talk (or chat), the verses of scripture written upon that wall of iron: the sorrow over that fine soldier that had been sacrificed in vain, the gentle conduct of our men at the Court Martial, the courage shown in the face of collapsed health and when reason was failing, and the cheerful readiness to die for the faith. It was delightful to witness the tenderness of many ordinary soldiers and of officers and doctors towards the prisoners. It is true that we were brought face to face with incredible cases of malice and utterly uncalled for cruelty. May God forgive these ignorant and hard-hearted men.¹⁹⁸

The stigma of being a 'conchie' stayed with many conscientious objectors for many years and made employment difficult for many. But the observance of the ban on voting imposed on COs under the Representation of the People Act (1918) was kept more in the breach than the observance. Indeed, the Caerphilly by-election was won in 1921 by the former conscientious objector and NCF leader, Morgan Jones, and this event indicated how far public opinion had moved since the end of the war. Of the Welsh conscientious objectors, at least six - Morgan Jones, Emrys Hughes, the brothers T.W. and J.W Jones, Wrexham, Ness Edwards and G.M.LI.Davies, became Members of Parliament. Others such as Arthur Horner, David Thomas, Nun Nicholas and Mark Starr became prominent trade unionists, educationalists and labour activists either within the Labour or Communist parties.

A number of these young men went on to play active roles as pacifists in the Nonconformist denominations, and within the Labour Party, the trade union movement and the growing anti-war movement of the twenties and thirties. In Wales this energy expressed itself through the No More War Movement, the Peace Pledge Union, which initiated a mass petition of over three hundred thousand Welsh women against war in the nineteen thirties, and in theyuor movement, Urdd Gobaith Cymru, and its annual message of peace to the youth of the world, established in 1922.

¹⁹⁸ *Y Deyrnas*, April 1919 (E.K. Jones's own translation).

The experience of the Government in dealing with the thorny problem of conscientious objectors in the First World War informed its thinking in the Second World War, and those who could recall the unhappy policy that led to the re-arrest and consecutive imprisonment of the absolutist conscientious objectors in particular, attempted to avoid these circumstances again. When the re-introduction of conscription was considered in 1939, the Government did not wish to revive hostility towards conscientious objectors, and it ensured that civilian control was granted over both civilian and military manpower, and semi-professional tribunals were appointed by Ministers. The opportunity was afforded to objectors to have a range of options for exemption, including 'work of national importance' that was strictly under civilian control, and to have tribunals that were appointed on the basis of the principle of impartiality.¹⁹⁹ The Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, emphasised the importance of respecting the principle of conscientious objection and deplored any tendency 'in the nature of persecution, victimisation, or man-hunting' towards the conscientious objector which he believed was 'odious to the British people'.²⁰⁰

For the individual conscientious objector, his experience of resistance to militarism was invariably seen as one of the great adventures of their lives. Emrys Hughes declared to Bertrand Russell:

When I think of my life before I was arrested, of trying to fit into the environment of one of those soul-killing schools in the Rhondda valley, of disheartening little encounters with the headmasters of the old regime and all the dismal shabbiness of life in a South Wales village, I feel a thrill to think of how we have challenged it all, refused to fight for the foul old ideas and tried to show the way to a better world.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 241-245.

²⁰⁰ Parliamentary Debates, 5 HC 370, col.284, 20 March 1941.

²⁰¹ *Bertrand Russell Papers*, Emrys Hughes to Russell, 4 March 1917, McMaster University.

Conclusion

This thesis has considered the extent and significance of the opposition to the Great War in Wales and narrates a hitherto untold story that has been largely ignored or minimised in the majority of histories of the Great War and its impact on Wales. Much of this story was only captured contemporaneously in a very small number of newspapers and journals, and subsequently in the biographies, autobiographies and archives of those who took part in the movement opposed to the war. The latter tended to frame opposition to the war within the realms of Christian pacifism or political subversion and whilst concentrating on the plight of individual conscientious objectors, has ignored the organised nature of much of the opposition, whether that opposition that took political form through the ILP, the NCF and activists within the SWMF, or religious form through the FoR and the pages of *Y Deyrnas*.

This study attempts to create a coherent description of the anti-war movement in Wales that includes an analysis of the main political, religious and moral strands of opposition and deploys the Welsh element of the *Pearce Register* of over seventeen thousand anti-war activists throughout Britain, including a database of approximately eight hundred and eighty five hundred anti-war activists in Wales.

This thesis is unique in its ambition to describe the range of opposition in Wales to the First World War. Many of the histories of anti-war activity during the Great War in Britain have concentrated on the individual tales of sacrifice suffered by conscientious objectors or on the Government's policy responses. The Welsh historiography of this subject has been dominated by either a labour or nationalist perspective, and its literature has failed to consider the entirety of opposition to the First World War in its various religious, political and moral aspects. This thesis challenges the failure of historians hitherto to provide an adequate empirical description of the extent of opposition to the War and highlights the value of a more localised analysis of the anti-war

movement. It charts how attitudes in Wales towards the War varied geographically and in response to the course of the war, as the initial high level of support in Autumn 1914 changed to growing war-weariness and greater support for the anti-war movement in 1917, before returning to a climate of greater enthusiasm in Spring 1918. The history of the Great War as it affected Wales has invariably been written in the context of other subject areas, but this study deals solely and exclusively with the subject of the extent of opposition to the War in Wales.

Whilst a number of studies have surveyed anti-war activity on a local level in other parts of Britain, such as Weller's study of North London, Pearce's study of the anti-war movement in Huddersfield,¹ and Duncan and Kenefick's studies of anti-war protest in Scotland,² only one local study of anti-war activity in Wales has been published, namely Adams's granular and impassioned account of the anti-war movement in Briton Ferry.³ This study builds upon their pioneering work and focuses on two areas where the anti-war movement was strongest in Wales, in Merthyr Tydfil and Briton Ferry. This study illustrates how the anti-war movement was integrated with the wider community in these areas, and places it in the context of the vigorous politics of the ILP, local trade unions, trades councils and Labour councillors, and the involvement of supportive local chapels and ministers. It also emphasises how local studies of those other areas where the Independent Labour Party was most influential in Wales, may be an effective method of describing and assessing the strength of the anti-war movement. These would include Wales's main towns, Swansea, Cardiff, Newport and Wrexham, together with the Swansea and Amman Valleys, Port Talbot and the Afan Valley and particularly strong centres for the ILP such as Bargoed, Tredegar and Aberdare.

¹ Cyril Pearce, *Comrades and Conscience*.

² Robert Duncan, *Objectors and Resisters*; William Kenefick, 'War Resisters and Anti-Conscription in Scotland: An ILP Perspective', in Macdonald and MacFarland (eds.), *Scotland and the Great War*.

³ Adams, *Not in My Name*.

Much of the history of anti-war activity during the Great War in Britain has concentrated either on the individual tales of sacrifice suffered by conscientious objectors, or on dealing with Government provision for conscientious objection. But the local and regional analysis of the anti-war movement is significant as an indication of how attitudes towards the War could vary substantially both in relation to location but also in relation to the period of the War, as attitudes shifted from initial support in Autumn 1914 to growing war-weariness, cynicism and greater support for the anti-war movement in 1917.

The religious opposition to the war was composed of a small minority, but its main effect was to provide the theoretical and moral underpinning for the beliefs of most conscientious objectors. Its intellectual energy was provided by the group of activists led by Principal Thomas Rees and based in Bala-Bangor Theological College, and it produced the unique manifestation of opposition to the war in Wales in the pages of the Welsh language journal *Y Deyrnas*. The Fellowship of Reconciliation provided the organisational, albeit weak, framework for the Christian witness against war, and the Christian opposition to the war was expressed mainly through individual activists such as T.E.Nicholas, within the Welsh language Nonconformist denominations, in particular the Congregationalists and the Baptists. This thesis also emphasises the role of those millenarian sects, such as the Christadelphians, Jehovah's Witnesses and Plymouth Brethren, who gained the Government's acceptance of the right to avoid conscription and formed a substantial proportion of Welsh conscientious objectors, but have rarely figured in any written narrative of opposition to the War in Wales. This study therefore provides a more accurate reflection of the wider extent and nature of the religious opposition to the war in Wales.

This thesis shows how the political opposition to the War was underpinned by the organisation of the Independent Labour Party, The study of the ILP in the Briton Ferry and Merthyr Tydfil areas provides a better understanding of how

the ILP worked symbiotically with other anti-war organizations such as the NCF and the NCCL to broaden the influence of the anti-war movement. In the 'new communities' of the coalfield, such as the Rhondda and Monmouthshire's eastern Valleys, the vanguard of the anti-war movement was the grouping of 'advanced men' that emanated from the URC and who propagated industrial unionism and workers' control within the mining industry. This study highlights the agitation against conscription within the mining industry, and its achievement in postponing the combing-out of men in the mining industry for eleven months. The 'comb-out' ballot over the intention to bring conscription into the mining industry is a significant barometer of attitudes in south Wales and beyond towards the war, and both the propaganda war conducted by the pro-war and anti-war campaigners provide a rich and detailed portrait of a divided society in the south Wales coalfield. It also marks the growing influence of the Unofficial Reform Committee and its leaders, and the influence of the Russian Revolution on political thought in the coalfield.

This thesis also highlights the significance of the success of the NCCL in its ability to provide a bridge between the anti-war movement and the trade union movement and trades and labour councils. It stoked the fear of the further extension of military conscription and the creation of civilian conscription within vital industries such as coal, steel, tinsplate and transport. Whereas the NCCL gained most support in other parts of Britain from predictable sources such as the ILP, NCF and the UDC, the particular strength of the NCCL in Wales, as in London, lay in its ability to gain support from trade unions and trade councils to campaign against the extension of conscription. The personal connections and influence of its organiser, Ivor Thomas embodied the symbiotic relationship between the NCCL, the trade union movement, trades and labour councils (often dominated by the ILP), and the anti-war movement, and ensured that the voice was amplified to such an extent that the authorities came to view the anti-conscription lobby as a branch of the anti-war movement. Whilst all who opposed the war opposed the extension of

conscription, not all who opposed conscription, opposed the war. But as the NCCL's meeting in Merthyr Tydfil in December 1916 shows clearly, the two elements could combine to form a powerful lobby that gave Government and its intelligence agencies pause for thought.

This thesis quantifies the numbers of conscientious objectors in Wales for the first time, at approximately 900, and provides a detailed breakdown of the reasons for their unpopular stance. Most opposed on religious grounds, but many did so on grounds of morality, in which a belief in Christ's Sermon on the Mount was as much an article of faith for ILP members as a belief in the efficacy of political change. A smaller proportion of conscientious objectors described themselves as 'political' objectors but had the greatest influence on the organisation of objectors through their involvement in the No-Conscription Fellowship, which was run invariably by members of the ILP. This thesis breaks down the approximately 900 conscientious objectors by the basis of their objection to war, and whether they became absolutists and refused to compromise with the State, or, as in the majority of cases, what alternative provision they accepted. Contrary to popular myth promulgated by histories that concentrate on the plight and sacrifice of individual objectors, only a minority of approximately 8 percent were absolutists and therefore served imprisonment without accepting alternative work. Whilst the suffering of individual conscientious objectors cannot be dismissed, and seven of their number died as a result of their treatment, yet most accepted alternative work, albeit in unsatisfactory circumstances, in former prisons and work camps. The No-Conscription Fellowship represented the conscientious objectors in its dealings with Government, organised relief for families, and campaigned against conscription, but as this study suggests, the primacy of conscience did not make it easy to mould this group of men into an effective political weapon against conscription.

In conclusion, this study suggests that the degree of opposition to the first World War, whilst in a comparatively small minority, was greater than has

been recognised in Welsh historiography. This opposition was led by the ILP and radical elements within the trade union movement, and the anti-conscription movement allied with the anti-war movement in south Wales. This opposition was supplemented by a religious opposition which was expressed in the sacrifice and witness of individual conscientious objectors, and in the pages of *Y Deyrnas*.

For many, the conscientious objectors represented the anti-war movement, and for many people, they were 'traitors' and 'shirkers' who did not deserve respect or recognition. But they gained increasing support throughout the war because of the perceived mistreatment they received, including that of some who supported the war effort, such as the Member of Parliament for East Carmarthenshire, W. Llewellyn Williams, who compared the suffering of conscientious objectors, such as Ithel Davies, to the fate of the Puritan martyr, John Penry:

He knew of a young Welsh poet who was doing hard labour for the fourth time. As Recorder he had never given two years' hard labour to the most hardened criminal who had come before him. 'Are we living really in the twentieth century in the era of Christ?' he asked. 'Are people who profess to be Christians so lost to all sense of shame that these things are going to be allowed to go on? I protest against it myself, and I care nothing what the consequences may be'.⁴

As a prominent barrister in south Wales, Williams appeared on behalf of conscientious objectors and anti-war activists in the local courts and his comments reflect a growing respect towards conscientious objectors. For many in the movement the three years after the introduction of the Military Service Act was a period of martyrdom, suffering and persecution, and a golden chapter in their history.⁵

⁴ *Llanelly Star*, 12 January, 1918.

⁵ *Y Deyrnas*, April 1919.

This portrayal of self-sacrifice and suffering was reflected often in biographies and autobiographies of conscientious objectors, or thinly disguised novels by former conscientious objectors such as Gwenallt. For example, T.W. Jones (later Lord Maelor), reflected that his experience as a conscientious objector instilled a hermit's attitude in him, which he compared to the greatest bereavement that he could experience. He acknowledged that much of the bitterness against conscientious objectors was engendered by the loss of a loved one in the war and that it was 'difficult for these families to understand my standpoint.'⁶

The significance of the stand taken by the conscientious objectors, according to John Graham, was that the British state, for the first time, was forced to face substantial civil dissent, described as 'flat disobedience, followed up by a weighty weapon of passive endurance.'⁷ The journalist and conscientious objector, Percy Ogwen Jones, believed that the anti-war movement's greatest weakness was its lack of unity and only the Military Service Act provided the focus for the challenge to military compulsion. What united most conscientious objectors was their conflict with the State, even though a substantial minority of objectors, such as the Christadelphians and Jehovah's Witnesses did not object to the war as much as the compulsion to be under the authority of the State.⁸ The anti-war movement in Wales, more so than in England, succeeded in developing an influential opposition to conscription through the local activism of the ILP in those areas of south Wales where the party had gained its deepest roots. The NCCL and the NCF bridged the anti-war element of the labour movement and brought in that part of the trade union movement that was concerned about the extension of military conscription into civilian life. Allied to the increasingly assertive and class-conscious 'advanced' men of the SWMF, this made for a potent mix of revolutionary fervour and political radicalism.

⁶ Lord Maelor, *Fel Hyn y Bu* (Denbigh, Gwasg Gee, 1970), 88.

⁷ Graham, *Conscription and Conscience*, 343.

⁸ Jones, *Ceinciau Cymysg*.

This trend was not reflected immediately in the 1918 'Khaki' Election, held only weeks after the Armistice, which underlined the unpopularity of those candidates, such as T.E. Nicholas, Labour's candidate in the Merthyr Boroughs, who had been active in the anti-war movement.⁹ Yet, in 1921, the Caerphilly by-election witnessed Morgan Jones returned as the first conscientious objector to become a Member of Parliament after the war. The changing attitudes towards conscientious objectors may have reflected a growing disillusionment with the social and economic conditions that soldiers suffered on their return from the war. James Griffiths reflected that the onset of conscription in 1916 had been the 'first break' in the unity between Nonconformists and the Liberal party and felt it was the beginning of the dissolution of the traditional alliance, creating the opportunity for Labour to win the Nonconformist vote.¹⁰ Together with the response to Lloyd George's refusal to implement the Sankey Commission's majority recommendation to maintain ownership of the coal industry in public hands, it ensured that Labour in Wales grew from ten parliamentary seats in 1918 to eighteen parliamentary seats in 1922, becoming the majority party in Wales in the 1922 General Election.¹¹ At least five Labour MPs for Welsh constituencies could be considered to have been anti-war activists; Ramsay MacDonald (Aberavon), David Williams (Swansea East), Morgan Jones (Caerphilly), Dr. J.H. Williams (Llanelli) and R.C. Wallhead (Merthyr Tydfil).¹² Barlow suggests that the election of the prominent peace activist, G.M.Ll. Davies, as a Member of Parliament for the University of Wales in the 1923 General Election, symbolised the post-war mood. He stood as an independent Christian Pacifist, and was supported by the University's Labour club. Although he only won by ten votes, his victory suggested that 'the ideals of war and militarism were thought to be in the past'.¹³

⁹ David Howell, *Nicholas of Glais: The People's Champion* (Clydach Historical Society, 1991), 25.

¹⁰ Griffiths, *Pages from Memory*, 22-23.

¹¹ Smith, *James Griffiths and his Times*, 21.

¹² Beti Jones, *Etholiadau Seneddol yng Nghymru* (Talybont, Y Lolfa, 1977), 59-64.

¹³ Barlow, *Wales and World War One*, 233.

In Wales, the peace movement increased in popularity and activity throughout the 1920s and 1930s. David Davies, the Liberal M.P. for Montgomeryshire, created the League of Free Nations Association in 1917 and founded the Chair of International Politics at University College of Wales in Aberystwyth in 1919. Following the creation of the League of Nations in 1920, he helped to establish the Welsh League of Nations Union in January 1922 which attracted the support of all political parties, with the exception of the Communist Party, and had a membership of over twenty thousand by 1924.¹⁴

The youth organisation, Urdd Gobaith Cymru (the Welsh League of Youth), was established in 1922 and launched its annual message of peace aimed at the youth of the world. In 1923, the Welsh League of Nations launched a petition to the women of the United States, asking them to use their influence to persuade their country to become full members of the League of Nations, and was signed by the remarkable number of almost four hundred thousand women throughout Wales. In May 1926, two thousand women from villages in the Nantlle Valley near Caernarfon began a Peace Pilgrimage and held fifteen public meetings in north Wales before marching on Hyde Park in London, where over ten thousand women gathered to urge the Government to agree to international arbitration and to support the forthcoming Disarmament Conference of the League of Nations.

This Peace Pilgrimage led to the formation of the North Wales Women's Peace Council, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. In 1935, a 'Peace Ballot' to support Britain remaining as a member of the League of Nations was signed by the remarkable number of over a million Welsh electors, including sixty-two per cent of the Welsh electorate, the largest percentage of any part of Britain. But as Fascism achieved ascendancy in Spain, Italy and Germany by 1936, the League of Nations faltered fatally, and by 1938, the opening of the magnificent Temple of Peace

¹⁴ Huw L. Williams, 'Segurdod yw Clod y Cledd; David Davies a'r Helfa am Heddwch Wedi'r Rhyfel Mawr', in Gethin Matthews, *Creithiau* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2016), 187.

and the establishing of the Centre for the Study of International Affairs in Cardiff presaged the failure of collective international action.¹⁵

The political campaign against the Great War had an obvious influence on Britain throughout the nineteen twenties and thirties, since the ILP's foreign policy of ensuring arbitration between countries through the League of Nations became the Labour Party's foreign policy. After the Great War, hopes for a genuinely different international order based on the surrender of some sovereignty to an international body, were frustrated by the 1919 Paris Peace Conference and only gradually did Labour for instance, accept the League of Nations as a viable organisation. But those policies quickly faltered in the face of the Great Depression and the emergence of challenges to the international order in Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and the militarily resurgent Japan. Gradually a recognition of the weakness of the League of Nations led many of those ILPers who had opposed the Great War to conclude by the mid-1930s that the case for Britain's re-armament was unanswerable. Hugh Dalton was one of the party's leaders who questioned the belief that force could not be justified and in spite of the views of the party leader, George Lansbury, and his adherence to pacifism, figures such as the pacifist Morgan Jones, and war resisters such as Aneurin Bevan and James Griffiths who had been prominent in the anti-war movement, supported re-armament in terms that may have been inconceivable twenty years earlier. In a speech in November 1933, Morgan Jones suggested that the League of Nations ought to take 'violent action' against a nation which showed aggression against another nation. This shift in his attitudes coincided with the growing aggression of Italy and Germany, but for him and others on the left, it was the Spanish Civil War that occasioned them to press for military intervention, and after the bombing of Guernica, he urged the Government to allow volunteers from Britain to join the Republican cause.¹⁶ Aneurin Bevan accepted the general Marxist belief that imperial rivalries led to war, and while the peace movement and the League of Nations Peace ballot in 1935 marked the zenith of the anti-war movement, it

¹⁵ Jones, *Wales and the Quest for Peace*, 140.

¹⁶ Wayne David, *Morgan Jones* (forthcoming publication, 2017).

was the Spanish Civil War in 1936 that persuaded him and other anti-war activists for the first time of the efficacy of armed intervention.¹⁷ By 1938, the majority of Welsh MPs, by twenty to thirteen, voted against Chamberlain's Munich Agreement and went on to support re-armament.¹⁸

For Christian pacifists such as George M.Ll.Davies, although he condemned the Guernica bombing, he argued against intervention: 'all foreigners should withdraw from a civil war'.¹⁹ Davies poured his considerable energy into the Peace Pledge Union, established in 1934, which became the vehicle for a purer non-violent renunciation of war than the League of Nations's emphasis on collective security. He became the British chairman of the PPU after the Second World War. In Wales, it was established at the National Eisteddfod in August 1937, and in an echo of the distinctive nature of the group of activists that coalesced around *Y Deyrnas* in 1916, a Welsh and Welsh-speaking wing of the PPU, named *Heddychwyr Cymru* (Welsh Pacifists), was created in April 1938, with Gwynfor Evans, the prominent leader of the Blaid Genedlaethol (the Welsh Nationalist Party), as its first President.²⁰

By the Second World War, the authorities had learnt lessons from their experiences of having to deal with an intransigent and uncooperative cadre of war resisters. When the Government prepared its legislation for conscription at the beginning of the Second World War, the claim for exemption on conscientious grounds was included but whereas the Local Government Board had conceived the tribunal system as an extension of local government, the tribunals in the Second World War were made semi-professional bodies appointed by the Minister and dealing exclusively with applications from conscientious objectors. The legislation also provided for more categories of exemption on grounds of conscientious objection, so that it

¹⁷ Michael Foot, *Aneurin Bevan* (Victor Gollancz, 1997), 109.

¹⁸ Davies, *Hanes Cymru*, 572.

¹⁹ Llywelyn, *The Pilgrim of Peace*, 259.

²⁰ *ibid*, 256.

was regarded as a ‘useless and exasperating waste of time and effort’²¹ to persuade absolutists to behave in a manner that was contrary to their principles, and those who, whilst unprepared to put themselves in a position to take life, had no objection to doing work that was non-military in nature. The spectre of repeated prison sentences imposed on the absolutists was prevented by the Government’s acceptance of civilian legal machinery to discharge from the army a soldier who had committed an offence for conscientious reasons. These provisions were placed in the Military Training Act, 1940, and as Rae states, they ‘enabled those affected by the Act to exercise freedom of conscience to a degree unequalled in any other country.’²²

The ambition of this study has been to provide a national profile of the extent of the opposition to the Great War throughout Wales, through those organisations such as the ILP, NCF and the FoR who coordinated that opposition. It is hoped that this thesis raises sufficiently interesting questions to be the stimulus for further research related to its main subject area of opposition to the war in Wales. Only Barlow’s powerful vignettes and pen-pictures have gone some way to meet the challenge set by Cragoe and Williams in 2007 that no full-length treatment of the war as it affected Wales had yet appeared.²³ This study suggests that attitudes towards the war were not uniform across Wales, and varied according to time and circumstance. Abbreviated studies of the war, such as K.O.Morgan’s seminal series of textbooks,²⁴ and Gwyn A. Williams’s *When Was Wales?*²⁵ have either emphasised continuity or violent change, but interestingly, Morgan describes his own interpretation of the course of the war in Wales as one in which there is ‘protest as much as patriotism’.²⁶ He recognises the picture of full-blooded

²¹ Neville Chamberlain, 5 HC,col.2097-8, 4 May 1940, cited in Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 242.

²² Rae, *Conscience and Politics*, 245.

²³ Barlow, *Wales and World War One*.

²⁴ Morgan, *Wales in British Politics*; Morgan, *Re-birth of Nation*: Morgan, *From Revolution to Devolution*.

²⁵ Williams, *When Was Wales?*.

²⁶ Morgan, *From Revolution to Devolution*. xiii.

enthusiasm for the war as a 'deceptive, incomplete picture',²⁷ and only briefly describes the growth of humane Liberal dissent and the building up of Labour anti-war dissent, before embarking on a description of the impact of the war on Welsh society more generally.²⁸ Morgan does not engage in the 'new questions' that we are encouraged by Cragoe and Williams to consider about the relationship between war and society, for instance, the groups marginalised in Welsh historiography, such as the aristocracy, Conservatives women, and those who suffered 'residual social hostility' such as those in reserved occupations and 'pacifists'.²⁹ As Braybon suggests, there is a growing interest in the multi-dimensional nature of war and the 'complexity of the war's impact on different societies and social groups' and emphasises there is no one 'war experience'.³⁰

On the basis of this study, it is suggested that elements of the received view of Wales's response to the war should be re-examined with a particular focus the public response from the outbreak of war onwards, and on the reaction of different communities. In their studies of the impact of the war in Swansea and Carmarthenshire, for example, McCarry and Barlow³¹ reflect a remarkable diversity of responses that are at variance with Morgan's smooth narrative of the response to the course of the war in Wales. The changing attitudes of people in Wales towards the War from the outbreak of war, the introduction of conscription and the industrial unrest that concerned the Government in the summer of 1917, led to a more receptive attitude towards the anti-war movement. These subtle changes in attitudes throughout the war are seldom captured by sweeping, 'national' histories.

This study highlights the importance of the local experience of war and considers conscientious objectors not as 'heroic/misguided individuals but

²⁷ *ibid*, 152.

²⁸ *ibid*, 158-164.

²⁹ Cragoe and Williams, *Wales and War*, 11,12.

³⁰ Gail Braybon, *Evidence, History and the Great War* (New York, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2003), 5.

³¹ McCarry, *Labour and Society in Swansea*; Barlow, *Aspects of the First World War in Carmarthenshire*.

also as groups and individuals expressing a broader community consciousness'.³² The anti-war movement was certainly in a minority, however its tolerance by the wider community signified a wider acceptance of such a viewpoint. Whilst this study concentrates on Briton Ferry and Merthyr Tydfil as important centres of opposition to the war, amongst other geographical communities that merit further investigation are other strongholds of the Independent Labour Party in south Wales, such as the Swansea and Amman Valleys, the Rhymney Valley, and the three main south Wales conurbations of Cardiff, Newport and Swansea.

Another field of research that has not been pursued as fully as possible are the shifting attitudes of Non-conformist chapels, churches and ministers of religion during the Great War. Whilst this study has identified key communities of opposition to the War, such as Bala-Bangor Theological College in Bangor, the group involved in the production of *Y Deyrnas*, and those ministers involved in the anti-war movement in certain towns and villages, there has been little study of the relationship between anti-war ministers of religion, for instance, and their chapels, and how tensions were managed between those who opposed the war, and those who supported the War.

Whilst the anti-war movement was undoubtedly a small minority, its extent and influence, especially on a local level was greater than has been suggested by most historians, and the subject has yet to be explored fully. Since anti-war activity was such a profoundly controversial matter at a time when newspapers and even individual conduct were subject to Government control, it is inevitable that contemporary sources, such as newspapers that describe the anti-war movement in a comparatively cool and rational manner, were relatively scarce. The task of assessing the strength of the anti-war movement is aided by the creation of new tools such as the *Pearce Register* online database that for the first time, provides the opportunity to follow the stories of hundreds of individuals who decided to follow their consciences and

³² Pearce, *Comrades in Conscience*, 27.

oppose the war, and the investigation of archive material such as the E.K. Jones Papers provide the opportunity for revelatory illumination of a dramatic episode in Wales's history.

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