



Dissent to war

“We must not forget those who were ridiculed, jailed and worse for daring to fight for peace.”

www.theguardian.com, Priyamvada Gopal, 28 February 2014

Australian Quaker response to WW1

‘Our meeting has been held under a solemn sense of the war cloud now hanging over the civilised world... war involves the suspension of so many moral restraints that we cannot regard it with anything but abhorrence...

At the same time we encourage our members to bear their full share of the national burden by helping to relieve the misery and distress certain to be caused by the present conflict...

We earnestly pray, and believe that when the war clouds have passed away a rational system of international arbitration will be universally adopted.’

Society of Friends, Queensland, 16 August 1914

Challenging the war

Quakers continued to express their testimony to peace in various direct and indirect ways. As well as support for the state Peace Societies, Quakers played a role in newly-established groups such as:

- ◆ The Australian Peace Alliance
- ◆ The Fellowship of Reconciliation
- ◆ The Sisterhood of International Peace
- ◆ The Women’s Peace Army
- ◆ No-Conscription Fellowship
- ◆ The Australian Union of Democratic Control for the Avoidance of War.



Conscription

With mounting war casualties, and insufficient recruitment, the Military Service Act, providing for conscription, came into effect in Britain in March 1916. A similar Military Service Act was introduced in New Zealand in August 1916.

In Australia, however, there was widespread opposition to conscription and, although the government could have introduced legislation, it was considered wiser to put it to the people.

Quakers, of course, expressed opposition to conscription and there were strong ‘Vote No’ campaigns by peace, anti-conscription groups, the Catholic Church (largely led by Daniel Mannix), and sections of the Labor movement. Despite much propaganda, referenda held in October 1916 and December 1917 were both defeated.



Conscientious Objection

Whether to accept compulsory military service, or apply for exemption as a conscience objector, was a dilemma for many Quakers in Britain and New Zealand.

Australians opposed to the war were spared the harsh treatment, including death sentences (commuted) and long prison terms, meted out to many of the 20,000+ conscientious objectors overseas.

Nevertheless men who followed their conscience, and withstood the pressure to enlist, were often labelled as cowards and subjected to derision and humiliation.

Step In Line

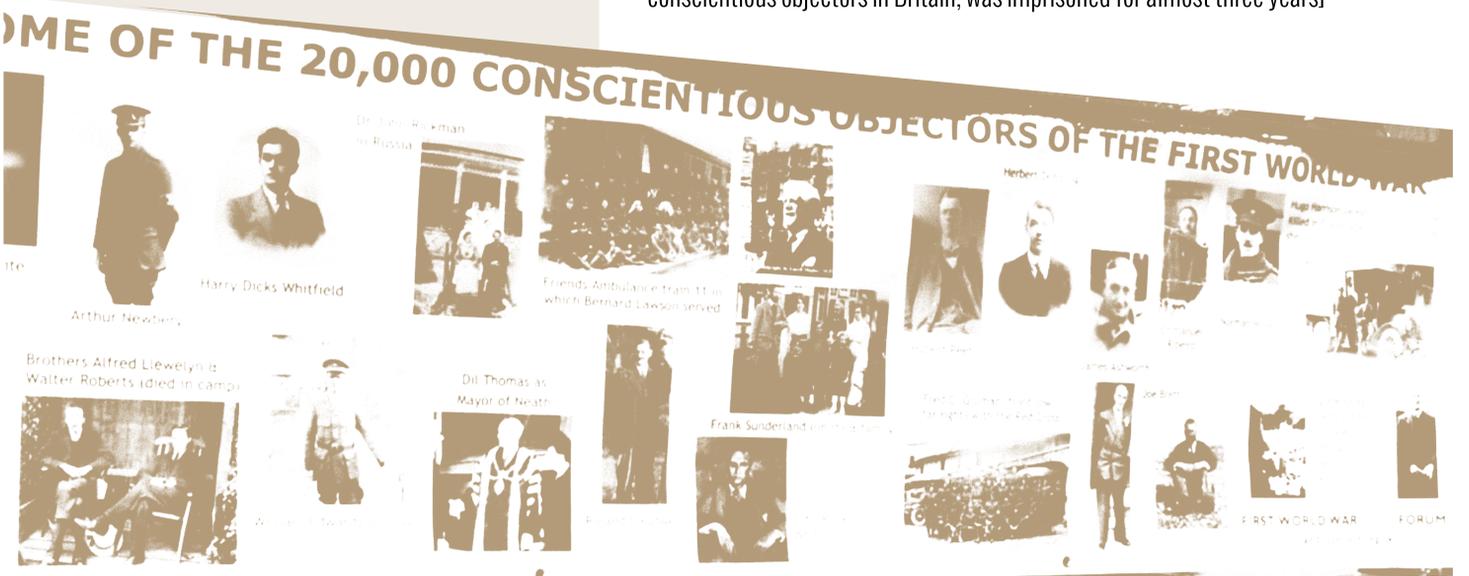
Coo-ee march
stepping through this town,
calling youth to arms
ten thousand miles from home
A freer way it seems
than to be conscripted.
But how much choice is there,
when not to hop in line,
unless they need you here,
marks you as a traitor?
Taunted by your fellows,
sent white feathers in the mail
by those beside you in church pews
declaring “peace be with you.”

Marc Marusic, Sydney, 2008

Cowards or patriots?

‘We conscientious objectors are often called cowards and shirkers... Loyalty to principle prevents us from expressing loyalty to country in the same way as the soldier, but I dare to hope, none the less, that we are still patriots.’

T. Corder Catchpool. On Two Fronts. 1918 [Corder Catchpool, like many other conscientious objectors in Britain, was imprisoned for almost three years]



International Conscientious Objectors' Day, 15 May 2014, Tavistock Square, London.

