

2014-2018 - How will we remember the First World War?

Don't forget the conscientious objectors and women peace activists who opposed it

How can we make sure that the courage of men and women who campaigned to prevent the First World War, who resisted the jingoism, and who, as conscientious objectors, refused conscription, is given proper attention during the First World War centenary commemorations?

In a new briefing - ***Opposing World War One: Courage and Conscience*** - British peace organisations suggest that local and national events to mark the centenary of the First World War should also honour those whose convictions led them to oppose it.

Public events, exhibitions, tv and radio programmes should include the forgotten story of conscientious objectors and women peace activists who opposed the war.

Over 16,000 men registered as COs after the Military Service Act became law in 1916. Many "absolutists" were imprisoned repeatedly, and over 80 COs died as a result of their treatment.

A strong international women's peace movement grew out of contacts made before the war through the international suffrage movement.

Opposing World War One: Courage and Conscience

will be available on the websites of the five organisations behind the briefing:

Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) - www.for.org.uk

Pax Christi - www.paxchristi.org.uk

Peace Pledge Union (PPU) - www.ppu.org.uk

Quaker Peace and Social Witness - www.quaker.org.uk

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) - www.ukwilpf.org.uk

They have prepared it because of their impression that plans for commemorative events announced so far by the government will focus only on military heroism. The 'old lie' identified by war poet Wilfred Owen* - that it is patriotic and glorious to die for one's country in battle - is in danger of being repeated. (*in his poem Dulce et Decorum est)

Dramatic stories

Some of the stories of the peace activists of the First World War are dramatic and powerful. They include:

- The 1200 determined women from 12 countries who overcame multiple obstacles to gather in The Hague in 1915, as war raged. They drew up 20 proposals for stopping the war by a negotiated peace - and took these personally to world leaders.
- The courage of conscientious objectors, such as the group imprisoned in Richmond Castle, Yorkshire, who believed they were going to be executed, and scrawled heart-rending messages on their cell walls which are still visible there today.

Opposing World War One: Courage and Conscience

An information briefing about conscientious objection and peace activism in the First World War is available at:

<http://www.ppu.org.uk/OpposingWorldWarOne.pdf>

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