

PACIFIST(IC) CATEGORIES

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Martin Ceadel. *Semi-Detached Idealists: the British Peace Movement and International Relations, 1854–1945*. London and New York: Oxford U. P., 2000. Pp. viii, 477. £74; US\$178.

Martin Ceadel's *Semi-Detached Idealists* provides a superb overview of the activities of British peace organizations from the Crimean War to the onset of the atomic age; it is the sequel to an earlier volume—*The Origins of War Prevention* (OUP, 1996)—that examined the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century antecedents to the modern peace movement in Britain. Ceadel argues that British peace activists were “close enough to the continent to fear being drawn into any major war which breaks out there, yet distant enough not to be permanently anxious about national security”; from this semi-detached geographic position they adopted an idealistic pacific outlook, believing they had “both the incentive to seek to abolish war and the serenity ... to believe that this ambitious goal might be achievable” (p. 1). Ceadel discounts the positions of historians who emphasize the political importance of the peace movement or who view pacific activism primarily as a social movement. Instead, he supports a third approach which views peace activists “above all as ideological protagonists driven by the conviction that they have achieved fundamental insights into international relations” and which sees them as deeply concerned “with the moral, ethical, and analytical problems posed by war ... irrespective of whether the public or the government is interested” (p. 6). While this ideological outlook united anti-war organizations against militarism, Ceadel also argues that the British peace movement was seriously divided between pacifists supporting the unconditional repudiation of war and a larger *pacifist* group supporting the conditional use of force while international mechanisms empowered to prevent war were constituted.

The second half of *Semi-Detached Idealists* duplicates much of the information found in Ceadel's earlier landmark work, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914–1945* (OUP, 1980). The great strength of the book under review is the presentation of the first cogent overview of the British peace movement in the six decades before 1914. During this period, peace societies experienced varying degrees of public support. Successful and popular British imperial campaigns in Egypt and the Sudan in the late nineteenth century, for example, checked the influence of

the peace movement, while British participation in the Boer War fostered widespread opposition to British colonial policies. Ceadel pays particular attention to documenting the affairs of the London Peace Society by examining the Peace Society's recently opened archives. Ultimately, all British peace organizations "underachieved institutionally" (p. 186) in the run-up to the First World War, which allowed new organizations such as the No-Conscription Fellowship and the Fellowship of Reconciliation to carve a unique—though controversial—position in British society between 1914 and 1918. The 1920s witnessed the "spectacular revival" (p. 239) of the peace movement's fortunes, with the Union of Democratic Control benefiting from the rising support for the Labour Party in the immediate post-war period and the League of Nations Union capitalizing on the improved international situation in the second half of the decade to build a vibrant national peace organization. The latter enjoyed wide support across political and class boundaries. Neither of these organizations, however, could match the public support eventually garnered by the Peace Pledge Union, which adopted utilitarian and humanitarian arguments for pacifism and benefited from the simplicity of the pledge itself and the charisma of its founder, Dick Sheppard. But the deteriorating international situation and the threat of Nazism splintered and polarized the peace movement, leading to its retreat and decline during the Second World War.

There are many direct references to Bertrand Russell in *Semi-Detached Idealists* that will interest Russell scholars. The opening of the London Peace Society's archives allows Ceadel to reveal for the first time that Russell had joined a major pacifist organization in the Edwardian era (p. 170). Ceadel relies heavily on *Collected Papers* 13 and 14 to document Russell's support for the Union of Democratic Control and his active involvement with the No-Conscription Fellowship during the First World War, and he outlines Russell's seemingly ambivalent attitude towards British peace organizations during the 1920s. Ceadel also provides a cogent overview of Russell's temporary support of pacifism following the publication of *Which Way to Peace?* in 1936; this book allowed Russell to become the "leading exponent of utilitarian pacifism" (p. 339) and influenced prominent intellectuals such as Vera Brittain to abandon her advocacy of collective security through the League of Nations in favour of the pacifism of the PPU.

In sum, *Semi-Detached Idealists* is an outstanding piece of scholarship with few discernible flaws. One problematic issue concerns Ceadel's attempt to categorize every strand of the British peace movement. He readily acknowledges the confusion resulting from his initial separation of peace activists into pacifists and pacificists by italicizing the latter term throughout his text. But he compounds this awkward typology by endlessly dividing these two primary camps into various sub-groups. In his chapter on the peace movement in 1936–39, for

example, the reader is given a bewildering collection of pacifist or pacificist categories such as socialists, defencists, absolutists, humanitarians, utilitarians, sanctionists, and accommodationists. But this defect and some minor factual errors and typographical flaws do not detract from the impressive nature of this study. Ceadel's comprehensive analysis is based on a remarkable array of primary and secondary sources, and his prose is clear and lucid. *Semi-Detached Idealists* will appeal to both the specialist and the casual reader, and it solidifies and enhances Ceadel's reputation as the leading scholar of the British peace movement.
