

RUSSELL IN 1916

The Russell Archives came to McMaster just when I was considering on what topic to write my doctoral thesis in modern British history. Since the story of pacifism, its theories and practices, is a major interest of mine, I was delighted to explore the possibilities of basing a thesis on some part of Bertrand Russell's activities, and finally settled on the first world war period. The two organisations with which Russell was closely connected during this time were the Union for Democratic Control and the No-Conscription Fellowship, and I am dealing mainly with the latter. Correspondence and memoranda in the Archives are one of the several sources of which I have made use. What is emerging is a study not only of Russell's activities, but also of the Fellowship as a political pressure group.

The N.-C.F. was founded in 1914 (by Fenner Brockway, then editor of the Labour Leader, now Lord Brockway), to bring together men who would refuse to fight even if conscription were introduced. Russell seems to have admired the work of the group and long contemplated offering his services, but he did not become active in it until conscription was actually brought in, at the beginning of 1916. He then formed part of a small Associates' Political Committee, with H.N. Brailsford, J.S. Middleton and Catherine Marshall. The last-named had had experience with the constitutional wing of the women's suffrage movement, and within the space of a few weeks the Committee produced and put into action a quite remarkably comprehensive scheme for exerting political pressure, making use of the Press, all shades of sympathisers, deputations, Parliamentary spokesmen (notably Philip Snowden), meetings, liaison with other organisations, and all manner of local and central agitation.

Russell's connection with the U.D.C. had been limited to little more than was appropriate from a dissident university lecturer - mainly some writing and the organisation of a Cambridge branch. Even this had brought some obloquy, but more because of the misleading Press campaign against the U.D.C. than because of anything subversive that could justly be ascribed to it. But, for the N.-C.F., Russell really came down into the arena, working incessantly, doing whatever seemed necessary - speaking, writing, answering letters, telephoning, briefing M.P.s, organising and serving on deputations. The machinery for political agitation readied by the Associates' Committee, together with a remarkable information service, for which Catherine Marshall

is again entitled to much of the credit, was constantly in use throughout 1916 to involve public opinion and to confront the Government on issues such as the treatment of conscientious objectors by the Tribunals and by the military, the shipping of some to France (where they might be shot for persisting in their refusal to obey orders), the need for changes in the Military Service Acts, and for new administrative regulations. Meanwhile, nearly all the National Committee went to gaol for issuing a leaflet calling for the repeal of the Military Service Act; and Russell, for the authorship of another pamphlet, suffered prosecution, a fine, refusal of a passport to take up a temporary lectureship at Harvard, and dismissal from his lectureship at Trinity College, Cambridge. A speaking tour which he gave in South Wales led to a War Office order restricting his movements in Britain, under a regulation clearly designed to prevent spies from entering coastal areas.

As the original leaders disappeared, one by one, into prison, for refusing to serve in the army, more and more of the burden fell on the Associates. In January 1917, Russell was elected Acting Chairman of the N.-C.F., and he and Catherine Marshall, as Acting Honorary Secretary, worked together very closely, if not always in perfect harmony, throughout 1917. Some of the exhilarations and discouragements of that year may be described in a later article.

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