

# Russell as ghost-writer

## a new discovery

I recently had the exciting experience of discovering Russell's authorship-cum-editorship of a small book called '*I Appeal unto Caesar*'<sup>1</sup>, published during the First World War and supposedly written by "Mrs. Henry Hobhouse".

Mrs. Henry Hobhouse was not fictitious: indeed she was a determined woman and very much alive. Born Margaret Potter, she was a sister of Beatrice Webb. Her husband was a Member of Parliament, and came from a well-connected west-country family. Their eldest son, Stephen, had become a Quaker and a socialist and had renounced his patrimony before the war. He was a conscientious objector, and went to jail in 1916 in defiance of his mother's wish to use her influence to keep him out.<sup>2</sup> He had not converted his mother to pacifism: Russell wrote of her, "Her son persuaded her that Christianity and War are incompatible, so she gave up Christianity."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, she was determined to get her son out of prison, and appears to have been genuinely convinced by the spring of 1917 that not only her son but his fellow absolutists among the C.O.s - many of whom had served over a year at hard labour - had proved their sincerity and should be released.

Margaret Hobhouse had friends in the Cabinet, notably Lord Milner who had been Stephen Hobhouse's godfather (although Stephen's lapse from the Anglican faith suggests that Milner had not been successful in the role). The No-Conscription Fellowship was naturally glad to accept Mrs. Hobhouse as a fellow-traveller as soon as they became aware of her first attempt to influence the Cabinet (in May 1917), and Russell in particular (he was then Acting Chairman) saw that the alliance was one which brought exciting possibilities of opening new doors. That she - respectable, conservative and pro-war - should turn to the "unpatriotic" N.C.F. for help and information is less extraordinary than it may seem: recently discovered evidence shows that government officials, Cabinet members and even the Prime Minister himself did the same from time to time. Russell's undoubted social respectability would also have been reassuring to Margaret Hob-

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<sup>1</sup>London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1917. 86 pages.

<sup>2</sup>S. Hobhouse, *Forty Years and an Epilogue: An Autobiography 1881-1951* (London: James Clarke, 1951), p. 155; *ibid.*, "Fourteen Months' Service with the Colours", in Adrian Bell (ed.), *We Did Not Fight* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1935); W. David Wills, *Stephen Hobhouse: A Twentieth-Century Quaker Saint* (London: Friends' Home Service Committee, 1972), p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>B.R. holograph note with Hobhouse correspondence, Russell Archives.

house - she may indeed have met him before the war.

Early in June 1917, shortly after the failure of her first attempt to persuade the Cabinet to free the absolutists, Mrs. Hobhouse made use of information received from Russell for a letter to the *New Statesman*. At about the same time, she began to plan a pamphlet to urge the case of the imprisoned objectors. Russell was soon supplying her with material from the N.C.F. files and with advice, and the project quickly grew in scope. The outcome was the paperback book '*I Appeal unto Caesar*', which was published in August 1917.<sup>4</sup> It is now clear that the body of it was written by Russell.

The greatest secrecy regarding Russell's authorship was preserved, and it has lasted down to the present day. There were very good reasons why as few as possible should be in on the secret. Margaret Hobhouse was most appreciative of Russell's assistance, but was apprehensive of having it discovered. If Russell had obeyed her wishes, the evidence in correspondence would not now be available. She wrote: "By the way, is my correspondence with you safe from molestation in the post? Perhaps when you have finished with it you will kindly destroy - and I should rather it was not known to others - as you are not supposed to be helping me and I am not saying a word to anyone."<sup>5</sup> Both Hobhouse and Russell knew that the book would lose all its special effectiveness if it were known to emanate from the N.C.F. It had features, in addition to its supposed authorship, which an N.C.F. publication could never have aspired to. Mrs. Hobhouse had approached a number of distinguished people who, though for the most part strongly pro-war, might be persuaded to make a guarded statement on the unsatisfactory nature of the treatment of the absolutists. The book is prefaced not only by an introduction by Gilbert Murray, but by "Notes" (actually passages excerpted, with permission, from letters written to Mrs. Hobhouse) by the Earl of Selborne, Lord Parmoor, Lord Hugh Cecil and Lord Henry Bentinck (*Ottoline Morrell's* brother). In this way, it was designed to reach an influential audience with whom the N.C.F. had little credibility. Russell indeed had become convinced that it was difficult for long-standing opponents of the war and of conscription to be heard outside their own restricted circle.

Margaret Hobhouse wrote a four-page foreword to the book. Her correspondence with Russell makes it clear that substantially the whole of the rest was written or compiled by him, although he was careful to consult

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<sup>4</sup>The first advertisement in the *Tribunal* was in the issue of Aug. 30.

<sup>5</sup>M. Hobhouse to B.R., n.d., Russell Archives. Lady Constance Malleon, in a letter to the Russell Archivist of August 19, 1974, reports that she was told nothing of B.R.'s authorship, though she (faintly) recalled the book.

her and to conform to some extent to her wishes, and to make use of the arguments which she was in the practice of using. At the same time he refused to smooth over the awkward and unpopular opinions of the absolutists, explaining in a letter:

I feel also a certain scruple in agitating for the release of these men without letting it be known what it is that they really believe. They care more about their beliefs than about themselves, and they think, rightly or wrongly, that they help the spread of their beliefs by being in prison for them. It is hardly fair to them, or even really kind, to minimise their opposition to the views of the majority of mankind. I feel sure this is what your son himself would think.<sup>6</sup>

The bulk of the book was in fact largely in the words of the objectors themselves. One chapter dealt with the careers and views of representative men, and made use of many court-martial statements. Another described prison conditions and their effects, mostly as they were revealed in letters written from prison. These chapters offered little scope for Russell's distinctive style. As for the selection of material, some might have accused him of leaning too far towards softening the tone of the political objectors. There is a piquancy in finding Lilla Brockway, wife of the socialist founder of the N.C.F., disgusted with Mrs. Hobhouse for the description of Fenner, which leaned heavily on his missionary parentage. "It sounds", she wrote to Marshall, "as though he were a wretched little Sunday-school prig."<sup>7</sup>

In the first chapter, a short general statement of the problem, Russell's authorship can clearly be recognised. It begins with a lucid outline of the position of the absolutists, and then moves into the argument for their release. When Russell came to present this ostensibly from the point of view of the pro-war Mrs. Hobhouse, and for an audience of the like-minded or even less liberal, he was not able to prevent (or to resist) a suggestion of satire, or at the very least of double meaning. He wrote severely of the absolutists that although their numbers were

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<sup>6</sup>B.R. to M. Hobhouse, June 6, 1917, copy in Russell Archives. Russell also said in this letter that he had the pamphlet well in hand, and that he thought that he quite understood the sort of thing she wished it to be. In letters to him, she mentioned receiving his manuscript, referred to the supporting letters she was soliciting and discussed the foreword she was to write. She suffered some injury in an accident at about this time, which may have increased her dependence on Russell's help. A few of the letters bear dates in early June 1917, others are undated. All are in the Russell Archives. An effort, so far unsuccessful, has recently been made to locate the other side of the exchange (a copy of only one of B.R.'s letters to Mrs. Hobhouse is present), but it is likely that she obeyed her own advice and destroyed the evidence.

<sup>7</sup>Lilla Brockway to C.E. Marshall, n.d., Catherine Marshall papers, Cumbria Record Office. Fenner Brockway is now Lord Brockway but still fighting the good fight.

negligible as far as the Army was concerned, "there is no doubt that the treatment of them has caused criticism abroad, and has tended in this country to rouse sympathy for the very class which, of all others, right-minded people would least wish to invest with the halo of heroic endurance." In another passage he purports to explain the wrong-headed beliefs of the men:

They will say in all sincerity that they yield to none in anxiety to save their country, and many of them in support of this can point to a past record of self-sacrificing social service. But they maintain, paradoxical as it may appear, that victory in war is not so important to the nations's welfare as many other things. It must be confessed that in this contention they are supported by certain sayings of our Lord, such as, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Doubtless such statements are to be understood figuratively, but the history of religion shows that founders of religions are always apt to be understood literally by some of their more slavish followers. These men believe that the greatest goods are spiritual goods. They believe, like Spinoza, that hatred can be overcome by love, a view which appears to derive support from a somewhat hasty reading of the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>8</sup>

One wonders how much closer Russell could have got to mocking his readers and even the nominal author. Such a passage could hardly have been written by Margaret Hobhouse, but fortunately for the cause no contemporary reader seems to have questioned the authorship. The book was of course hailed by the anti-war press and praised by the liberal papers, but it also earned favourable reviews in the *Times Literary Supplement* and in the *Observer*. Even the *Spectator* admitted that the little book deserved "the attention of the Government and of the public generally".<sup>9</sup> Four editions were printed between July and October 1917, for a total of 18,000 copies. Mrs. Hobhouse gave all her profits to the cause of prison reform.<sup>10</sup> There is no reason to suppose that Russell received a penny for his work. The N.C.F. distributed copies to all who attended the Inter-Allied Socialist Conference at the end of August: Milner gave one to the King<sup>11</sup>; one hundred were placed in libraries by the Fellowship at Mrs. Hobhouse's expense. Well pleased with the circulation, Mrs. Hobhouse gave a donation of six pounds anonymously to the N.C.F.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup>*'I Appeal unto Caesar'*, pp. 7, 6. Kenneth Blackwell and John G. Slater both say that these pages seem to be authentic Russell.

<sup>9</sup>*Spectator*, Sept. 15, 1917. See also "A Notable Book and Some Opinions Concerning It", *Tribunal*, Aug. 23, 1917; Thomas C. Kennedy, "The Hound of Conscience: A History of the No-Conscription Fellowship, 1914-1919" (Ph.D. thesis, University of South Carolina, 1967), p. 390.

<sup>10</sup>Wills, p. 53.

<sup>11</sup>War Office officials regarded this development with alarm. John Rae, *Conscience and Politics* (London: Oxford, 19170), p. 215.

<sup>12</sup>Receipt and covering letter from C.E.M., date illegible, not sent; "Propaganda Report: July and August 1917"; "Propaganda Report", Nov. 9, 10, all in Marshall papers.

Russell's venture into ghost-writing must be judged a success.<sup>13</sup> *'I Appeal unto Caesar'* was the most prestigious of several publications which appeared in mid-1917, designed to take advantage of, and to feed, the mellowing feeling towards the absolutists which was beginning to appear, particularly in religious circles, and which was even affecting the fringes of Government. Russell himself seems to have had no doubt of its effectiveness, commenting in November in an article in the *Tribunal*:

As a result largely of Mrs. Hobhouse's "I Appeal Unto Caesar", many influential people who formerly had only contempt and derision for the C.O. have now come to believe that the policy of indefinitely prolonged imprisonment is not the wisest in the case of men whose sincerity and earnestness are sufficiently patent to arouse public sympathy.<sup>14</sup>

Margaret Hobhouse's name (which, characteristically, she always gave as "Mrs. Henry Hobhouse") and her capacity for making a nuisance of herself, carried weight, and what Russell had done was to ensure that that weight was thrown into the scale on behalf of all the absolutists and not merely for her son and perhaps other religious objectors.

Although Russell's main purpose was not achieved, Margaret Hobhouse's was. Influential public opinion, aroused in part by *'I Appeal'*, helped to bring the matter before the Cabinet again in August and in October, but the War Office refused to grant unconditional release to all absolutists.<sup>15</sup> Instead, those who were declared to be seriously ill were let out. Stephen Hobhouse was among the first, although it is questionable whether his undoubted ill-health was really acute, but Russell was enormously relieved that the move also released the N.C.F.'s Chairman, Clifford Allen, who was indeed dangerously ill.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>It was not the first time he had avoided signing a piece of anti-war propaganda. In addition to the 1916 letter reprinted in *Russell 2*, he had written leaflets. Also in 1916 he had (presumably) consented to the publication of an interview in which he was not identified. See "Says War Will Have Bad Effect upon Education / View of Famous Mathematician in England" in the *New York Evening Post*, Oct. 11, 1916, p. 5. We hope to reprint this in a forthcoming *Russell*. [Editor.]

<sup>14</sup>"A New Tribunal for Gaol Delivery", *Tribunal*, Nov. 15, 1917.

<sup>15</sup>War Office file 32/5474, Public Record Office, London, contains the documents relating to these attempts.

<sup>16</sup>See, for example, B.R. to Ottoline Morrell, Dec. 18, 1917, Ottoline Morrell Papers, no. 1478, University of Texas; B.R. to Allen, Dec. 1917, Russell Archives.