Legal Problems of Conscientious Objection to Various Compulsions Under British Law

Address to a Meeting of the Friends' Historical Society, 3.v.1968

(*Note*. All statements of fact relate only to Great Britain: some statements relate only to England and Wales.)

WHEN the law imposes upon individuals obligations with which some individuals feel that they cannot conscientiously comply, then, unless special legal provision is made for them, these individuals must choose between disobeying their consciences and disobeying the law. In order to prevent or minimize conscientious law-breaking, Britain made statutory provision for legal conscientious objection in four branches of law—the law regarding oaths, the law regarding compulsory military service, the law regarding compulsory vaccination, and the law regarding religious worship and religious instruction in schools. There have been some other kinds of legal compulsion to which there has been conscientious objection with no statutory rights for objectors: some examples of these are industrial conscription and compulsory fire-watching in war time, and the legal compulsion on parents to provide or allow necessary medical treatment for their children.

It will be noted that the kinds of legal compulsion to which there has been conscientious objection are very diverse —I cannot think of any other subject of inquiry which would involve comparing the law of oaths with the Vaccination Acts! But I have found this very diversity helpful, as it assists the inquirer to identify what are the problems of conscientious objection itself as contrasted with the problems of conflicting views on particular questions. I have found myself in agreement with the views of some conscientious objectors and in disagreement with the views of others and I have had to consider what is the right treatment of objectors holding views which I regard as mistaken or even nonsensical.

Another result of my inquiry has been to make me very interested not only in the views and problems of the objectors but also in the views and problems of their opponents—the authorities enforcing the law. This is a salutary result as, while I have been an objector to certain legal compulsions, I am also a citizen with some responsibility for the formation and enforcement of laws. In this address I shall discuss the legal problems of conscientious objection bearing in mind the problems of both sides.

Regarded logically, provision for legal conscientious objection is a queer phenomenon. When Parliament has decided, rightly or wrongly, to make a particular type of action compulsory, it can be presumed that Parliament has also decided that the advantages to be gained from the universal performance of the action outweigh the expense of effort and other disadvantages of enforcing compulsion on the recalcitrant. Why then should Parliament make concessions based on the motives for recalcitrance of some of those unwilling to obey the law?

In three out of the four spheres of law in which conscientious objection has been provided for by legislation, this legislation was preceded by a considerable amount of conscientious law-breaking over considerable periods. The granting of the first legal right of affirmation in 1689 was preceded by thirty years of illegal refusal of oath-taking by Quakers and Baptists. The first concession made to Quakers in the Militia Acts, in 1757, was preceded by a hundred years of Quaker resistance to military service. Compulsory vaccination of children against smallpox existed for 45 years—from 1853 to 1898—before legal conscientious objection was allowed, and in the last thirty years of this period there were considerable numbers of conscientious law-breakers. The fourth sphere of law—the "conscience clause" in the Education Acts—seems to show a contrast, as the right of parents to withdraw their children from religious worship or religious instruction in schools has been part of the law as long as there has been compulsory education, that is since 1870. But if this right is regarded as part of the wider right of religious freedom, then it can be said that this right was preceded by much conscientious law-breaking in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thus it is clear that one reason for the introduction of legal

conscientious objection was the wish to avoid a state of law under which a considerable amount of illegal conscientious objection occurred.

Britain has experienced illegal conscientious objection when there has been no provision for legal conscientious objection, as in spheres of law already cited. But illegal conscientious objection has also occurred when there has been inadequate provision for legal conscientious objection, inadequate in the sense that the right has not been granted, or has not been granted fully, to all objectors, for example, with regard to objectors to military service from 1916 onwards. I will now discuss some of the problems of illegal conscientious objection.

Problems of Illegal Conscientious Objection

The enforcement of the law in cases of illegal conscientious objection has included three types of sanction: (1) Direct constraint; (2) Legal disabilities of various kinds; (3) Punishment under the criminal law. I will discuss these three types of sanction in turn.

Direct Constraint

I am using the term "direct constraint" to mean coercion which attains the object of the law without involving the co-operation or consent of the objector. This method cannot be used to compel any type of action but it can be used to enforce claims on money or property and to perform certain medical operations.

During the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Quakers consistently refused to make payments for military purposes—these payments included rates, fines and payments to substitutes for militia service. They also refused to supply specific property, for example, horses and carriages. The demands of the law were normally enforced by distraint on the property of the objector, the value of goods taken often exceeding the original demand. At some periods the total of distraints was considerable; for example, the returns from Quarterly Meetings for the year 1803–4 showed a total value of £2,840 for goods taken in distraints for military purposes. In Essex Quarterly Meeting area in that year thirty-two individuals (including

three women) suffered distraints for original demands varying between 1s. 8d. and £25: the goods taken in distraint included wheat, barley, cheese, sugar, wearing apparel, a silver spoon and two gallons of gin. The legal right to distrain for fines and rates has also been used against conscientious objectors in other spheres of law; for example, it was fairly commonly used with regard to fines under the Vaccination Acts and, with regard to rates, it was used to enforce the law against the considerable number of "passive resisters" who refused to pay rates for denominational schools in the early twentieth century.

The medical operation of vaccination could, theoretically, have been enforced by direct constraint—in practice the seizure of babies and children from their parents would probably have led to riots. Such action was never officially sanctioned in Britain nor even (as far as I know) seriously proposed. But in a few cases in recent years the method of direct constraint has been used to enforce the law when Jehovah's Witnesses have refused, on religious grounds, to consent to necessary blood transfusions for their children. In these cases a Juvenile Court has placed the child in the care of the local authority which has then given consent to the operation.

Direct constraint seems to me to be, in some circumstances, the least objectionable method of enforcing the law against the conscientious objector: the object of the law is attained, punishment is avoided, and there is no violation of the conscience of the objector because his consent is not involved. However, the possible scope for methods of direct constraint is limited.

Legal Disabilities

Legal disabilities affecting the objector were very important in the history of the law of oaths. William C. Braithwaite in "The Second Period of Quakerism"[1] described the legal position of Quakers before 1696 as follows: without taking oaths "they could not sue for their debts, nor carry through their transactions with the customs and excise, nor defend their titles, nor give evidence: they were, in strict law, unable to prove wills or be admitted to copy-

[1] P. 181.

holds, or take up their freedom in corporations, and in some places they were kept from voting at elections. Nor could they answer prosecutions in ecclesiastical courts for tithes and church-rates." In 1833 the preamble to the Act giving Separatists the right of affirmation stated: they "are exposed to great losses and inconveniences in their trades and concerns, and are subject to fines and to imprisonment for contempt of court, and the community at large are deprived of the benefit of their testimony". This last phrase showed a recognition that insistence on oaths harmed the community as well as the objector. A striking case of this was cited in Parliament in 1869: a witness as to the identity of a murderer was not allowed to take the oath because he was an unbeliever and his evidence therefore could not be used. Oaths were also obligatory on assumption of certain offices, for example M.P.s and members of a jury. It was not until 1888 that all conscientious objectors to oaths were allowed on all occasions to affirm instead of swearing.

Legal Penalties

Penalties imposed on conscientious objectors under the criminal law have varied in severity from the maximum penalty of a fine of twenty shillings and costs under the Vaccination Acts to the sentences of imprisonment for life or at the King's pleasure incurred by seventeenth-century oath-refusers and the death sentences pronounced, but not executed, on some objectors to military service in the First World War. The history with which I am concerned does not, fortunately, include any executions, though it does include the deaths of some objectors caused or partly caused by conditions of imprisonment.

With the possible exception of the seventeenth-century period of persecution of Nonconformists, I think it is fair to say that the motives for punishing the objector have not normally been vindictive. The purpose of punishment has been to enforce the law both by coercing the law-breaker himself and by deterring others from taking his line of action. The present discussion is not concerned with the effectiveness of law-enforcement on recalcitrants other than conscientious objectors. With regard to objectors the effects of successful coercion must be distinguished from the effects of unsuccessful coercion.

Legal deterrence of the conscientious objector has probably often been successful. On this matter one would not expect any conclusive evidence but the two following sets of figures show a strong probability that many objectors were successfully deterred by fear of the law.

In the 1880's, when there was no legal exemption from vaccination, there were 11,400 cases of fines inflicted on parents breaking the law over a period of about ten years. In the nine years 1899 to 1907 nearly 400,000 legal exemptions were granted to parents claiming as conscientious objectors. It is true that the number of fines inflicted would have been considerably greater had all the local authorities concerned rigorously enforced the law—there were many law-breakers unpunished. It is also true that the annual number of births was larger in the later period. But the difference between the two figures is so great as to convince me that many parents in the 1880's did not resist the law but would have applied for legal exemption had it been available.

Another convincing set of figures concerns objectors to military service in the Second World War. Out of 12,200 men refused any exemption by tribunals, probably not more than a quarter proceeded to resist military service by breaking the law (though a considerable number among the others were able to work in Civil Defence or other civilian employments). There were also some objectors who were successfully coerced after starting illegal resistance: probably about 8 per cent of those prosecuted for refusing medical examination then submitted to examination (though a number did so for the purpose of entering Civil Defence).

The effect of successful deterrence or coercion of the conscientious objector is that the object of the law is attained by forcing the individual to act against his conscience or with an uneasy conscience. We should consider whether this result is worth the price paid for it.

Public opinion and the authorities have usually been much more worried about the effects of unsuccessful coercion than about the unseen effects of successful deterrence. Fines and, to a greater extent, imprisonment cause suffering to the objector and his family. This has often roused the sympathy not only of people agreeing with his views but of many disagreeing. Most objectors have been generally

law-abiding people, often respected by their neighbours and acquaintances, and their treatment as criminals has been resented by those who have known them. It has also shocked many Christians to find fellow-Christians punished for acting according to their interpretation of Christian principles.

Public resentment against the use of coercive methods was particularly important in the history of compulsory vaccination. At Derby, in 1871, an objector, on his release from prison, was received by bands of music and "several thousand people with a large red flag carried in front". Sympathetic magistrates sometimes imposed nominal penalties. The local Board of Guardians (the authority responsible for enforcing the law) might refuse to prosecute offenders: the Royal Commission on Vaccination found that in 1891 nearly a fifth of the Boards in the country were not enforcing the law. The Commission also found that, "In some districts guardians have been elected from time to time solely because they have pledged themselves not to prosecute those who fail to have their children vaccinated". As a result of resistance to the law and non-enforcement of the law the percentage of babies vaccinated decreased from 84½ per cent to 62½ per cent between 1885 and 1897. The majority of the Royal Commission reached the conclusion that it would conduce to increased vaccination if, while general compulsion remained, "a scheme could be devised which would preclude the attempt (so often a vain one) to compel those who are honestly opposed to the practice to submit their children to vaccination". The majority therefore recommended some form of legal exemption for those "honestly opposed" to vaccination and this was enacted in 1898.

Imprisonment causes not only suffering but waste—waste of the services of the prison staff and waste of the services of the imprisoned objector. This waste has been regarded as particularly harmful in war time and the wish to avoid it has influenced the treatment of objectors to military service, particularly during the Second World War. In that war the Ministry of Labour had to enforce the provisions of the National Service Acts, but it often refrained from using its powers to prosecute again after one sentence of imprisonment had been served and instead tried to

fit the objector into some form of useful service which he was willing to undertake.

One of the important problems of illegal conscientious objection has been the problem of repeated prosecutions of the same individual. The possibility of repeated prosecutions has occurred whenever the law has created a continuing obligation and the objector has not been induced to obey the law by being punished once. Two extreme cases, cited before the Royal Commission on Vaccination, were those of one parent prosecuted sixty times in respect of nine children and another parent prosecuted seventy-nine times in respect of two children. During the First World War 1,548 objectors to military service were sentenced by court-martial more than once and of these 372 were sentenced more than three times. During the Second World War local authorities were responsible for enforcing the law concerning fire-watching and in some cases authorities persisted in prosecuting the objector: the record was one case of eleven and one case of nine prosecutions.

The argument against repeated prosecutions was well expressed by the Chairman of the Magistrates on the occasion of the ninth and last prosecution in one of these fire-watching cases: "We do feel that his case has been before us quite often enough, and we cannot see any useful purpose is served by further prosecution . . . The law cannot make a man do things—it can only punish him for not doing them."

The authorities have often refrained from using their powers to continue indefinitely the prosecution of the same offender: in contrast, the position of the objector in the army has been especially unfortunate because under army law the commission of a further offence has almost inevitably led to further punishment.

There have been two types of statutory protection against repeated prosecutions. In 1871 a Vaccination Bill included a clause limiting the number of prosecutions of one individual but, having passed in the House of Commons, the clause was defeated by one vote in the House of Lords. However, in 1898 the Vaccination Act provided that no parent could be convicted more than twice on account of the same child. The other type of protection was that given by the National Service Acts of 1939 and 1941 and continued under post-war

National Service: these Acts provided that an objector sentenced to imprisonment for three months or more, either by court-martial or for refusal of medical examination, should have the right to apply to the appellate tribunal.

This discussion has illustrated some of the problems of illegal conscientious objection. I will now discuss some of the problems of legal conscientious objection.

Problems of Legal Conscientious Objection

British law has wisely not attempted to define conscience but, in conceding the right of legal conscientious objection, it has had to decide how to distinguish between the conscientious objector and the objector for other reasons. Three alternative methods of identifying the conscientious objector have been used: (1) to confine the right of legal conscientious objection to members of certain religious bodies; (2) to make the right dependent on the decision of a judicial body in each individual case; (3) to give the right substantially to all who claim it by making some form of statement. I will discuss these three methods in turn.

Rights Confined to Members of Certain Religious Bodies

The two spheres of legislation which confined the right to members of certain religious bodies were the early law of affirmations and the law concerning the militia.

The Toleration Act of 1689, which gave the first legal right of affirmation, allowed this right, for very limited purposes, to Protestant dissenters. Apart from the provisions of this Act, rights of affirmation prior to 1854 were confined to three religious groups—Quakers, Moravians and Separatists. Quakers were covered by legislation from 1696 onwards, Moravians were covered from 1749, and Separatists were covered by an Act of 1833. From 1833 onwards members of these three bodies had the right of affirmation on all occasions and in 1838 the right was extended to former Quakers and Moravians if they had "conscientious objections to the taking of an oath". (This is the earliest use of the term "conscientious objection" that I have yet found.) The Quakers and Moravians Acts 1833 and 1838 are still in force.

In a series of Acts from 1854 to 1867 limited rights of affirmation were granted to all religious objectors. The person claiming the right had to declare "that the taking of an oath is, according to my religious belief, unlawful". In 1869 and 1870 limited rights of affirmation were granted to unbelievers—atheists and agnostics. The position since 1888 will be discussed later.

The law concerning the militia first made special concessions to Quakers in 1757 and from 1786 they were protected from compulsory enrolment in the militia. From 1803 these concessions were extended to Moravians. In practice there was no compulsory military service between the 1830's and 1916. In 1916 a proposal was made during the parliamentary debates on the Military Service Bill that the ground for legal conscientious objection should be that the applicant was "a member of the Society of Friends or of any other recognized religious body one of whose fundamental tenets is an objection to all war". But this proposal was not adopted and the twentieth-century law of military conscription has not exempted members of specified religious bodies solely on account of their membership.

There are some arguments in favour of this method of identifying the conscientious objector. Probably a historical reason was that concessions to religious bodies, whose objection to oaths or military service was well known, were regarded as logical corollaries of religious toleration of these bodies. The method is easy for the administrator, as the objectors are in well-defined groups whose approximate numbers are known. Another advantage of the method is that it lessens the risk of a pretended conscientious objection: few people would become Quakers or Christadelphians or Jehovah's Witnesses just to avoid military service; they would be deterred by the other obligations of membership of these bodies.

But there are two strong arguments against this method of exemption. One argument is that the method excludes many objectors. For example, during two years of the Second World War, out of 3,350 applicants to the South-Western Tribunal only some 40 per cent were members of religious denominations with collective views against military service. (Quakers were 9 per cent of applicants.) The second argument is that this method is based on the

false conception that consciences can be classified tidily in groups and that it shows a lack of respect for what is essentially a decision of the individual.

Rights Dependent on Decisions of a Judicial Body

The second method of identifying conscientious objectors —by making the right dependent on the decision of a judicial body in each individual case—was used in the first period of legal exemption from vaccination and in the two twentieth-century periods of military conscription.

The Vaccination Act of 1898 exempted the parent from any penalties "if within four months of the birth of the child he satisfies two Justices . . . in petty sessions, that he conscientiously believes that vaccination would be prejudicial to the health of the child". This system of exemptions lasted for nine and a half years—from the middle of 1898 to the end of 1907. In the nine years 1899–1907 the total number of exemptions was just under 400,000; the number of exemptions each year averaged about 5 per cent of the total number of births in the year.

Magistrates were given no initial guidance as to how their new powers should be exercised and there was no right of appeal against their decisions. There were wide differences between different courts in their method of treatment of applicants and in their interpretation of the requirement that the applicant should "satisfy" the magistrates. At one extreme were courts which granted exemption with no examination of the case: at the other extreme were courts which cross-examined applicants or urged pro-vaccination views on them. The Lord Chief Justice stated in 1904: "Some Magistrates appeared to think that they ought to be satisfied that vaccination would be harmful to the child . . . He desired to point out that this was not the question which Magistrates had to decide." There was no information available as to the number of applications refused but the Home Secretary received frequent complaints about refusals. In 1907, in introducing the Bill which ended this system of exemptions, John Burns spoke of "requiring the applicant to satisfy the Bench of the reality of his conscientious conviction—that is, to satisfy others of the state of his own conscience—an impossible task".

During the First World War and from 1939 to 1960

exemptions from military service on the ground of conscientious objection were granted on the decision of tribunals. Because of lack of time I will discuss only the tribunal system in the Second World War.

During the War there were nineteen local Conscientious Objectors' Tribunals in Great Britain, each with a county court judge (or his Scottish equivalent) as Chairman, and there were six divisions of the appellate tribunal. All applicants dissatisfied with the decision of their local tribunal had the right to appeal to the appellate tribunal. The tribunals had to decide not only whether to grant exemption but also what (if any) conditions of exemption to impose.

From 1939 to the end of June, 1945, the number of men who had their cases considered by tribunals was 59,192. The decisions of local tribunals or, in the cases of appeal, of the appellate tribunal were as follows (these figures do not include applications to the appellate tribunal after a sentence of imprisonment):

	Number	*Percentage of Applicants*
Registered unconditionally ..	3,577	6 %
Registered conditionally on performing civilian work specified by the tribunal	28,720	48½%
Registered for non-combatant duties in the Forces	14,691	25 %
Total registered as conscientious objectors	46,988	79½%
Not granted exemption.. ..	12,204	20½%

At least 31 per cent of applicants appealed to the appellate tribunal and decisions on appeal added over 5,300 to the number of men granted exemption by local tribunals.

These figures show that nearly 47,000 men—nearly four-fifths of all who appeared before tribunals—obtained some type of exemption without breaking the law. In the large majority of cases the legal exemption granted apparently satisfied the conscience of the objector and he was able to engage in useful work to his own satisfaction and to the benefit of the community.

Decisions of the appellate tribunal in cases of men apply-

ing to it after a court-martial sentence of imprisonment resulted in the discharge from the army of more than 500 original objectors and of a considerable number of men who had become objectors. Decisions in the cases of men applying after a sentence of imprisonment for refusal of medical examination freed over 1,000 men from future liability for military service. Thus a considerable number of illegal conscientious objectors had their position eventually legalized.

No one who observed the system working would claim that it led to no mistaken decisions, though it was administered with much greater efficiency and generosity than the system of the First World War. Tribunal members were fallible and sometimes prejudiced. Objectors did not always make the best of their case. The inarticulate were sometimes at a disadvantage. There were large differences between local tribunals in the proportions of applicants exempted so that, even with the rights of appeal, the system was not completely fair in the sense of giving equal treatment to all in equal circumstances. Applicants with certain types of views often had a special difficulty in convincing tribunals, for example, non-religious objectors, non-pacifist objectors, and objectors who refused to accept any condition of exemption. The system did not eliminate conscientious law-breaking but it did make it unnecessary for the majority of objectors. I leave it to your consideration whether any system of this type can achieve perfect results, dependent as it is on the judgement of fallible human beings without powers of telepathy.

Rights Available to All Who Claim Them

The third method of identifying conscientious objectors—to give the legal right substantially to all who claim it—is the method used in the present law regarding religion in schools and in the present law regarding rights of affirmation; it was also the method used in the last forty years of compulsory vaccination.

The "conscience clause" for parents has been part of the law since 1870, when education became compulsory. The clause in the Education Act of 1944[1] reads as follows:

[1] Section 25(4).

"If the parent of any pupil . . . requests that he be wholly or partly excused from attendance at religious worship in the school, or from attendance at religious instruction in the school, or from attendance at both religious worship and religious instruction in the school, then, until the request is withdrawn, the pupil shall be excused from such attendance accordingly." (The parent has no legal right to withdraw his child from religious activities in independent schools, that is schools entirely outside the public educational system.) The law gives the parent an unconditional right: his reasons for requesting the withdrawal of his child need not even be reasons of conscience, though presumably they usually are. There seem to be no collected figures regarding the number of parents who use this right, though it is certain that they are a fairly small minority of all parents. Some parents are probably deterred from withdrawing their children by reluctance to make the child feel conspicuous or by inadequate provision of accommodation and alternative activities for children who are withdrawn. The child himself has no legal right of objection.

The present law regarding rights of affirmation for conscientious objectors to oaths is governed by the provisions of the Oaths Act of 1888. The wording of the main provisions of the Act is as follows: "Every person upon objecting to being sworn, and stating, as the ground of such objection, either that he has no religious belief, or that the taking of an oath is contrary to his religious belief, shall be permitted to make his solemn affirmation instead of taking an oath, in all places and for all purposes where an oath is or shall be, required by law."[1] "Every such affirmation shall be as follows: 'I, A.B., do solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm', and then proceed with the words of the oath prescribed by law, omitting any words of imprecation or calling to witness".[2]

It should be noted that the right to affirm has to be claimed. The objector to being sworn can be asked to state the reason for his objection, though in many cases he is not asked to do so.

Do the present legal provisions include all conscientious

[1] Section 1.
[2] Section 2.

objectors to oaths? A religious believer might disapprove of oaths but not regard them as "contrary to his religious belief": in this case, in strict law, his objection would not be covered. But the provisions probably do cover nearly all objectors.

There are no figures available as to the number of people claiming the right to affirm but it is certain that they are a fairly small minority. Some objectors may be deterred by reluctance to make themselves conspicuous in court, a place where, in any case, many people tend to be nervous. In some cases it is probably still a social disadvantage to the person concerned to make a public statement of unbelief, and there have been cases in which unbelievers asking to affirm have been subjected to a detailed inquisition on their opinions.

There is no legal advantage to be gained by affirming, as the law of perjury applies to affirmations in the same way as it applies to oaths. After a long struggle it has been accepted that, for the purpose of ensuring truth-speaking or the performance of promises, the religious sanction of the oath is not necessary for everyone. Those who conscientiously take an oath and those who conscientiously make an affirmation are equally fulfilling the purpose of the law.

The Vaccination Act of 1907 exempted a parent from penalties if, within four months from the birth of the child, he made a statutory declaration before a magistrate or other authorized officer. The wording of the declaration was: "I. . . do hereby solemnly and sincerely declare that I conscientiously believe that vaccination would be prejudicial to the health of the child". This remained the law until compulsory vaccination was ended in 1948 under the provisions of the National Health Service Act.

In the first year of the new law the proportion of babies exempted was 17 per cent—double the proportion in the previous year. In the years prior to 1939, from 1913 the proportion was over 35 per cent; from 1925 the proportion was over 40 per cent; and in each of the years 1935 to 1938 the proportion was slightly above 50 per cent. The actual number of exemptions was large—it averaged 259,000 a year in the decade 1908–17 and 295,000 a year in the decade 1928–37.

These figures raise two interesting questions. The first question is whether the legal right of exemption was claimed by some parents whose objections were not conscientious. In my opinion the right probably was so claimed in some cases: the parent had to take some initiative and trouble to claim exemption but might prefer this to the trouble and discomfort of having the child vaccinated. In providing for all conscientious objectors the law took the risk of providing for some unconscientious objectors. The second question is whether the effects of this system of exemptions defeated the purpose of the Vaccination Acts to obtain universal or near-universal vaccination of children. To this question the answer is clear: this purpose was defeated, and this fact was one reason for the eventual ending of compulsion. The law had given to all parents opposed to vaccination the opportunity to obtain exemption, and, as such a large proportion had used this opportunity, the logical sequel was to make vaccination voluntary.

Conclusion

I have discussed some legal problems of conscientious objection under British law. But conscientious objection involves not only legal problems but problems of ethics and problems of political theory. I do not propose to tackle these problems this evening! I will merely state my opinion that conscientious objection is one of the bulwarks of liberty of conscience. It is a menace to any totalitarian system and a reminder to all governments and parliaments that they are not infallible. The objector's conviction that the State is not the ultimate moral authority, and that he must act according to his own conscience, even though it is fallible, is a contribution of great value both to morality and to citizenship.

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