

A NEARLY FORGOTTEN CHAPTER IN BRITISH PEACE ACTIVITY – 1915

When the war of 1914 broke out, Henry Hodgkin was 37 years old, at the height of his powers. (He was, at that time Secretary of the Friends Foreign Mission Association.) During the first months of the war he was actively concerned for Friends to take a positive stand and also to see what could be done among Christian pacifists. The latter had involved bringing together a number of Christian pacifists at Cambridge, and this in turn led to the formation of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. The former led to the formation of a special War Sub-Committee of the Peace Committee of London Yearly Meeting. This sub-committee was quite active for about a year, but its work was then carried on by the main Peace Committee. Its active year's work has been largely ignored or forgotten by those who have written about Friends' peace activities during the First World War, and more needs to be recorded.¹

It is perhaps still useful to give the names of some 15 Friends who apparently accepted membership on the sub-committee at the beginning,² but no document can be found that indicates the ground Henry Hodgkin hoped would be covered. The first meeting lasted for most of the day on January 2, 1915 at the home of Edith and Percy Bigland in Chelsea, including an hour or more for lunch and general conversation. This method of bringing people together was used a good deal by Henry Hodgkin, who at the same time, as mentioned above, was bringing together the leaders of what became the F.O.R. My recollection even suggests that we met like this for a whole day more than once, but surviving records do not support this. Anyhow, it certainly had the effect of giving us a strong sense of unity which almost certainly would not have been achieved without the informal session.

As far as I know, Henry was mainly responsible for the selection of the fifteen. Several individuals were invited because they were known to have close relationships with important people. Thus, Francis Fox was in close touch with leading Jews and pressed our committee to support their claim to a territory in Palestine. Arthur Stanley Eddington

was a close friend of leading German physicists. Among the original members there were some strange omissions. Edward Grubb, editor of the monthly *British Friend*, had just published a pamphlet called 'The True Way of Life' which was a vigorous reply to J. St. Loe Strachey, editor of *The Spectator*, who had published a book entitled '*A New Way of Life*' advocating compulsory military training. It may well be that Edward Grubb was asked to join the committee, but refused on grounds that he was already giving all he could to the No Conscription Fellowship (N.C.F.) which was busy organizing young men to resist conscription. This, indeed, may be helpful in understanding the early demise of the sub-committee, for by the end of 1915 it was very clear that conscription was coming and many of the most active young pacifists were working to prevent it. Thus, A. Barratt Brown, who was of the fifteen, was a close friend of Clifford Allen, Chairman of the N.C.F., and as far as I remember, Barratt Brown gave the War Sub-Committee little active support because he was working for the N.C.F.

The documents still extant hardly mention Robert J. Long, who was the full time secretary of the recently formed Northern Friends' Peace Board, and so he was the only British Friend whose job was to work full time for the cause of Peace. Thus, when our War Sub-Committee took any action it could be sure that the Northern Friends' Meetings would know about it. Robert Long, as far as I remember, was a full member of our committee and a very active one.

Some of our members saw our main function as trying to bring the war to an end, so a good deal of our time in the first several meetings was given to this possibility, and indeed the last thing that the sub-committee worked on was really a petition, but for technical reasons referred to in the sub-committee's Minutes as a 'Memorial', to the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary.

We have already noted that John William Graham had been asked, presumably by Henry Hodgkin, to be Chairman of the sub-committee. To my surprise, the committee asked me to become Secretary. I had thought Ernest Unwin of Leighton Park might be the secretary as he took a useful part in drafting the pamphlet which was published under the title: 'Looking Toward Peace'. The publication and distribution of this quite long pamphlet looks to us now as the chief achievement of the sub-committee, but their sense of proportion in early 1915 was very different from ours in 1986, and it is perhaps useful to quote what J.W. Graham or I wrote at the time as the main exercise of the Committee at its first meeting.³

Although many possible topical questions were discussed, with a view to further consideration in writing by various committee members, in fact none of these was ever written up.⁴ The main pamphlet, 'Looking Toward Peace' covers much ground, and correspondence on this kept the secretary busy through the early months of 1915. Several special meetings were held up and down the country, and from my central position I heard a good deal about this from those who undertook speaking engagements. I think, for instance, of Leonard Doncaster (who may now be identified as Hugh Doncaster's father and whose early death was a grievous loss to Friends, especially in East Anglia). J.W. Graham had many speaking engagements in many parts of the country, and in one of his letters to the Secretary which is preserved, he spoke of things getting more and more difficult which presumably means that the public only wanted to hear about military victory and did not readily turn to problems of peace making.

Records of attendance show that the sub-committee was not getting full and enthusiastic support from all of its members during the latter part of the year. A letter to the Secretary from A. Stanley Eddington, which has been preserved and which was really his letter of resignation, illustrates this attitude and shows why the sub-committee, by the end of 1915, was absorbed into the main Yearly Meeting Peace Committee.⁵

I became secretary of the Friends' Peace Committee, as it was called, and effort was made to get this appointment approved by the Central Tribunal for Conscientious Objectors, but that Government body would not agree to this. They insisted on my becoming a teacher, so Edward Backhouse took over the secretarial work of the Peace Committee. He also found time and energy to run for Parliament on the basis of peace by negotiation, but his service to Friends was tragically cut short by a fatal Alpine accident in 1922. After his death and also following the sudden death of Thomas P. Newman, Chairman of the Peace Committee, John W. Graham became its chairman. Bertram Pickard succeeded Edward Backhouse and his long and effective work for Friends, first in London, then in Geneva, may fairly be said to have continued the work that the War Sub-Committee had started. Thus, while the War Sub-Committee had a life of its own for hardly a year, it nevertheless planted seeds which were to bear fruits for many, many years to come.

Horace G. Alexander

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ But see: Ormorod Greenwood, *Quaker Encounters*, (Vol. 3, 1978), 190.
- ² From page one of the Minute Book of the War Sub-Committee:
 Horace G. Alexander, 3 Mayfield Rd., Tunbridge Wells.
 Edith H.A. Bigland, 29 Tite St., Chelsea, SW.
 A. Barratt Brown, Woodbrooke, Selly Oak, Birmingham.
 Arthur S(tanley) Eddington, The Observatory, Cambridge.
 Marian E. Ellis, Wrea Head, Scalby, Scarborough.
 Francis W. Fox, 80 Lansdowne Rd., London, W.
 Joan M. Fry, Durbins, Guildford.
 John W. Graham, Dalton Hall, Manchester.
 (J. St G. Heath, Toynbee Hall, Commercial St., Whitechapel, London, E.)
 Henry T. Hodgkin, 15 Devonshire St., Bishopgate, London, EC.
 Thomas P. Newman, Hazelhurst, Haslemere, Surrey.
 Joseph Sturge, 318 Hagley Rd., Edgbaston, Birmingham.
 Francis Thompson, Rowantree, Rose Mount, Birkenhead.
 Ernest E. Unwin, Grove House, Leighton Park, Reading.
 William Whiting, Elberton, West Park, Leeds.
 – with power to add to their number.
- ³ The Minutes of the first meeting of the War Sub-Committee read as follows:
 ‘... Much general conversation took place on our functions and policy – on our possible service in interpreting the requirements of an ideal morality in the light of the actual situation – in working for the settlement of the war either immediately or at the earliest psychological moment – in considering whether all the influences for peace should be utilized by us, or only the highest motives – in recognising the many links between war among nations and war among classes, and yet the separableness in practice of the two reforms.
 ‘It was decided to name ourselves “The War Sub-Committee”’: also to
 (1) Organize Peace Propaganda throughout the Society on the Christian argument.
 (2) Prepare public opinion for a permanently peaceful settlement.
 (3) Face and discuss the many theoretical problems presented by the war.
 To carry out (1) a circular was drafted to Preparative Meetings: – (to be fixed on here) Towards (2) proposals were read from Francis W. Fox – from Horace G. Alexander – and from some German Socialists whom Henrietta B. Thomas had met or heard from (NOTE: Henrietta Braithwaite Thomas, whose mother was English, was a young American Quaker doctor who gave all her time and effort to bring the warring European nations together – HGA, 1986)
 ‘It was decided to endeavour to prepare for our next meeting a draft proposal for terms of peace on Christian lines, to be prepared separately by northern and southern groups and combined by the Chairman and Secretary. We decided to meet at Birmingham on Thursday, February 11th at 11 o’clock.
 ‘Towards (3) the following 20 problems were written down to be considered before next time; by those whose initials are appended to each, or by others. No decision as to the use to be made of such contributions was reached.
 ‘It was decided that the five northern Quarterly Meetings should send their replies to R.J. Long, Secretary of the Northern Peace Board.’

John W. Graham, Chairman

⁴ The 20 problems:

1. Reasons for not enlisting even in a 'just' war. J.W.G., J.St G.H., E.E.U.
2. Limits of the right of the state over the individual. J.W.G., A.B.B.
3. Limits to the use of force. J.W.G., A.B.B.
4. Relativity of moral obligation. J.W.G.
5. Question of an international force. H.G.A.
6. Possibility of immediate peace. J. St G.H., H.G.A.
7. The soldier's conscience, or the limits of military discipline. W.W.
8. Nationality and federal ideas as opposed to imperialism, in Europe. H.G.A.
9. The same throughout the world. H.G.A.
10. Can war be civilised? H.G.A.
11. What is the meaning, in war-time of loving our enemies? H.T.H., E.E.U.
12. War as a moral tonic. J.M.F.
13. Why is a moral tonic needed? J.M.F.
14. Can peace be a moral equivalent for the tonic of war (heroism, romance, self-sacrifice)? J.M.F.
15. The meaning of national 'honour'. H.T.H.
16. National magnanimity. J.M.F., M.E.E., H.T.H.
17. The possibilities of an unarmed state. J. St G.H.
18. International morality. W.W., A.B.B.
19. Disarmament as a practical policy (connect with 17). H.G.A.
20. Offensive and defensive warfare. J.W.G.

⁵ Arthur Stanley Eddington's letter:

Observatory
Cambridge
1915 Sept. 27

Dear Alexander

I am sorry I shall not be able to come up for the Committee on Friday.

I think it is probable that the Committee has a useful service in organizing work among Meetings and arranging for speakers, etc. But that is not the part of the work for which I joined and I do not think I am likely to come to the committees in this connection.

With regard to the other part, the thinking out of the attitude, which we ought to take up on the various problems of war and peace, and giving, perhaps, a lead to the Society; I think the main purpose of the committee is over. At the time we started, pacifism seemed to be in a bad way and the testimony of Friends against war was very shaky. Now the movement is much stronger. Whether the work of the committee contributed much to this (apart from the private activities of members of it) is very doubtful; but I think we must have derived benefit from our discussions. Certainly I do not regret the time spent on those earlier meetings. But, though much remains to be done on the intellectual side of the peace question, it has now got beyond the scope of a committee, I think.

I think probably I shall resign from the committee, but will wait and see what is the outcome of the consideration of its future activities.

Yours sincerely,

A.S. Eddington