
Conscientious Objectors

[leaflet, circa May 1917]

by Louis C. Fraina

Typeset 4 page leaflet published by the League of Conscientious Objectors, New York.
Specimen in BoI/DoJ Investigative Files, NARA collection M-1085, reel 934.

The Conscientious Objector is determined, come what may, to refuse any form of military service.

He is equally determined to refuse alternative, or non-combatant service.

This means that the Conscientious Objector refuses *any* participation in this war, and his refusal is based not alone upon the objection of his individual conscience, but upon the general social necessity of striking at war and at the reactionary purposes that war promotes.

Alternative service is as necessary a factor in war as actual military service at the front. They are inseparable. They are equally objectionable. The man who refuses to fight at the front, but is will to work behind the lines or at home to assist *others* to kill and be killed, is a coward. The Conscientious Objector is not a coward and has no use for cowards.

Against all forms of war service because all are equally objectionable and reactionary — that is our animating purpose.

But what about the Red Cross, it may be asked. The Red Cross is as necessary a factor in war as munitions and soldiers. It heals men and then sends them to the front to continue the horrible business. The Red Cross, fundamentally and essentially, is neither sentiment nor humanitarian — its purposes are strictly military. Under these circumstances the Conscientious Objector will have nothing to do with the Red Cross or similar organizations. Logic and necessity are brutal.

The war is on, and therefore we are asked to

participate in it because whatever our opinions are, we must see it through. But to “see it through” is to discard our principles. If the man who objects to war is going to acquiesce in war after it is declared, then wars will never end. Our opposition must continue,



consistently and permanently, for in this opposition alone is there any hope of the abolition of war. The Conscientious Objector does not for a moment imagine that his refusal is going to end the war, or even materially influence its course. But that is relatively unimportant, for his chief purpose is to make his protest, to arouse revolt, to clarify the opposition, and to build up a morale for action in the days to come.

The Conscientious Objector does not proceed upon the basis of his conscience alone. The convictions of our conscience are the expression of our social principles, of the purposes for which we struggle during war and peace. Ours is a social cause. We are engaged in a real war to make the world safe for democracy — the social war of the oppressor against the oppressed, the war for the overthrow of the infamous social system that produces the evil of war and evils infinitely more horrible. War, after all, has a certain adventurous charm; but the evils of peace, the corroding evils that eat at the souls of the people and that

crush spiritual democracy, are much worse if not so apparent.

In its Conscription Law the government recognizes only those Conscientious Objectors affiliated with religious organizations, such as the Quakers. It may be said that our objections are social and political, and not objections of conscience. But since when is conscience necessarily synonymous with religion? Religious beliefs are usually writ in water; *vide* the alacrity with which they, whose creed insists that “Thou shalt not kill,” willingly acquiesce in the business of butchery. Our convictions are intense, and they are part of our lives, our temperaments, and our consciences. They are not inherited, but acquired; they are not of a creed, but of life. And it is this that makes the Conscientious Objector determined to “carry on” his objection to war.

The government may or may not grant us exemption. But the Conscientious Objector is supremely indifferent to what the government may decide. The government is the representative of the conservative, dominant state of things; whereas our attitude and convictions are the expression of a new social order now in the process of asserting itself. It is not simply a matter of our conscience and the consciences of those who participate in war, but of the social order these two groups represent.

Conscience in itself is not the determining factor, *but the principles the conscience represent.*

In every land and clime there is a great struggle going on between the old and the new, between the oppressed and the oppressor, between the conservative and the revolutionary. In this great struggle the

international solidarity of the revolutionary forces is indispensable. The Conscientious Objector in his protest against the war strikes hands with the objectors in all the belligerent countries — aye, even in Germany, where Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, and Katie Dünker are in prison for their convictions; even in Austria, where Fritz Adler has just been condemned to imprisonment for a revolutionary act.†

It is this international solidarity that we shall maintain at all hazards.

All nations, in the last analysis, are responsible for this war, for they are all dominated by a social order that produces war. All peoples are equally the victims of this war, for all peoples had the war forced upon them by the ruling class. These peoples must strike internationally against war and against those who make war; and it is our protest, even in the midst of war itself, that will stimulate this solidarity and action.

The Conscientious Objector opposed to the Conscription Law, and after it was passed, agitated for its repeal. But conscription has been put through, and it now remains for the Conscientious Objector *as an individual* to emphasize his objections and his principles by individual action.

This is our determination. These are our purposes. At a moment when the hypocrisy of preaching democracy and freedom while acting war and tyranny is dominant, the Conscientious Objector prepares himself to act in the spirit of real democracy.

*Issued by The League of Conscientious Objectors,
179 East Broadway, New York.*

†- Friedrich “Fritz” Adler (1879-1960) pleaded guilty in May 1917 for the Oct. 21, 1916, assassination of Austrian Prime Minister Stürgkh in protest of the world war. This trial date provides the circa date for Fraina’s leaflet. Although initially condemned to death, Adler’s sentence was commuted to 18 years’ imprisonment after public protest and he was freed after the war. From 1921 to 1923 Adler served as the Secretary of the so-called “Two-and-a-Half” International, established in Vienna.

Edited with a footnote by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2007. • Non-commercial reproduction permitted.