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“The Conchie,” Enemy or Friend?

**To what extent did propaganda influence Welsh perceptions of
Conscientious Objectors during the First World War (1914-18)?**

Helen Frances Carroll

May 2021

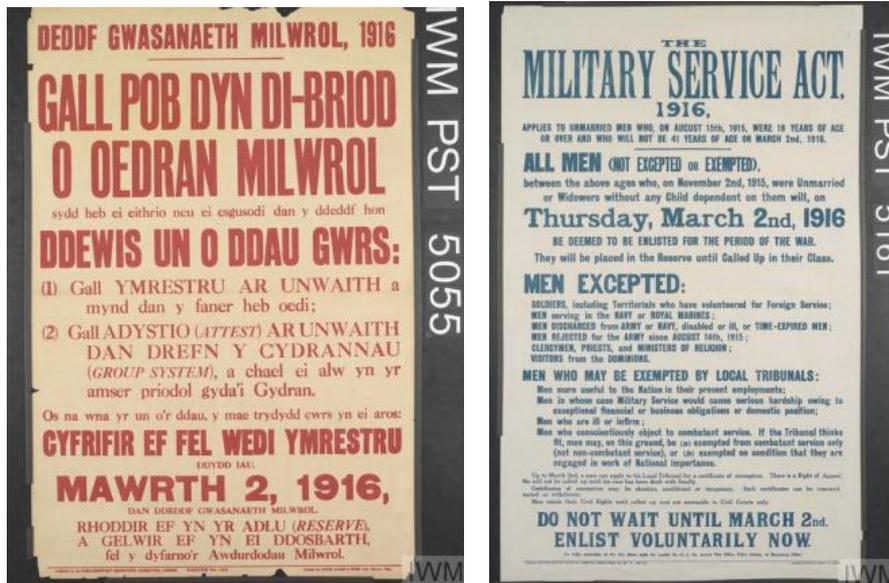
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Introduction



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The above single sheet posters were produced by the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, in both the Welsh and English languages, and were publicly displayed to notify the public that Parliament had passed the Military Service Act 1916 which introduced compulsory active service, also known as conscription.³ These posters advised the public how the Act affected them and the action they needed to take. Importantly, for the purpose of this dissertation, the Act allowed for men to apply to their local tribunal for ‘a Certificate of Exemption from the provisions of this Act’ due to Section 2, (1),(d); ‘on the ground of a conscientious objection to the undertaking of combatant service’ but the reality was the British Government needed the public

¹ © IWM Art.IWM PST 5055, Imperial War Museum. Available at <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/28371> (Accessed 22 May 2021).

² © IWM Art.IWM PST 5161, Imperial War Museum. Available at <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/28449> (Accessed 22 May 2021).

³ In January 1916 the Military Service Act 1916 was passed by the UK Parliament. It applied to single men aged between 18 and 41 and from May 1916 was extended to include married men. UK Parliament, (Online, n.d.). Available at <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/yourcountry/overview/conscription/#> (Accessed 22 May 2021).

to support the war and the conscientious objectors' refusal to fight was believed by the British Government to undermine the war effort as their stance could have led the public to question the validity of the War which may have resulted in men refusing to enlist.⁴ The purpose of this dissertation is to establish the extent that propaganda influenced the opinions of the Welsh population about conscientious objectors, also known as Conchies, who refused to fight during the First World War (1914-18). The Oxford English Dictionary describes propaganda as 'the systematic dissemination of information, especially in a biased or misleading way, in order to promote a political cause or point of view' and this seems to accurately describe the way that the British Government attempted to convince the public as to the merits of the First World War and to deter men from applying for exemption due to their conscience.⁵ Conversely, this method also appears to have been used to promote an anti-war message usually by politically motivated, socialist groups, such as the Independent Labour Party which included high-profile members who were also conscientious objectors.⁶ By examining how conscientious objectors were portrayed in Welsh newspapers and the public's reaction, this dissertation will determine to what extent propaganda influenced Welsh public opinion about conscientious objectors.

The use of propaganda during the First World War has previously been examined by historians but usually in the context of the success or otherwise of persuading the

⁴ Military Service Act, 1916, The National Archives. Available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1916/104/contents/enacted> (Accessed 22 May 2021).

⁵ 'Propaganda', *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁶ Aled Eirug, *Opposition to The First World War in Wales*, (unpublished PhD thesis, Cardiff University, 2016) p. 2.

public as to the merits of the War. Although Anthony Mòr-O'Brien's "'Conchie", Emrys Hughes and The First World War' is about Hughes experiences as a conscientious objector, Mòr-O'Brien discusses the successful promotion of the War as he quotes Hughes as writing about Keir Hardie's (1856-1915) experience of his voice being drowned by the crowd in Aberdare on 6th August 1914 as 'sympathy for Belgium had convinced even some of his closest supporters that Britain had a moral right to declare war on Germany'.⁷ However, despite the article being primarily about Hughes experiences as a conscientious objector, Mòr-O'Brien does not examine whether conscientious objector propaganda had an effect as to how Hughes was viewed or treated by his fellow Welsh. Similarly, 'Conscientious Objection in the Swansea Area' by Daniel Cleaver examines the reasons why men became conscientious objectors and their experiences but does not examine whether the public's perception of the conscientious objectors' stance had been influenced by propaganda, instead he attributes anti-conscientious objector sentiment as being due to 'the desperate pressures exerted on the British public as a direct result of the demands of the war, [which] exercised a restrictive effect on the measure of the public's civilised and compassionate behaviour towards men who were, for conscientious reasons, not prepared to take up arms'.⁸ While Mari Williams' essay 'In the Wars': 1914-1945' writes that although 'deeply committed to the war effort', the introduction of compulsory military service was considered by

⁷ Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Hardie, (James) Keir [formerly James Kerr] (1856-1915), founder of the Labour Party', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2011[2004]); Anthony Mòr-O'Brien, "'Conchie" Emrys Hughes and The First World War', in *Welsh History Review Cylchgrawn hanes Cymru*, Vol. 13, Nos. 1-4, (1986-87), p. 330.

⁸ Daniel Cleaver, 'Conscientious Objection in the Swansea Area', in *Morgannwg transactions of the Glamorgan Local History Society*, Vol. 28 (1984), pp. 48-49.

some Liberal Members of Parliament, such as W. Llewelyn Williams, E. T. John and G. Caradog Rees, as 'a serious infringement of the basic principle of individual freedom' but Williams does not examine whether this opinion was used to influence the public about the stance taken by conscientious objectors.⁹ Although the main focus of these secondary sources is not to examine propaganda regarding conscientious objectors, they appear to attribute public opinion to the public's experience of the War and its impact on their lives, and they do not appear to examine to what extent propaganda was influencing their views. This is also the case with 'The Peace Movement in Wales' written by Kenneth O. Morgan which has a section that concentrates on anti-war sentiment during the First World War and discusses concerns about the 'plight of conscientious objectors' while the war was ongoing.¹⁰ While in 'Gwynedd and the Great War, 1914-1918', Cyril Parry discusses the low support for the war and explains that generally Welsh language newspapers were against the war whereas English language newspapers were for it, but the article does not examine whether the newspapers actively promoted their viewpoint and if so, what effect this had on the public's perception.¹¹ Although not focused on propaganda regarding conscientious objectors, Aled Eirug's unpublished 2016 thesis *Opposition to the First World War in Wales* contains an in-depth analysis of the extent of opposition and the different reasons men did not want to participate in the War, along with an informative section which details conscientious objector's

⁹ Mari A. Williams, 'In the Wars: Wales 1914-1945', p. 5, in *The People of Wales*, G. E. Jones and D. Smith eds., (Llandysul, 1999), pp. 179-206.

¹⁰ Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Peace Movement in Wales', in *Welsh History Review Cylchgrawn hanes Cymru*, Vol. 10, Nos. 1-4, (1980-81), pp. 412-13.

¹¹ Cyril Parry, 'Gwynedd and the Great War 1914-1918', in *Welsh History Review Cylchgrawn hanes Cymru*, Vol. 14, Nos. 1-4, (1988-89), p. 87.

experiences at the hands of the authorities.¹² These secondary sources suggest that the effect of propaganda in influencing the Welsh public's perception of conscientious objectors has not been examined and it is hoped that by examining available online primary sources, this dissertation will add to the existing knowledge about the methods used to influence the Welsh public and whether they had an impact on the public's view.

To achieve this objective, this dissertation will examine Welsh newspapers as at the time of the First World War they were the most commonly used method of promoting propaganda to influence the Welsh public. Being inexpensive and easily available, newspapers were often the only way the public obtained information and as politicians believed newspapers had successfully used propaganda 'to improve recruitment and mobilization of the public', they were the obvious choice to influence public opinion about the men who refused to enlist.¹³ Politicians' reliance on newspapers during the early years of the twentieth century is demonstrated by the first act of the newly appointed Prime Minister David Lloyd George (1863-1945),¹⁴ who after attending Buckingham Palace went to dine with the owners of the *News of the World* and the *Daily Telegraph*.¹⁵ However, newspapers may not reflect a true picture of the public's opinion as pro-war newspapers were unlikely to publish reader's letters that supported the conscientious objectors' stance while newspapers

¹² Eirug, *Opposition to The First World War in Wales*, p. 204-264.

¹³ 'Great Britain and France, Newspapers, Censorship and Mobilization during World War I in Press/Journalism', 1914-1918-online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*. Available at <https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/pressjournalism> (Accessed 17 May 2021).

¹⁴ Kenneth O. Morgan, 'George, David Lloyd, First Earl Lloyd-George of Dwyfor (1863-1945), Prime Minister', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2018 [2004]).

¹⁵ 'Lord Riddell's War Diary 1914-1918', (London 1933), in John M. McEwen, 'The National Press during the First World War: Ownership and Circulation', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 17, no. 3, (1982), p. 459.

with a socialist bias probably would have taken the opposite view but, by taking this into account, it may still be possible to get an understanding of public opinion by examining the concerns of the letter writers as well as any reported actions taken by the public either to denounce or support the conscientious objector. However, due to the word limit of this dissertation it is necessary to be selective when choosing primary sources, so this dissertation will focus on three topics used by Welsh newspapers to report on conscientious objectors. This dissertation will examine how Welsh newspapers portrayed conscientious objectors as cowards and traitors who were dishonest about their reasons for refusing to enlist. As well as looking at how they were believed to have benefited from the jobs vacated by men who enlisted, in addition to examining the reporting of tribunal hearings which decided the conscientious objector's fate. By examining these areas along with examining the public's response, it is hoped that it will be possible to determine to what extent propaganda influenced Welsh perceptions of conscientious objectors during the First World War.

Chapter 1 - Cowards and Traitors

To deter men from applying for exemption from combatant service due to their conscience, the pro-war newspapers used propaganda to depict conscientious objectors as cowards and traitors which was intended to make their lives extremely difficult so that enlisting to fight for their country would seem the better option. This was at a time when male and female roles in society were strictly defined and although females were affected by the Military Service Act 1916 as they were expected to take on employment vacancies caused by men being conscripted, they were not called to enlist, this only applied to men.¹⁶ Depicting the conscientious objector as a coward cast doubts on both his masculinity and his honesty as this implied he was scared to fight at a time when society expected men to be courageous and was being dishonest about his reasons for not enlisting. While being depicted as a traitor led the public to believe conscientious objectors were using the excuse of their conscience to act in their own self-interest and by not playing their part in the war effort, they were working against Welsh interests. Being believed to be either a coward or a traitor meant the conscientious objector was likely to be ostracised by his community.

To encourage the people of Wales to treat conscientious objectors with contempt and shun their company, the newspapers reported the views of people in positions of authority such as the senior Liberal, Welsh politician, and future Prime Minister,

¹⁶ Women, War and Wales, (Online, n.d.). Available at <http://www.womenandwar.wales/en/1916.php> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

David Lloyd George as this would be seen to endorse the views promoted in their articles against conscientious objectors. An article that appeared on page three of the weekly English language Liberal newspaper *The Carmarthen Weekly Reporter*, 24th March 1916, headed 'Conscientious Objectors' makes clear Lloyd George's opinion when it reports on his speech in the House of Commons, the previous Wednesday, that conscientious objection was a 'cloak for cowardice' and that they only 'had a conscientious objection to be fired at'.¹⁷ Lloyd George's contempt for conscientious objectors as cowards reflected his previous requests for the Welsh to support the First World War. His encouragement of a 'Welsh army in the field' and praising their history of 'fighting for freedom' as he appealed to Welsh national pride and encouraged the Welsh people to view the First World War as a Welsh war can also be seen as promoting the view that anyone who refused to participate was going against the best interests of Wales and the people of Wales.¹⁸ Lloyd George may also have believed that many Welsh people agreed with his low opinion of conscientious objectors as the historian Thomas C. Kennedy writes of 'the public mood which became more harsh and bellicose after the introduction of conscription' so to ensure continued Welsh support for the War it was pragmatic for Lloyd George to be seen as denouncing the stance taken by conscientious objectors and agreeing with the views being promoted by the newspapers and which were believed to be held by the Welsh public.¹⁹

¹⁷ Anon, 'Conscientious Objectors', *The Carmarthen Weekly Reporter*, (24 March 1916), p. 3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3585480/3585483/39> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

¹⁸ David Lloyd George speech at Queen's Hall, (London), 19 September 1914, in J. Gower, *The Story of Wales*, (London, 2012), in Catherine Preston, 'Week 14: Wales and the World Wars, Block 4: New Identities? Class and protest', in A329, *The Making of Welsh History*, (Milton Keynes, n.d.).

¹⁹ Thomas C. Kennedy, 'Public Opinion and the Conscientious Objector, 1915-1919', in *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (1973), p. 108.

**Thus Conscience Does Make Cowards Of Us All
Western Mail, 17 May 1916**



"Hamlet."

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Newspapers also used cartoons to endorse the negative image of conscientious objectors as the cartoons content would stress the importance of the main articles and were easily understood so the viewer could be influenced even if they did not read any articles against the conscientious objectors' stance. The cartoons of J. M. Staniforth appeared in the pro-war newspapers, the Welsh daily *Western Mail* and the popular British national Sunday newspaper *The News of the World*, and were used to justify the First World War and vilify any who did not support it. In 1915 the *News of the World* was achieving sales of 2 million and 2.75 million by 1917 and although this information does not detail Welsh sales, it does show that many people in Britain would have seen and possibly been influenced by these Staniforth cartoons.²⁰ To reinforce the message that conscientious objectors were dishonest cowards, the *Western Mail* on 17th May 1916 published the Staniforth cartoon, titled

²⁰ McEwen, 'The National Press during the First World War: Ownership and Circulation', p. 483.

'Thus Conscience Does Make Cowards Of Us All' which shows a sign stating 'bogus conscientious objectors waiting room' full of unhappy looking men waiting to go into their local tribunal with a soldier looking on in disgust.²¹ The historian Chris Williams quotes from Staniforth's obituary in the *Western Mail*, that a cartoonist needed to have 'his finger on the public pulse and interpret events and happenings of all kinds and reflect or sometimes lead the views of his readers' so it is possible that the *Western Mail* believed that this cartoon reflected the views of their readers as well as increasing public awareness of the many men applying for Conscientious Objector status.²² As this issue's publication date was just prior to the implementation of the Military Service Act May 1916 (Session 2) on 25th May 1916 which increased the numbers of men who were compelled to enlist in the armed forces, it appears that the men who applied for exemption from enlisting 'on the ground of a conscientious objection to the undertaking of combatant service' were being portrayed as abusing the system.²³ The use of cartoons reinforced and confirmed the view that conscientious objectors were cowards and traitors who were lying about their reasons for not supporting their country and this propaganda helped to influence the public that it was necessary to question the motives of anyone who either applied to be or who successfully became a conscientious objector.

²¹ J. M. Staniforth, 'Thus Conscience Does Make Cowards Of Us All', *Cartooning the First World War*. (Online, n.d.) Available at <https://www.cartoonww1.org/image.htm?id=557> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

²² *Western Mail*, 19 December 1921, in C. Williams, "'Our war history in cartoons is unique": J. M. Staniforth, British public opinion, and the South African War, 1899–1902', *War in History*, Vol. 20, No. 4, (2013) p. 499.

²³ Military Service Act 1916 (Session 2), The National Archives. Available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1916/15/enacted> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

The view of conscientious objectors as cowards and traitors appears to have been shared by Welsh soldiers who were fighting abroad as they made their opinions public by writing letters to the newspapers in Wales. The percentage of population recruitment in Wales is estimated between 13.82 percent,²⁴ and 21.52 percent,²⁵ which is in addition to the members of the population with reserved occupations, such as miners and dockers.²⁶ This suggests that, even at the lower level of recruitment, many people in Wales had a personal connection with someone involved in the war effort which probably would have prejudiced their views of men who refused to fight as they were not supporting the men who were. Even allowing that letter writing was the only available means of communication for the majority of the population during the early twentieth century, by taking the time to write to a newspaper and knowing your opinion would be made public shows the writer held strong views about the subject matter. One soldier who felt strongly about men applying to become conscientious objectors was Private Glyn Watkins who was with the British Expeditionary Force in France and his letter 'Conscientious Objectors' appeared in the 'Letters to the Editor' section of the 15th June 1918 issue of the weekly newspaper *The Aberdare Leader*. He wrote that he was surprised to read about the numbers of conscientious objectors in the Aberdare area, and he could not understand 'that they can muster the 'pluck' to stand before a tribunal ... in spite of the fact that thousands of their fellow men are facing danger and death for their

²⁴ J. Davies, *A History of Wales*, (Harmondsworth, 1994), p.513, in Preston, 'Week 14: Wales and the World Wars.

²⁵ C. Williams, 'Taffs in the trenches: Welsh national identity and military service, 1914–1918', in M. Cragoe, and C. Williams, eds., in *Wales and War: Society, Politics and Religion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, (Cardiff, 2007), pp. 126–64, in Preston, 'Week 14: Wales and the World Wars.

²⁶ Anon, 'Cardiff and World War One', Cardiff University Share with Schools Resources, (Online, n.d.). Available at <https://sites.cardiff.ac.uk/share-with-schools/resources/wwi-in-cardiff/> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

sake'.²⁷ Pluck is another way of describing courage, so Watkins shared the view that conscientious objectors were cowards.²⁸ He also implies that his contempt for conscientious objectors is shared by his fellow soldiers as he recalls a story that is doing the rounds in France which showed the disdain that conscientious objectors were held in by other soldiers. As Watkins' letter was published only five months before the Armistice on 11th November 1918, it appears that experience of war had not led serving soldiers to have sympathy for the conscientious objectors' position, rather it seems it had increased the soldier's contempt for them and their lack of support.²⁹ *The Aberdare Leader* mainly covered local news and Watkins writes that a 'pal' regularly sent him a copy. Receiving newspapers from home meant serving soldiers retained an involvement with local events as well as being aware of how the war was being reported to family and friends so they would be aware that any letter they had published in a newspaper would be taken seriously by the readers as they were the men most affected by their fellow countrymen's refusal to enlist. It can be argued that letters from soldiers like Watkins were published as they reflected the views that the newspapers wished to promote to their readers and *The Aberdare Leader's* intended audience was the industrial valleys where Anthony Mòr-O'Brien tells us in "Conchie', Emrys Hughes and The First World War' that

'the outbreak of war had provoked great enthusiasm in the Rhondda and an unprecedented rush to volunteer for the armed services meant that the production

²⁷ Private Glyn Watkins, 'Conscientious Objectors', *The Aberdare Leader*, (15 June 1918), p. 7. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3581102/3581109/79> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

²⁸ 'Pluck', *Oxford English Dictionary*.

²⁹ Peter Sawers, 'What was the Armistice?', National Trust, (Online, n.d.). Available at <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/what-was-the-armistice-> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

of steam coal for the navy was so badly affected that before long miners were expressly forbidden to volunteer'.³⁰

The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality also published letters from serving soldiers who were ashamed that conscientious objectors 'call themselves Britons' so it appears that the area of Wales that Welsh soldiers called home, did not affect their opinion of conscientious objectors as cowards and traitors.³¹ However, it cannot be presumed that this was the opinion of all soldiers as it is possible that propaganda meant soldiers who felt compassion for the conscientious objectors' stance, felt pressure to conform to the popular view and so kept their opinion private.

When determining the extent propaganda influenced Welsh perceptions about conscientious objectors, it needs to be considered that conscientious objectors were family members, friends and work colleagues, but it is also necessary to remember that the men serving in the forces were all these things as well. Approximately 40,000 Welshmen lost their lives fighting for their country so any suggestion that conscientious objectors were lying about their moral beliefs to avoid playing their part to help the war effort and were working against the national interest due to their cowardice, can be seen as an attempt to stop any sympathy the public may

³⁰ Anthony Mòr-O'Brien, "'Conchie' Emrys Hughes and The First World War', pp. 331-2.

³¹ L. Cpl. R.W.F. Parry, 'Conscientious Objectors', *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, 26th May 1916, p. 4. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4243449/4243453/61> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

have held for their wish to uphold their beliefs and instead propaganda of this type was intended to inflame public anger against them.³²

³² BBC Wales (Online, 2018). Available <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-wales-46124721> (Accessed 23 May 2021); Williams, 'In the Wars: Wales 1914-1945', p. 1.

Chapter Two - Stealing Jobs

Propaganda which focused on the concerns of the Welsh people during the First World War was more likely to be effective in influencing Welsh perceptions of conscientious objectors. As conscription increased the number of men enlisting, so the number of vacant jobs increased but placing conscientious objectors in these jobs was unpopular with the public and with local authorities who were resistant to employing conscientious objectors. Jobs such as council workers or school teachers were probably more suitable for older men or returning disabled soldiers who were not physically able for manual work in many of the reserved occupations which were considered essential to the war effort, such as coal mining or the docks. The historian Glenn R. Wilkins explains that for a newspaper to retain its popularity it needed to keep its readers 'stimulated and satisfied' so any articles and letters chosen to be published by the newspapers' editors gave an insight into the issues they believed were affecting their readers and any propaganda could be tailored to reflect these concerns.³³ Propaganda about the employment of conscientious objectors promoted the view that the people of Wales were against conscientious objectors being employed and did not want to work with them and this opinion was shared by all sections of the community.

Many newspaper articles reported the reluctance to employ conscientious objectors by local public officials who had responsibility for running local services and held the

³³ Glenn R. Wilkinson, *Depictions and Images of War in Edwardian Newspapers, 1899–1914* (Houndmills, 2002), p. 10, in Williams, "Our war history in cartoons is unique", p. 494.

authority to implement decisions which affected their local area. However, public officials were also private individuals who would have been influenced by what they read in the same way as the general public and if elected to their post, these officials also needed to take into account the opinions and concerns of the people they represented. Under a section called 'Gazette Gossip', the weekly, local newspaper, *The Glamorgan Gazette*, published on 5th May 1916, 'No Jobs for Conscientious Objectors' which told readers that the Ogmere and Garw Council listened in 'stony silence' when they were asked by the local Government Board if they would find employment for conscientious objectors. The article tells us that 'no fightee, no eatee' was 'evidently the Council's motto'.³⁴ In the same edition another article reports that the Porthcawl and Assessment Committee had received a letter asking about vacancies for conscientious objectors who were willing to do work of national importance but the Committee decided they could not find jobs. The Chairman was reported as saying 'if they can't fight Germans, they can't fight germs' and that 'he looked upon them as shirkers and nothing less'.³⁵ Although some local authorities did not want to employ conscientious objectors, they were expected to follow government recommendations, for example, *The Aberdare Leader* reported on 9th December 1916 that the Pelham Committee had written to the Aberdare Education Committee to ask if they wished to retain the services of Mr. Matt Lewis as a teacher.³⁶ In this case, despite a military appeal, the tribunal had agreed to exempt

³⁴ Anon, 'Gazette Gossip', *The Glamorgan Gazette*, (5 May 1916), p. 5. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3886550/3886555/48> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

³⁵ Anon, 'No Jobs for Conscientious Objectors', *The Glamorgan Gazette*, (5 May 1916), p. 2. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3886550/3886552/7> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

³⁶ The Pelham Committee, known officially as the 'Home Office Committee on Employment of Conscientious Objectors', was founded to organise and monitor Conscientious Objectors taking on Work of National Importance;

Lewis from combatant service, conditional upon him remaining a teacher so it was necessary for a post to be found for him.³⁷ However, the people who sat on local committees with responsibility for decisions regarding employment for conscientious objectors were not always unanimous in their decision. Nearly six months earlier, the 17th June 1916 issue of *Llanelly Star* reported a difference of opinion in the County Education Committee discussions as to whether it should agree to a request from the National Work Committee to employ a student and conscientious objector as a teacher. The article reports that 'it was decided by sixteen votes to six not to employ this man'.³⁸ In this instance, as ultimately the conscientious objector did not gain employment, it may have appeared to analysts of government statistics that he had no support, and although the article informs that nearly three quarters of the committee believed he should not be given employment, it does show that opinion regarding the employment of conscientious objectors was divided.³⁹ It appears employing conscientious objectors remained a contentious issue even as the war progressed as it seems that local authorities were still reluctant to be seen to support conscientious objectors as shown by an article in the daily English language newspaper, *The Cambria Daily Leader* on 6th February 1918 where an article reports "'C.O." Teacher Not Re-engaged' as Glamorgan

Anon, 'The men who said no, conscientious objectors 1915-1919', (Online, n.d.). Available from https://menwhosaidno.org/context/context_wni.html (Accessed 23 May 2021).

³⁷ Anon, 'Conscientious Objector', *The Aberdare Leader*, (9 December 1916), p. 8. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3580382/3580390/134> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

³⁸ Anon, 'Funk, not Conscience', *Llanelly Star*, (17 June 1916), p. 1. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4123161/4123162/4> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

³⁹ 'Pelham Committee', UK Parliamentary Papers, HC Deb., 1916, Vol. 82, cc666-7.

Education Committee had decided not to re-engage a teacher who was a conscientious objector.⁴⁰

The Social Leper
Western Mail, 7 October 1916



"Alderman Illtyd Thomas contended that no man who was a conscientious objector should be employed by the education committee. He did not agree with the appointment of social lepers." - Report of meeting of the Cardiff Secondary Schools Committee.

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Combing Them Out
Western Mail, 13 December 1916



THE GEE-GEE: "My word! it will be a relief to get rid of 'em!" The Cardiff City Council on Monday, the Lord Mayor (Mr. J. Stanfield) presiding, decided that no person who was a conscientious objector to military service should continue in the service or pay of the council.

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⁴⁰ Anon, "'C.O.' Teacher Not Re-engaged', *The Cambria Daily Leader*, (6 February 1918), p. 3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4104625/4104628/71> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

Newspapers, especially the *Western Mail*, used cartoons to influence public opinion about conscientious objectors being employed by the authorities. Publishing cartoons about conscientious objectors losing their jobs, let the public know that neither the newspaper nor the local councils agreed with employing conscientious objectors. On 7th October 1916, The *Western Mail*, published a Staniforth cartoon titled 'The Social Leper' which depicted a lone man being ridiculed by men and children surrounding him while being ignored by passers-by and included the text 'Alderman Illtyd Thomas contended that no man who was a conscientious objector should be employed by the education committee. He did not agree with the appointment of social lepers'.⁴¹ This was followed on 13th December 1916 by another Staniforth cartoon entitled 'Combing Them Out' which showed the Lord Mayor of Cardiff, Joseph Stanfield, combing a horse but instead of fleas and ticks, conscientious objectors fall into the bucket. This referred to Cardiff City Council's decision that no 'conscientious objector to military service should continue in the service or pay of the council'.⁴² In 'Our war history in cartoons is unique', Williams puts forward the idea that Staniforth's cartoons highlighted public opinion and although Williams is examining Staniforth's cartoons of the Boer War (1899-1902), his explanation is still relevant for cartoons published during the First World War.⁴³ So, it is possible that by publishing these Staniforth cartoons about local authorities refusing to employ conscientious objectors, the *Western Mail* believed their readers

⁴¹ Staniforth, 'The Social Leper'. Available at <https://www.cartoonww1.org/image.htm?id=679> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

⁴² Staniforth, 'Combing Them Out'. Available at <http://www.cartoonww1.org/image.htm?id=815> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

⁴³ Chris Williams, "Our war history in cartoons is unique", p. 500.

would have agreed with this policy and is informing them that the authorities also were against employing men who refused to work for the war effort and were trying to resolve the situation.

The employment of conscientious objectors appears to have been an issue even before the Military Service Act 1916 came into effect. *The Cambria Daily Leader* reported on 7th January 1916 under the heading 'Conscientious Objectors Barred' that the Navy and Royal Naval Division recruiting office in the Strand, London, had displayed a notice stating 'No Conscientious Objectors need apply'.⁴⁴ Although this notice had appeared in London, the reporting of it by a Welsh newspaper informs that articles about the armed forces being against conscientious objectors were used to influence the Welsh public. Published letters from the public confirm that the question of employing conscientious objectors remained controversial as the war progressed. This is evidenced by Welsh miners refusing to work beside conscientious objectors and the public were informed of this by a letter sent to the Editor and published under the title 'A Warning to Conscientious Objectors' in the weekly bilingual newspaper, *The Amman Valley Chronicle and East Carmarthen News*, on 29th March 1917. The writer, I. & C. Loyalist, informed the readers that a meeting of Hebburn miners had unanimously decided they would not work in the same mine as conscientious objectors and that the management had agreed to stop employing them which, according to the letter, was 'a step towards clearing our land

⁴⁴ Anon, 'Conscientious Objectors Barred', *The Cambria Daily Leader*, (7 January 1916), p. 1. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4100762/4100763/41> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

of pro-German traitors'.⁴⁵ However, evidence also shows that public opinion was not clear cut, especially when conscription was first introduced, as not everyone felt a conscientious objector should lose his livelihood especially if a local man was involved and appearing before a local tribunal. The 15th March 1916 issue of the weekly, English language, newspaper *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter for the Counties of Pembroke, Cardigan, Carmarthen, Glamorgan and the Rest of South Wales* reported on the Caerphilly Tribunal hearing of a local school teacher and member of Caerphilly District Council, Mr. W. J. Jenkins, where the crowded court cheered Jenkins' replies to the tribunal's questions and comments.⁴⁶ This article highlights that the public's reaction to conscientious objectors was dependent on circumstances and personal knowledge of the applicant. As the newspaper which published this article was seen as supporting Liberal policies and as such would have supported the recent introduction of conscription, it can be thought that the assumed typical reader of this newspaper would have been unlikely to have supported someone like Jenkins.⁴⁷ However, it is possible that public support like this prompted a more focused campaign to discredit the conscientious objector.

⁴⁵ I. & C. Loyalist, 'A Warning to Conscientious Objectors', *The Amman Valley Chronicle and East Carmarthen News*, (29 March 1917), p. 5. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4013691/4013696/53> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

⁴⁶ Anon, 'A Conscientious Objector', *Haverfordwest and Milford Haven Telegraph and General Weekly Reporter for the Counties of Pembroke, Cardigan, Carmarthen, Glamorgan and the Rest of South Wales*, (15 March 1916), p. 2. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4118722/4118724/6> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

⁴⁷ Welsh Newspapers [Online, n.d.]. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/browse/4116145> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

Although it appears that many people who held positions of authority believed the conscientious objector should not be employed due to their refusal to enlist, it is necessary to consider that public officials were also members of the public and were recipients of propaganda in the same way as the general public. It is possible that these officials believed they were enabling the wishes of the Welsh public as well as following their own personal views but there is evidence that not everyone thought the conscientious objector should be deprived of his livelihood. Equally, there is evidence that many members of the public had the opposite opinion especially as the war progressed. Although it is possible that public disapproval may have contributed to the decision of newspapers to campaign against the employment of conscientious objectors, it appears that this sustained propaganda influenced many members of the Welsh public to agree with this view.

Chapter Three - Tribunal Hearings

Propaganda about conscientious objectors was not only used by the Government, it was also used by anti-war groups, such as the Independent Labour Party and the No-Conscription Fellowship, who put forward their views usually in socialist newspapers. Tribunal hearings which judged the merits of applications for exemption due to a 'conscientious objection to the undertaking of combatant service' were an opportunity for both sides of the argument to be reported by the newspapers and be made known to the public.⁴⁸ It is estimated that Wales had slightly more than nine hundred conscientious objectors,⁴⁹ of which seventy were considered Absolutists: men, who usually for political reasons, refused to participate in any non-combat schemes promoted by the Government and spent their war years in and out of prison.⁵⁰ The Liberal and Conservative newspapers' emphasis on the socialism of high-profile conscientious objectors would have been helpful to the British Government, as socialists, especially the Independent Labour Party, were gaining supporters in Wales as the War progressed and with increasing fatalities and casualties, it was to the war time British Government's advantage for the public to believe that socialists were working against Welsh interests.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Military Service Act, 1916.

⁴⁹ Hanna Huws, 'Wales Remembers those who stood against the First World War', in *Wales for Peace*, (Online, 2016). Available at <http://venuewithaheart.wales/wfp/news-article.html?id=69> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

⁵⁰ Eirug, *Opposition to The First World War in Wales*, p. 222.

⁵¹ Only four years after the end of WWI and following the passing of the People's Representation Act June 1918, Labour secured 41 percent of Welsh votes in the November 1922 General Election. Williams, 'In the Wars: Wales 1914-1945', p. 6.

The reporting of tribunal hearings gave the pro-war newspapers an opportunity to publicly name and shame conscientious objectors as well as inflame public anger against their stance. The standard reporting for tribunal hearings, used by many newspapers, was to report only the essential information such as the names of the applicants, occasionally their age, where they came from and the outcome of the hearing with the article appearing beside other news which would interest the readers, such as deaths of local soldiers and local events. This appeared to be the case throughout Wales and can be seen in local newspapers such as *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality* and *The Cambria Daily Leader*, whose circulation covered the South and West of Wales.⁵² However, the method of reporting appears to have changed if the applicant was a conscientious objector as the article now included a more detailed report of the hearing, as well as being placed in a prominent position in the newspaper so that the information was easily seen by the reader and the reasons for the application were often ridiculed. For example, on 10th June 1916, the *Llanelly Star* reported that the applicant, Henry B. Morgan, was 'refused exemption because the appellant was inconsistent, being employed as a munition worker'.⁵³ This was the first item in a large article under the heading of 'Conscientious Objectors' and subtitled 'County Tribunal deal with Local Appeals' which filled an entire column on the front page and ensured anyone who

⁵² Anon, 'Gwyrfaj Tribunal - No Exemption in Eight Cases', *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, (1 September 1916), p. 6.;

Anon, 'Glaslyn Tribunal, Portmadoc', p. 6. Both available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4243535/4243541> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

Anon, 'Prospective Soldiers', *The Cambria Daily Leader*, (10 June 1916), p. 1.;

Anon, 'A Jewish Claimant', p. 1. Both available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4101658/4101659> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

⁵³ Anon, 'Conscientious Objectors', *Llanelly Star*, (10 June 1916), p. 1. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4123156/4123157/14> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

saw the newspaper, such as on a newspaper stand, knew it contained information about conscientious objectors which probably will have increased sales of the newspaper, which will have then resulted in an increased public awareness of who the conscientious objectors were. The pro-war press was especially hostile to conscientious objectors who were also members of a socialist party as this was an opportunity to portray socialism as working against Welsh interests. An article in *The Cambria Daily Leader*, on 27th April 1916, headlined 'Stiff-Necked Objectors', reported how 'socialists' were defying the military authorities in Glamorgan by refusing to go before the medical board for examination and openly defying military discipline.⁵⁴ The newspapers also reported on comments made by the applicant during the hearing, especially if they were contentious and may turn public opinion against them, an example is seen in the 6th October 1917 issue of the weekly, local newspaper, *The Aberdare Leader*, which published a large article about the tribunal of Gwilym Evans, a member of the Independent Labour Party, who included in his definition of 'bad company': 'soldiers, drunkards and gamblers'.⁵⁵ Not surprisingly, this article provoked a response and on the 20th October 1917, *The Aberdare Leader* published a letter from A. Keast of Cardiff (late Aberdare) who replied that the Bible would 'never condemn soldiers but often commends them' and quoted verses from the Bible 'to justify his assertion'.⁵⁶ However, newspapers with a pro-war, anti-conscientious objector message were not the only newspapers the Welsh public

⁵⁴ Anon, 'Stiff-Necked Objectors', *The Cambria Daily Leader*, (27 April 1916), p. 1. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4101446/4101447/37> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

⁵⁵ Anon, 'Conscientious Objector - I.L. Peer Closely Questioned', *The Aberdare Leader*, (6 October 1917), p. 2. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3580778/3580780/4> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

⁵⁶ A. Keast, 'Scriptures and the Soldiers', *The Aberdare Leader*, (20 October 1917), p. 7. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3580796/3580803/91> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

read and with the rise of socialism and its supporting newspapers, it is possible that others may have agreed with Evans.

Newspapers which supported socialism, such as the weekly, Welsh language *Llais Llafur*,⁵⁷ or the weekly *Pioneer*,⁵⁸ which was launched by Keir Hardie, generally did not support the war but it appears they were aware that the issue was not clear cut for their readers as instead of writing against their fellow Welsh who were engaged with the war effort, they reported on the unfairness of the outcomes of the tribunal hearings of conscientious objectors. Often the applicants' reasons for applying were not believed and the treatment they received if they still refused to enlist or participate in any type of work which would help the war effort, was often physically brutal.⁵⁹ The *Pioneer* was able to promote itself as an authority on this as Keir Hardie's son in law, Emrys Hughes, was an Absolutist who was also a high-profile member of the Independent Labour Party.⁶⁰ Hughes kept the newspaper informed about the treatment he and his fellow conscientious objectors were receiving, for example in an article headed 'South Wales Conscientious Objectors - Their Position under the Military' dated 20th May 1916, the readers were informed that Emrys Hughes has sent the newspaper a letter card in which he mentions that the court martial for himself and his 'Abercynon comrades' had been postponed and he details

⁵⁷ *Llais Llafur*, also known as *Labour Voice*. Established by Ebenezer Rees (1848-1908) in Ystalyfera, to serve the industrial districts of Glamorganshire and Carmarthenshire. Source: Welsh Newspapers Online. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/browse/3977363> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

⁵⁸ *Pioneer*, a weekly newspaper published in Merthyr Tydfil from 1911 to 1922 which espoused the socialist cause. Source: Welsh Newspapers Online. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/browse/3999696> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

⁵⁹ Walter Griffin et al, 'Conscientious Objectors In their Own Words', (Audio Transcript), (n.d.), Imperial War Museum. Available at https://www.iwm.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/2018-06/Conscientious_Objectors_Transcripts.pdf (Accessed 23 May 2021).

⁶⁰ Mòr-O'Brien, "'Conchie" Emrys Hughes and The First World War', p. 329.

the information for his 'comrades' as well as the outcomes of the other applicants while writing that the press and family will be allowed so 'there seems plenty of opportunity for propaganda speeches' and on the same page under the heading 'Emrys Hughes on Trial', in a large article, the newspaper reports on the details from the court martial hearing.⁶¹ By reporting that the tribunal hearings were sceptical and dismissive of the cases brought before them by conscientious objectors, the newspapers were also highlighting that the people involved in the tribunal hearings and implementing the sentences received were not impartial and their private views about conscientious objectors influenced their decisions.

The socialist newspapers also used the injustices of the tribunal hearings to appeal to the Welsh public's sense of fairness to raise sympathy for the conscientious objector. The biased tribunal hearings for conscientious objectors led to the No-Conscription Fellowship launching its own newspaper *The Tribunal* in March 1916 which included reports on tribunal hearings as well as advice and support for men applying for conscientious objector status,⁶² and was described by the *Pioneer* as the 'courageously little paper of the conscientious objectors'.⁶³ While socialist supporting newspapers may have used propaganda to promote their view that Wales should not have been taken into the First World War by the British government, it appears that in the case of conscientious objectors' treatment by the

⁶¹ Anon, 'South Wales Conscientious Objectors. Their Position under the Military', *Pioneer*, (20 May 1916), p. 5;

Anon, 'Emrys Hughes on Trial', p. 5. Both available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4001344/4001349/52> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

⁶² Anon, *The Tribunal* available at <https://menwhosaidno.org/tribunal/tribunalindex.html> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

⁶³ 'Anon', 'Shall this Pass?', *Pioneer*, (4 May 1918), p. 2. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/3999782/3999784/14> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

tribunals they did not need to use propaganda as they were reporting actual events which when known raised concerns with the Welsh public and Members of Parliament. This mistreatment was the subject of discussions in the House of Commons as at a debate on 25th October 1916, the Welsh Member of Parliament for Carmarthen Boroughs, William Llewelyn Williams (1867-1922),⁶⁴ explained that although he did not have ‘any sympathy with the view of Conscientious Objectors’ he argued that ‘the Government ought to put a stop to the injustices and inequalities which exist’.⁶⁵ The lack of justice for the conscientious objector attracted letters to the newspapers from all sections of the Welsh public. On the 23rd March 1916, the Liberal, weekly newspaper *The Brecon Radnor Express Carmarthen and Swansea Valley Gazette and Brynmawr District Advertiser*, published a letter from ‘Believer’, under the heading ‘Conscientious Objections’, where the writer expressed his disapproval of the way that conscientious objectors were being disbelieved in their ‘Christian beliefs and convictions’ and the seemingly ‘universal practice of these tribunals to misconstrue the motive and ridicule’ their opinions.⁶⁶ Discrimination by the tribunal hearings is also shown by W.’s letter ‘To the Editor’ which was published the following day, 24th March 1916, by the weekly Conservative newspaper *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality* under the heading ‘Conscientious Objectors’. W. expressed disapproval of the news that applicants were questioned in private at one tribunal and that the reason given for this was

⁶⁴ Kenneth O. Morgan, ‘Williams, William Llewelyn (1867-1922), politician and author’. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2006 [2004]).

⁶⁵ ‘Conscientious Objectors’, UK Parliamentary Papers, HC Deb., 25 October 1916, Vol. 86, cc1249-66.

⁶⁶ Believer, ‘Conscientious Objections’, *The Brecon Radnor Express Carmarthen and Swansea Valley Gazette and Brynmawr District Advertiser*, (23 March 1916), p. 3. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4094067/4094070/30> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

that a public hearing would enable other applicants to learn how to argue which seems to confirm that conscientious objectors were not treated equally with men who applied for exemption for other reasons. However, it seems that W. has done this unwittingly as in his letter he also talks about their 'false logic' so he appears to be against the conscientious objectors' stance.⁶⁷

Reporting the tribunal hearings was an opportunity for pro-war Conservative and Liberal newspapers to diminish socialists in the eyes of the public by using their articles to name and ridicule the men who applied for exemption from enlisting due to their conscience. While the anti-war, usually socialist supporting, newspapers proudly named high-profile socialists who refused to participate in the war due to their conscience and by reporting the injustices of the tribunals, as well as publicising the brutal implementation of the sentences given to conscientious objectors, these newspapers reports were used to gain sympathy from the public. From the public's published letters in response to these articles, it appears that although the public may not have supported the conscientious objector, many people in Wales were opposed to the unfair treatment the conscientious objector appeared to have received from the authorities responsible for administering the tribunal hearings and their outcomes. It can be argued that the accurate reporting of the unjust sentences and ill-treatment of conscientious objectors was not propaganda but was making the public aware of injustices. However, due to the Defence of the Realm Act 1914 many events in the public interest were not being reported so it is possible to see

⁶⁷ W., 'Conscientious Objectors', *The North Wales Chronicle and Advertiser for the Principality*, (24 March 1916), p. 5. Available at <https://newspapers.library.wales/view/4243384/4243389/55> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

this as an attempt to gain public sympathy for their unfair treatment and consequently influence public opinion in favour of the conscientious objector.⁶⁸ Equally, as newspapers from both sides of the political argument continued to publicise the outcomes of tribunal hearings, it appears that tribunal hearings continued to be used as propaganda.

⁶⁸ Defence of the Realm Act 1914 (DORA), UK Parliament (Online, n.d.). Available at <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/parliament-and-the-first-world-war/legislation-and-acts-of-war/defence-of-the-realm-act-1914/> (Accessed 23 May 2021).

Conclusion

Even without the current restrictions due to Covid19 impacting on access to sources, it still would not be possible to do justice to examining the extent that propaganda influenced Welsh perceptions of conscientious objectors during the First World War in a seven thousand word dissertation. To properly examine this subject, it is necessary to look in greater depth at all the available methods that were used to influence the public as well as the public's reaction. For example, publicly displayed posters that were printed in the Welsh language to influence monoglot members of the public as well as examining personal items, such as letters and diaries, to learn about the public's private opinions and personal experiences which will add further knowledge to their publicly expressed views. Consequently, this dissertation has only touched the surface by concentrating on the use of newspapers which were the main source of information to the public during the early twentieth century and focusing on three key aspects of propaganda which appear to have triggered Welsh reactions either by members of the public, soldiers serving in the forces or the authorities with responsibility for implementing the rules and consequences of the Military Service Act 1916.

The Welsh newspapers stance on conscientious objectors reflected their political bias with pro-war Liberal and Conservative supporting newspapers promoting the view that the conscientious objector was dishonest by lying about his reasons for not enlisting, a coward as he was scared to fight, a traitor as his refusal to fight was against Welsh national interests in addition to benefiting from the war as he

obtained jobs, which were now vacant due to men enlisting, that would have been more suitable for men no longer able to do physically difficult work such as men who were too old to enlist and returning injured soldiers.

Although the socialist supporting newspapers tended to be anti-war, it appears that they took into account that many people in Wales supported the war, in addition to having family and friends involved in the war effort, so these newspapers do not appear to have actively promoted conscientious objection as a concept. Instead, it appears they focused on supporting members of political groups such as the Independent Labour Party who were conscientious objectors, by reporting the injustices and consequent ill-treatment conscientious objectors received due to biased tribunal hearings. As this was also reported in pro-war newspapers, along with questions being asked in the House of Commons, it can be argued that as this was accurate reporting it was not propaganda. However, the intention of these articles also appears to have been to influence public opinion to sympathise with the conscientious objectors' plight which can be viewed as propaganda.

The Welsh public responded to articles and reports about conscientious objectors by writing letters which gave their opinion as to whether they agreed or disagreed with what they had read. As many members of the public supported the war, it appears that many disapproved of any Welshman who did not and their published letters in Welsh newspapers tended to reflect this. Letters from soldiers serving overseas were especially emotive as by being actively involved in the fighting they were most affected by the war and the lack of support from conscientious objectors. The public

officials within local authorities and the people responsible for administering the tribunal hearings and their decisions, also read the newspapers and their actions seem to show they were also influenced by what they read.

Although the propaganda promoted by the newspapers was being read by the public in a country that predominantly supported the war and it is possible that the Welsh public were already predisposed to be against the conscientious objectors' stance, it appears that they wanted conscientious objectors to be treated fairly as they objected to their unjust and ill-treatment by the tribunal hearings. It is noticeable that only a relatively small number of the Welsh population became conscientious objectors which possibly was due to the success of the propaganda against them as potential conscientious objectors would have been aware of the consequences of their stance. However, it appears that many in Wales, as well as Welsh soldiers serving abroad, did look on the conscientious objector as a coward who was scared to fight for his country and who they did not want to work alongside them. This opinion is further evidenced by the actions of the public who sat in local councils, who decided not to employ conscientious objectors and the members of the tribunal hearings who did not believe the reasons given by the conscientious objector applicants and the actions of the authorities who meted out brutal punishments. It appears that although the Welsh public wanted the conscientious objector to be treated fairly, many people in Wales were against the conscientious objectors' refusal to participate in the war effort so ultimately the propaganda promoted by Welsh newspapers had a large influence on Welsh perceptions of conscientious objectors during the First World War.

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