

Brock, Peter: *Against the Draft. Essays on Conscientious Objection from the Radical Reformation to the Second World War*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2006. ISBN: 0802090737; 462 Seiten

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Peter Brock was the Professor of History at the University of Toronto for many years, having joined the university in 1966. Sadly, he died on 28 May 2006 at the age of 86. During his long and productive life he had established himself as the pre-eminent historian of pacifism, an ideology and moral conviction with which he identified completely.

In an affectionate and appreciative foreword to the current volume Martin Ceadel recalls how a representative of the University of Toronto Press referred to Brock's edited volumes as 'Brockbusters'. Presumably this title is the last of them - and as such it constitutes a wonderful memorial to his professionalism as a historian and his sincerity as a pacifist, sharing with the subjects of his studies the principled rejection of war. The twenty-five essays included in this volume reflect a selection of his published research over the past three decades. They provide ample evidence of the chronological span and the cultural range of his persistent uncovering of the history of what others have termed 'troublesome people'. As in earlier volumes we find evidence of the astonishing range of his research - from the broad sweep of conscientious objection in revolutionary and Napoleonic France or the inter-war years in Poland, via the fascinating account of the origins of conscientious objection in Japan, through to a focus on such small-scale episodes as a six-week training camp for a Universities Ambulance Unit near a village in Essex in the summer of 1940. So rich is Brock's grasp of his subject matter that even to read his source notes is a humbling experience for any historian of the pacifist movement, as he refers to original and secondary sources in a range of languages, whilst apologising for his lack of knowledge of Japanese and his consequent reliance on English-language sources for his account of

the emergence of conscientious objection in Japan!

The theme linking the different essays is the various ways individuals and groups with a principled objection to the use of lethal weapons have grappled with the conflicting demands of state and conscience. Thus we read of Polish anti-trinitarians of the 16th century debating whether or not it was legitimate to act as 'watchers' ready to alert their fellow citizens at the approach of any hostile force. One argument raised was that it was as morally culpable to identify the location of the enemy so that others might kill them as it was to bear arms oneself. Another of their number suggested that it was acceptable to carry arms, so long as one made it absolutely clear to the relevant authorities that you would never use them in lethal combat. Another debate current in such circles five hundred years ago, which still resonates to this day, was the question of 'war taxes'. Should one pay taxes to fund military force whilst refusing to bear arms oneself? This question does not seem to have troubled the Mennonites of the Netherlands who, in 1572 at the outset of the war for independence from Spain, handed over a considerable sum of money to William of Orange 'for the advancement of the common cause', on the understanding that he would free draftees from their ranks from the obligation to bear arms. For the Mennonites the payment of war taxes or special levies to excuse them from conscription was in full accordance with Christ's injunction to render unto Caesar things that are Caesar's. This was a view shared by a group of Quakers living in southern France during the revolutionary period at the end of the 18th century who hired substitutes to take their place when they were drafted for the militia. Such a stance was not shared by the main body of Quakers at that time and since.

Another debate that has exercised those who have been committed to the biblical injunction that 'Thou shalt not kill' has concerned whether or not it is morally right to agree to perform alternative service, thereby freeing someone else to carry lethal weapons into combat. Brock records that it was in the province of North Holland in 1575 that the first legislation was passed allowing conscien-

tious objectors to perform alternative service. In exchange for not carrying weapons during their period of enlistment Mennonites were to carry 'a sharp spade and basket' to help dig defensive ditches and ramps. (p. 46)

In the twentieth century the British established Non-Combatant Corps to facilitate 'weapon-less' alternatives for objectors in the two world wars. In similar fashion the German Democratic Republic introduced a non-combatant branch of the army in 1962, the members of which, according to Brock, acted as foci for the expanding peace and protest movement in the DDR. For many objectors, however, the kind of work performed in such non-combatant units, such as servicing military bases, was unacceptable. Pacifists and conscientious objectors, whether their stance resulted from religious belief or secular doctrine, have invariably linked their refusal to kill with the compulsion to relieve the suffering occasioned by war. One little known example of this is recorded by Brock in his account of those objectors who trained as medical auxiliaries and accompanied British paratroopers who landed in Normandy as part of the D-Day assault.

Conscientious objectors prepared to enlist in the military, albeit in non-combatant roles, constitute what must be considered the most moderate of their breed. Historically Quakers have tended to be more 'absolutist' in their stance, particularly when compared to other 'peace churches' such as the Mennonites. Thus, in his review of the experiences of Quakers who were 'pressed' into service in the Royal Navy in the 17th century, Brock recalls the nonviolent resistance offered by one member of the Society of Friends who had been forcibly put on board a man of war. He refused to cooperate with his captors, rejecting the offer of 'alternative service' as a doctor's assistant and refusing the offer of food. He recorded, 'I was sensible if I had eat of their victuals, they would have kept me.' (p. 54) After a number of days the captain of the vessel relented and allowed him to return to shore. In the same essay Brock records the experiences of another Quaker who was prepared to perform non-combatant duties in lieu of handling a weapon and who earned the congratulations of his commander for the

manner in which he cared for the wounded during a running sea-battle with the Dutch in 1665.

Towards the end of the 19th century Tolstoy had begun to exercise a deep influence on war resisters and pacifists in many countries and in a number of the essays Brock explores aspects of the 'Tolstoyan movement' within Russia and beyond. Recording some of the suffering of Russian conscientious objectors, Brock highlights the concerns of Tolstoy who felt responsible for their 'conversion' and his refusal to judge those who lacked the resolve to stand firm in their commitment to the 'law of love' in the face of the threat of punishment and persecution.

Amongst those influenced by Tolstoy was Gandhi. In his essay on the history of conscientious objection in Japan Brock observes that conscientious objection was never an issue in India because universal military service was never introduced. Therefore, whilst India produced Gandhi it was Japan that produced the first conscientious objectors in the oriental world. One of the significant figures in the small band of Japanese pacifists during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, Uchimura Kanzo, adopted a most idiosyncratic position with regard to conscription. He advised his fellow Christians who were facing conscription that they should serve in the armed forces, and carry arms, although they should refrain from using them for lethal purposes. His reasoning was that if they refused the draft they would be branded as cowards and thereby give pacifism a bad name, whereas if they died in military service they would be excellent exemplars of self-sacrifice and thereby enhance pacifism's reputation. Moreover, when he heard that one of his followers had decided to refuse the draft he travelled overnight on a crowded train to dissuade the young man, urging him to think of the shame he would cause his family by such a stance! (p. 191)

Military and state authorities have been known to try and neutralise the challenge to their authority posed by conscientious objectors by labelling them as psychologically disturbed. In one of the essays Brock reveals how a number of objectors in Germany during the First World War were confined to psy-

chiatric clinics, after all those who refused to defend their country in its hour of need must be psychotic! However, such a fate was relatively mild compared to the death sentences suffered by those objectors, many of them Jehovah's Witnesses, who refused to bear arms for Hitler's Reich and were thereby deemed guilty of 'undermining the country's military strength [Zersetzung der Wehrkraft]'. Their story is told in the final essay of the book, and Brock concludes by observing that 'it deserves to be better known than it has been hitherto.' (p. 442) The fact that it is known, along with the subterranean history of war resisters, pacifists and conscientious objectors in many parts of the world is due in large measure to the work of Peter Brock. Historians, peace researchers and peace activists owe him a great debt.

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