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G. H. Hardy

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## I. *Introduction*

The expulsion of Bertrand Russell from his lectureship in 1916 made a great stir at the time, and is still remembered as one of the minor sensations of the last war; but there are few men left, even in Trinity, who could tell the story of the case correctly. Outside the College there is hardly anyone who knows the facts at all, as I found in Oxford when I went there in 1920. Almost all my colleagues there were curious about the case and questioned me about it, and almost all of them had been wrong on four important points, about which misunderstanding was quite natural.

(1) It was generally believed that Russell had been deprived of a Fellowship. In fact he was not a Fellow, though he had been one, under title ( $\alpha$ ), from 1895 to 1901. It is of course much more difficult to remove a Fellow than to dismiss a lecturer.\*

(2) It was supposed that he had been dismissed by the College acting as a whole, whereas actually he was dismissed by the Council. This is a very natural mistake for anyone unfamiliar with the constitution of a large college.

(3) It was supposed that he had been dismissed because he had been sent to prison. Actually, Russell was twice 'convicted of an offence', in 1916, when he was fined £100, and in 1918, when he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. It was after the first conviction that he was dismissed; in 1918 he was no longer even a member of the College.

(4) Finally (and this was of course the most important misapprehension), no one knew that he had ever been reinstated.

These misapprehensions made the action of the College

\* See Statutes XIII and XXXIV (old Statutes XVII and XXXIV).

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(or the Council) seem in some ways less, in some more, violent and irrational. Their net result was, I am sure, to discredit the College. By now every incident has been obscured still more by the passage of time; and I imagine that there are even many Fellows, elected during the last twenty years, who know as little about the affair as my Oxford colleagues knew in 1920. It therefore seems desirable, both to me and to friends whom I have consulted, that there should exist a coherent account of the whole matter, written by someone who really knows the facts, and accessible to every Fellow.

I have at any rate some of the qualifications for writing it. I did not take any part in the actual quarrel, except to sign the protest at the time and the memorial for Russell's reinstatement later; and indeed I had, in the peculiar conditions of the time, no opportunity of doing so. But I was here all through the war, and heard all there was to hear about the question (except, naturally, the private deliberations of the Council); I have discussed it with many members of the College whose opinions about it have differed widely; and I think that I have read nearly all the comments of any importance upon it which appeared in either the Cambridge or the London press. In any case it is likely that, if I do not write the story, no one will do so until it is too late.

There is one qualification which I certainly have not, though it may seem to some Fellows the most important: I am not 'impartial'. I felt bitterly about the matter at the time, and feel strongly about it still, and I have not changed my views on any important point. But I doubt if there is any Fellow who knows the facts, and has not, one way or the other, decided views about them. At any rate I will do my best to write dispassionately, and to make clear what is statement of fact and what is merely expression of my own feelings.

Actually, there will be five elements in my narrative. First, statements of fact published in the press, or otherwise generally accessible. Secondly, statements derived from confidential

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sources (such as the Council Minutes and the Report Book) accessible only to Fellows. Thirdly, those based on what I have been told by other, past or present, Fellows. Fourthly, those for which I have to trust my own recollection. Finally, expressions of opinion. I will distinguish these various elements as carefully as I can.

## 2. *Public opinion towards pacifism during 1914–1918*

The emotions excited by pacifism\* of all kinds during the last war were, except for short periods near its beginning and end, far more violent than they are now. In Cambridge, particularly, and above all in Trinity, there was often a real bitterness which a present Fellow may find it difficult to picture. It is impossible to understand the Russell case without understanding something of the reasons for this intensity of feeling, and I must begin by saying something about those which underlay general public opinion.

(1) It must be remembered, first, that there was much more genuine political disagreement about the last war than there has been about this one.

(2) There was no automatic conscription: conscription came gradually and after a big fight. First there was the

\* I use the words 'pacifism' and 'pacifist', here and later, in the sense in which they came gradually to be used by the public and the press during 1914–1918, that is to say as applicable to all individuals and organizations whose views about the war were in any way unorthodox or unpopular. Thus I should describe Russell, Lowes Dickinson, Ramsay MacDonald, Lord Lansdowne (after 1916), and indeed anybody who did not accept the doctrine of 'victory at all costs', as 'pacifists', and I shall call the 'U.D.C.' a 'pacifist organization'. The word degenerated into a term of abuse, and I have no doubt that many people whom I should call pacifists would have repudiated the description, and reserved the word for those who subscribed to particular doctrines about the wickedness of war and the sanctity of human life. The implications of the word have no doubt moved in this direction since 1918; but I need a word to use in the sense which I have explained, and cannot find a better one.

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period of enthusiasm and of genuinely voluntary enlistment; then the period of voluntary enlistment under the pressure of public opinion, or economic pressure; finally, in the dying days of the voluntary system, the period of the 'Derby scheme'.\* There was no attempt, in the early stages, at systematic reservation, though certain classes, such as munition workers and civil servants over a certain age, came gradually to be reserved in practice. A man's decision to join up depended entirely upon his sense of duty, his sensitiveness to public opinion, and the attitude of his employer.

(3) The 'tribunal' system caused great bitterness after the coming of conscription. Apart from munition workers and a few other privileged classes, every man who wanted exemption, or whose employer wanted it for him, had to state his case individually to a tribunal. These tribunals dealt with appeals of all kinds. A man might appeal on the ground of special hardship, on the ground that his work was of national importance, on conscientious or even on medical grounds; whatever the ground, he went before the same tribunal, and his case was reported in the press.

The working of the system depended entirely on the personality of the tribunals, and above all of their chairmen. The Cambridge tribunal contained representatives of the University, and was no doubt one of the best; but many were both stupid and brutal, and could not be trusted to carry out correctly even the letter of the law or of the instructions which they received from time to time. And naturally all the weaknesses of the tribunal system were shown up most clearly by their treatment of conscientious objectors.

(4) Pacifist organizations were more numerous, more combative, and more diverse, both in their avowed aims and in their underlying motives (which were by no means always

\* Under which, certainly, hundreds of thousands 'volunteered' because they regarded conscription as certain and supposed (quite wrongly) that voluntary attestation would entitle them to preferential treatment. I can say this the more easily as a 'Derby man' myself.

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the same). There were two which are particularly important for my purpose, the U.D.C. (Union of Democratic Control) and the N.C.F. (No Conscription Fellowship): of these I shall have a good deal more to say later. There were also the I.L.P., which was definitely political, but had many members in common with the U.D.C. and the N.C.F., the National Council against Conscription (to organize political opposition to conscription before it came), and a good many definitely religious bodies such as the Friends' Service Committee. All of these bodies, except the U.D.C. and the I.L.P., came gradually to be occupied more and more with cases of hardship to conscientious objectors. For the properly political pacifist, naturally, the conscientious objector was always a handicap which he had to carry.

(5) Finally, there was no 'total' war; a general at the War Office, a bellicose civilian, or a conscientious objector who had been given total exemption, could carry on their work in almost complete safety.\*

I should add a word about the *official* attitude towards pacifists, and particularly conscientious objectors, though it cannot be more than a statement of my personal opinion. I have always thought that the Government's policy was, granted the premisses from which it started, and considering the great difficulties of the problem, on the whole very reasonable. They had, on the one hand, to avoid any serious loss of military efficiency or man-power, on the other to do their best to conciliate bitterly hostile currents of public opinion. If there were scandals—and there were many bad ones—it was not primarily the fault of the central authorities. We should remember that the internment of aliens in this war led to a good deal of hardship and injustice, and reflect that, then as now, the carrying out of the intentions of the Government was often in the hands of subordinates who,

\* The total number of deaths from air-raids during the war was 1414 (670 in London).

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deliberately or from sheer stupidity, failed to give effect to their orders.

As regards conscientious objectors, the position was roughly as follows.

(a) It was admitted by all except a few extremists that some recognition of conscientious objection was inevitable. Only a negligible minority were prepared for a religious persecution.

(b) It was also admitted, by all except a few extremists on the other side, that, while the majority of conscientious objectors were honest, and some of them very estimable people, there was a substantial body of would-be 'shirkers' prepared, if the way were made at all easy for them, to become conscientious objectors in order to escape military service. It was therefore essential, on military as well as on political grounds, that the position of a conscientious objector should be a hard and unpleasant one.

(c) It was certain that the decisions of the Government would often be administered by quite unintelligent and violently prejudiced agents. The result would be that, whether a conscientious objector were honest or not, his chance of securing exemption, and the nature of that exemption, would often depend on external circumstances, and in particular on his education, his social position, and the pressure that could be exerted by his friends. Indeed all this is true to some extent even under the much more rational system in force to-day.

All this must have been familiar to the Government; and their policy in the circumstances seemed to me then, and seems still, fundamentally sane. They wanted the position of a conscientious objector to carry with it penalties just sufficient to deter all but completely honest or very determined men.

The Government (at any rate its more prominent and intelligent members) never wished to *attack* pacifists, and least of all those who were obviously honest, able, and determined. And the last thing they could have wanted would have been

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to attack so formidable an antagonist as Russell, a man who was famous all over the world, and particularly in America, and whose prosecution would be bound to provoke a first-class sensation. They prosecuted Russell because, first the stupidity of their agents, then his own challenge, made prosecution inevitable.

On the other hand I imagine that there is no doubt that, once having begun the prosecution, they were quite determined that it should succeed. I was told at the time that a good deal of influence was brought to bear on the Lord Mayor, when he showed signs of being too much impressed by Russell's arguments. I cannot substantiate this assertion, but it is very plausible, since Russell argued well and an *unsuccessful* prosecution would have been disastrous.

I should add that all that I have said about public opinion applies particularly to the first three years of the war. It had toned down a good deal before the end of 1917, most people having become, in private, exhausted and rather cynical.\*

### 3. *Opinion in the College*

There were additional causes tending to exacerbate feeling in Cambridge, and particularly in Trinity.

(1) In the last war there was no automatic 'reservation' of dons, though the University or a College could appeal for the exemption of a teacher if they regarded him as 'indispensable'. Nor was there, at any rate in the early stages

\* It is hardly too much to say that, late in the war, the respect shown to one by a porter, taxi-driver, or waiter was *greater* if one was not in uniform: it was evidence that one was really a 'toff'. I can recall a rather amusing case of this in my own experience. I had shared lodgings with a friend for a year or so in Eaton Terrace, but some time in 1917 he left and I had to find other rooms. I had always gone out before breakfast to buy the *Morning Post* from a news-vendor at the corner, and when I went out on the last day I said to him 'I'm afraid this is the last time I shall be buying a paper from you'. I shall never forget the sudden look of disillusionment in his eyes, or the tone in which he said 'What, Sir, they've not nabbed *you*, Sir?' He may of course have spoken ironically.

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of the war, any real attempt to use scientific ability systematically: thus Littlewood was an artillery officer and Fowler a marine (though both were turned to scientific work later). The result was a sweeping clearance from Cambridge of dons below a certain age, and a corresponding concentration of the government of the College in the hands of the senior Fellows.

(2) There was a clearly defined ‘minority’ in the College. Four Fellows were conscientious objectors, and thirteen members of the U.D.C. (though four of these held commissions in the Army). These Fellows formed a party whose views, though by no means identical, were in sharp conflict with those of the majority and in particular with those of the Council; and no member of this minority would have stood the slightest chance of election to the Council. Thus membership of the Council became more and more the prerogative of the senior Fellows, and it is no wonder that it should have gradually lost touch with the general opinion of the College.

(3) The minority included a number of ‘provocative’ people, though no one who was actually a Fellow in 1916 was at all prominent publicly.\*

(4) There was a strong feeling among the senior Fellows that Cambridge was regarded by the world outside as a stronghold of pacifism. This feeling was no doubt exaggerated, but it is undeniable that there was something in it, and that the suspicion with which Cambridge was regarded was due primarily to Russell.† There was a sharp contrast in this respect between Cambridge and Oxford, which never had a similar reputation, and where differences of opinion were much more successfully controlled or concealed.

\* The most prominent people were Russell himself (a lecturer absent on leave) and Barnes (who had ceased to be a Fellow a little before).

† Lowes Dickinson was also suspect as a pacifist; but he was less provocative than Russell, and devoted himself more and more, as the war went on, to ‘League of Nations’ propaganda. See Ch. XII of E. M. Forster’s *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson*.



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There was another important factor in the reputation of Cambridge, *The Cambridge Magazine*, a remarkable journal very ably edited by C. K. Ogden. The *Cambridge Magazine* was founded in 1912, and was certainly the most interesting 'undergraduate' periodical ever produced in either University. It acquired a considerable outside circulation during the war, mainly as the result of an excellent 'survey of foreign opinion' edited by Mrs C. R. Buxton: this part of the *Magazine* came out weekly even during vacations, and was almost the only place where one could find an impartial selection of what was appearing in the foreign press. Naturally it had to face much hostility, which was fomented vigorously by various senior members of the University; but it continued as a weekly until 1920, and as a quarterly until 1923. Its premises in King's Parade and Bridge Street were smashed up during the riots in 'Armistice Week', but I need not go into that discreditable story.

The *Cambridge Magazine* was not an avowedly pacifist organ, but there was never any doubt about which side its sympathies lay. In particular, during the early days of conscription, it gave full reports of the proceedings at tribunals when prominent conscientious objectors appeared before them. These ceased after the Russell case: 'it is always our policy to stop short of anything likely to promote prosecution or raids.' But the *Magazine* was, as we shall see, very outspoken in its comments on the action of the Council.

For all these reasons feeling in Trinity had become tense long before the Russell case: it was plain, all through 1915, that the clouds were banking up for a storm. The relations between Fellows never degenerated to the point of downright rudeness, but different sections definitely avoided one another.\* The general tension reached its height in the summer of 1916, after Russell's dismissal, and did not develop further:

\* Rather as Dickinson and McTaggart, who had been most intimate friends, avoided one another.

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I can hardly remember a reference to the second Russell case of 1918. But life in College was through all these years, for a member of the minority, definitely unpleasant, and the recollection of them was an important factor in my own decision to try to move to Oxford.

The storm broke first over a dispute which seemed a minor affair after Russell's dismissal, and in which he was not involved directly. I shall begin my narrative of events in College with the story of this dispute, but I must first say a little more about the U.D.C. and the N.C.F., the two pacifist organizations over which our quarrels came to a head.

#### 4. *The U.D.C.*

The Union of Democratic Control was founded shortly after the beginning of the war. Its first manifesto, a letter to the press signed by Norman (now Sir Norman) Angell, Ramsay MacDonald, E. D. Morel and C. P. (now Sir Charles) Trevelyan (who had resigned from the Government in August), appeared in September 1914; and its first pamphlet, *The Morrow of the War*, in October. It had a General Council of thirty members, the most conspicuous of whom (besides the four whom I have mentioned already) were H. N. Brailsford, Arthur Henderson, Arthur Ponsonby (now Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede), Russell, and Lees Smith. Morel, a remarkable man famous for his part in the exposure of the 'Congo atrocities', was honorary secretary and treasurer. Philip Snowden (afterwards Viscount Snowden) joined later. All these men represented what were then the left wings of the Liberal and Labour parties; and a good many of the members of the Union were, or became later, Members of Parliament, and formed the intellectual nucleus of the first Labour