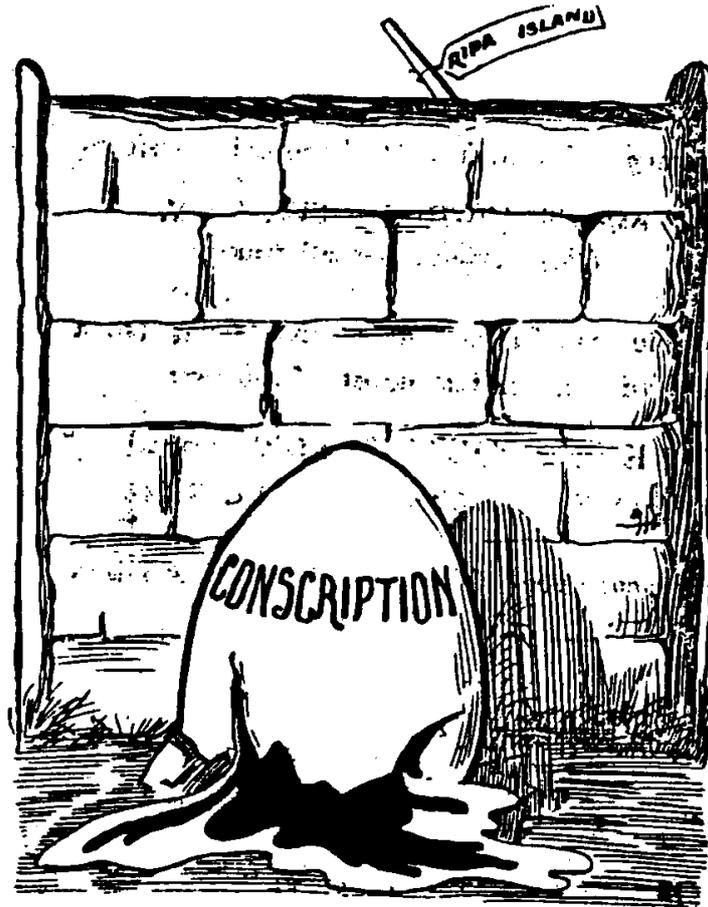


‘Don’t be a conscript, be a man!’:  
A History of the Passive Resisters’ Union, 1912-1914



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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the qualification of Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in History  
The University of Auckland, 2010

**Abstract:** The Defence Act 1909 introduced compulsory military training (CMT) into New Zealand. Shortly thereafter, an anti-militarist movement was born as a means to combat what some considered to be an unwarranted intrusion of militarism into public life and an excessive allocation of power into the hands of the government. The movement that opposed the Defence Act has been discussed at length by a number of scholars and the success of the movement, in placing considerable stress on the training scheme, has been noted. However, little has been made of the specific impact of the Passive Resisters' Union (PRU), an anti-militarist group consisting entirely of young men directly affected by the Act. As such, it is the aim of this essay to analyse the role that this union played in the movement to oppose CMT. Employing both primary and secondary sources, this essay demonstrates that the most intensive pressure placed upon the training scheme arose from the unique actions and tactics of the PRU. To highlight this point, the PRU's unique approach in opposing CMT is broken into four parts – membership restriction, civil disobedience, publicity, and humour – and discussed in detail. In addition, the union's activities are mapped chronologically alongside the campaign against CMT, serving to highlight the effects of the PRU's actions on governmental policy and public opinion. In making these points it becomes clear that the PRU was not simply one part of the anti-militarist movement that opposed CMT, but rather the union was the crucial component of the campaign as its unique approach precipitated the movement's successes.

In late February 1912, nine members of the recently formed Passive Resisters' Union (PRU) were fined for refusing to comply with the compulsory military training (CMT) scheme, a military initiative that had replaced voluntary training in December 1909. As PRU members, the young men had pledged to resist CMT 'in defiance of all pains and penalties that may be imposed' and in line with this pledge, they refused to pay their fines.<sup>1</sup> Their sustained resistance resulted in all nine being sentenced to 21 days in prison. On Saturday 9 March 1912 a meeting was held in Christchurch Square to protest their imprisonment. The meeting was described in the National Peace Council's journal, the *Anti Militarist*, as easily eclipsing 'any meeting previously held by the anti-militarists. In fact,' the Journal continued, 'we doubt if any meeting on a similar subject has ever been attended by so large a crowd'.<sup>2</sup> Speeches were held and resolutions were carried condemning the compulsory military training scheme and a number of PRU members stood before the crowd and declared their intentions to defy CMT. James Worrall, secretary of the PRU said:

If they put me in gaol for the rest of my life, I would not have anything to do with conscription. They call us cowards. I'm ready to fight anyone. I'm ready for any of the officers at the drill shed, but the fight is mental, not physical.<sup>3</sup>

The protest carried over to the following day when a chartered train took hundreds of people – including PRU members, waterside workers, members of local women's groups and others from the anti-militarist movement – to an open-air meeting at the gates of Lyttleton jail.<sup>4</sup> Upon arrival, 500 copies of the song 'We'll Set the Children Free' were handed throughout the crowd and to the tune of 'John Brown's Body' the crowd sang:

...

Don't let a tyrant rule you while there's honest men and true.  
Never let the military get a grip of you,  
Better send them packing – Godley, Ward, and all his crew,  
And set your children free!

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<sup>1</sup> *Press*, 9 February 1912.

<sup>2</sup> *Anti-Militarist: A Journal of Protest and True Patriotism*, 1 April 1912, p.12.

<sup>3</sup> *Grey River Argus*, 11 March 1912, p.5.

<sup>4</sup> Bert Roth, 'Hell No We Won't Go!', *New Zealand Monthly Review*, XI, October 1970, p.20.

Chorus:-

Glory, glory, hallelujah,

Glory, glory, hallelujah,

Glory, glory, hallelujah,

We'll set our children free.

...

Cruel war and slaughter has held long enough its sway,

Burning homes, and killing wives and children where they play,

But now we have made up our minds that peace shall reign for aye,

And our children shall be free.<sup>5</sup>

The events outlined above illustrate the important role the PRU played in the campaign to oppose CMT. The union represented an attempt by young men to band together and actively oppose state coercion and their refusal to cooperate with the Defence Act placed considerable stress on the training scheme.

However, when discussing the PRU, scholars often fail to appreciate the union's pivotal role in the opposition movement to CMT. The authoritative work on the subject, R. L. Weitzel's 'Pacifists and Anti-militarists in New Zealand, 1909-1914', positions the PRU within a movement that consists of a number of groups and individuals.<sup>6</sup> This movement, in its entirety, is depicted as placing so much pressure on CMT that, as Weitzel explains, by mid-1914 it was becoming 'more and more possible that the Defence Act might after all have failed'.<sup>7</sup> The PRU were certainly involved in the wider movement and they received considerable assistance from a number of groups and individuals therein. However, Weitzel's approach – replicated in the works of numerous subsequent historians – fails to appreciate the PRU's specific impact on the opposition movement to CMT.

Two historians who have commented on the specific impact of the PRU are James D. Milburn and Elsie Locke. Milburn, in his MA Thesis 'New Zealand's First Experiment with Compulsory Military Training 1900-1914', which was completed in 1954, depicts the PRU's opposition to CMT as

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<sup>5</sup> 'We'll Set the Children Free' in Rona Bailey and Herbert Roth, *Shanties by the Way: A Selection of New Zealand Popular Songs and Ballads*, Christchurch, 1967, pp.112–113.

<sup>6</sup> R.L. Weitzel, 'Pacifists and Anti-militarists, 1909–1914', *New Zealand Journal of History*, 7, 2 (1973), pp.128–147.

<sup>7</sup> Weitzel, p.147.

militant and spectacular though he dismisses their role when he states: ‘at best ... the Passive Resisters’ Union can only be said to have had a nuisance value’.<sup>8</sup> This assessment is in contrast to the comments made by Locke in her 1992 book *Peace People: A History of Peace Activities in New Zealand*. In this she states that ‘the heftiest muscle in resistance to the Defence Act came from the remarkable Passive Resisters’ Union’ and that by mid-1914, ‘the whole structure of compulsory military training was rapidly becoming a shambles’.<sup>9</sup> The discrepancy between these two analyses might be explained by the periods in which they were written. Milburn was writing at a time when fear of communism was prevalent, and loyalty to the British Empire was the norm.<sup>10</sup> Hence, a socialist group such as the PRU, which opposed a policy, which as we will see, was enacted to support the Empire, would have been viewed by many in a negative light. While Locke’s positive assessment of the PRU, which is influenced by Weitzel’s article, reflects a time when links with the Empire had weakened, peace movements had permeated society, and fear of communism had become a fringe issue. In any case, neither of the authors substantiates their claims in any meaningful way, leaving a gap for such an analysis.

In light of this lacuna, the aim of this essay is to highlight and assess the specific role the PRU played in the opposition movement to CMT. The techniques and tactics employed by the union will be outlined and discussed, with a particular focus on the aspects of the union that set it apart from other groups in the anti-militarist movement. Included in this discussion will be the PRU’s policy of restricting membership to those liable to serve under the Defence Act; its commitment to the tactic of civil disobedience; its particular aptitude for using opposition to CMT as a platform from which to gain publicity; and the humour and exuberance the group brought to the struggle against CMT.<sup>11</sup> In the course of outlining the tactics and techniques employed by the PRU, the union’s specific role in the struggle against CMT will be assessed. In so doing, this essay will highlight that the PRU was of crucial importance to New Zealand’s first major anti-militarist struggle.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> James Dalton Milburn, ‘New Zealand’s First Experiment with Compulsory Military Training 1900-1914’, MA Thesis, Victoria University College, 1954, p.84.

<sup>9</sup> Elsie Locke, *Peace people: A History of Peace Activities in New Zealand*, Christchurch, 1992, pp.43–47.

<sup>10</sup> Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, Auckland, 2003, p.412.

<sup>11</sup> E.W. Plumridge, ‘Labour in Christchurch: Community and Consciousness, 1914-1919’, MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1979, p.79.

<sup>12</sup> Freda Larsen, ‘The Peace Movement in New Zealand 1909-1939’, BA Honours Dissertation, Massey University, 1982, p.10.

## The Introduction of CMT

The Defence Act of 1909, which introduced CMT into New Zealand, was passed at a time of increasing imperial loyalty. In the midst of what James Belich has termed ‘recolonisation’, the period is marked by a number of policies and initiatives that strengthened New Zealand’s links with Britain.<sup>13</sup> Many of these links were imperialistic, and at times overtly militaristic. In 1907 the state began publishing the *New Zealand School Journal* which, from the outset, was ‘a deliberate attempt to indoctrinate children with an imperialist ideology’.<sup>14</sup> An article from the May 1909 edition reads:

Britons have carried Christianity and civilisation to all the ends of the earth, redeeming from barbarism many of its dark places. Wherever the Union Jack flies, those who live under its folds, dark and white races alike, enjoy liberty and justice such as cannot be found under any other flag.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile 1908 saw the peak of the cadet corps’s activities with 15,000 cadets enlisted in 185 units.<sup>16</sup> This body was recognised as a central component of New Zealand’s contribution to the Empire’s collective defences. In 1909 the government gifted a dreadnought battleship, the *HMS New Zealand*, to Britain and in July and August of the same year a New Zealand deputation attended the Imperial Naval and Military Conference in London. At the conference it was decided that the Empire’s Defence Force should be re-organised into an integrated system with the colonies’ strengthening their home defences while agreeing to assist the ‘Mother-Country’ in the event of a conflict.<sup>17</sup> Such changes were made in light of Germany’s growing power on mainland Europe and the threat that nation posed to Britain’s long held hegemony. The Defence Act, which became law in December 1909, represented New Zealand’s contribution to this re-organisation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: A History of the New Zealanders, from the 1880s to the Year 2000*, Auckland, 2001, p.11.

<sup>14</sup> E.P. Malone, ‘The New Zealand School Journal and The Imperial Ideology’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, 7, 1 (1973), p.12.

<sup>15</sup> Malone, p.15.

<sup>16</sup> Megan Hutching, ‘“Turn Back this Tide of Barbarism”: New Zealand Women who were opposed to war, 1896-1919’, MA Thesis, University of Auckland, 1990, p.59.

<sup>17</sup> Milburn, pp.51–53.

<sup>18</sup> Weitzel, p.128.

The Defence Act, which was amended in 1910 following the advice of Field-Marshal Viscount Kitchener, was first implemented in April 1911. The legislation replaced voluntary training with compulsory military training. The Act held that males between the ages of 12 to 14 were to enrol in the Junior Cadets; 'from 14 to 18 in the Senior Cadets, from 18 to 25 in the General Training Section and from 25 to 30 in the Reserve'.<sup>19</sup> The territorial force, the nation's primary defence force, was to be composed of men transferred from the General Training Section.<sup>20</sup> Implementation of the Act began on 3 April 1911, the first step being the compulsory registration of all young men between the ages of 14 and 20 (inclusive).<sup>21</sup> Posters appeared at railway stations and post offices highlighting the 'Universal Obligation for Military Training' and informing the public that failure to register would result in a £5 fine.<sup>22</sup> Registration was completed on 17 July 1911 and the government's required quota of 30,000 Territorials was achieved. Despite the success of registration, 13,000 young men or roughly 25% of those eligible for the Senior Cadets and the Territorials failed to register.<sup>23</sup>

### **Early opposition to CMT**

Of those who failed to register, only a minority did so for reasons of conscience. The vast majority simply neglected to register, not taking the government's announcements seriously. In any case, the government prosecuted the offenders selectively, singling out those with pacifist, socialist and working class backgrounds.<sup>24</sup> This introduced a pattern of selected prosecutions, amounting to persecution, as the government used the Defence Act as a tool to silence its most vocal opponents.<sup>25</sup> Such direct attacks only served to promote the conviction of many working class activists that CMT's introduction at a time of growing working class radicalism was no coincidence. Twelve prosecutions were brought before the courts in July and August 1911, with three young men being convicted and fined £5 each for failing to comply with the Act. Two of these young men, William Cornish from Wellington and Harry Cooke from Christchurch, refused to pay their fines.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Weitzel, pp.128–129.

<sup>20</sup> Weitzel, pp.128–129.

<sup>21</sup> Weitzel, p.129.

<sup>22</sup> J.P. Fletcher and J.F. Hills, *Conscription Under Camouflage: An Account of Compulsory Military Training in Australasia Down to the Outbreak of the Great War*, South Australia, 1919, p.108.

<sup>23</sup> Weitzel, pp.129–132.

<sup>24</sup> Weitzel, p.132.

<sup>25</sup> Weitzel, p.132.

<sup>26</sup> Weitzel, p.132.

Cooke's and Cornish's belligerence marked the onset of direct pressure upon CMT, though it did not represent the genesis of the wider opposition movement. Groups had started to campaign against the Defence Act as early as 1910 and the onset of registration in 1911 saw a growth in the movement's activities. The most prominent groups were the National Peace Council and the Federation of Labour. The National Peace Council approached the issue with a temperate, conciliatory tone, hoping to appeal to the middle class by focussing on issues around the militarization of youth and society in general; while the Federation of Labour approached the policy in a more antagonistic manner, viewing CMT as a weapon of capitalist imperialism which could be used against workers domestically and internationally.<sup>27</sup> Both groups invested substantial time and energy into the dissemination of their ideas in pamphlets, newspapers and public meetings, hoping to convince the population of the dangerous nature of the policy. The National Peace Council suggested 'that very many people are today in favour of military training only because they have never given the matter any serious thought, and judicious distribution of literature to these [people] will have a marked result'.<sup>28</sup> The National Peace Council may have been correct in this assessment, though their approach of public education was painstakingly slow and accordingly, was easily ignored by the government. The actions of Cooke and Cornish however, could not so easily be dismissed.

In 1849, the American essayist and political activist, Henry David Thoreau, in his essay 'Resistance to Civil Government', articulated the concept of civil disobedience: namely 'the deliberate violation of a law in pursuit of a social goal'.<sup>29</sup> In the essay Thoreau questioned why a population should defer to governments and laws with which they did not agree and why the population should not use its own moral judgement in such cases?<sup>30</sup> He asserted that it is the duty of the citizen to withhold her or his support from a government considered to be committing injustice and wrote the now famous lines: 'Under a government that imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison'.<sup>31</sup> Adopting the tactic of civil disobedience, Cooke and Cornish refused to comply with the Defence Act. To them the compulsory clause of the Act was an affront to the traditions of liberty fought and won by their forebears. In addition, the Act, which was viewed by Cooke and Cornish through a class

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<sup>27</sup> Milburn, p.77; Len Richardson, 'Politics and War: Coal Miners and Conscript, 1914-18', in Philip Ross May, ed., *Miners and Militants: Politics in Westland 1865-1918*, Christchurch, 1975, p.128.

<sup>28</sup> Milburn, p.77; *The Anti-Militarist*, 1 October 1911, p.16.

<sup>29</sup> Howard Zinn, *A Power Governments Cannot Suppress*, San Francisco, 2007, p.125.

<sup>30</sup> Zinn, p.125.

<sup>31</sup> Zinn, p.126; Henry David Thoreau, 'Resistance to Civil Government' (first published 1849), *Civil Disobedience and Other Essays*, Mineola, 1993, pp.1-18.

conscious lens, was seen as a weapon to be employed by the capitalist class to suppress and control the working class (these ideas will be expanded below as they were similarly adopted by the PRU). Therefore, as we have seen, Cooke and Cornish refused to register under CMT. They were subsequently fined for this offence and as a result of their refusal to pay their fines, each man was imprisoned for 21 days.

Their imprisonment caught the government completely off guard. Punishment, as legislated under the Defence Act, was limited to fines and as such the incarceration of the young men was a result of the authorities following standard judicial practice relating to the refusal to pay a fine. The government's resultant surprise was amplified by an outcry amongst middle class liberals. This sector of the population, by in large, was not concerned with the young men's anti-militarist ideas, but rather their incarceration alongside common criminals.<sup>32</sup> Cooke and Cornish were the first Pākehā political prisoners in the nation's history and it seemed outrageous to some that they should be treated like common criminals for following their conscience. Neither the Liberals nor Reform appreciated the resulting attention CMT received. Both parties were preparing for a general election in November and given that the policy enjoyed near universal support within the House, neither party wanted to see CMT become a political issue. Recognising that the imprisonment of young men was having this effect, the Liberal government brought prosecutions to an end in August 1911.<sup>33</sup>

The Liberals decision to cease prosecutions represented the first victory for the opposition movement to CMT. Unlike the tactics adopted by the National Peace Council and the Federation of Labour, the employment of civil disobedience by those directly affected by the Defence Act offered a means by which direct pressure could be brought to bear on the government. Although opposition to CMT was and remained a minority issue, these tactics gave the movement an impact that far outweighed its numbers. Success in this instance was short lived as the Liberal government, reinstated in the November election, recommenced prosecutions with a renewed vigour in early 1912.<sup>34</sup> However, it was during this wave of prosecutions and informed by the actions of Cooke and Cornish, that the PRU was established.

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<sup>32</sup> Weitzel, p.133.

<sup>33</sup> Weitzel, p.133.

<sup>34</sup> Weitzel, p.136.

## The formation of the Passive Resisters' Union

The PRU was formed in the early weeks of February 1912 by a group of apprentices employed at the Addington Railway Workshops in Christchurch. Within a few weeks over 200 youths had joined, pledging 'to resist coercion, conscription and compulsory military training under all circumstances, and in defiance of all pains and penalties which may be imposed'.<sup>35</sup> As news of the PRU's formation spread, branches were established throughout the country. Membership and activity remained strongest in the southern regions – especially Christchurch and the West Coast – however small groups arose in Auckland, Waihi, Huntly and Wellington, as young men across the nation replied to the union's call for them 'to stand solidly with us against tyranny and oppression'.<sup>36</sup>

Paul Baker identifies four issues that motivated people to oppose the Defence Act prior to the First World War. These were the militarization of youth, immorality of camp life, the denial of liberty and the dangers of a standing army.<sup>37</sup> It was the latter two points specifically that concerned the PRU. Firstly, the compulsory clauses of the Defence Act were interpreted as a denial of fundamental rights. The union's manifesto, entitled *Why We Will Not Obey the Defence Act*, stated:

It is un-British and iniquitous in that it deprives us of our liberty.... we are free-born, and in spite of all attempts of the capitalistic press, the militarist parsons, and other toadies of flunkeyism to force the fetters of conscription on us, we will not tolerate serfdom.<sup>38</sup>

In an article published in the Federation of Labour's newspaper the *Maoriland Worker*, on 8 March 1912, James Worrall, the first secretary of the PRU, reiterated these concerns when he wrote: 'Our forefathers fought long and hard for the liberty we now have, and we will not surrender it to the military despots while we have breath to last out'.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Press*, 9 February 1912.

<sup>36</sup> Fletcher, p.112.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Baker, *King and Country Call: New Zealanders, Conscription and the Great War*, Auckland, 1988, p.12.

<sup>38</sup> Fletcher, p.112.

<sup>39</sup> *Maoriland Worker*, 8 March 1912, p.6.

Of equal concern to the PRU was the threat of a standing army. The union collectively subscribed to the philosophy of international socialism and viewed capitalism as a harmful global force that could only be challenged by international solidarity amongst the working class. Accordingly, the union viewed national armies as a weapon of the bourgeoisie which could be deployed against the working class, domestically and internationally, in defence of private capital. The PRU's manifesto stated that CMT was organised by a 'body composed of the capitalistic and exploiting classes, whose interest it is to keep the worker in subjection'.<sup>40</sup> These concerns were echoed by the West Coast branches which proclaimed 'all wars are a ruse of the capitalist class to set the workers of this country and the workers of other countries at each other's throats'.<sup>41</sup> They declared: 'we recognize no enemy except the hereditary enemy of our class - the employers and exploiters of labour in this and other countries'.<sup>42</sup>

To demonstrate their opposition to CMT, the PRU adopted the tactics and strategies that Cooke and Cornish employed with such success in 1911. The union took advantage of the ability of young men to disrupt the policy by limiting membership to those who were liable to serve under the Defence Act. A notice in the *Evening Post* advertising the establishment of the Wellington branch read: 'Passive Resisters' Union: A general meeting will be held in Messers Godber's Rooms, Cuba St., Friday 29th, commencing at 8 o'clock. All intending members must be liable under the Defence Act'.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the PRU adopted the tactic of civil disobedience. As evidenced in a song written by the union, its strategy was a total refusal to comply with the Defence Act based on their belief that it curtailed their rights and freedoms. The song, to the tune of 'Marching Through Georgia', went as follows:

They are up against a problem, and they don't know what to do,  
They think they're going to make their soldiers out of me and you;  
But take our tip, we're not the stuff to fail the P.R.U.

And take the oath in Godley's conscript army

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<sup>40</sup> Fletcher, p.112.

<sup>41</sup> Leslie C. Jauncey, *The Story of Conscription in Australia*, London, 1935, p.92.

<sup>42</sup> Len Richardson, *Coal, Class and Community: The United Mineworkers of New Zealand, 1880-1960*, Auckland, 1995, p.30.

<sup>43</sup> *Evening Post*, 28 March 1912, p.8.

Chorus:-

Hurrah, hurrah! No conscript oath for me!

Hurrah, hurrah! We'll stand up with the free!

We'll pay no fine, we'll bide our time,

To jail we'll go with glee,

And bear the brunt in glorious fight for freedom.

The craven prosecutors, they can do their level best,

To coax us and coerce us; but we'll stand their vicious test;

In spite of jibes from magistrates, the Press, and all the rest,

We'll have no truck with Godley's conscript army!<sup>44</sup>

The interplay between these two approaches – restricting membership to those liable to serve under the Defence Act and civil disobedience – gave the PRU a particularly effective means of opposing CMT. Due to the age restriction all PRU members, following their inevitable failure to comply with the law, would be punished by the government. Their punishment, which would include fines and/or imprisonment, would in turn force the young men into the workings of CMT, at which time their continued adherence to civil disobedience would enable them to oppose the scheme internally.

It was in the midst of the prosecutions that precipitated the PRU's establishment that the effectiveness of this approach was first illustrated. The Liberals reinstated prosecutions with the hope that opposition had subsided: however it soon became clear that the opposite was the case. Over 100 prosecutions were brought before the courts in February alone. Amongst these prosecutions were a dedicated band of PRU members, identifiable in the docks by the red and gold PRU badges worn on their jackets, who were imprisoned for failing to pay their fines. Once more, a public outcry resulted. Thousands took to the streets of Christchurch in early March to show their support for the young men, while others made their opposition felt via letters to newspaper editors and private communication with their Members of Parliament. Sarah Saunders Page, who would later become a prominent feminist and pacifist activist, commented that this episode forced her to become more involved in the movement against CMT and peace issues in general, as 'some of the finest lads I knew began to be thrown into the

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<sup>44</sup> *Repeal: Official Organ of the Passive Resisters' Union*, 9 June 1913, p.9.

common jails for following the dictates of their conscience in refusing to train for the work of destruction'.<sup>45</sup>

Facing unwanted public scrutiny of CMT and having control of the house by the smallest of margins following the November election, Prime Minister Sir Joseph Ward was forced to act. He commissioned a report to investigate the situation and offer solutions to the problem. Upon its release the report stated that civil jails did not provide 'suitable accommodation' for recalcitrant offenders and suggested that military detention was a more suitable alternative.<sup>46</sup> This report had the affect of raising anticipation that the legislation would be amended. However, such changes were delayed by the political fallout resulting from the Liberal Party's implosion, ending their 21 years in power. In the end it fell to the Reform Party, and specifically the Minister of Defence James Allen, to table the bill.

By the time the Defence Amendment Bill 1912 reached parliament in October, 4819 young men had been convicted under the Defence Act and over 100 PRU members had been imprisoned for failing to comply with the Act. The imprisonment of these young men, in a country that little over 18 months prior had never imprisoned a Pākehā for political reasons, constituted a considerable threat to the government.<sup>47</sup> To avoid such a situation arising a third time, the Defence Amendment Act of 1912, which was passed into law on 7 November 1912, introduced a number of measures that aimed to keep the young men out of prison while strengthening the government's ability to secure compliance with CMT. The Amendment Act maintained the magistrates' power to administer fines; but further empowered them to retrieve unpaid fines via an attachment order, or garnishee, to be placed on the wages of the offender. In addition, the law gave the magistrate the power to compel the offender's employer to comply. Attempts made by offenders to avoid the garnishee would result in their incarceration. However, under the new Act, that incarceration would not be in a civil prison but in a military barracks.<sup>48</sup> Here, the offender would be subject to military discipline, and be forced to obey all lawful orders in regard to training, discipline, and duties from any officer of the Defence Forces.<sup>49</sup> In addition, the amending Act empowered the magistrate at her/his discretion, to remove the offender's civil rights for up to ten years.

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<sup>45</sup> Hutchings, p.71.

<sup>46</sup> Weitzel, pp.137-138.

<sup>47</sup> Locke, p.44.

<sup>48</sup> T. C. Gregory, *The Challenge Direct*, Bristol, 1913, p.2.

<sup>49</sup> Society of Friends, Peace Committee. *A Blot on the Empire: Conscription in New Zealand*, London, 1913, p.11.

Some contemporary observers claimed the Defence Amendment Act of 1912 as a victory for the PRU and the anti-militarist movement. Quakers in London wrote a pamphlet detailing the Defence Amendment Act as an ‘implicit confession of the failure of previous methods of dealing with those who refuse to serve’.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the PRU’s adoption of certain tactics and techniques, employed so successfully by Cornish and Cooke in 1911, did place the government under pressure. However given the policies which were introduced by the amending Act it was hardly an achievement worth celebrating. The Act represented an implicit declaration of the government’s intention to bring an end to PRU-style opposition. Besides the slight liberalising of the law in favour of religious objectors, the Act was fundamentally crafted to place greater pressure upon the actions of the PRU. Unperturbed, the PRU wrote to every member of the house, as the bill made its way through parliament, stating:

We have refused to obey the Defence Act because we cannot conscientiously comply with it, and we must state that in future, if the compulsory clauses are not repealed, we will again willingly bear the punishment.<sup>51</sup>

Thus the Defence Amendment Act 1912, although confirming the effectiveness of the PRU’s tactics, had the affect of intensifying the campaign. The authorities now had new means with which to gain compliance, and as a result, the PRU were forced to step up their campaign to maintain their defiance.

### **The enforcement of the Defence Amendment Act 1912**

The authorities’ first move, following the Amendment Act, was a concerted persecution campaign aimed at challenging the young men’s will to oppose. The union and the wider anti-militarist movement were no strangers to harassment by the authorities. Throughout the opposition the government had persecuted its most vocal opponents by prosecuting selectively, singling out defaulters with political connections while overlooking the misdemeanours of many a-political defaulters. In addition, supporters of the PRU had faced similar unwanted attention from the authorities throughout 1912. A particularly prominent case involved the Christchurch boot maker H. W. Reynolds who was charged £5 for hanging a copy of the *Maoriland Workers’* ‘Roll of Honour’ in his shop window: the

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<sup>50</sup> Society of Friends, p.8.

<sup>51</sup> *Maoriland Worker*, 20 September 1912, p.6.

‘Roll of Honour’ was a list of all the young men who had been imprisoned due to their opposition to the Defence Act. In response to this charge, Reynolds wrote to Prime Minister William Massey stating:

I did not and do not intend paying it myself, as everyone says it is simply persecution not prosecution.... Wishing your government a speedy exit accompanied with the conscription act.<sup>52</sup>

However, what separates the persecution that occurred following the Defence Amendment Act 1912 from that which had preceded it, was the intensity of the government’s actions. In this latter instance, strategic efforts were made to hamper the young men’s effectiveness and disrupt their will to oppose.

The PRU had long played a central role in the organising and hosting of public street meetings using the forum as a means to spread their ideas, inform the public of their activities and gain recruits for the ‘anti-militarist brigade’.<sup>53</sup> In early 1913 the authorities attempted to shut down these meetings. In Christchurch, where weekly meetings were held in front of the Clock Tower, the City Council attempted to stop meetings by invoking by-laws, usually in regards to disrupting traffic. Reg Williams, a prominent member of the PRU, was arrested and jailed on 3 March 1913 for ‘wilful blockage of traffic’.<sup>54</sup> His summons form explained that he ‘deliver[ed] an address in a public place to wit Manchester Street, in consequence whereof other persons were induced to congregate in Manchester Street, so as to cause an obstruction’.<sup>55</sup> This charge was made despite the fact that a PRU member had hired a taxi and driven in front of the Clock Tower to highlight that traffic was not being obstructed.<sup>56</sup> Persecution continued in Christchurch and gave vent to what became known as the ‘Free speech campaign’ as activists outside of the PRU became involved in an attempt to defend the public’s right of free speech. Meanwhile the actions of the Christchurch City Council were replicated elsewhere in the South Island. Meetings were shut down in Greymouth and the Borough Council of Rangiora passed a by-law intended to silence the Passive Resisters and Socialists.<sup>57</sup> Two PRU members were arrested in Rangiora for blocking traffic, a charge to which they responded: ‘anyone who has been to that busy

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<sup>52</sup> Reynolds to Massey, 2 November 1912, AD 19/36 108/42, Archives New Zealand, Wellington.

<sup>53</sup> Weitzel, p.131.

<sup>54</sup> Weitzel, p.142.

<sup>55</sup> Reginald Williams’s summons form, 1 March 1913, Lincoln Efford Papers, MS Papers 0445 X/2, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), Wellington.

<sup>56</sup> Weitzel, p.142.

<sup>57</sup> *Repeal*, 13 March 1913, p.4.

centre knows that a fence could easily be run across the main street for a whole week, and no one, save the policeman, being any the wiser'.<sup>58</sup> Both members were fined for their offence.

Members of the PRU also faced persecution in other spheres of their lives. As empowered under the Defence Amendment Act 1912, magistrates began to strip defiant young men of their civil rights. In practical terms the deprivation of these rights meant the offenders would be unable to gain employment in the public sector and be denied the right to vote when their age permitted them to do so. As the PRU saw it, this silenced the young men's voice to oppose the government of the day and made them powerless to elect a government that might better represent their point of view in the future. Among those who were affected by this policy were Harry Cooke and Chubert Beary who lost their civil rights for three years, and Reg Williams who lost his for two.<sup>59</sup> PRU members were also threatened with the loss of education scholarships. James Allen, who held both the Defence and Education portfolios, suggested that any young men who refused to comply with the Defence Act should lose any scholarships they had been awarded.<sup>60</sup> The PRU, who viewed Allen's dual ministerial responsibilities with some irony, stated that his suggestion was a move to keep the working class ignorant and it was the PRU's desire that 'our people become internationalists instead of jingoes; men of peace, instead of "dogs of war"'.<sup>61</sup>

In response to this persecution, the PRU began to publish a journal entitled the *Repeal*, aptly named to encapsulate the union's desire for the repeal of the Defence Act. The editorial in the first issue stated:

Had the boys not been persecuted, this paper would have been only a hazy idea in the minds of its founders; but the authorities have decreed with regards to the Passive Resisters that they "will break their hearts, make them drill, or drive them out of the country:" and no one with a trace of manhood, a feeling of sympathy, or professing a love of justice, ought to keep quiet while such a monstrous outrage is being perpetrated.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Repeal*, 13 October, 1913, p.7.

<sup>59</sup> E. W. Plumridge, 'Labour in Christchurch: Community and Consciousness, 1914-1919', MA Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1979, p.81.

<sup>60</sup> *Repeal*, 13 March 1913, pp.4-5.

<sup>61</sup> *Repeal*, 13 March 1913, pp.4-5.

<sup>62</sup> *Repeal*, 13 March 1913, p.3.

Published from March 1913 to August 1914, the journal offered the union an opportunity to reclaim the voice and publicity curtailed by the authorities' efforts to silence them. As it turned out however, it became a central tool in the union's campaign against CMT. As such, the journal exemplifies two vital aspects of the PRU's opposition to CMT. Firstly, the journal is evidence of an aptitude for publicity, which had its genesis in the street meetings mentioned above, but flourished following the formation of the *Repeal*. The monthly publication was filled with overviews of the activities of the PRU and others involved in the anti-militarist movement throughout the country. In addition, it published commentaries on issues such as the arms industry and fear-mongering around the 'yellow-peril', offering readers a regular publication that acted as a counter-point to the mainstream media, which the PRU depicted as the mouthpiece of militarist sentiment in society.<sup>63</sup> Carrying such a message, the *Repeal* was distributed throughout the country by PRU branches, individuals, and other groups involved in the campaign against CMT. Most important to this effort was the Christchurch branch which administered subscriptions that saw copies distributed to small New Zealand towns including Kaipara, Hawea, Ngaruawahia and Hastings, and to large international cities such as London, Edinburgh and Sydney.<sup>64</sup> Ironically, attempts to silence the PRU were inverted and used as a means to expand its audience.

Secondly the *Repeal* highlights the youthful exuberance and humour introduced to the campaign against CMT by the PRU. The content and style of the *Repeal* is humorous to the point of outright rebellion, and lends credence to Herbert Roth's suggestion that the PRU was 'a militant youth organisation which shows many similarities with [the] Progressive Youth Movement'.<sup>65</sup> The journal regularly referred to New Zealand as 'Godley's own country', in reference to the perceived tyrannical power held by Alexander Godley, the chief of New Zealand's Defence Force, and tongue in cheek faux-classified advertisements were common throughout the journal's pages. One such advertisement requested donations for a fund to support officers of the Defence Force who would be unemployed following the repeal of the Defence Act.<sup>66</sup> Another read: 'WANTED - young men with jelly fish backbones for the New Zealand forces; those who don't think will rapidly gain promotion'.<sup>67</sup> This approach, which as we will see was consistent throughout the latter part of the PRU's campaign,

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<sup>63</sup> *Repeal*, 10 May 1913, p.1.

<sup>64</sup> PRU Subscription Book, Lincoln Efford Papers, MS papers 0445 X/1, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

<sup>65</sup> Roth, p.20.

<sup>66</sup> *Repeal*, 10 July 1913, p.9.

<sup>67</sup> *Repeal*, 10 August 1914, p.4.

appears to have had a dual purpose. Primarily, the humour and insubordination inherent in much of the content would have appealed to other young working class men, and undoubtedly helped to attract others affected by CMT into the anti-militarist fold. Furthermore, the humour would have helped to ease the tension resulting from the serious consequences these young men were facing.

While the PRU began publishing the *Repeal* as a means of dealing with persecution, prosecutions continued unabated. The garnishee clause, introduced by the Defence Amendment Act 1912, resulted in a marked decrease in the number of unpaid fines. From the government's point of view this was a great success as less unpaid fines resulted in fewer incarcerations, and in turn, less pressure from the public. The PRU however, viewed the garnishee policy in a very different light. The union stated:

Tricky, subtle, and fraudulent, the garnishee is the most contemptible and cowardly plan yet invented to filch from the earner his earnings, from the toiler his rights, and from the citizen his liberties. By the garnishee the youth of this country is handed over, financially, to the military, who have power to claim his wages, and reduce him to starvation, if he is not implicitly obedient and slavishly subservient to them.<sup>68</sup>

Consequently, the union set about disrupting the policy.

As early as March 1913, members of the Runanga branch had gone on strike as a means of challenging the garnishee. By sacrificing their wages the young men aimed to avoid the involuntary payment of their fines and their efforts proved successful.<sup>69</sup> At a meeting in Greymouth on 3 May 1913, the strategy was, therefore, extended to the entire West Coast. In addition to adopting the strike strategy, the West Coast branches also decided to federate, forming the West Coast Federation of Passive Resisters. This move represented an attempt to unify the PRU's regional opposition to CMT, the efficacy of which was exemplified by the establishment of a regional strike fund which raised much larger figures than individual branches could hope to achieve. Each PRU member was to pay 6d per week into the fund, and additional contributions would be collected from local trade unions and the wider public. The *Repeal* published an advertisement which read: 'At the present time money is

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<sup>68</sup> *Repeal*, 10 July 1913, p.4.

<sup>69</sup> *Repeal*, 10 June 1913, p.17.

urgently needed ... to give strike pay to those who are on strike against the garnishee....Be generous, be prompt'.<sup>70</sup> The money in the fund was available to assist any young man who went on strike to avoid the garnishee. The intention was to offset the financial strain of striking and thus prolong the young man's resistance.<sup>71</sup>

The extension of the strategy beyond Runanga proved to be successful. A report from the West Coast was published in the July edition of the *Repeal* explaining that 'the garnishee is absolutely useless, for as soon as the boys are summoned they refuse to work'.<sup>72</sup> The article continued, 'if conscription is allowed to succeed, it will not be the fault of the lads in this part of God-ley's Own'.<sup>73</sup> Typically those who left work would skip town to avoid apprehension by the authorities. Many fled into the surrounding hills, camping out in the bush while PRU members who remained in town would provide them with food and supplies. In this way, the PRU extended their use of civil disobedience from the legal into the industrial realm, with equally successful results. The strategy was used a number of times during the remainder of the campaign and given the support the young men had in the local area they usually managed to avoid the authorities long enough to make their point. However, on occasion mistakes were made and the authorities were quick to capitalise on these.

This was acutely demonstrated in late June 1913. Five young men were hiding in the bush after striking to avoid the garnishee, when they returned to Greymouth to assist in the election bid of Paddy Webb, a prominent socialist activist and vocal critic of CMT who would be jailed in 1917 for his opposition to conscription. When the young men returned to town they were recognised by the local authorities and apprehended. Charged with avoiding the garnishee, they were sentenced to 21 days military detention. This sentence was served at Fort Jervois military barracks on Ripapa Island in Lyttleton Harbour.

### **The Ripapa affair**

Ripapa Island, known as Ripa Island by the Pākehā population of early twentieth-century New Zealand, had housed followers of the Parihaka peace prophets Te Whiti o Rongomai and Tohu Kakahi,

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<sup>70</sup> *Repeal*, 10 July 1913, p.14.

<sup>71</sup> *Repeal*, 10 June 1913, p.17.

<sup>72</sup> *Repeal*, 10 July 1913, p.5.

<sup>73</sup> *Repeal*, 10 July 1913, p.5.

arrested in the late nineteenth-century for their civil disobedience in protest at the theft of their land. It was again used by the government during the campaign against CMT, in this instance in an attempt to break the resolve of Pākehā who refused to comply with the dictates of the state. The five young West Coast men arrived on Ripapa on 25 June 1913, joining eight Christchurch PRU members who had been transported to the island nine days prior. The latter group were marched through Christchurch by guards with fixed bayonets as water-side workers and others ‘gave vent to their feelings in rousing cheers to the lads, and hearty hoots, groans and epithets for the uniforms and the injustice they represented’.<sup>74</sup> Not to let the seriousness of the situation get in the way of a laugh, the *Repeal* later questioned why Mr Allen had gone to the trouble of ‘protecting [the young men] en route with fixed bayonets [explaining that] they are not like Bill Massey, and do not require the policeman’s batons and soldiers’ bayonets to protect them from the fury of the populace’.<sup>75</sup>

Ripapa proved to be a defining moment in the PRU’s opposition to the Defence Act as PRU members came face to face with military personnel. According to Reg Williams, who was incarcerated on Ripapa with the other Christchurch men, the charge officer, Sergeant-major Conlay, set the scene early stating that ‘his men would be glad of a fight and would knock the stuffing out of them’.<sup>76</sup> As provided for by the Defence Amendment Act 1912, young men sentenced to military detention were subject to military discipline. The act read:

Persons in military custody are... to obey all lawful orders in respect to training, discipline, and duties, from any officer or non-commissioned officer of the Defence Forces. Failure to comply with this provision is punishable, on summary conviction before a Magistrate by a further term of twenty-eight days in military custody.<sup>77</sup>

What occurred on Ripapa was described by one historian as the most spectacular event of the entire opposition to CMT.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Repeal*, 10 July 1913, p.16.

<sup>75</sup> *Repeal*, 10 July 1913, p.9.

<sup>76</sup> *Repeal*, 10 August, 1913, p.9.

<sup>77</sup> *Society of Friends*, p.11.

<sup>78</sup> *Milburn*, p.84.

Within two days of arriving on the island, the Christchurch contingent was at odds with military personnel. On 18 June 1913, three of the young men were ordered to assist in the dismounting of a gun that was being transported to Christchurch. All three refused on pacifist grounds. On the same day seven of the young men were sent to unload coal from a lighter at the dock. Citing a refusal to ‘scab’ on the labour of the Waterside Workers, all seven refused. The seven were charged with insubordination and ‘sentenced to solitary confinement with half rations [which] consisted of a slice of bread and a half-pint mug of tea for breakfast and tea [lunch], and for dinner a small piece of meat and two small potatoes’.<sup>79</sup> For two days they were housed under these conditions, until 20 June 1913, at which time they were returned to their ‘old conditions with full rations’.<sup>80</sup> It would seem that the military authorities wanted to avoid confrontation, explaining to the young men that ‘there was a great deal of ordinary work to do on the island’ and that they would not be asked to clean guns or do work they found disagreeable until the ordinary work ran out.<sup>81</sup> Accordingly, the following two weeks went by without incident, though shortly after the arrival of the West Coast contingent, ordinary work ran out and the situation on the island changed dramatically.

An order was given on 30 June 1913 that all the young men were to clean guns. This order initiated a battle for supremacy between the PRU and the military personnel as both groups vied to get the upper hand and place pressure on the other. In response to the order, all 13 PRU members refused to co-operate. Testing their resolve, the officer in charge ordered them to drill. The PRU members continued to refuse. The officer then placed them on half rations, to which ten of the PRU members responded with a hunger strike. The ten were Jim Nuttall, Bill Robson, Bob McTaggart, Jack McTaggart and Henry Guthard from the West Coast and Walter Hooper, Jim Worrall, Ted Edwards, Tom Nuttall and Reg Williams from Christchurch.<sup>82</sup> For some of them, the hunger strike lasted 40 hours. Again, the military authorities responded, this time establishing a makeshift court on the island and charging all 13 prisoners with insubordination and sentencing them to an additional seven days’ military detention. However, it was the PRU who had the final say, as amidst this battle for supremacy they managed to send communications to the mainland outlining the treatment they had received and the conditions under which they were being housed. Surprisingly the communications were not

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<sup>79</sup> *Repeal*, 10 August 1913, p.9.

<sup>80</sup> *Repeal*, 10 August 1913, p.9.

<sup>81</sup> *Repeal*, 10 August 1913, pp.9–10.

<sup>82</sup> *Repeal*, 10 August 1913, p.10.

censored by the military authorities and mail passed through their hands which resulted in the largest furore of the entire campaign.

A letter was sent to the Unity Congress of Trade Unions that was meeting in Wellington at the time. The letter highlighted the military authorities' attempts to make the young men complete tasks they found morally objectionable and discussed the punishment they had received for failing to comply. The letter, which was sent while ten of the young men were on hunger strike, concluded:

By the time this reaches you we shall be too exhausted to write any more. Our message to you, our comrades, is to fight hard – no quarter, no compromise, no surrender. We are prepared to play the game to the last: all we ask is for you to do the same. Let the world know that this little country is game enough to challenge the power of the military autocracy which is threatening to overwhelm the world, and is running the workers of the world.<sup>83</sup>

The PRU could not have hoped for a better response. Four hundred members of the Unity Congress marched on Parliament immediately, a small deputation of which demanded and received a hearing with the Prime Minister. At the hearing a number of trade union leaders aired their concerns. Amongst them was Professor Mills who told Massey:

These boys have burnt no buildings, they have broken no windows, they have destroyed no property... they are not where they are because they are not good citizens, they are there because they are good citizens. The hunger strike may not be popular but there is no other remedy for the man who by force has been shackled and manacled and confined and commanded to do that which conscientiously he can not do; and the consequences that follow passive resistance of that sort, though it may kill the man who does it, kills the institution that tolerates it.<sup>84</sup>

In response to the deputation, the cabinet met to discuss the matter on the following day. They released a statement assuring the public that in future the young men housed in military detention would not be

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<sup>83</sup> Bert Roth, 'The Prisoners of Ripa Island', *Here and Now*, 43, November 1954, p.16.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with the Premier, AD 19/39 108/199, Archives New Zealand, Wellington.

denied food and would not be asked to complete tasks which contradicted their base moral principles. In the end the assurance meant little by way of changes on the island as similar treatment was received by other PRU members later in the year. However the fact that Massey met with a deputation of Trade Union leaders who supported the young men, and as a result felt it necessary to release a public statement, highlights the continued pressure the PRU's actions represented to the government.

While the young men remained on Ripapa, the issue received considerable publicity in newspapers owing to the efforts of anti-militarists in bringing the episode to their attention. Typically pro-militarist in their coverage of CMT, newspapers questioned the efficacy of military detention for the first time. The *Lyttleton Times* of 4 July read:

The salient fact is that military detention is serving no good purpose. The resisters are not drilling, and there is no reason to anticipate that they will drill, while it is obvious that they cannot be kept at the fort indefinitely. The situation, in fact, is becoming absurd.<sup>85</sup>

On 12 July 1913, the *Evening Post* suggested that Ripapa Island was in danger of 'becoming simply a centre of anti-militarist propaganda' and explained that 'people who have supported the Defence Act all along are saying that it would be better to let these youth go than to have them posing as martyrs and proving the inability of the Defence Department to apply real compulsion'.<sup>86</sup> Owing to the public spotlight that was cast upon Ripapa, the remainder of the young men's time on the island was relatively hospitable.

Upon their release in late July 1913, public interest remained and the PRU harnessed this publicity to promote its cause. Two thousand five hundred supporters crammed into the Coliseum Theatre in Christchurch on 30 July to welcome some of the young men home. As each of the PRU members walked onto the stage the crowd let out a massive cry of support, followed by unanimous and equally enthusiastic cheers calling for the repeal of the Defence Act.<sup>87</sup> Soon thereafter, a number of the young men embarked on a nationwide tour, speaking to crowds about their experience and using the

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<sup>85</sup> S. V. Bracher, *Ripa Island: A Lesson for Conscriptors*, London, 1913, p.13.

<sup>86</sup> *Evening Post*, 12 July 1913, p.3.

<sup>87</sup> David Grant, *Out in the cold: Pacifists and Conscientious Objectors in New Zealand during World War II*, Auckland, 1986, p.14.

opportunity to network with other anti-militarists and spread their ideas to the public. They spoke to a crowd of over 1000 in Auckland and 1200 in Wellington and, while publicising the campaign, incorporated their unique blend of politics and humour. Throughout their nationwide tour they dismissed military detention as a joke, one of them suggesting that the one place in New Zealand where you would not be punished for ‘refusing to drill was Ripa Island’.<sup>88</sup> The dismissal of military detention was carried over to the *Repeal* which included a faux-classified in the August 1913 edition advertising military barracks on the island as a government sanatorium. The notice described the facility as ‘cool, convenient and comfortable’ with ‘windows frosted to secure privacy and seclusion’ and ‘burglar proof fences’.<sup>89</sup> The advertisement explained that admission was by invitation only, that chaperones were provided and the proprietors were listed as Godley, Allen and Massey.<sup>90</sup> Although this image of Ripapa was obviously a joke, the PRU’s joking dismissal of the effectiveness of military detention proved to be not far off the mark as suggested in a report released late in 1913.

The report was the product of a governmental enquiry into the Ripapa affair which was undertaken at the behest of Charles Mackie from the National Peace Council. Although largely inconclusive in relation to the placement of blame for the breakdown of order on the island, the findings of the ‘Report of Joint Defence Legislation Committee’ provided the PRU and the anti-militarist movement with cause to celebrate. In the report the military authorities involved in the Ripapa affair described their powerlessness in the face of the PRU’s opposition. Colonel Heard explained: ‘We are placed in a humiliating position; we are open to all kinds of insults, to all kinds of insubordination, and we are perfectly helpless’.<sup>91</sup> When asked by Allen if the prisoners were obeying rules on the island, Heard stated; ‘No, Sir, they were not. They were not parading, they were not performing physical drill, nor fatigues’.<sup>92</sup> The report then mentions an admission of defeat by Lieutenant Macdonald who explained to Allen that ‘under the present conditions I cannot maintain discipline at the fort. I cannot do it’.<sup>93</sup> In light of these findings, Allen concluded that many of the young men were ‘regular young anarchists’ who were acting purely to ‘break down the Act altogether’

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<sup>88</sup> J.P Fletcher and J.F. Hills, *Conscription Under Camouflage: An Account of Compulsory Military Training in Australasia down to the Outbreak of the Great War*, South Australia, 1919, p.119.

<sup>89</sup> *Repeal*, 10 August 1913, p.2.

<sup>90</sup> *Repeal*, 10 August 1913, p.2.

<sup>91</sup> *Repeal*, 13 January 1914, pp.12–13.

<sup>92</sup> *Repeal*, 13 January 1914, pp.12–13.

<sup>93</sup> *Repeal*, 13 January 1914, pp.12–13.

and who were willing ‘to adopt any means to attain their end’.<sup>94</sup> Not all of the young men were libertarian socialists of the anarchist bent though, in regards to Allan’s other comment, it appears the PRU’s dedication was finally making an impression on him.

### **The government’s final stand: alternative service**

While the military detention debacle engrossed the anti-militarist movement, prosecutions continued to rise. Over 7000 prosecutions were brought before the courts in 1913 alone, and 4819 young men were convicted.<sup>95</sup> Not only were PRU members highly represented in these figures – the union’s membership having risen to over 400 in Christchurch alone, many of whom had been arrested twice, three times and in one instance eight times – but also their efforts to convince others not to drill together with copy-cat activities resulting from the union’s successes undoubtedly contributed a considerable number. In light of this situation Mackie wrote to an anti-militarist colleague in late 1913 stating: ‘they [the young men] have beaten the country absolutely. So long as there are such recalcitrants in the country, and there are numbers, the so-called Defence Act is a failure’.<sup>96</sup>

The government responded to the continued increase of prosecutions and the effective neutralisation of the threat posed by military detention with what amounted to an implicit admission of defeat, thinly disguised as a benevolent concession. Since its inception the Defence Act had included provisions that allowed for the exemption of young men on the grounds of religious objection provided they were willing to perform alternative service elsewhere in the community. Throughout the campaign a handful of young men, including an active PRU member Frank McCullough, were granted exemption on religious grounds.<sup>97</sup> In early 1914 Allen looked to expand the terms of exemption writing: ‘the advisability of providing similar exemption to those who on “conscientious” grounds seek to be relieved is now being considered’.<sup>98</sup> This proposal was framed within a context of compassion permissible by the success of CMT. Allen stated: ‘We shall soon be in a position of having more men

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<sup>94</sup> Weitzel, pp.145–146.

<sup>95</sup> David Grant, *Field Punishment No. 1: Archibald Baxter, Mark Briggs and New Zealand’s anti-militarist tradition*, Wellington, 2008, p. 26.

<sup>96</sup> Weitzel, p.145.

<sup>97</sup> Melanie Nolan, *War and Class: The Diary of Jack McCullough*, Wellington, 2009, p.19.

<sup>98</sup> *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives* (AJHR), 1914, H-19c, p.1.

then we require. If men are not keen about performing military duties, and are willing to do an equivalent amount of work, we should let them do so, and keep the best men in the territorials'.<sup>99</sup>

Allen's assertion that CMT had proved successful in recruiting the required numbers was correct. However, his attempt to frame the extension of alternative service as a concession on behalf of the government, due to the scheme's success, disguises the reality of the situation. CMT had been operating as a contradiction since before the Ripapa affair, as military authorities turned away interested young men for lack of space, while prosecuting defiant young men for refusing to comply.<sup>100</sup> It was not, therefore, due to scheme's need for more conscripts that the events of Ripapa took place, but rather an attempt to inform and warn young men that defiance of the Defence Act would not be tolerated. After this threat was effectively broken down, the government was forced to adopt a new policy and in doing so attempted to save face by masking their defeat as a concession. In reality however, and as Mackie explained in the letter mentioned above, the PRU had gained the upper hand.

To organise the alternative service Allen contacted local government bodies and the New Zealand Quaker community requesting assistance for its development and administration. The expectation was that service rendered by the scheme would be equal in time and remuneration to those complying with CMT and it was hoped that the alternative service programme would benefit the public in the form of community focussed service.<sup>101</sup> The PRU responded to this move in typical fashion. The *Repeal* suggested that whoever added the alternative service clause into the Defence Act must have been a keen humourist, knowing 'full well what a "high time" the Defence Authorities would have when they started to get it going'.<sup>102</sup> They dismissed the notion of alternative service as little more than an attempt to extract free labour from young men and force them to scab on their class and commented on the irony that alternative service be productive work since 'military trainees do absolutely nothing in productive work, being trained exclusively in the "Arts of War"'.<sup>103</sup> The *Repeal* compared the alternative service affair with the 'fiasco' that had transpired on Ripapa a year earlier. The February 1914 edition read:

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<sup>99</sup> Fraser, p.124.

<sup>100</sup> Weitzel, p.140.

<sup>101</sup> Fraser, p.124.

<sup>102</sup> *Repeal*, 13 March 1914, p.11.

<sup>103</sup> *Repeal*, June 1914, p.4.

Maybe a word of advice to the Minister of Defence to drop his crude, absurd ideas on alternative service would not be acceptable, but if followed it would prevent his accomplishing such another fiasco as his detention barracks scheme.<sup>104</sup>

As it turned out, a few snide remarks was all the effort required on the part of the PRU as the policy failed before it got off the ground. Many local bodies failed to reply to Allen's request for assistance and those that did accused the government of being too lenient on the 'shirkers', with some suggesting that the recidivist offenders should be 'made to crack stones'.<sup>105</sup> Meanwhile the Quakers offered similar assistance but for very different reasons. In communications amongst individuals within the anti-militarist movement, John Fletcher, a prominent member of the National Peace Council, explained that the main point of anti-militarists' actions is the abolition of conscription 'and we cannot do anything that will help to make conscription popular by removing any anti-militarist difficulties'.<sup>106</sup> A prominent figure in the Quakers agreed, asking why should they suggest ways to make the functioning of the Act more effective when 'the Christchurch lads are winning this in advance by their refusal to undertake any duties on Ripa Island'.<sup>107</sup>

The alternative service scheme proposed in 1914 represented the government's final attempt to deal with recidivist offenders. Prosecutions continued though they had long been dismissed by the PRU as a joke. Friday – the day cases involving the Defence Act were now being heard in Christchurch – was renamed crucifixion day. The *Repeal* explained; Friday 'has long been celebrated as the day on which the most notable crucifixion took place, and it is, to-day, still maintaining its reputation'.<sup>108</sup> In February 1914, 400 young men were prosecuted in Canterbury alone for failure to comply with the Defence Act. While for the year ending April 1914, there were 2779 convictions of Territorials and 1367 convictions of Senior Cadets; 234 of whom were sentenced to military detention.<sup>109</sup> These numbers continued to rise until August 1914.

Leading up to the onset of the First World War the PRU maintained its defiance and the union, along with the wider anti-militarist movement, was given a boost when for the first time, a newspaper

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<sup>104</sup> *Repeal*, 13 February 1914. p.4.

<sup>105</sup> Fraser, p.125.

<sup>106</sup> Weitzel, p.146.

<sup>107</sup> Weitzel, p.146.

<sup>108</sup> *Repeal*, 13 March 1914, p.18.

<sup>109</sup> Weitzel, p.147.

came out in open criticism of the Defence Act. An editorial in the *Manawatu Evening Standard* in early May 1914 read: ‘amongst taxpayers, employers and territorials themselves, very serious doubts are being entertained as to the wisdom of the expensive and disorganising system.... There are signs of revulsion of public opinion in favour of the old volunteer system’.<sup>110</sup> This news was complemented by word from Australia that, in light of the union’s success in New Zealand, a PRU branch had been established in Victoria. A policy of CMT had been introduced in Australia shortly after New Zealand, and Harry Flintoff wrote to the Christchurch branch in June 1914 stating: ‘I am now organising a PRU so as to get more lads to refuse to submit to this futile system which we are striving hard to put down’.<sup>111</sup>

## Conclusion

By mid-1914 CMT had lost its teeth, or rather had had them battered out by a small band of young men under the banner of the PRU. The training scheme itself had managed to conscript sufficient young men to reinvigorate the New Zealand Defence Force and thus satisfy New Zealand’s obligations as agreed at the Imperial and Naval Military Conference of 1909. However, efforts to secure an equality of service and bring all young men under the auspices of the military authorities had failed. The government had made a number of efforts to secure compliance under the Defence Act – including fines, imprisonment, persecution, garnishee, military detention and alternative service – but members of the PRU had maintained their resolve; staying true to their pledge to ‘resist coercion, conscription and compulsory military training under all circumstances and in defiance of all pains and penalties that may be imposed’.<sup>112</sup> As a result, by mid-1914 prosecutions were rising while the government had no plan with which to address the growing recidivism. CMT had descended into disarray and as Weitzel suggests, the possibility of the scheme failing was constantly increasing.<sup>113</sup>

The PRU were involved in a wider anti-militarist movement that opposed CMT and received considerable support from groups and individuals therein. The National Peace Council provided the union with financial assistance to help with legal fees.<sup>114</sup> The Federation of Labour made significant

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<sup>110</sup> *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 4-5 May 1914.

<sup>111</sup> Flintoff to ‘Editor of the *Repeal*’, Lincoln Efford Papers, MS Papers 0445 X/2, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

<sup>112</sup> *Press*, 9 February 1912.

<sup>113</sup> Weitzel, p.147.

<sup>114</sup> Weitzel, p.147.

contributions to the PRU's strike fund and offered solidarity to the union's efforts at protests and public meetings.<sup>115</sup> The Freedom League provided personnel to help PRU members in Auckland distribute anti-militarist information and gifted the Christchurch PRU with funds to purchase a new printing press.<sup>116</sup> And the Canterbury Women's Institute provided moral support for the young men. They protested outside of parliament during the Ripapa affair and visited the young men during their periods of imprisonment and military detention.<sup>117</sup> Given this level of interaction between different groups in the anti-militarist movement, it is not surprising that historians have credited the pressure placed upon CMT to the anti-militarist movement in general. However, by analysing the specific actions and tactics of the PRU, it is clear that the union's unique approach was the pivotal contributing factor to the massive pressure placed on CMT by the anti-militarist movement.

By restricting membership to those liable to serve under the Defence Act, the PRU represented the banding together of the demographic who could most effectively oppose CMT. All PRU members would inevitably be forced into the workings of CMT due to their age and sex. From this position the young men would be offered the opportunity to disrupt the policy internally. As a means to disrupt the policy, PRU members adopted the tactic of civil disobedience, refusing to comply with any aspect of the Act. As a result, the government was forced to continually intensify the punitive measures it adopted to secure compliance; however such actions were consistently met by the resolve of the PRU leaving the government with few options with which to deal with the recalcitrant young men. The PRU's actions, which were at times spectacular, attracted considerable publicity which the union learned to harness as a means to propagate its anti-militarist message. This is most clearly seen in the union's monthly journal, the *Repeal*, which disseminated news of the campaign against CMT across the country and throughout the world. Evident in the *Repeal*, as well as in a number of the union's other activities, was the exuberance and humour that the PRU brought to the campaign against CMT. This light hearted approach was used effectively to undermine the authority of politicians and military figures; to attract other young men to the union; and to offer some humouristic respite from what was, otherwise, a very serious situation.

These four central tactics – restricted membership, civil disobedience, publicity and humour – saw the PRU mount a sustained and vibrant campaign against CMT which continually neutralised the

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<sup>115</sup> *Poverty Bay Herald*, 27 February 1913, p.3.

<sup>116</sup> Gill to Fletcher, 24 March, 1914. Lincoln Efford Papers, MS Papers 0445 X/2, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

<sup>117</sup> Fraser, pp.121–122.

government's attempts to enforce compliance under the Defence Act. In the end, the PRU left the government with little recourse with which to deal with recidivist offenders and as a result, the number of young men who refused to comply with the Defence Act continued to grow. The abolition of the compulsory clauses of the act was becoming a very real possibility by mid-1914. Whether this ultimate embarrassment to the government would actually have taken place however is hard to say, as the onset of the First World War forced anti-militarists to dramatically curb their activities. What the National Peace Council described as 'war fever' engulfed the country, as a climate that demanded social conformity descended upon the nation.<sup>118</sup> Societal pressures were such that the PRU quickly dissolved. This however, tells us more about the intensity of the jingoistic passions that overwhelmed the country than the resolve of the PRU, which had proven time and again its ability to defy the status quo.

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<sup>118</sup> Baker, p.75.

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