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CONSCRIPTION AND CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION IN THE EXPERIENCE OF NORWEGIAN FRIENDS

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ABSTRACT

This article is a revised and elaborated version of The George Richardson Lecture of 1998. It gives an account of the young men who were members of or affiliated with the Norwegian Religious Society of Friends who refused to serve in the military in the nineteenth century. The article starts with the dramatic story of Søren Olsen who refused to do naval service in 1848 and was sentenced to suffer 27 lashes a day for three days with the nine-tailed cat. His case went to the Supreme Court and even to the King before it was finally settled. He kept a journal of his experiences and thoughts during his ordeal, a unique testimony in the history of conscientious objection. The Dissenter Law of 1845 allowed churches outside the Lutheran State Church to establish in Norway, but it did not allow conscientious objection. After general conscription was implemented in the 1850s other young men followed Søren Olsen in refusing military service, and the article analyses their suffering and the response of Norwegian and British Quakers and their efforts to influence the authorities to make provisions for conscientious objectors (COs). During the last quarter of the century several young male Quakers emigrated to the USA to escape military service, and the very existence of the Norwegian Quaker Society was threatened. The peace organisations and members of the Norwegian Parliament used the fact that young men had to emigrate to practise their faith as a strong argument in their lobbying for a law allowing conscientious objection. The refusal on the part of the YM clerk to provide the authorities with lists of young men liable for conscription resulted in the loss of the Society's status as a registered church. It seemed impossible to practise the Quaker faith under these circumstances. Conscientious objection was up to that time a Quaker issue, but around 1900 young men outside the Quaker Society were also recorded as conscientious objectors. In 1902 some provisions for conscientious objectors were granted, and in 1922 a law permitting alternative civil service was passed. In 1936 NYM was again registered as a church. The article evaluates the efforts of the Quakers in Norway and Britain on behalf of the conscientious objectors and the impact their refusal had in the struggle for religious freedom and human rights in Norway.

KEYWORDS

Norway, Quaker history, military service, conscription, conscientious objection

THE SØREN OLSEN CASE

In 1849 George Richardson of Newcastle, Great Britain, published a small book entitled: *The Rise and Progress of the Society of Friends in Norway*. This book tells the history of Friends in Norway in detail, from the beginning onboard prison ships in Britain during the Napoleonic wars 1807–14 and up to the year of publication.

In his book George Richardson recounts the story of a young Norwegian, who was imprisoned for refusing to do naval service 'and has been sentenced to be whipped three days, which is considered capital punishment, but the case was about to be laid before Oscar, the king, in the hope that it will be mitigated'. Richardson cites the young man who writes: 'I often feel that impatience is ready to break in upon me; but the Lord be praised, who, up to this time, has preserved me, and I do feel it an excellent thing, when the distress of my heart is made to burst forth before the Lord'.¹

Who was this young man, and why did he refuse to do naval service? Fourth day (Wednesday) 7th of sixth month (June) 1848, 21½-year-old Søren Olsen was arrested on Rennesøy Island and taken to the town of Stavanger on the West coast of Norway and placed before the military authorities.

A few days earlier, sixth day (Friday) 2nd of sixth month, he had been summoned to register for military enrolment. In the rural districts of Norway a surplus of young men were liable for military service, and therefore it was possible to escape enrolment by drawing lots. Søren Olsen met for registration, but refused to draw lots. The sheriff did it for him, and Søren was not drawn free. Søren Olsen tells that the officer in charge of the registration 'also demanded that the same sheriff take me to Stavanger and in chains, if I did not come of my own free will'.² So, Søren Olsen was taken to Stavanger: '...on the 7th of the same Month the sheriff ordered three men to seize me and take me to Stavanger. And they came, and forced me to come with them. But [they]...laid hands on me and took me from my work with my master...and brought me to Stavanger'.³

To refuse to do military service, to defy the law and the orders of the authorities, was a very drastic thing to do, and at that time it implied dire consequences. What impelled Søren Olsen to such a dramatic action?

Søren was asked to give reasons for his refusal to do military service, by people he met as well as by the authorities and the courts. On one occasion he stated 'that I did not feel free to go to any war, as it is explicitly said that "all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword"'.⁴ On another occasion he pointed out that it is not in accordance with the law of God to attack one's fellow men and that 'War, or war-making, is the opposite of true Christianity'.⁵

He also mentioned the consequences for himself if he did not object to doing military service:

It was for the sake of my own conscience that I objected, and I thought that if I went against my conviction I would feel a lasting uneasiness in my conscience etc. I said: that I believed it was right to obey King and Authorities as long as they acted in accordance with the Law of God, but if not, I believed it was right to obey God rather than men.⁶

By referring to the New Testament, Søren Olsen gives religious reasons for his objection, thus his strong personal faith was the foundation. He could not but follow God's will obediently and then take whatever consequences that might lead to. 'I am therefore prepared to receive or submit to any suffering that may be considered appropriate for me. But this is my best comfort and relief, when my heart's need can turn to the Lord, for He does not slight the prayers of the miserable. Yeah, He is my light and my Legislator?'⁷

Such an uttering of strong personal faith can be seen to have a connection with the Haugian lay movement, which dominated Norwegian Christianity from the end of the eighteenth century up to Søren Olsen's time. For the Haugians, their Christian faith had become something very personal, something that concerned every single person—a personal 'awakening'. It is possible, however, that other ideas and events influenced Søren Olsen's mind, for example, the revolutionary outbursts in Europe in 1848, uprisings against the repression by political authorities.

The peace movement had not yet reached Norway. The first Norwegian peace associations were not formed until the beginning of the 1880s. The organised peace movement started in the USA and England around 1815, but it is not likely that Søren Olsen had any knowledge thereof.

There were, however, some people in Norway who felt that war was against the will of God, and Søren Olsen was in contact with them. He tells about the interrogation at the chief officer's office: 'I follow the principles of the Quakers, and find them to be right'.⁸

Almost from the beginning, the Quakers had maintained that war was wrong. Their explicit Peace Testimony dates from 1660. It is likely that Søren Olsen had read a pamphlet entitled *The Unlawfulness of all Wars and Fightings under the Gospel* translated and published in Norwegian in the very year of his conscientious objection, 1848.⁹

Quakerism came to Norway in 1814. Norwegian prisoners of war in English captivity during the Napoleonic wars came into contact with British Friends and brought Quakerism with them when they went back to Norway. The Norwegian Religious Society of Friends was organised in 1818.

The Quakers were from the start persecuted by the Norwegian authorities. They were allowed to live only in certain places, and they were punished for not baptizing their children in the Lutheran state church or burying their dead according to church rituals. These were some of the reasons for the first Norwegian emigration to the United States on the sloop *Restauration* in 1825. However, most Quakers stayed behind in Norway and continued their fight for religious freedom.¹⁰

Søren Olsen's uncle, Osmund Sørensen, was a central Friend in Stavanger from 1838. Asbjørn Kloster, Søren's childhood friend, four years his senior, from Vik on Rennesøy Island and a Quaker teacher in Stavanger, had just returned in 1848 from studies at Quaker schools in England, but was not yet a member. At the time Søren Olsen was arrested Søren still remained within the Norwegian state church. He did not become a Quaker until after his emigration to the USA. But he was part of the Quaker milieu in Norway—and in this actual case acted like a Quaker.¹¹

There might also have been another influence, closer than the Friends in Stavanger. According to the Police Protocols in the Regional State Archives of Stavanger, a young man from the neighbouring farm, Andreas Danielsen Ask, refused to take the oath of faithfulness to King and Constitution at the registration for Conscription in 1841 and 1843.¹² There might have been a local precedent.

The reason we have such detailed knowledge of Søren Olsen's case is because he wrote about his own experiences, what actually happened when he refused naval service and how he was trying to cope with it. His small handwritten book with the title: *A Small Testimony Against War and Fighting*, is a unique document. In the whole world we only know of a few such documents predating 1900.¹³

But the case was also very important to the authorities, and they gave it a thorough trial. How should conscientious objectors be treated? How should their legal status be defined or perceived? What kind of punishment should be dealt them? Søren Olsen's first sentence was so special and brutal that it was not effectuated and the case went all the way to the Supreme Court and even to the King, Oscar I, to be settled.

The case also received a lot of publicity from the Norwegian Press. The effect of this publicity might have been two-fold. On the one side, it could frighten young men from refusing to do military service when they learned about Søren Olsen's sentence, especially his first sentence. On the other hand, the Søren Olsen case was a good example of the struggle for freedom of conscience consistent with the liberal ideas of the time. Søren Olsen made the problem of conscientious objection visible and public. The case became a unique symbol of the struggle for religious freedom and the right to follow one's conscience in a young country, which had formed a constitution in 1814 that was the most liberal in Europe. In many ways Søren Olsen represented an ideal for modern political thinking. He embodied the individual person's struggle against the authorities, the lay person's fight against the learned, but also a minority group that fought for its common rights. He can be seen as part of the democratisation process and the movement towards greater spiritual freedom in the nineteenth century.

In 1845 the Norwegian Parliament, Stortinget, passed the Dissenter Law. This law meant that the state church monopoly was broken. Other churches were allowed to establish in Norway within 'the limits of law and decency',¹⁴ and the Religious Society of Friends was officially established in 1846. The Dissenter Law was a big step towards freedom of religion in Norway, but as we shall see, it was not liberal enough, and that created severe problems.

There had been a few conscientious objectors on religious grounds earlier, all with Quaker connections. Søren Olsen's case was the first after the enactment of the Dissenter Law, and the first after the implementation of a more consistent conscription policy by the authorities in the 1840s. But the Dissenter Law did not allow conscientious objection on religious grounds. The case was brought before the Naval Court, which found Søren Olsen guilty of insubordination to Naval Law. The sentence was harsh: 3 times 27 lashes (81 lashes) with the nine-tailed cat. This was a deadly punishment; at best it would be crippling. The authorities would rather not make use of 'a punishment so out of tune with the general mood of the time', and they bid Søren Olsen to appeal for a reprieve.¹⁵ The case was then sent to the

Supreme Court and later to King Oscar I. In the end Søren Olsen was sentenced to 10 days on bread and water, but he was incarcerated for almost five months, most of the time appending sentence.

The authorities took their time because they wanted to give the case careful consideration. It was important to get a statement from the Supreme Court containing an interpretation of the Dissenter Law that would create precedence for future cases, which they knew would come.

Søren Olsen was the only conscientious objector to get such a harsh first sentence followed by a long imprisonment. The subsequent conscientious objectors were sentenced to a certain number of days in prison, in some cases merely fined. The reason for Søren Olsen's barbaric sentence of lashing was probably that he had already sworn an oath when he was signing on as a sailor aged 16. He was, therefore, on objecting to military service, liable to harsher punishment than those who simply objected from the start, both to giving the oath and to doing military service.

It is natural to ask whether Søren Olsen's conscientious objection had any influence on Norwegian history. To follow one's deepest convictions is a human right. It has to do with freedom of conscience and freedom of religion. Several people at Søren Olsen's time recognised this, and some members of the Norwegian Parliament suggested that the Quakers should be exempt from military service for religious reasons. The local paper in Stavanger, *Stavanger Amtstidende*, supported this view.¹⁶ But it took time before it was accepted in the Storting and was legalised—almost two generations. I think it is right to say that Søren Olsen's immediate influence was to raise and make visible the issue of conscientious objection, and initiate a process to get it accepted as a legal right.

Søren Olsen himself seemed to be fairly unaware of the effects of his refusal. But he wrote an account of what he had experienced both to better remember what had happened and for those who wanted to see a more complete report. He seems also to have edited his manuscript for publishing. He did not, however, regard himself as a founder of any movement or organisation to fight for the right to object to military service. Neither did anyone else at that time, not even the Norwegian Religious Society of Friends. Apart from the certificate they wrote to certify that Søren Olsen was acquainted with the Religious Society of Friends, they did not directly approach the authorities. They informed British Friends who sent a letter through the Swedish Ambassador in London to the king of Sweden and Norway, Oscar I.¹⁷ Individual Norwegian Friends, however, supported Søren Olsen while he was in jail. A sign of this was the letters they wrote to him while he was imprisoned.

THE ROLE OF BRITISH FRIENDS

British Friends were immediately informed when Søren Olsen was arrested. Only a week after Søren Olsen's arrest, Endre Dahl wrote to George Richardson (6th mo 14, 1848) about a young man who refused to be engaged in war, and who was taken on board a ship by the officers, by forcible means.¹⁸ In a letter reporting from yearly meeting (dated 6th mo 28th, 1848) Endre Dahl tells more about this case:

We are glad to perceive some increase, especially in the case of two young men, who have refused to go onboard ships of war, or use arms: one of them is in prison, at Frederiksværn: we are not yet informed where the other is. They were not much acquainted with Friends before; but when the trial came upon them, they professed Friends principles, and were made willing to take up the cross. It appears that a spirit of enquiry after true religion is prevailing around us.¹⁹

We have reason to believe that both Søren Olsen and the other young CO, [Tor]Bjørn Thorsen Hæggem, were more closely acquainted with Quaker principles than Endre Dahl suggests. [Tor]Bjørn Hæggem had left the State Church; Søren Olsen had Friends in his family and in his neighbourhood.

Asbjørn Kloster, the Quaker teacher and childhood friend, took great interest in Søren's case. He was also in contact with George Richardson in Newcastle. And George Richardson contacted Friends in the Continental Committee in London. Asbjørn Kloster writes in his *Journal*:

9th [June] Travelled to Dusevig and took leave with our young Friend Søren Olsen who is forcibly enrolled and has gone onboard to sail to [Horten]. Oh what sorrow and sadness this has induced on my mind.²⁰

The actions of George Richardson gave results. A letter to the Norwegian/Swedish authorities was written by members of the Continental Committee and handed over to the Swedish ambassador in London, and it arrived just in time to be mentioned in the recommendation to the King.

1848. Minute 5. Since the last meeting of this Committee, information has been received that two young men professing with friends at Stavanger have been imprisoned in consequence of their conscientious refusal to bear arms. The subject required immediate attention and a few friends of this Committee met, a Memorial to the Swedish Ambassador was prepared: it was presented to him by Sal. Gurney & George Stacey who were kindly received: the subject is left under their care.²¹

When the imprisonment had come to an end, the Continental Committee records:

1849 2nd month, Minute 4: Samuel Gurney and George Stacey report that they have heard from the Swedish Ambassador that the case of suffering referred to when we last met, was brought through him before the King of Sweden: he has also informed them that Søren Olsen's punishment was commuted for ten days imprisonment. The other young person appears to have been released after 15 days without any further interference.²²

The case of Søren Olsen was not easily forgotten by English Friends. In the *Journal* of his journey in Norway in 1860, James Backhouse writes about a visit to Rennesøy:

5 mo 28... On this island is the house in which Søren Olsen lived, who suffered severe punishment some years since for refusing to serve in the navy; which he felt he could not do as a consistent disciple of the Prince of Peace. S. Olsen afterwards emigrated to America, and is married to Anna Ravnaas, a young woman who interested us much seven years ago.²³

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS IN NORWAY BEFORE SØREN OLSEN

So far we have registered four COs in Norway before Søren Olsen, but there might have been more. The first cases were cases of refusing to swear an oath in connection with military service. In 1815 Tønnes Johnsen of Kristiansand applied for a letter of citizenship without having to swear the oath and without doing military service. He was granted this right. The next CO citing Quaker principles is Peder Ommundsen Gilje who in 1828 refused to take an oath of fidelity to the King and Constitution in connection with naval service. He was sentenced to pay daily fines and this sentence was repeated several times during the years that followed. In 1830 the case disappeared from the Court records without any known settlement. In 1836 Peder O. Gilje emigrated to the United States.²⁴

In 1843 Endre Dahl described at Monthly Meeting in North Shields the difficulties that he himself and his friend were subjected to '...[he] may not follow his Trade in Stavanger (but in the country around the town, only) on account of refusing Military Exercise which all Norwegians are expected to practise, and contribute to the Band by payment for Instruments. Therefore Distraints are levied, from Friends'.²⁵ I have not found any case against Endre Dahl, and I suppose he referred to the cases discussed below.²⁶

The most interesting case in these years may be the case of Peder Mathiasen Grønnestad. Together with Andreas Danielsen Ask he refused to take the oath of fidelity to King and Constitution at the registration for conscription in 1841. This was repeated in 1843 and then it became a legal matter. The two young men were sentenced to pay daily fines or to take the oath. They refused, and the case went to the next court level and finally to the Supreme Court. Both belonged to the Quaker sect, it was stated in the sentence. The Supreme Court decided to postpone the execution of the sentence. In 1845 Andreas Danielsen Ask emigrated to America with permission by the authorities.²⁷

In between a different case occurred in 1845, when the Stavanger citizen and Quaker Andreas Bryne refused to take part in the civic guard. He met without uniform and weapon, only with a stick. He was fined and refused to pay the fine, and was thus imprisoned for three days. That closed his case.²⁸

In 1847 the case against Peder Mathiasen Grønnestad was reopened. In the meantime the Dissenter Law had been passed by the Storting in 1845, and this law granted dissenters the freedom not to take an oath. An Order in Council 19 May, 1847 states that a solemn promise could be given instead. Peder agreed to promise to be loyal to the King and Constitution, but emphasised that it would be against his conscience and conviction to serve in any war or be a conscript. He could not give the promise without the clear condition that he should not take part in any military activity. The court would not accept this and he was sentenced to pay a daily fine of 60 Sh. Peder refused to give the promise and the sentence was executed in 1848. But as they found nothing among his possessions to pawn, the case was terminated.²⁹

There are two interesting circumstances in the early cases of Gilje, Grønnestad and Ask. First, there is a reference to an Order in Council May 11, 1826. The Orders in

Council of 1826 and 1829 and a special agreement for Christiania (Oslo) gave persons that were acknowledged as Quakers the right on certain conditions to live within limited areas in Norway defined to Stavanger town and Christiania. The conscientious objectors were accused of not having used the time between 1841 and 1843 to move to a place where they could live according to their beliefs without opposition to the authorities or to apply to the authorities to be excused from the conscription prescribed in the Constitution of 1814 and the Military Law of 1816.

Does this mean that if they lived in prescribed places, they would be exempted from military service? In the case of Peder Ommundsen Gilje it is stated in the courts proceedings as the accused cannot prove to be an acknowledged Quaker or has Royal licence as such, he cannot be exempted from the common civic duty to take an oath of fidelity in the way that the laws demanded. It is not clear whether living in the 'permitted areas' would go also so far as exemption from military service. No known case can give decisive evidence of that, nor have we any known case of anyone being excused from conscription by applying to the authorities. Further, there might have been a change in interpretation of what the statement of the places to live as a Quaker implied, as time went by. It seemed to have changed in the case of the conscientious objectors, from moving to the permitted places in Norway to emigration to another country.

In 1847 Peder Mathiasen Grønnestad stated that he did not intend to leave his native country, even though he was advised repeatedly to do so. He did not find it in concord with the Law of God that members of the Religious Society of Friends could be driven from one country to another. Andreas Danielsen Ask might not have emigrated to America in 1845 if he could have avoided conscription just by moving to Stavanger.³⁰

Second, three of the four early cases of conscientious objection seem to be about refusing to take an oath of fidelity to the town or King and Constitution. The taking of this oath seems to be the first claim that met the young men when they registered at the board of conscription. The Quakers were quite clear on not swearing oaths. Therefore the refusal to take an oath stopped them from getting to the next stage: refusal to do military service. When the oath was exchanged for a solemn promise or vow, and Peder Mathiasen Grønnestad said that he was willing to except that, he at the same time declared that he could not take part in any war because this was against his conscience and Quaker principles.

Thus, the cases of the early conscientious objectors consisted of two steps, the objection to take an oath *and* the objection to do military service. In the case of Søren Olsen, he had at the age of 16 taken the oath to King and Constitution. This was necessary to qualify as a sailor, and may not have had any direct military implications at the actual time. Søren therefore started at step two, the refusal to do military service, when he met for conscription. The authorities regarded his case as more severe because it meant that in addition to refusing conscription, he had *broken* the oath he had given, which was more serious than just refusing to take an oath. The laws applied in this case were different from the laws used later and the punishment graver.

Even if the case of Søren Olsen in this way was not typical, it brought out very clearly what it all actually was about, *the refusal to do military service*, and it also led to a new practice of handling such cases.

The deliberations and report from the Supreme Court in the Søren Olsen case brought an end to the ambiguity that the Orders in Council from 1826 and 1829 might have caused. And more important: the Court made it quite clear that the Dissenter Law did not allow refusal of military service. From this point on we find the typical cases of conscientious objection of the nineteenth century and the kind of punishment that was applied.

CASES OF CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION FROM 1845 TO 1900

After the passing of the Dissenter Law in 1845, the situation for dissenters refusing military service became clearer and in some cases worse. The law states in §18: 'No confession can exempt from military service'.³¹ The Norwegian Constitution of 1814 had stated that there should be general conscription. The Military Law of 1816 presupposes this principle, but it took some time to implement it in the young nation of Norway, and an attempt was made to make it general in the law of 1854. But even then, and until 1876, it was young men from the countryside that were conscripted.³² The situation in the towns was less clear, and this made it easier to evade military service for town people, where one traditionally had to be a citizen to take part in the defence. About 80 per cent of the Norwegian population lived in the countryside at this time. Until 1897 the three northernmost counties had no conscription.³³

The law of 1854 said nothing about refusal. In the 1857 law the problem was recognised to be serious enough to be included in the law. The paragraph reads: 'the one who refuses conscription or to take part in the military forces should be punished with fines or imprisonment'.

The law exempts certain professions from military service—for example, chemists and teachers—but not dissenters. It states also the possibility of paying a replacement.

Military regulations in the 1850s and the Military Law of 1866, §36 demanded that the pastor/leader in a dissenter congregation should submit lists of young men liable for conscription. The following laws of 1876, 1885, 1897 and 1899 did not lessen the burden of the conscientious objectors. In fact these laws were rather sharpened towards the end of the century, in spite of—or perhaps as a consequence of—the pressure from the emerging peace organisations. But change was at last to come. In 1902 provisions were made for conscientious objectors.³⁴

We find 22 different persons and 44 cases of conscientious objection among Quakers in the period from 1845 to 1900. There seems to be another Quaker conscientious objector in 1899, but we have not yet managed to identify him by name. In addition we have the four persons in the period 1815–44. A survey of the Quaker COs in Norway in the nineteenth century is to be found in the tables on the following pages.

Table 1. *Survey of Conscientious Objectors with Quaker Affiliation in Norway*³⁵

| <i>The Early Period 1814–45</i> | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Name</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Sentence</i> | <i>Place of Imprisonment</i> |
| Tønnes Johnsen | 1815 | None, special arrangement | |
| Peder Ommundsen Gilje | 1827 | fine | |
| Peder Mathiasen Grønnestad | 1843 | fine | |
| Andreas Danielsen Ask | 1843 | fine | |
| <i>The Main Period 1845–1900</i> | | | |
| <i>Name</i> | <i>Year</i> | <i>Sentence/days imprisoned</i> | <i>Place of Imprisonment</i> |
| Andreas Bryne | 1845 | Fine/3 days | Stavanger |
| Peder Mathiasen | 1847 | Fine | |
| Søren Olsen | 1848 | 20 weeks 10 days | Fredrikssvern |
| [Tor]Bjørn T. Hæggen | 1848 | 15 | ? |
| Mathias M. Husebø | 1854 | 30 | Bergen |
| Elias S. Stakland | 1855 | 30 | Bergen |
| Mathias M. Husebø | 1855 | 12 Spd fine | |
| Elias S. Stakland | 1857 | 35 | Bergen |
| Elias S. Stakland | 1857 | 35 | Bergen |
| John Olsen Botn | 1857 | 20 | Bergen |
| Elias S. Stakland | 1858 | 35 | Bergen |
| Ole Bryngeldsen | 1859 | 20 | Bergen |
| Elias S. Stakland | 1859 | 35 | Bergen |
| John Olsen Botn | 1861 | 5 | Voss |
| Gudmund I. Erland | 1861 | 25 | Bergen |
| Ole Bryngeldsen | 1862 | 14 Spd fine | |
| Gudmund I. Erland | 1862 | ? | Bergen |
| Ole Bryngeldsen | 1863 | 10 | Bergen |
| Gudmund I Erland | 1863 | 10 | Bergen |
| Ole Bryngeldsen | 1864 | 10 | Stavanger |
| Mikkel Bryngeldsen | 1864 | 10 | Stavanger |
| Gudmund I. Erland | 1864 | 10 | Nærstrand |
| Karl T. Røiseland | 1864 | ? | Kristiansand |
| Gudmund I. Erland | 1865 | 25 Spd fine | |
| Iver Olsen Sætre | 1865 | 10 | Bergen |
| Gudmund I. Erland | 1866 | 5 | Stavanger |
| John Johnsen Botn | 1866 | 15 | Bergen |
| John Johnsen Botn | 1866 | 5 | Sand |
| Karl T. Røiseland | 1866 | 6 months | Kristiansand |
| Ingebret I. Erland | 1868 | 40 | Bergen |
| Søren T. Skjørestad | 1869 | 25 | Kristiansand |
| Peder A. Pedersen | 1869 | ? | Kristiansand |
| Iver Thorsen Tvedt | 1870 | ? | Kristiansand |
| Nils Størksen Vaagen | 1870 | 40 | Bergen |
| Aanen J. Svineli | 1870 | 50 | Bergen |
| Johan Sunde | 1874 | short sentence | Stavanger |
| Søren Stakland | 1896 | 20 | Kristiansand |
| Søren Stakland | 1897 | 30 | Kristiansand |
| Ivar E. Larsen | 1897 | 78 | Stavanger |
| Søren Stakland | 1898 | 40 | Kristiansand |
| Ivar E. Larsen | 1898 | 6 | |
| Søren Stakland | 1899 | 50 | Kristiansand |
| Ivar E. Larsen | 1899 | 6 | |
| Ivar E. Larsen | 1900 | 6 | |

Table 2. *Number of Cases of Conscientious Objection 1845–1900, Five-year Periods*

| | |
|-----------|----|
| 1845–49 | 4 |
| 1850–54 | 1 |
| 1855–59 | 8 |
| 1860–64 | 10 |
| 1865–69 | 9 |
| 1870–74 | 4 |
| 1875–79 | 0 |
| 1880–84 | 0 |
| 1885–89 | 0 |
| 1890–94 | 0 |
| 1895–1900 | 8 |
| | 44 |

Table 3. *Number of Cases of Conscientious Objection Relative to Persons 1845–1900, Sentence and Subsequent Emigration*

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Cases</i> | <i>Days imprisoned</i> | <i>Emigrated</i> |
|------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Peder Mathiasen | 1 | fine | No |
| Andreas Bryne | 1 | 3 | No |
| Søren Olsen | 1 | 20 weeks | Yes |
| [Tor]Bjørn T. Hæggen | 1 | 15 | Yes |
| Mathias Husebø | 2 | 30 + fine | Yes |
| Elias S. Stakland | 5 | 170 | No |
| Johan Olsen Botn | 2 | 25 | Yes |
| Ole Bryngeldsen | 4 | 30 + fine | Yes |
| Gudmund I. Erland | 6 | 45 +? + fine | No |
| Mikkel Bryngeldsen | 1 | 10 | Yes |
| Karl T. Røiseland | 2 | 6 months + ? | No |
| Iver Olsen Sætre | 1 | 10 | Yes |
| John Johnsen Botn | 2 | 20 | Yes |
| Ingebrigt I. Erland | 1 | 40 | No |
| Søren T Skjørestad | 1 | 2 months, leave country | Yes? |
| Peder Pedersen | 1 | 5¼ months, leave country | Yes |
| Iver Thoresen Tvedt | 1 | ? | Yes |
| Nils Størkersen Vaagen | 1 | 40 | No |
| Aanen Svineli | 1 | 50 | No |
| Johan Sunde | 1 | short | Yes |
| Søren Stakland | 4 | 140 | No |
| Ivar E. Larsen | 4 | 96 | No |
| <i>22 persons</i> | <i>44</i> | | <i>12 Yes / 10 No</i> |

This survey shows that most cases of conscientious objection occurred between 1855 and 1870 inclusive. About three quarters of the conscientious objectors appeared in this period. In the 20-year period years from 1875–95 there are none. I shall try to explain this later.

THE SENTENCES

The cases of Peder O. Gilje, Andreas Bryne, Peder Mathiasen, and Andreas Danielson Ask were police cases and were treated in the civil juridical system by what was

called 'The Under Court' and 'The Over Court'; occasionally the Supreme Court and the Department of Military Affairs were involved. Their sentences were fines, and in the case of Andreas Bryne, 3 days imprisonment when he refused to pay the fine.³⁶

The case against Søren Olsen was held before a military court, the naval court, and the charge was 'subordinationsstridigt Forhold' (insubordination). He was judged by a Naval Law from 1756, and the punishment was 3 times 27 strokes by the nine tailed cat over 3 days. But the authorities thought, as we have seen, that this was a savage punishment, and convinced (nearly forced) Søren Olsen to apply for pardon.

The other conscientious objectors got prison sentences or fines. This was in accordance with the practice implemented after Søren Olsen and in accordance with the explicit statement in the Military Law of 1857: refusal to obey order should be punished with 'fines or imprisonment'. As regards the measurement of sentences, there seems to be different practises in different military districts and at different military courts. There were also different levels of imprisonment, simple incarceration and solitary confinement, and there were also differences in the size of fines. In his thesis on conscription and conscientious objection, Nils Ivar Agøy has analysed 44 conscientious objectors and 78 cases of conscientious objection from 1885 to 1901, and he found that the military authorities handed out harsher sentences in the southwestern part of Norway, to which most of the conscientious objectors belonged and where the Quaker Movement and peace movement were strongest. The average imprisonment on first refusal was about 20 days, and on the second refusal 60 days.³⁷

It is important to realise that these young men were, through their personal testimonies and suffering, a continuous reminder to the authorities of the human right of freedom of conscience. Their stubborn persistence was an important force in achieving better conditions for the conscientious objectors.

WHAT DID THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS IN NORWAY DO AS REGARDS CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS?

The Søren Olsen case had certainly made the Quakers in Norway aware of the problems that the Peace Testimony caused for their young men. The publicity surrounding the case and the support the Quakers got in the Press might have been considered a good opportunity to apply pressure upon the Storting. Strangely enough the Religious Society of Friends did not mention the issue of Peace Testimony in a letter to the Storting about their sufferings in 1849. Only ten years later, in 1859, was a letter sent to the Storting about the sufferings for refusing to bear arms. The subject of the letter was mainly the repeated imprisonments of Elias S. Stakland.

The Society was, however, aware of the problems. The minutes from the YM in 1855 suggested that they must have an open eye to the sufferings that war service created.³⁸ Upon a request in 1856 from British Friends about the matter, Norway YM answered:

We are not free from sufferings, either on account of non-payment of priests' demands, or refusal to serve in the army. We are not at present able to state precisely what is the

law in our country in the case of refusal to bear arms: but within the last 3 years, two friends (or rather one member & one regular attender of our meetings) have at separate times been taken to Bergen before Courts Martial, & there have suffered 30 days' imprisonment in a room nearly dark, without books, pens, ink, or paper, no friends or others being allowed to visit them. The only recent alteration in the law, regarding service in the army is, that certain descriptions of persons who were formerly exempt from military service, are not now so excepted. There is also some limitation as to the period of service in the army. (Answers to questions sent by P. Bedford and J. Forster, on behalf of the Meeting for sufferings in London, as is supposed, to Friends in Norway 12th mo 1, 1856.)³⁹

In 1857 the question was mentioned again, but no action taken.⁴⁰

In the same year, however, an interesting personal initiative in the matter of conscientious objection was taken by a young and forthcoming Friend in Stavanger, Reier Reiersen. In a letter to George Richardson he recounted the case of Elias Stagland and his endeavours in this connection:

My dear friend George Richardson

Hull the 26th of 5th Mth 1857

I arrived here yesterday with a steamer from Norway intending to go up this Morning for Friends at the yearly Meeting in London.

I think to speak with friends there about some affaires in Norway, as thou knows young friends are exposed to suffering because they do'nt will let them teach to kill their fellowmen, one of them a son of Søren Eriksen Stagland has twice suffered solitary confinement on that account, and perhaps or very likely they are at work with him again because when he came out from the prison, they told him to come and be thought the same art, which he formerly had refused the 15th of this month.

Thou may have been told that friends thought it well that I went to him when we heard about his departure for Bergen for giving him som advice. I went and speaking with the commander in chief he told me that the only person who could do something about the case was the King.

This past week I was favoured with coming to Christiania and did speak with the son of the present king 'the prince regent' or 'Visekongen'. There, he thought he could not alter or help the case of Elias because the Laws were so. I asked him by parting to think of it and do what he could and he appeared to be willing to that.

The parliament or Storting is now sitting there and they have just before them a proposal of the king about some alteration in 'Law for the Militia', some of its Members are good friends with me and do esteem and I think I can say love many of the other friends, one of them was very helpful to me and seemed to feel much interested about the case they wished to do what they thought they could to stop persecution, but they wished not to free them from the service, them to which it was not inlawful because their belief was so.

Some of them thought it was well that friends in Stavanger sent a petition to the Storting; and also in order to give the concern more weight they thought a petition from Friends in England would be useful and they thought that it was better for me to go personally, especially when I had told them that there was held a general Meeting now.

I know that thou art much interested about us, and therefore I had to tell thee about this subject, it is bad written, when I went away friends were in general well in health.

Receive my love to thee and thy family, and friends.

Thy obliged

Reier Reiersen

One of the leading men of the parliament told me that he would seek to get the Law altered so that the authorities should be empowered to let be free them from suffering who they thought were conscientiously bound not to fight or learn to kill.

I may now finish because the train is soon going.

R.⁴¹

I think this letter is a good illustration of the actions and the responses Norwegian Friends encountered in this matter, the closeness to 'power', the impotent sympathy from and the dependence on British Friends.

In 1858 steps were taken by Norway YM to provide a book to record the sufferings, and in 1859 a letter was sent to the Storting. In the letter this somewhat strange explanation why they had not made a request earlier was included:

We have realised, that it was not easy for the government, to change such an important law concerning conscription, generally or concerning us, and this has been the reason that we earlier have not dared to raise the matter.⁴²

So they went on to plead to the Storting to abolish conscription for those whose creed does not permit them to take part in war. They even proposed the wording of the paragraph:

'The legal provisions regarding conscription are not to be applied to those who can prove that they are accepted as members of a religious society with a Christian creed that does not permit its members to take part in war'.⁴³

This was followed up in 1860 by a private law proposal from four members of the Storting. The proposal was sent to the government, and nothing more happened. A rather optimistic version of this occurrence is reported in *The Friend* 1865, fifth month 1:

A motion or bill was introduced into the Norwegian Storting, several years since, without any solicitation from friends, the object of which was to set them free from military service. The majority of the members were favourable to the motion; but in that assembly, two-thirds of the votes are required to carry a bill.⁴⁴

In reports to Meeting for Sufferings, NYM wrote on the issue of conscientious objection in the following years.⁴⁵

1856:

...within the last 3 years, two friends (or rather one member & one regular attender of our meetings) have at separate times been taken to Bergen before Courts Martial, & there have suffered 30 days' imprisonment in a room...

1859:

2 jong friends are in prison in Bergen, one from Roildal and one from Stagland, the first from Roildal is Ole Helleslien is the first time he is ther. the other Elias Stagland he

have been the 4 times before. As[?] for refusal of being a Soldier (in Var) [original spelling].

It is interesting to note that 1859 was the year the first letter to the Storting was sent.

1861:

...no suffering on account of military service.

1862:

Three of our friends have been imprisoned, during the last year, for our testimony against War.

1863:

Suffering for military service have been inconsiderable during the past year.

1864:

...sufferings for military service are but slight.

1865:

Sufferings for military service...have been inconsiderable.

A commentary in *The Friend* the same year states:

The sufferings of Friends, on account of their refusal to perform military service, have been greatly lessened. Ten days' confinement in the prison at Stavanger, with bread and water diet, has been the heaviest infliction reported of late; and, in some instances, the punishment has only extended to a few days' imprisonment in the house of a constable.⁴⁶

There were no reports for 1866, 1867, and 1868.

1869

Some of the Friends have been exposed to sufferings because of refusal to do military service.

1870

Two young men have been suffering (the one two months', the other five and a quarter months') imprisonment and solitary confinement during last year in Christian-sand for refusing military service, and were set at liberty on condition of promising to leave the country, or else they would, according to existing military laws, be liable to imprisonment and punishment so long as they should continue to refuse military service.

This reporting by the clerk, Endre Dahl, is a bit strange if we compare it to Table 1 displaying the distribution of conscientious objectors over the years. The reports give the impression that the sufferings due to refusal of military service were small, and yet this was the period when the largest number of Norwegian young Friends refused to do military service!

THE CONTINENTAL COMMITTEE'S RESPONSE

What can be found on the British side, in the Minutes of the Continental Committee? We have already mentioned their letter in the Søren Olsen case.

In 1854, 9th mo, Mathis Mathison Husebø's case is reported by William Tanner, who had visited Norway that summer for health reasons. In the next meeting (12 mo, min 7) the committee concludes that it is not necessary to take any steps on behalf of Husebø. He has already suffered his punishment (30 days imprisonment). In his account of the 1854 journey to Norway, Tanner wrote: 'I earnestly hope that in the event of his being sent to prison, the remonstrances, which will no doubt be made by Friends in England to the king on his behalf, will be instrumental in preventing the execution of any extreme sentence which may be passed upon him'.⁴⁷ In 1855 Søren Stagland (this should read Elias Stagland) is reported to be in prison in Bergen for refusing to bear arms (3 mo, min 9).

In 1856 a minute states

that there seems to be a probability that some young friends may be subjected to suffering in Norway in the faithful maintenance or our testimony against War. The subject is referred to the close attention of Peter Bedford and Josiah Forster who are to report thereon. Peter Bedford is encouraged to express our sympathy with our friends in Norway under these circumstances [6th mo, min 4].⁴⁸

This results in the letter that Norway YM answers in the 12th mo 1856, which was quoted earlier. But the background to the Continental Committee's minute was probably this letter from Endre Dahl (his own spelling) to George Richardson:

My dear G. Richardson

There are a jong frend, a son of our dear old frend Søren Stagland. This jong frend Elias Sørensen Stagland, refused to be a soldier and he was last year brought to Bergen and kept in prison in a Dark hole, as far as [?] 30 Days. And now is he again ordered to come and take arms. but he continue to refuse. and ther are no other expectation than he will again be put in prison. This is not the only one another from Roildahl a jong frend is also pressed[?] (called upon) to come, and we have the confidence in him also that he will be faithfull and refuse to take Arms and the punishment will be the same.

Friends in Stavanger have from time to time considered what thy could do, and we have felt it our duty to recommend them to be faithful and suffer hoping that the great good shepherd will care for his two [true?] follower. But we have also desired if any of friends in London, the Committee of the Meeting for Sufferings would consider if a Word could be spoken to the higher Autorty in Norway either the King himself or some other in conection whit him on behalf of this jong men who are likly to be put into prison or other kind of sufferings. We have had full proff of, that frends petitions to our King have had good effect, and you are more heard than we. And therefore we leave this to your Conideration. I belive tha Commitee nead not more enformation about this as ther have been several amongst our frends who have suffered, allready, and the prospect is that some other will from time to time be called upon, as frends encrease so many such cases will perhaps come to pass, so that yours appeaction [application] and petition may be on behalf of those who m[a]y happen to be called upon and are at present called upon. or else as you may find it best to do.

This have been Our frends desire to lay this before you, and I do hope thou my dear frend will mention it to those who like to help us, and those who suffer amongst us.

I am thy affectionate frend

Endre Dahl (5th mo 1856)⁴⁹

THE CLERKS DILEMMA

According to the military regulations and laws from 1857 onwards the commissioner of the county, later the parish priest, demanded that the leader/pastor of every dissenter congregation should submit a list of young men eligible for conscription ('Mandskaber') between 19 and 23 years of age.⁵⁰ The first time this is documented in the archives of the Quaker Society is in 1859. The clerk refused to submit the lists, because it had to do with military enrolment. In 1863 a letter from the commissioner complained about lists missing for several years. There is an interesting piece of information in the letter: the commissioner has been so kind as to promise to send in the required lists himself on behalf of the clerk of the Religious Society of Friends! Whether this actually happened or not is unknown, because lists were asked for again in 1865, in 1869, 1870 and 1871.

In 1869 the clerk informed the commissioner that it was because it had a close connection to military service that he refused to submit the lists. He made it known that it was not his intention to hide 'our young men that might be exposed [to conscription]'. He then wrote with the information that there were no members at the age of 19 in this year.⁵¹

From 1869 to 1896, there is no documentation in the archive of any requests for lists. In 1896 a process started that would lead to a dramatic move by the clerk, Thorstein Bryne, in 1898.

In 1897 Thorstein Bryne again answered that there was no male member at the age of 19 in 1896. Bryne was then requested to send a written statement explaining his reasons for not sending in the lists. The next letter from the authorities stated that the case would be set before higher authorities and in 1897 Bryne was fined 40 kroner. The same was repeated in 1898—another penalty of 40 kroner.⁵²

At YM this year (6th mo 1898) the minute reads:

T. Bryne told that he had been submitted to a fine of 40 kroner also this year because he declined/refused to fill in and deliver to military authorities the ordered lists of so called conscriptable men, and that he was informed that if it was put before a higher court, he would be sentenced a current daily fine until the order was fulfilled. He had investigated what could be done and had arrived at the result that one ought to write to the Commissioner and return/deliver the books [of membership etc.] that was prescribed by the Dissenter Law together with a statement that the Society did not want to be in a position where this was demanded. . .

Friends united in this proposal on the condition that the Society did not loose any of the rights it appreciated.⁵³

A committee authorised to make a final decision was appointed. On October 7, 1898 the membership protocol was delivered to the Governor, and consequently the Religious Society of Friends ceased to exist as a registered dissenter congregation—and contrary to the conditions in the minute, lost its rights as a registered free church.⁵⁴

EMIGRATION

Quakers and Haugians started organised emigration from Norway to America in 1825, and in the following years several Quakers crossed the Atlantic. When the problem of conscription occurred, it is reasonable to think that emigration could be the solution for the individual conscientious objectors.

Did the conscientious objectors emigrate? It seems to be right to break the question down into two questions. First, did the conscientious objectors who had suffered punishment emigrate? I have found that 12 of 22 persons on our list did so. The first is Peder Ommundsen Gilje, who emigrated in 1836. He is followed by Andreas Danielsen Ask who emigrated in 1845. Then follow [Tor]Bjørn Thorsen Hæggen in 1849, Søren Olsen in 1854 and Mathias Husebø in 1864.⁵⁵

Second, were conscientious objectors encouraged or forced to emigrate? I have earlier referred to the report to Meeting for Sufferings in 1870 where it is recorded that two young men were incarcerated in Kristiansand, and that they were set free on the condition that they promised to leave the country; otherwise they would, in accordance with the present laws, be imprisoned as long as they continued to object to military service.⁵⁶ It seems that the authorities who executed this sentence thought it was a clever way to solve the problem.

Emigration had always been a threat to the Norwegian Quaker Society, and conscientious objectors had emigrated before. In 1856, 5m 22, Endre Dahl wrote to George Richardson:

Ther are manny Storms on this litle Society and one thing is, that several jong hopful friends are about to leave us for going to America, some who is close united whit us, in Christian fellowship. And the more [??] is that they have an effect upon other to follow them, I can not see any good in this for our litle flok to be so parted whit.⁵⁷

But it was in the 1870s and onwards to the turn of the century that young male Quakers seem to have emigrated to the USA for the reason of escaping military service. Did the case of the two conscientious objectors in Kristiansand in 1869–70 make young men decide to emigrate? If so, that might explain why there was not a single case of conscientious objection between 1875 and 1895.

The Norwegian Religious Society of Friends became aware of the alarming fact that the young people were forced or chose to emigrate in the 1890s. The Society lost members and its very existence as a registered free church was jeopardised. It became urgent to keep the young people at home. In the report to the Meeting for Sufferings in London in 1891 Norway Yearly Meeting states that difficulties in earning a livelihood in Norway coupled with the pressure of military service had threatened to drive some of their young members to America.⁵⁸ In 1894 the report says: 'either they leave us and go into the world with no interest in religion, or they go away to America, often to avoid military service here'. In 1898 again: 'Younger people often emigrate to avoid military service'.⁵⁹

In the beginning of this 20-year-period, in 1879, the Religious Society of Friends had taken another initiative to the Storting, but it was yet again futile, and it seemed as if they had more or less given in.⁶⁰ In the reports to Meeting for Sufferings

between 1870 and 1891, nothing on the CO issue is mentioned, as far as I can see. In the 1890s, when Quaker COs appeared again, the Quakers had a powerful ally. At this moment in history, the peace movement entered the stage, and Quakers were strongly involved in this movement. The strategy chosen was that the peace associations should act on behalf of the Society. I see this as part of the modernisation of the Norwegian Quaker Society. The Society was more outgoing, engaged in political and social issues, cooperating with other organisations, and its members became influential citizens.⁶¹

THE PEACE MOVEMENT AND THE CO QUESTION

Asbjørn Kloster, Søren Olsen's Quaker friend, took great interest in the international peace movement, through the 1860s and into the 1870s. He wrote many articles about the peace issue in his teetotalist periodical *Menneskevennen* [The Philantropist], but he did not found any organisation, and the problem of conscientious objection does not seem to have occupied his mind.

The first peace organisation in Norway was founded in 1885. However, it was not until the middle of the 1890s that the peace movement, along with many local organisations, started to grow rapidly. One of the issues, at least for the radical wing of the peace movement, was conscription and conscientious objection. The pacifist peace activists were found mainly in the southwestern part of Norway and Christiania. In Stavanger a peace association was founded in 1894 by the American–British Quaker couple Richard H. Thomas and Anna Braithwaite. It grew rapidly and had 545 members three years later. The Quaker influence in this association was strong. The Quaker Thorstein Bryne became the first chairman, and he was succeeded by John Frederick Hanson, another Quaker. The Quaker influence was felt also on the national level. In addition some of the members of the national association were conscientious objectors themselves.⁶² The organisational structure was efficient, with periodicals that kept members updated on both the national and the international arena.⁶³

In 1896 a private law proposal was put before the Storting that 'dissenters... may, when their conscience forbids them, demand to be exempted from doing military service'.⁶⁴ It was mainly directed at the Quaker issue. In the premises for the law proposal of 1896 complaints were made that under present laws the Quakers would soon be expelled from the country. They felt that they had to choose between going to prison or emigrating. It was said from the rostrum in the Storting that the country's finest youth were forced to emigrate.⁶⁵ John Fredrick Hanson, clerk of Norway Yearly Meeting from 1898 to 1902, wrote in the Quaker periodical *Vennen* in 1901 that there had been a pause of 20 years between 1875 and 1895 in the imprisonment of conscientious objectors due to the fact that 'the youth hurried away to America, because they saw no use in sitting in prison in a country where the government was absolutely deaf for the demands of conscience and truth'.⁶⁶

In October 1898 John Fredrick Hanson wrote to the Palace/King's residence in Oslo, and pleaded for audience to put before the king, Oscar II, a petition concerning the conscientious objectors' possibilities of staying in the country and the

possibility of full religious freedom. He felt that the emigration of conscientious objectors was harmful to the country, and he asked the king for his personal engagement in the issue so that the conscientious objectors could live in the country without a criminal stigma. Oscar did not give any audience, and he stated that he would receive no petition from law-breakers.⁶⁷

As we have seen, the British Religious Society of Friends had been previously engaged in the conscription issue in Norway. Around the turn of the century, this interest was stronger than ever. A committee on military service in Norway and Sweden was convened, and British Friends tried to influence Norwegian authorities directly. Another private law proposal was put before the Storting in 1898 proposing for the first time in any country, alternative service.⁶⁸ The idea of an alternative service—to do useful work instead of military service—in the 1898-proposition, was supported by British Friends: 'The young men that because of their conviction cannot execute military service, should have admittance to do ordinary work for the state'.⁶⁹

At this point it is important to note that the issue of conscientious objection had not only a national interest, but also international implications. It was in a way a testing ground for the problems connected with conscription, which interested the peace movement in several countries. For British Quakers it may have been of special concern due to their internal discussions on pacifism. I am tempted to say that English Friends looked with envy and admiration upon the clearness and purity of the Peace Testimony of young Norwegian Quaker conscientious objectors.⁷⁰

As regards alternative service, the military authorities resisted any special or alternate treatment for conscientious objectors, but they thought that some measure of consideration could be taken and proposed unarmed service in 1900, but this was not accepted by the peace organisations and the conscientious objectors.⁷¹

While this was happening, the dramatic development recounted above, took place in the Norwegian Religious Society of Friends. Thorstein Bryne and the Society decided to hand in the obligatory membership protocols, and in that way they in 1898 ceased to be a registered religious society. Norway Yearly Meeting functioned as a private religious association until 1936 when it again registered with the authorities as a religious society or church.

Why did Thorstein Bryne and Norway Yearly Meeting choose this strategy? The Quaker conscientious objectors in the 1890s were scarce in numbers, but had a strong case.

Agøy mentions three Quaker conscientious objectors on his list of 44 conscientious objectors and 78 cases from 1885 to 1901.⁷² One of them was Søren Stakland, imprisoned four times between 1896 and 1899; the others might be Ivar Larsen, also imprisoned four times from 1897–1900, who together with his father attended meetings, and a friend from Kvinesdal, possibly part of the Røiseland family. These along with three unnamed young men (not connected with Friends?) are mentioned in a letter from P. Fugellie to Walter Morice 17.V.1899.⁷³ In addition to the sources I have used, it is an interesting fact that J.F. Hanson mentions in his book *Light and Shade from the Land of the Midnight Sun* a number of persons 'having more or less in agreement with Friends' who have suffered for refusing to do military service from 1890 and onwards—altogether 17 persons, and at least 32 cases.⁷⁴

The law proposals and the peace associations circled around the Quaker situation, as we have seen. Agøy's work shows that there were many dissenters among the conscientious objectors. This was a general trend. The first conscientious objectors were indeed Quakers, but at the end of the nineteenth century and further into the twentieth century other groups had taken over. According to the statistics it seems a bit strange that the Quakers were used as argument and reference group when the private law proposals were discussed in the Storting in 1896 and 1898. I think the reason for this was the uncompromising and firm attitude that the young Quakers showed, and the strong connection conscientious objection had to the issue of practising their religious beliefs. This, along with the shame it must have induced on Norwegian authorities, that some of their citizens were forced to emigrate, made a very strong argument.

THE ARGUMENT OF EMIGRATION VALIDATED

To what degree is it true that young men with Quaker affiliation emigrated to avoid military service? During the nineteenth century about one third of the Norwegian Quaker members emigrated to the USA.

Table 4. *Members of the Religious Society of Friends in Norway who Emigrated 1860–90*⁷⁵

| | |
|---------|----|
| 1860–64 | 14 |
| 1865–69 | 38 |
| 1870–74 | 13 |
| 1875–79 | 0 |
| 1880–84 | 13 |
| 1885–89 | 17 |
| 1890–98 | na |

Based on the evidence in the membership protocols and other sources we found that these young men emigrated in the period from 1870 to 1900:

Table 5. *Young Friends who Emigrated 1870–1900*⁷⁶

| | | |
|-------|-------------------------|-----------|
| 1870? | Søren T Skjørestad | 25 years* |
| 1870? | Peder A. Pedersen Tou | 27 years* |
| 1880 | Johan Peder Sunde | 23 years |
| 1882 | Richard Haga | 22 years |
| | Ommund Mæhus | 19 years |
| 1883 | Lars Tædnes | 21 years |
| 1885 | Laurits Tædnes | 19 years |
| | Peder Andreas Røiseland | 17 years |
| 1886 | Peder Emil Fugellie | 19 years |
| | Asbjørn Kloster [jr] | 18 years |
| 1891 | Endre Erland | 18 years |
| 1896 | Ole Stakland | 20 years |

* Not members, but affiliated to Quakers.

This shows that young male members indeed emigrated, but there are no indications as to why they emigrated. It seems odd to find only two young men emigrating in

the 1870s. That may be due to the extensive emigration in the 1860s. The membership records for the 1890s are incomplete. This may explain why there are only two emigrants in that period.

In some way, these few cases of emigration, may give some sort of verification to the claim so forcibly raised by the peace movement that young Quakers were compelled to leave their native country.

Thorstein Bryne's refusal to hand in lists can be viewed as a symbolic gesture in solidarity with these young men, showing that it was impossible for a religious society whose members object to military service to exist as an official church in a country like Norway, and therefore had to close down as a protest. This might be seen as a desperate act of a small religious group on the outskirts of Norwegian society. But the issue of refusing to do military service was gaining interest. The question of Norway's separation from Sweden made the prospect of war real. The public interest is described in this paragraph, quoted from a report from Norway YM to the Continental Committee in 1898:

Two young men, one member and the other an attender, have during the past two years refused to render military service or practice drill; the former has been imprisoned on both occasions, and this faithful testimony, with some other cases of those connected with our society, attached much attention. Much sympathy with the objection to war has thus been called forth, finding expression in the newspapers and otherwise.⁷⁷

THE SITUATION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In 1902 a small victory was won. It became politically impossible both to force young conscientious objectors to emigrate and to, year after year, imprison those who stayed behind without in principle an end to their suffering. The Norwegian officials acknowledged that something simply had to be done. In a letter from the highest military authorities provisions were made to exempt conscientious objectors from military service on religious grounds. In short it said: Do not punish conscientious objectors when it is not absolutely necessary, suspend punishment, forward the case to the Ministry of Defence which will consider reprieve.⁷⁸

In 1907 it was possible to be exempted from military service by paying a tax, a solution not popular with the peace organisations. Then in 1922 the Storting passed a law which permitted alternative service for persons who refused to do military service of any kind because of a serious religious conviction or other serious reasons of conscience.⁷⁹

After 1900 the Quaker influence was not as comprehensive any longer; other groups, larger and more influential, had taken over—peace organisations, labour organisations, and so on. Agøy states in an article about the Quakers as lobbyists for a law allowing conscientious objection that

By the example of the Quaker Conscientious objectors and the standing challenge to the authorities through the nineteenth century, by its engagement in the peace movement and by its initiatives towards the authorities, the Religious Society of Friends had played an important role to enforce the liberalisation of 1902... It is however right to say that the direct engagement of Friends...in the question of conscientious objection came to an end just after the turn of the century...⁸⁰

In some way this may be right, since some sort of solution was arrived at, but the Norwegian Quaker Society acknowledged that much was still to be done, and has taken several initiatives in the twentieth century as regards conscientious objection.

Just to mention a few:

- The alternative service should be connected to peace and international issues.
- The basis for accepting conscientious objectors should be broadened also to situational conscientious objection.
- Conscientious objection to military service should be a human right.
- Peace tax instead of paying tax to the military establishment should be accepted.

But this is another story. Our story ends with the nineteenth century.

CONCLUSIONS

What main features can we discern in the struggle for conscientious objection in Norway in the nineteenth century, and what conclusions might be drawn?

1. The pioneer role of Quakers: Quakers started conscientious objection to military service in Norway. Only Quakers and persons with connections to the Religious Society of Friends refused to bear arms up until the 1880s.
2. The *individual* testimonies of young men are the most conspicuous features up to the end of the century. Their refusal/conscientious objection is what is known, spoken of, and given as examples.
3. There was support from individuals within the Quaker community, but the Yearly Meeting was more cautious, and it seems more interested in fines and penalties for not paying church taxes, school tax, and so on. Only two letters were sent to the Storting on the issue of conscientious objection. Sympathy was mostly what British Quakers offered the conscientious objectors in Norway in the period up to the 1890s, except in the Søren Olsen case.
4. Only when emigration was felt to drain the Quaker Society of its best youth, was action taken, and then together with the peace organisations, which in the southwestern part of Norway were mainly a Quaker initiative. British Quakers strongly supported this initiative, and contacted Norwegian officials directly. In the 1890s British Quakers looked upon Norway as an interesting showcase for the handling of the issue of conscientious objection.
5. At the end of century Peace Organisations functioned as pressure groups, and they had wider support than the Religious Society of Friends. They also had influential members, for example, members of the Storting. At the same time a modernisation of the Norwegian Quaker Society started, encouraging more outgoing political and social action and cooperation.
6. The Quaker emigration, the fact that young persons were driven from the country, and that a religious society in that way was forbidden, was used as a very strong argument for allowing conscientious objection.

7. After the concessions in 1902, the peace organisations were rather passive in the question of conscientious objection, and that goes for the Religious Society of Friends as well. Later in the century other interest organisations took over the fight for the conscientious objectors. The most important Quaker concerns in the twentieth century have been to fight for acceptance of conscientious objection as a human right and a new understanding of conscientious objection as the right to refuse to pay military tax.

As a general conclusion I would like to quote a letter from Continental Committee, 3 mo 31, 1898 to Norwegian Friends:

The faithful testimony against all war, which some of your young men, as well as some unconnected with our society, have given of late years at the cost of suffering, has rejoiced our hearts. We believe that such faithfulness to the Commands of Christ will do more than many public speeches to advance the cause of peace, and we hope that many more will be equally steadfast in their testimony, instead of leaving the country, thus avoiding the opportunity of good and weakening the hands of those who remain.⁸¹

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SOURCES

- PA 160 Quaker Archives in Statsarkivet i Stavanger, The Regional State Archives of Stavanger, Norway
 LSF Library of the Religious Society of Friends, London
 RSAS Regional State Archives of Stavanger [Statsarkivet I Stavanger]

NOTES

1. Richardson, G., *The Rise and Progress of the Society of Friends in Norway*, London: Charles Gilpin; Dublin: James B. Gilpin, 1849, pp. 120-21.

2. The following citations of Søren Olsen are taken from his own journal published in Norwegian by Aarek Hans Eirik in *Et lidet Viidnesbyrd mod Krig og Færdning. Søren Olsens militæmektersak fra 1848*, Utgitt med innledning og kommentarer av Hans Eirik Aarek; Stavanger: Kvekerforlaget, 1998, p. 32. The citations are translated into English by Hans Eirik Aarek. Søren Olsen's original MS in PA 160, Box 45/14.

3. Aarek, *Et lidet Viidnesbyrd*, p. 32.

4. Aarek, *Et lidet Viidnesbyrd*, p. 35.

5. Aarek, *Et lidet Viidnesbyrd*, p. 42.

6. Aarek, *Et lidet Viidnesbyrd*, p. 42.

7. Aarek, *Et lidet Viidnesbyrd*, p. 35.

8. Aarek, *Et lidet Viidnesbyrd*, p. 32.

9. *Ulovligheden af alle Krige og Fegtninger under Evangelium*, Stavanger: Paul T. Dreyer, 1848; Quakers Archives, Stavanger.

10. Aarek, H.E., 'The Significance of Norwegian Quakers for Early Emigration from Norway to America: How True are the Traditional Views?', in *Norwegian-American Essays 2001*, X, Oslo: NAHA, 2001; Cadbury, H.J., 'The Norwegian Quakers of 1825', *Harvard Theological Review* 18.4 (1925), pp. 293-319.

11. Aarek, *Et lidet Viidnesbyrd*, p. 117.

12. RSAS, Karmsund Sorenskriverembete. *Ekstraretsprotokoll* 1840-47.

13. Brock, P., *Records of Conscience*, York: William Sessions, 1993, p. 2.

14. *Lov, angaaende dem, der bekjende sig til den christelige Religion, uden at være Medlemmer af Statskirken af 16. Juli 1845 (Dissenterloven)*.

15. Aarek, *Et lidet Viidnesbyrd*, pp. 77-78, 89.

16. Aarek, *Et lidet Viidnesbyrd*, pp. 95-99.

17. Norway and Sweden was in a union with a common king between 1814 and 1905.

18. Richardson, *The Rise and Progress*, p. 116.

19. Richardson, *The rise and Progress*, p. 119.

20. PA 160, Box 57/12, *Erindring af min reise til England 1847-48*, p. 54.

21. LSF, Continental Committee Minutes 1842-68, 1848.

22. LSF, Continental Committee Minutes 1842-68, 1849.

23. LSF, Backhouse, J., *Journal 1860*, I, p. 88.

24. Seierstad, A., *Kyrlelegt reformarbeid i Norig i nittande hundreaaret*, Bergen: Lunde, 1923, pp. 240-41; Nag, M., *Synliggjøring, ny trojka*, Stavanger: Kveldbels-eika forlag, 2003, pp. 11-12.

25. LSF, Portefolio 14, No 25, 4/10/43.

26. RSAS, Sorenskriveren i Karmsund. *Ekstraretsprotokoll* 1840-47.

27. RSAS, Sorenskriveren i Karmsund. *Ekstraretsprotokoll* 1840-47.

28. RSAS, Amtmanden i Stavanger. *Kriminalfortegnelse*. Avdeling VI 1843-46, 1845 sak 108, 1846 sak 106.

29. RSAS, Sorenskriveren i Karmsund. *Ekstraretsprotokoll* 1840-47.

30. In 1830 Iver Halvorsen Revem was sentenced to leave Norway because he had settled outside the permitted area in Stavanger. The case went to the Supreme Court, and the case was dismissed (Seierstad, *Kyrlelegt reformarbeid*, p. 247). The idea of expatriation was, however, not dead. It occurred again in connection with the discussion of the Dissenter Law (Seierstad, *Kyrlelegt reformarbeid i Norig i nittande hundreaaret*, p. 322).

31. *Lov, angaaende dem, der bekjende sig til den christelige Religion, uden at være Medlemmer af Statskirken af 16. Juli 1845 (Dissenterloven)*, Christiania, 1845.

32. Nåvik, Ø., *Verneplikthens historie 950-1996*, Oslo: Elanders forlag, 1996, pp. 101-32

33. Nåvik, *Verneplikthens historie*, p. 105.

34. Agøy, N.I., 'Kampen mot vernetvangen' *Militærmeeterspørsmålet i Norge 1885-1922*, MA thesis, Oslo University, 1987, pp. 55-84; Lapin, E., *Vennenes Samfunn Kvekerne 1846-1898*, Stavanger: Kvekerforlaget, 1999, p. 157.

35. A survey of most of the conscientious objectors can be found in Lapin, *Vennenes Samfunn Kvekerne 1846-1898*, p. 156. Background data are to be found in RSAS in PA 160, Document nos. 11 and 12, Box 45/14 and Box 93-94; and Amtmanden i Stavanger. *Kriminalfortegnelse*, Avdeling VI, 1843-46; Sorenskriveren i Karmsund. *Ekstraretsprotokoll* 1840-47; Agøy, 'Kampen mot vernetvangen'. The length and kind of sentence may vary in the different sources. I have mainly followed Lapin.

36. RSAS, Amtmanden i Stavanger. *Kriminalfortegnelse*, Avdeling VI, 1843-46; Sorenskriveren i Karmsund. *Ekstraretsprotokoll* 1840-47.

37. Agøy, 'Kampen mot vernetvangen', p. 32.

38. PA 160, *Protocol eller Udkaast Bog for Vennenes Tomaanes-forsamling i Stavanger Begyndet Aar 1818-[1859]*, Aarsforsamlingen 1855, minute 4. PA 160.

39. PA 160, Box 45/13, Answers to Questions from London.

40. PA 160, *Protocol eller Udkast Bog for Vennernes Tomaanes-forsamling i Stavanger Begyndet Aar 1818*–[1859], Aarsforsamlingen 1857, min 2.
41. LSF, MSBox H 3/2, Richardson, George, Letters from various Friends (English and Norwegian) on Friends in Norway 1855–59. Folder 3: 1857.
42. PA 160, Box 45/8.
43. PA 160, Box 45/8.
44. *The Friend*, 1865, 5 Mo, p. 98.
45. PA 160, 1856: Box 45/13, remaining years: Box 93/8 (1851–60), 9 (1861–70). Copies from LSF.
46. *The Friend*, 1865, 5 Mo, p. 98.
47. *Memoir of William Tanner*, ed. Ford, J.; London; F. Bowyer Kitto; York: William Sessions, 1868, p. 73.
48. All quotations from LSF, Continental Committee Minutes 1842–68.
49. FKL, Temp Box 2/20, Papers and letters about Norway. LSF.
50. Lapin, *Vennenes Samfunn Kvekerne*, p. 157.
51. Documents referred to from 1859 to 1871 in PA 160, Box 45/14.
52. PA 160, Box 45/14, and 20, *Aarsforsamlings- og tomaanedsforsamlingsprotokol 1892–1910*, p. 21 (translated from Norwegian).
53. PA 160, 20, *Aarsforsamlings- og tomaanedsforsamlingsprotokol 1892–1910*.
54. PA 160, Box 47, 4 *Medlemsprotokoll 1857–1937*, p. 79.
55. Nag, M., *Nytt lys over Ashjørn Kloster og hans nærmiljø i Stavanger, Ryfylke og Christiania*, Ås: Kvekerforlaget, 1986, pp. 43–44; Aarek, *Et lidet Viidnesbyrd*, p. 18; Nag, *Synliggjøring, ny trojka*, pp. 11–12.
56. PA 160, Box 93/9 (1861–70).
57. LSF, MS Box H 3/2 Richardson, George, 1856.
58. PA 160, Box 93/12 (1891–1900).
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60. Agøy, N.I., 'Kvekerne som pådrivere for militærnektelovgivning', in Utne, B.S. and Aarek, H.E., *'Dette Ukrudt fra Engellands settrige og geile Jordbund' Rapport fra forskningsseminar om: Den rolle kristne dissenterbevegelser—spesielt kvekerne—spilte i norsk kulturutvikling på 1800-tallet*, Working papers from Rogaland University Centre no 184; Stavanger, 1993, p. 27 n. 48.
61. Aarek, H.E., 'Kvekerne og det moderne Norge', in *Frikirkelighet, lavkirkelighet, arbeiderbevegelse og det moderne Norge (1880–1920)*, redigert av Ingunn Folkestad Breistein og Dag Nygård; Oslo: NFR, 2002, pp. 77–90. English version of the article available.
62. A short survey of the history of the Norwegian peace movement is given in Aarek, H.E., 'Pionértiden i norsk fredsbevegelse', in Nag, M., *I strid for fred. Tre kapitler av fredsbevegelsens pionértid i Norge*, Ås: Kvekerforlaget, 1985, pp. 9–20.
63. Aarek, 'Pionértiden i norsk fredsbevegelse'.
64. *Stortingsforhandlinger 1896*, d. 5, Tillæg til Dokument nr. 21, s. 4, in Agøy, 'Kampen mot vermetvangen', p. 57.
65. Agøy, 'Kampen mot vermetvangen', pp. 57–58, *Stortingsforhandlinger 1896*, d. 5, Tillæg til Dokument nr. 21, s. 3.
66. 'Skitser fra Samfundets Historie No. 4', *Vennen* nr. 4 1901.
67. PA 160, Box 94/8. 'Norway and Sweden. The Peace Position', *The Friend*, 25 November 1898, p. 756
68. Agøy, 'Kampen mot vermetvangen', p. 61.
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70. For the discussion on pacifism among British Friends see: Kennedy, T.C., *British Quakerism 1860–1920. The Transformation of a Religious Community*, Oxford, 2001, Chapter 7, 'Never to Fight with Carnal Weapons'.
71. Agøy, 'Kampen mot vermetvangen', pp. 71–80.

72. Agøy, 'Kampen mot vernetvangen', p. 25.
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78. *Militær Lovsamling* 1902, p. 192. Agøy; 'Kampen mot vernetvangen', pp. 80-81.
79. *Stortingsforhandlinger* 1922, d8.
80. Agøy, 'Kvekerne som pådrivere for militærnekte Lovgivning', p. 26.
81. PA 160, Box 93/12.

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