

# British Journal for Military History

Volume 12, Issue 2, July 2026

---

Prisoners of Conscience: Labour, Religion, and Gender in Conscientious Objectors' Second World War Protests

**Caleb Woodall**

---

**ISSN:** 2057-0422

**Date of Publication:** 23 July 2026

**Citation:** Caleb Woodall, 'Prisoners of Conscience: Labour, Religion, and Gender in Conscientious Objectors' Second World War Protests', *British Journal for Military History*, 12.2 (2026), pp. 8-26.

[www.bjmh.org.uk](http://www.bjmh.org.uk)

---



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.



The BJMH is produced with the support of

**Goldsmiths**  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

# Prisoners of Conscience: Labour, Religion, and Gender in Conscientious Objectors' Second World War Protests

CALEB WOODALL\*

University of Cambridge, UK

Email: [cw700@cam.ac.uk](mailto:cw700@cam.ac.uk)

## ABSTRACT

*This article explores a strain of antitotalitarian critique that emerged out of conscientious objectors' experiences with the Civilian Public Service programme during the Second World War. A complex interplay of ideas about labour, religion, and manly dignity animated this critique. The author places the actions of 'radicals' like Don DeVault, Stanley Murphy, and Louis Taylor in their wider religious and labour-driven contexts. Crucially, the article offers a fresh perspective on conscientious objectors' protests against the immediate World War context that stresses the importance of the 'dignity of labour.'*

## Introduction

When he signed the Selective Training and Service Act (STSA) into law in September 1940, President Franklin Roosevelt facilitated the birth of Civilian Public Service (CPS). Designed partly to prevent an embarrassing repeat of the repressive treatment endured by American conscientious objectors (COs) during the Second World War, the Act stipulated that, in CPS, COs would complete 'work of national importance under civilian direction.' The programme represented a unique compromise between church and state: pacifist Christians, especially in the Quaker, Mennonite, and Brethren traditions, accepted the principle of conscription in return for alternative service opportunities that represented the government's recognition of the individual's First Amendment right to conscientiously object.<sup>1</sup>

---

\*Caleb Woodall is a doctoral candidate at the University of Cambridge. His dissertation explores conscientious objectors' Second World War experiences in America through the lenses of masculinity, labour, and race.

DOI: [10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i2.1968](https://doi.org/10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v12i2.1968)

<sup>1</sup>Albert N. Keim and Grant Stoltzfus, *The Politics of Conscience: The Historic Peace Churches and America at War, 1917-1955*, (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1988), pp. 34–55; and Mulford Q. Sibley and Philip E. Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience: The American*

## CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' SECOND WORLD WAR PROTESTS

Nearly 12,000 men served in CPS during the war, in more than 150 camps and units across the country.<sup>2</sup> Under Selective Service's authority, CPS men initially worked with the Forest and Soil Conservation Services in reopened Civilian Conservation Corps camps. Their agitation for more meaningful labour, however, resulted in increasing opportunities as the war progressed. By the time CPS disbanded in 1947, its participants had contributed over eight million man-hours of labour in fields ranging from forest-firefighting and soil conservation to mental health advocacy and medical experimentation.<sup>3</sup> To demonstrate COs' willingness to sacrifice, the peace churches in charge of CPS agreed to fund the programme, and agreed that the work would be unpaid.<sup>4</sup>

The CPS experiment did not appeal or apply to all pacifists. More than 6,000 COs endured prison sentences, either because they viewed CPS as an intolerable collaboration with the warmaking state, because their objection was secular or limited to the Second World War, or because, as in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses and Muslims, the state did not recognize their religious claims with the same liberal respect that it gave members of the peace, mainline, and Catholic churches. While precise figures are impossible to ascertain, undoubtedly many COs chose to endure imprisonment because they saw little value in the kinds of labour demanded in CPS.<sup>5</sup>

---

*State and the Conscientious Objector, 1940-1947*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1952). For an overview of COs' experiences in World War I, see Christopher Capozzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 55–81.

<sup>2</sup>Rachel Waltner Goossen, *Women Against the Good War: Conscientious Objection and Gender on the American Home Front, 1941-1947*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 11–28; Steven J. Taylor, *Acts of Conscience: World War II, Mental Institutions, and Religious Objectors*, (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2009), p. 21.

<sup>3</sup>For the standard account of CPS, see Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*. On CPS firefighting, see Mark Matthews, *Smoke Jumping on the Western Fire Line: Conscientious Objectors during World War II*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006). On CPS human 'guinea pig' experiments, see Todd Tucker, *The Great Starvation Experiment*, (New York: Free Press, 2006). On mental health advocacy and hospital work, see Taylor, *Acts of Conscience*.

<sup>4</sup>Donald F. Durnbaugh, "The Fight against War of the Historic Peace Churches, 1919-1941," in *Challenge to Mars: Pacifism from 1918 to 1945*, ed. Peter Brock and Thomas P. Socknat, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 235.

<sup>5</sup>Steven Taylor notes the 'pervasive feeling among CPS men that their work in camps fell far short of being "work of national importance" and represented little more than "make-work."' See Taylor, *Acts of Conscience*, pp. 57–58. See also James Tracy, *Direct Action: Radical Pacifism from the Union Eight to the Chicago Seven*, (Chicago: University of

Certainly, the programme's deeply unsatisfactory labour regime - alongside other factors such as financial difficulty and perceived intimidation by CPS administrators - pushed at least 300 COs to 'walk out' of CPS.<sup>6</sup>

Federal authorities invariably apprehended CO walkouts and held them in local and county jails before placing them on trial for violating the STSA. Prison sentences varied geographically and depending on the individual severity of the presiding judges, with most COs receiving eighteen months imprisonment up to 1942, and around eighty-five to ninety months imprisonment from 1942 to 1945.<sup>7</sup> Following sentencing, authorities handed COs over to the Bureau of Prisons for incarceration.

When they repudiated CPS in favour of prison, many COs mirrored the concerns of Don DeVault, a CO chemist who walked out of CPS Germfask (Michigan) in 1944. DeVault argued that he did not 'object to making sacrifices' in CPS, but to the 'uselessness of the particular sacrifices that the authorities' designated for COs. He linked his rejection of 'made work' in CPS to a broader critique of the government's handling of its twin duties of preserving freedom of conscience at home and defending democracy abroad. That CPS labour was unsatisfactory was not the issue *per se*; for DeVault, the issue was the fact that 'useless' labour in CPS became a 'punishment for being conscientiously opposed' to war. Commenting on DeVault's case, another CO, Purnell Benson, put it succinctly: the state's refusal to live up to its promise to provide 'work of national importance' constituted 'religious persecution,' and a failure to recognize freedom of conscience. DeVault's protests also highlighted how ideas about manly independence suffused COs' understandings of labour dignity and religious freedom. The exasperated chemist told his parole board that 'to actually obtain' worthwhile work opportunities, 'one must behave servilely and show a respect for CPS which I honestly do not have.'<sup>8</sup> For many COs, CPS labour represented a type of 'involuntary servitude' that erased their individuality by making them dependent on the state. This CPS 'slavery' forced COs to put aside their manly pride and work at

---

Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 12–20; and Scott H. Bennett, *Radical Pacifism: The War Resisters League and Gandhian Nonviolence in America, 1915-1963*, (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), pp. 100–113.

<sup>6</sup>Jehovah's Witnesses made up around 75% of the CO prison population. For this figure and the differing treatment given to various religious affiliations, see Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*, pp. 332–34; and Keim and Stoltzfus, *The Politics of Conscience*, pp. 120–26. See also Bennett, *Radical Pacifism*, pp. 100–103.

<sup>7</sup>Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*, pp. 246–51.

<sup>8</sup>All quotes taken from Purnell Benson, 'Penicillin Study Threatened by Chemist's Arrest' (27 October 1944), Henry LeRoy Finch Papers, Box 1, 'Reference Material re. CPS: statements against CPS or conscription', Swarthmore College Peace Collection [hereinafter SCPC].

## CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' SECOND WORLD WAR PROTESTS

tasks better suited to what one CO disparagingly called 'an able-bodied moron.'<sup>9</sup> This kind of thinking demonstrated a logic, common amongst COs, which intertwined labour dignity and religious freedom with a concern for the endurance of independent CO manhood.

In CPS's erosion of the dignity of labour, religious freedom, and manly independence, DeVault diagnosed an altogether more harrowing condition. The 'old American "individualist" world' in which men secured the welfare of their families by performing their labour 'with skill and imagination' was disappearing; government had become so intrusive that a man's only 'responsibility' was to 'obey orders.' The kind of 'discipline' required in CPS produced only 'unimaginative slaves.' The 'unimportance of work' both broke men's spirit and reduced their productivity. Prolonged isolation from women broke up the 'family system.' The result, DeVault warned, would be the downfall of American democracy.<sup>10</sup> If historians have decisively repudiated the notion that the Second World War was a 'good war,' then DeVault and the men he represented deserve their place in this critical historiography.<sup>11</sup>

Frustration with CPS was widespread, but COs of the non-resistant Mennonite and Brethren traditions largely avoided political intervention *à la* DeVault. Indeed, it fell to a self-defined cadre of 'radical pacifists' to animate CO protest in the Second World War. James Tracy and Scott Bennett emphasise the charismatic leadership of activists like Dave Dellinger, Bayard Rustin, and James Farmer in resisting conscription and protesting racial segregation in the nation's prisons but largely underplay the continued significance of the CPS labour regime and of religion to imprisoned COs' protests.<sup>12</sup> Other historians have situated the prison experiences of American pacifists within longer histories. Joseph Kip Kosek argues that Rustin and other Fellowship of

---

<sup>9</sup>Channing B. Richardson to Friends, February 21, 1943, Civilian Public Service Personal Papers and Collected Materials, Box 3, Channing Richardson Correspondence (1943), SCPC.

<sup>10</sup>Don DeVault, 'Conscription and Personality', *CPS-GI*, December 1944, Caleb Foote Papers (MS 1013), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts, Amherst [hereinafter SCUA-UMA].

<sup>11</sup>For an introduction to historiographical revision of the so-called 'good war' narrative, see Michael C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). For recent additions to this critical historiography, focused on the disreputable behavior of American servicemen, see Aaron Hiltner, *Taking Leave, Taking Liberties: American Troops on the World War II Home Front*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020); and Ruth Lawlor, "Contested Crimes: Race, Gender, and Nation in Histories of GI Sexual Violence, World War II," *Journal of Military History* 84 (April 2020): pp. 541–69.

<sup>12</sup>Tracy, *Direct Action*, pp. 12–46; Bennett, *Radical Pacifism*, pp. 98–133.

Reconciliation (FOR) members became a 'vanguard of the more famous nonviolent movements of the 1960s' through their commitments to radical dissent while imprisoned.<sup>13</sup> Marian Mollin, James Tracy, and Scott Bennett similarly understand COs' wartime prison experiences as a launchpad for the radical pacifism that would shape pacifist protest following the war. Tracy in particular notes that during the war radical pacifists began to 'shift their agenda away from labor,' that 'fetish of the Old Left,' while producing an intensely individualist, libertarian resistance movement against 'nascent totalitarianism.'<sup>14</sup> Others have emphasized how prisons acted as a crucible for the forging of heroic, sacrificial models of manhood which 'masculinised' the peace movement. This 'masculinisation' prepared the peace movement for its 1960s heyday while insulating its leadership from the gendered and racial concerns of women and African Americans with whom it could have made strategic alliances.<sup>15</sup>

Protest in CPS certainly prepared radical pacifists for their postwar activist careers, but what ingredients produced that crucible? A complex interplay of ideas about religion and manly dignity was crucial to the production of a pacifist critique of the coercive bureaucratic machinery that imprisoned COs, religious and secular, saw as the defining feature of the wartime state. Labour, crucially, retained critical importance in this critique. It hinged on the notion that labour coercion in CPS directly undermined the nation's stated wartime objectives. The author places the actions of the radicals associated with this critique – Don DeVault, Stanley Murphy, and Louis Taylor-Krawczyk to name a few – in their wider religious and labour-driven contexts. Rather than viewing their prison protests primarily as rehearsals for postwar pacifist activism or as an early stage of the nonviolent civil rights movement, this article explores how the immediate context of the Second World War acted as a central component of their critique. Before they gained fame for their heroic protests against prison segregation, the men who left CPS argued that seemingly arbitrary and authoritarian government signalled the corrosion of individual and, importantly, *masculine*, character and moral responsibility; it also signalled that while the

---

<sup>13</sup>Joseph Kip Kosek, *Acts of Conscience: Christian Nonviolence and Modern American Democracy*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 147–48.

<sup>14</sup>Marian Mollin, *Radical Pacifism in Modern America: Egalitarianism and Protest*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Tracy, *Direct Action*, pp. 36–40; Bennett, *Radical Pacifism*.

<sup>15</sup>Timothy Stewart-Winter, 'Not a Soldier, Not a Slacker': Conscientious Objectors and Male Citizenship in the United States During the Second World War,' *Gender and History* 19, no. 3, (November 2007): pp. 519–42; Mollin, *Radical Pacifism in Modern America*, pp. 16–17. Mollin details pacifists' appropriation of the aesthetic of 'blue-collar' machismo of working-class men without analysing why this association came naturally to CO prison protestors.

## CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' SECOND WORLD WAR PROTESTS

government was fighting a war to preserve democracy abroad, it was unshackling the forces of totalitarianism at home.

### **The CPS Walk-Out Explained**

Most CPS walkouts blamed the work's coercive nature for their protest. This issue connected labour indignity to Christian notions of individual responsibility and gendered conceptions of brave, moral nonconformism. Walkouts suggested that these pillars combined to provide the scaffolds upon which individuality was built. If the state eroded any of these pillars, it would collapse that scaffold and mirror the totalitarian practices of America's undemocratic enemies. Walking out of CPS thus became part of a larger crusade: not just a rejection of insufficiently meaningful labour, but a protest against totalitarianism's encroachment into American life.

Walkouts criticised CPS for diminishing the dignity of labour. George Kingsley, a Presbyterian CO, promised to 'sever... relationships with C.P.S.' in October 1942. He justified his decision by arguing that CPS relegated 'the dignity of labor to that of serfdom; it means servility to Selective Service.' Like Don DeVault, Kingsley tied the notion of servility to the idea that to deny 'the right of individuals to pursue their vocations' was to deny freedom of conscience. Continued cooperation with this autonomy-erasing, servility-inducing programme, Kingsley argued, would make him a 'traitor to [his] innermost convictions'<sup>16</sup> Walking out of CPS, for Kingsley, entailed rejecting the diminution of his freedom by asserting his right to work free from the compulsion of Selective Service.

Other CPS walkouts reproduced Kingsley's argument in starker terms. Writing from Hudson County Jail in Jersey City, Bill Kuenning cast the programme as an 'immoral institution' because it upheld a 'form of slavery' through unpaid work that was 'not of primary significance.'<sup>17</sup> Art Brown, a CO and former textile worker, explained that working without pay in CPS was 'Slave Labor' and that the religious council in charge of the programme was '100% in favor of slavery.'<sup>18</sup> For Kingsley, Kuenning, and Brown, coerced labour in CPS rendered the individual less than whole, dependent and unfree.

---

<sup>16</sup>George R. Kingsley, 'Conscience Cannot Compromise': Statement of George R. Kingsley,' Big Flats, New York, October 13, 1942, Henry LeRoy Finch Papers, Box 1, Reference Material re. CPS: statements against CPS or conscription, SCPC.

<sup>17</sup>William Kuenning, Open Letter to the Friends Intelligencer, Jersey City, New Jersey, June 5, 1943, Henry LeRoy Finch Papers, Box 1, Reference Material re. CPS: statements against CPS or conscription, SCPC.

<sup>18</sup>Arthur Brown, My Reasons for Leaving CPS, Undated, Henry LeRoy Finch Papers, Box 1, Reference Material re. CPS: statements against CPS or conscription, SCPC.

When protesting the indignity of CPS labour, COs also drew on religious imagery to argue that the programme offended Christian conceptions of labour's importance. Brown invoked the scriptures to highlight how Christian notions of a man's responsibility to provide for his household mapped neatly on to mid-century labour ideology that cast the ideal male as a household breadwinner and protector.<sup>19</sup> The Bible's Timothy 5:18, he recalled, teaches how the labourer is worthy of his reward. Timothy 5:8, meanwhile, reveals that anyone who provides 'not for his own ... hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.'<sup>20</sup> For Brown, working without pay both undermined men's ability to uphold proper gender roles and implicated them in a betrayal of God's commands.

Spiritual concerns also underpinned COs' frequent invocations of the human personality. Since the 1930s, even non-pacifist churches had been warning the faithful that war was a 'violation of the human personality.' Once Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and Germany declared war on the United States, however, previously anti-war churches scrambled to justify their new-found support for the war. They modified their concerns for human individuality; now, it was America's duty to combat totalitarian regimes that erased the sanctity of the human personality by exalting the state as supreme and making men 'selfless cogs' in its machinery. The churches supported the war as one between ideologies; freedom-loving and God-fearing democracy versus slavery-inducing, state-worshipping totalitarianism.<sup>21</sup> When COs charged CPS with violating freedom of conscience and preventing them from realizing the depths of the human personality, they were then simply extending to their own government a religious critique that their churches had been making in the global context for the best part of a decade.

Countless COs argued along these lines. In May 1945, Donald Lehman, a walkout from CPS #59 at Elkton, Oregon, argued that in the wartime United States, freedom of religion meant only that it was 'permissible for an individual to be conscientiously opposed to participation in war.' If the same individual protested the subjugation of

---

<sup>19</sup>Gregory Wood, *Retiring Men: Manhood, Labor, and Growing Old in America, 1900-1960*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2012), pp. 7-8.

<sup>20</sup>Brown, "My Reasons for Leaving CPS."

<sup>21</sup>General Conference of the Methodist Church, 1936; Methodist Council of Bishops, 1942; both quoted in Gerald L. Sittser, *A Cautious Patriotism: The American Churches and the Second World War*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 4, p. 19. Patricia Faith Appelbaum, *Kingdom to Commune: Protestant Pacifist Culture Between World War I and the Vietnam Era*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 18. Gary J. Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity, 1900-1950*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), pp. 151-216.

## CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' SECOND WORLD WAR PROTESTS

labour in CPS, the 'result [was] imprisonment.' Lehman fumed that it was a 'mockery to call this freedom of religion when the State is allowed to rule what a person's religion may be!' The consequences would rebound into the 'personal lives of the citizenry.' Name-checking Don DeVault, he argued that 'the acceptance of bureaucratic control' would be accompanied by a 'loss of the sense of personal responsibility and a suppression of individual initiative.'<sup>22</sup>

Seven COs who walked out of the CPS camp at Coshocton, Ohio, in June 1943 concurred: they argued that CPS labour resulted in 'the curbing of the mind, the crushing of the spirit.'<sup>23</sup> For Philip Kelsey, a Quaker who walked out of CPS after only two months in late 1942, CPS represented an 'absolute denial of the fundamental sanctity of the human personality' that denied the validity of 'the teachings of Jesus' and the 'necessary assumptions involved with a belief in representative government.'<sup>24</sup> The imposition of a coerced labour regime constituted both the rejection of the Messiah's word and the denial of the right, central to America's democratic promise, to freedom of religion.

While they grounded their protests in the dignity of labour and freedom of conscience, COs also betrayed a masculinist streak within their critique of CPS. Perhaps to deflect gendered criticisms levelled at COs from outside the pacifist community – critics frequently labelled COs as cowards, sissies, and 'yellow-bellies' – walkouts frequently articulated their protests as acts of masculine bravery.<sup>25</sup> Art Brown suggested that to maintain his inability to provide for his dependents by remaining in CPS would be 'dishonest, selfish, cowardly, and inconsistent.'<sup>26</sup> Charles Butcher claimed that to avoid conflict with the draft would 'have been an admission of cowardice and weakness.'<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup>Donald Lehman, Civilian Public Service: A Conscription of Conscience, Elkton, Oregon, May 28, 1945, Bent Andresen Papers, Box 1, Reference Material re. conscientious objectors, etc., SCPC.

<sup>23</sup>Coshocton Walkouts, We Seven Are Walking Out of CPS, Coshocton, Ohio, June 7, 1943, Henry LeRoy Finch Papers, Box 1, Reference Material re. CPS: statements against CPS or conscription, SCPC.

<sup>24</sup>Philip M. Kelsey, Statement Against CPS, December 1942, Henry LeRoy Finch Papers, Box 1, Reference Material re. CPS: statements against CPS or conscription, SCPC.

<sup>25</sup>On these gendered critiques, see especially Stewart-Winter, "Not a Soldier, Not a Slacker."

<sup>26</sup>Arthur Brown, 'Why I Left CPS,' Erie, Pennsylvania, September 28, 1943, Henry LeRoy Finch Papers, Box 1, Reference Material re. CPS: statements against CPS or conscription, SCPC.

<sup>27</sup>Charles Butcher, 'The Absolutists Were Right,' Washington, D.C, February 9, 1943, Henry LeRoy Finch Papers, Box 1, Reference Material re. CPS: statements against CPS or conscription, SCPC.

Passive acquiescence to CPS labour represented not just a failure of moral duty, but of masculine duty, too.

Paton Price, who registered as a CO in 1940 due to his 'social, humanitarian, and religious beliefs,' wrote to Attorney General Francis Biddle in December 1942 to explain his upcoming 'civil disobedience.' To 'acquiesce' to the conscription machine while knowing in his heart that this course was wrong would be to deny 'the sanctity of the personality.' Denying one's internal morality was, crucially, 'the device of cowards' and the 'suicide of moral and religious life.'<sup>28</sup> Conversely, Don DeVault criticized COs for showing a 'lack of courage' in putting their material comfort above their moral scruples by accepting the relative comfort of CPS over the moral imperative of rejecting its labour regime.<sup>29</sup> Within pacifist thought, a preoccupation with affirming moral, masculine bravery and independence aligned closely with protests against the indignity of CPS labour and violations of religious freedom.

The masculine imperative to denounce cowardice combined with labour-infused religious protest to form the basis of an emerging pacifist critique concerned, ultimately, with the preservation of American democracy. If political scientist Ira Katznelson is correct that a 'climate of universal fear' became a 'permanent condition' for Americans in the 1930s and 1940s as totalitarian regimes grew in strength in Europe and Russia, then such fears were particularly acute for COs who found themselves at the blunt end of American governance.<sup>30</sup> As such, many CPS walkouts directed their protests against the perceived petty or quasi-authoritarian nature of the programme, which, they believed, undermined the United States' global commitment to preserving democracy.

Art Brown certainly envisioned the links between labour, religious freedom, and manly individuality as crucial bulwarks against creeping totalitarianism. Propaganda which diffused the 'repeated story that we are fighting for freedom and democracy,' Brown announced, compelled COs to 'look and see what is happening from sources right within our own nation.' Brown criticized wage stagnation, extensions of executive power, organised labour's wartime no-strike pledges, discrimination against African Americans 'in the army and in industry,' and the 'disgrace' of 'Japanese American concentration camps.' But he geared his argument primarily toward another 'disgrace':

---

<sup>28</sup> Paton Price to Frances Biddle, December 14, 1942, copy in Henry LeRoy Finch Papers, Box 1, Reference Material re. CPS: statements against CPS or conscription, SCPC.

<sup>29</sup> Don DeVault to Caleb Foote, August 11, 1944, Caleb Foote Papers (MS 1013), SCUA-UMA.

<sup>30</sup> Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*, (New York: Liveright, 2013), pp. 12–13.

## CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' SECOND WORLD WAR PROTESTS

CPS. He lamented that the 'fundamentalists' in CPS were, because they worked without pay, 'forced to violate Bible doctrines such as "the laborer is worthy of his hire."' For Brown, CPS denied its participants the chance to 'know how best they can contribute to society,' relegating the dignity of their labour by imploring them to 'follow the dictates of the state.' The moment required nonconformists to show the power of individuality by refusing to 'swallow all newspaper, radio, and movie propaganda'; it required men like Brown, who were 'interested in the future freedom of America' to take a courageous stand and 'nip it in the bud.' If they did not, the 'land of the free' would continue 'stumbling headfirst into totalitarianism.'<sup>31</sup>

What is most interesting about Brown's quite extraordinary language is that it was so unextraordinary among COs who walked out of CPS. Brown sent a transcript of an anti-CPS statement that he gave at his draft violation trial in September 1943 to every CPS camp in the country. Whether they read his message or not, other COs shared Brown's fear that the United States was engaged in a hypocritical totalitarian experiment in its administration of CPS. The seven COs who walked out of Coshocton that summer mirrored Brown's language almost exactly: CPS was conscription, and conscription required the individual to deny his religious expression and the dignity of his labour and instead follow the 'dictates of the state.'<sup>32</sup>

Others made the same point in different words. In a 1943 letter to friends in CPS, the Congregationalist CO Paul Kermiet announced that he refused 'any longer to give obeisance to the war-making state in its programme of conscription and regimentation.' Life in the 'ivory towers' of CPS represented a subservience to the state which contradicted his faith's command to obey God alone.<sup>33</sup> Historians have conducted rich explorations of the dilemma pacifists faced when attempting to navigate the competing claims of church and state.<sup>34</sup> But the extent to which COs like Kermiet saw religious freedom and the dignity of labour as intimately enmeshed elements in their rejection of the modern state's conscription system evidences the centrality of these two factors to the emerging pacifist critique of totalitarianism. Acceptance of CPS entailed approval of slave labour and the 'way of violence and to the State's pre-eminence over God.' It erased the 'sanctity of the human personality.' By coercing their labour, Kermiet wrote with metaphorical flourish, the state made

---

<sup>31</sup>Brown, 'Why I Left CPS.'

<sup>32</sup>Coshocton Walkouts, 'We Seven Are Walking Out of CPS.'

<sup>33</sup>Paul J. Kermiet to Henry LeRoy Finch Jr. and Karl Olsen, June 6, 1943, Henry LeRoy Finch Papers, Box 1, Reference Material re. CPS: statements against CPS or conscription, SCPC.

<sup>34</sup>For this theme in relation to a pacifist church, see Perry Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties: Mennonite Pacifism in Modern America*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

'automatons' of COs, 'Frankenstein monsters' who existed only on an 'animal' level. This mutilated humanity prevented the blossoming of individual personality, which God desired to 'remain inviolable.'<sup>35</sup>

Paton Price left CPS in 1942 because the 'seizure of an individual' and his labour by the state, predicated a 'concept of political absolutism' which prevented men from realizing their heavenly ordained 'human personality.' The ultimate result was the degradation of the 'individual into a puppet of tyranny.'<sup>36</sup> Three years later, Donald Lehman echoed the worries of Brown, Kermiet, Price, and the Coshocton COs: 'if democracy is to survive,' the state must not be allowed to direct the 'working' of citizens along lines they did not deem 'socially useful.'<sup>37</sup>

Throughout the war, then, CPS walkouts protested CPS as a symbolic assault on homegrown totalitarianism. Conscription of labour in CPS made COs cogs in the state machine, instruments rather than people, or, as Price worded it, 'means and never... ends.'<sup>38</sup> At the same time, relieving COs of control over their labour offended their religious sensibilities by denying them to actualize their individual 'personalities.' Labour in CPS, far from being a hallmark of democratic tolerance, emerged as a punishment, a denial of freedom of conscience. The servility that emerged from both the material fact of working under compulsion for no pay and being prevented from realizing one's individuality in turn threatened to undermine COs' sense of themselves as men. These threads knotted in COs' characterisations of CPS as an authoritarian weapon which, if left unchecked, promised to bludgeon the foundations of American democracy.

### **Democracy Begins at Home: The Murphy-Taylor Hunger Strike, 1943**

In walking out of CPS and into prison, COs took the first steps in what for many became a long march of protest. Some saw imprisonment as the end of their dissent. Agard Bailey, the CO son of an Army colonel, petitioned the government to *return* to prison after having been paroled to CPS because he found 'prison conditions more satisfactory and prison work more important than the work in the CPS camp.'<sup>39</sup> Others, to varying degrees of extremity, redoubled their protests against CPS labour once imprisoned.

---

<sup>35</sup>Paul J. Kermiet to Henry LeRoy Finch Jr. and Karl Olsen.

<sup>36</sup>Paton Price to Frances Biddle.

<sup>37</sup>Lehman, *Civilian Public Service: A Conscription of Conscience*.

<sup>38</sup>Paton Price to Frances Biddle.

<sup>39</sup>Agard Bailey, quoted in Henry LeRoy Finch, Jr., *A Note on CPS 'Walkouts, 1946*, Henry LeRoy Finch Papers, Box 1, Reference Material re. CPS: statements against CPS or conscription, SCPC.

## CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' SECOND WORLD WAR PROTESTS

The most dramatic of these protests had its origin in October 1942, when twelve COs at the camp at Big Flats, New York, initiated a work strike protesting Selective Service's refusal to pay for car insurance for COs who drove trucks on CPS assignments. Following several failed attempts to resolve the dispute, two of the camp's labour representatives, Stanley Murphy and Louis Krawczyk (who preferred the English equivalent surname, 'Taylor'), walked out of the camp.<sup>40</sup> War Resisters League (WRL) chairman Frank Olmstead had singled Murphy and Taylor out as 'somewhat restless' in their application to CPS as early as November 1941; the incident at Big Flats fanned their simmering restlessness into open revolt.<sup>41</sup>

Though they expressed their opposition to CPS in terms far more dramatic than most COs, Murphy's and Taylor's protest hinged on the same trifecta of labour dignity, religious freedom, and pacifist manhood that animated the walkouts discussed above. Again, this trifecta had as its corollary the idea that American democracy was at stake in the treatment of the nation's COs. Taylor, an apprentice letter-carrier before the war, argued that CPS represented the state's failure to recognize 'fundamental, religious freedom' and that only complete exemption from the draft would allow COs to realize their human personalities by fulfilling their individual 'social responsibilities.'<sup>42</sup> Murphy, previously an apprentice mechanic at La Guardia Airport, emphasised that Christianity was 'insistent upon righteousness' and that 'no deviation' was possible once a man had dedicated himself to a principle. Any man who accepted the state's direction to murder his fellow man betrayed his own righteousness, and in doing so became 'irresponsible and los[t] his manhood.'<sup>43</sup> From the outset, Murphy and Taylor shared other walkouts' conviction that CPS failed to uphold the dignity of labour and religious freedom, which in turn prevented COs' maintenance of proper manliness.

Following their sentencing, Murphy and Taylor entered the Federal Correctional Institution at Danbury, Connecticut, on February 12, 1943. Within hours they initiated the next stage of their protest, a 'fast unto death' against the conscription of pacifists' labour into CPS. Prisons Bureau Director James Bennett later noted that the COs had been preparing this protest since they had walked out of Big Flats, and that they

---

<sup>40</sup>Bennett, *Radical Pacifism*, pp. 101–102.

<sup>41</sup>Frank Olmstead to Paul Johnson, 17 November 1941, Center on Conscience and War Records [hereafter CCW] 1A, Box 32, Correspondence, Etc. Organizations/Denominations/Peace Leaders: Frank Olmstead, (War Resisters League), 1940 (Dec.)-1941, SCPC.

<sup>42</sup>Louis Taylor, Statement of Louis Taylor-Krawczyk: Thoughts for the Second Anniversary of Conscription, *Grass Roots*, October 1942, American Friends Service Committee [hereinafter AFSC], CPS Records, CPS Camp Periodicals, Box 11, SCPC.

<sup>43</sup>Statement of Stanley Murphy, *Grass Roots* (Big Flats, NY), October 1942, AFSC CPS Records, CPS Camp Periodicals, Box 11, SCPC.

'refused food beginning with the first meal after their arrival' at Danbury. Seventeen days later, the prison's medical director advised that they be tube-fed. After eighty-two days, they ended their strike, believing Selective Service to be on the verge of liberalizing parole conditions in the mental health and charity sectors. When it became clear that the COs and Selective Service would not come to an acceptable resolution as to what constituted 'liberalized parole,' Murphy and Taylor determined to remain in prison. The Bureau transferred them to the medical centre at the prison complex in Springfield, Missouri, where they continued to aggravate penal authorities.<sup>44</sup>

At Springfield, Murphy and Taylor protested the general mistreatment of prisoners. While arguably this critique represented an extension of COs' denunciation of antidemocratic, corporatised tendencies within CPS, their hunger strike from Danbury is of most relevance here.<sup>45</sup> Murphy and Taylor articulated their 'fast unto death' as a direct continuation of the protest they began by leaving Big Flats. As Bennett noted, they told prison officials that they had been preparing their non-cooperation since leaving the camp.<sup>46</sup> Their decision to refuse food was undoubtedly an incredibly dramatic step, but its premise was the same as that of the CPS walk-out: CPS denied the dignity of labour, religious freedom, and CO manhood. Allowed to continue, it undermined democracy's survival in America.

What should we extrapolate from these radicals' actions? Radicals they certainly were. Multiple COs engaged in hunger strikes during the war, making their bodies the site of their protest: in summer 1942, Corbett Bishop refused food in solidarity with Mohandas Gandhi and the Indian independence movement; in 1943, he began another hunger strike, this time against the maintenance of 'peonage and involuntary servitude in CPS.'<sup>47</sup> Radical pacifists fasted to protest Jim Crow at Danbury and later censorship at Lewisburg Penitentiary.<sup>48</sup> Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolent resistance, *Satyagraha*,

---

<sup>44</sup>James V. Bennett, Inquiry into Charges of Mistreatment of Inmates of the Medical Center for Federal Prisoners at Springfield, Missouri, March 3, 1944, CCW-1B, Box 90, Prisons/C.O. Prisoners: COs in Springfield Federal Prison Camp/Medical Center for Federal Prisoners (MO) [includes lists of COs and Jehovah's Witnesses, and reports etc. re: brutality toward COs and other prisoners., SCPC.

<sup>45</sup>See Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*, pp. 413-416, for a discussion of Murphy and Taylor at Springfield. For COs' attempts to reassert the individual's autonomy in "corporate" society, see Tracy, *Direct Action*, p. 40.

<sup>46</sup>Bennett, Inquiry into Charges of Mistreatment of Inmates of the Medical Center for Federal Prisoners at Springfield, Missouri.

<sup>47</sup>Protest, *The Reporter*, Washington, D.C., 1 July 1943.

<sup>48</sup>On Bishop, see Sibley and Jacob, *Conscription of Conscience*, pp. 401-9. On Dellinger, see Bennett, *Radical Pacifism*, pp. 126-31. For another pacifist's recollections of protest

## CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' SECOND WORLD WAR PROTESTS

faith in the efficacy of dramatic demonstrations of willingness to peacefully struggle for one's principles – what Don DeVault called the Mahatma's 'law of suffering' – won many American CO converts as they socialised in CPS.<sup>49</sup> Adherence to such methods, though, was rare, and did not always draw praise, even from those sympathetic to the pacifist cause. In 1945, the historian Harry Elmer Barnes suggested that if COs were 'lined up and shot in the next war,' it would be because people had no sympathy for the 'exhibition and eccentricities' of men like Murphy and Taylor.<sup>50</sup> The Murphy-Taylor hunger strike, though, is less important for what it reveals about the men themselves than for the insights it provides into how those across the country who sympathised with pacifists (and even many who did not) came to accept the warnings of CPS walkouts concerning the program's totalitarian bent.

At CPS Powellville (Maryland), COs took up Murphy and Taylor's cause. Fifteen COs wrote directly to President Roosevelt to announce that from March 10-12, 1943, they would stage a hunger strike of their own in sympathy with the Danbury strikers. Their most immediate concern was for the 'demoralizing effects of wasting energy and talent' in CPS. They lamented that their labour was 'made insignificant by the suffering around us,' and that they operated under 'slave labor conditions.' Here again, protest against CPS hinged on the idea that the programme undermined the dignity of labour.<sup>51</sup>

The Powellville COs' concern for democracy's survival was less pronounced, but they hinted at it all the same. They felt a duty 'as citizens' to protest 'the present situation.' They wedded the idea that citizens of a democracy should protest authoritarian infractions to the idea that to do so represented a moral and, if we accept contemporary rhetoric which equated aggressive patriotism with masculinity, manly failure.<sup>52</sup> To 'waste our prime and resources' was 'not only immoral, but unpatriotic,' charged the Powellville COs. At the same time, they voiced their appreciation for their 'courageous and conscientious comrades at Danbury,' again indicating the valorised position of the masculine-coded qualities of bravery and steadfastness within the CO milieu.<sup>53</sup> At Coshocton, another group of COs reiterated the point a month later:

---

at Danbury, see Harold Schoenfeld, "The Danbury Story," in *The Pacifist Conscience*, ed. Peter Mayer, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), pp. 332–45.

<sup>49</sup>Don DeVault to Caleb Foote. On Gandhi's influence on American COs, via the work of Krishnalal Shridharani, see Kosek, *Acts of Conscience*, pp. 179–81.

<sup>50</sup>Harry Elmer Barnes to Facts-On-Murphy-And-Taylor-Committee, Washington, D.C., February 3, 1945, Caleb Foote Papers (MS 1013), SCUA-UMA.

<sup>51</sup>CPS #52 to Franklin Roosevelt, 10 March 1943, RG147, Conscientious Objectors General File, Container 194, Danbury Prison Strike Materials, National Archives and Records Administration [hereinafter NARA 2], College Park, Maryland.

<sup>52</sup>On this association, see Stewart-Winter, "Not a Soldier, Not a Slacker."

<sup>53</sup>CPS #52 to Franklin Roosevelt.

‘Men with such strength of character’ could ‘never be broken.’<sup>54</sup> In June, the seven COs who walked out of the camp, reproduced Murphy and Taulor’s concern for democracy by arguing that remaining in the programme would give ‘tacit and moral approval’ to ‘the trend toward totalitarianism.’<sup>55</sup>

The actions of the Powellville and Coshocton COs are somewhat unsurprising: Murphy had spent time at Coshocton, and the COs there expressed no shock that he took a dramatic stand for ‘freedom of conscience.’<sup>56</sup> The Murphy-Taylor strike, in this sense, indicated only that many CPS men shared their concern for labour dignity, religious expression, and manly character. The strike’s greater significance lay in the fact that it disseminated this concern beyond CPS. Led by the WRL and the FOR, concerned citizens across the United States petitioned for Murphy’s and Taylor’s release and for the recalibration of the CPS labour regime in more meaningful directions. These sympathisers occasionally addressed their concerns to the President, and often to the Attorney General. Their primary target, however, was Selective Service Director General Lewis B. Hershey, the man charged with presiding over CPS. Hundreds of pages of epistolary protest survive in letters to Hershey; they offer a window into a different wartime America, one receptive to COs’ critiques of CPS and the threat it supposedly posed to American democracy. Their authors’ fears rested on the same concerns about labour dignity, religious persecution, and pacifist masculinity that animated the protests of CPS walkouts and the Danbury hunger strikers.

For Horace Berg, a Midwesterner who had a ‘son in the army’ and who was ‘not a CO himself,’ CPS clearly constituted involuntary servitude, rather than a gracious accommodation of pacifist oddities. He praised Murphy and Taylor for taking a stand that would make them ‘unpopular and persecuted more or less by society as a whole.’ He then attacked CPS for reducing COs to a ‘basis of labor that is lower than slavery.’ In logic uncomfortable to modern ears, he argued that COs were actually *worse off* than the enslaved had been because COs had to pay for their own maintenance in CPS. Linking the indignity of CPS labour to the notion that America was a Christian nation, Berg claimed that ‘Christian principles’ were ‘absolutely fundamental to national progress.’ The relegation of COs to this ‘reduced basis of labor’ evidenced the rejection of these ‘Christian principles’ and, by extension, America’s stunted

---

<sup>54</sup>CPS Side Camp, Sherrodsville, Ohio, to Lewis B. Hershey, April 12, 1943, RG147, Conscientious Objectors General File, Container 194, Danbury Prison Strike Materials, NARA 2.

<sup>55</sup>Protest, *The Reporter*, Philadelphia, 1 July 1943.

<sup>56</sup>CPS Side Camp, Sherrodsville, Ohio, to Lewis B. Hershey.

## CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' SECOND WORLD WAR PROTESTS

progress as a democratic state. Murphy's and Taylor's release would offer a step toward such progress.<sup>57</sup>

Berg was no socialist, but his complaints mirrored those the Socialist Party sent Hershey's way. The Party's Committee on Conscientious Objectors wrote to Hershey after the Powellville COs announced their sympathy strike. Characteristically, the Committee's concerns centred largely on the labour issue: CPS work was 'made work' and the 'conditions of work without remuneration were equivalent to slave labor.'<sup>58</sup> A Congregationalist from Chicago similarly wrote to Hershey that work in CPS was 'more "made work" than "work of national importance."<sup>59</sup> From New York, Julius Eichel, one of the few radical COs to be arrested for their objection in both World Wars, argued that CPS labour was 'enslavement.'<sup>60</sup> In a letter to Roosevelt, he called for the unconditional and immediate release of Murphy and Taylor, labelling their imprisonment the oppression 'of men who refuse to submit to involuntary servitude.'<sup>61</sup> Clearly, across the country pacifists and non-pacifists alike bought into COs' arguments that CPS erased the dignity of their labour and unleashed those arguments at powerful figures in government office.

Walkouts' arguments about the threat CPS posed to freedom of religion won similar purchase among concerned Americans. Historians generally downplay the religiosity of the Murphy-Taylor strike, implying that the main object of their worship was the WRL's anti-war position.<sup>62</sup> Contemporary observers saw differently. A New York correspondent, Frances Stewart, wrote to Hershey to describe Murphy and Taylor as 'men of sufficient courage to endure persecution and hardships in defense of their spiritual convictions,' highlighting again an overlap between appreciation for male-

---

<sup>57</sup>Horace H. Berg to Lewis B. Hershey, April 24, 1943, RG147, Conscientious Objectors General File, Container 194, Danbury Prison Strike Materials, NARA 2.

<sup>58</sup>Socialist Party Committee on Conscientious Objectors to Lewis B. Hershey, March 20, 1943, RG147, Conscientious Objectors General File, Container 194, Danbury Prison Strike Materials, NARA 2.

<sup>59</sup>George Vician to Lewis B. Hershey, March 24, 1943, RG147, Conscientious Objectors General File, Container 194, Danbury Prison Strike Materials, NARA 2.

<sup>60</sup>Julius Eichel to Grover M. Moscowitz, April 15, 1943, RG147, Conscientious Objectors General File, Container 194, Danbury Prison Strike Materials, NARA 2.

<sup>61</sup>Julius Eichel to Franklin D. Roosevelt, March 22, 1943, RG147, Conscientious Objectors General File, Container 194, Danbury Prison Strike Materials, NARA 2. For another CO who was arrested in both wars, see Max Sandin, *I Was Sentenced to Be Shot: Autobiography of a Political Objector*, ed. Ruth Benn and Ed Hedemann, (Brooklyn: Max Sandin Pacifist Cell, 2024).

<sup>62</sup>Bennett, *Radical Pacifism*, pp. 88–94.

coded bravery and religious steadfastness.<sup>63</sup> A Bostonian reverend made the same connection: Murphy and Taylor were serving God, and God was 'higher than the State and conscience is supreme.' Their actions proved not just their own bravery, but the 'sincerity, courage, and character' of all COs.<sup>64</sup> These correspondents saw the hallmarks of pacifist masculinity in the hunger strike and stressed how Murphy and Taylor utilised these traits to protest the suppression of Christian spirituality.

Other commentators emphasised the connections between Christianity and labour. Agnes Schultz implored Hershey to release the hunger strikers, claiming that being forced to work 'for nothing' was 'against all the laws of God and man.' She drew on the same Biblical imagery as Art Brown to stress that God's will was for labourers to receive their just rewards, and for labour itself to be worthy. 'If America is a Christian country,' Schultz concluded, then it had to uphold this 'Golden rule.'<sup>65</sup> Walkouts' insistence that CPS depended on a violation of Christian principles concerning the dignity of labour had clearly won adherents beyond the boundaries of their camps and jail cells.

The frequent invocations of 'courage' and 'endurance' in letters to Hershey demonstrated how, in a general sense, the COs' preoccupation with defending their manhood had also spread beyond the confines of CPS and prison. The people closest to Murphy and Taylor, though, identified that ideas about manhood played a more fundamental role in their protest, one concerned not with defending COs' individual masculinities, but with ensuring that all COs received treatment befitting their positions *as men*.

Lena Jaffe, the mother of a Jewish CPS assignee, attended a meeting of the Parents of Conscientious Objectors in Jersey City in March 1943. There she met the 'mothers of Stanley Murphy and Louis Taylor.' The next day, Jaffe related to Hershey the stories of these 'heartsick but proud mothers.' They told Jaffe that, at heart, their son's protest reflected a desire 'to be treated like men.' In a move which highlighted how concerns over labour dignity, freedom of conscience, and CO manhood often combined into a broader warning about the fate of American democracy, Jaffe concluded with a

---

<sup>63</sup>Frances B. Stewart to Lewis B. Hershey, March 31, 1943, RG147, Conscientious Objectors General File, Container 194, Danbury Prison Strike Materials, NARA 2.

<sup>64</sup>L. H. Paine to Lewis B. Hershey, April 14, 1943, RG147, Conscientious Objectors General File, Container 194, Danbury Prison Strike Materials, NARA 2.

<sup>65</sup>Agnes E. Schultz to Lewis B. Hershey, March 20, 1943, RG147, Conscientious Objectors General File, Container 194, Danbury Prison Strike Materials, NARA 2.

## CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS' SECOND WORLD WAR PROTESTS

reminder. The United States was 'fighting for the four freedoms.' But it had to 'begin at home by allowing sincere men freedoms of Conscience.'<sup>66</sup>

A Californian teacher shared Jaffe's concerns. Helena Nye criticised a politics of masculinity which privileged combat service above all other forms of labour when she lamented that the Murphy-Taylor strike demonstrated that there was 'no service acceptable to our great country except under arms.' While she only hinted at the masculine independence needed to make this 'valiant stand for freedom of conscience' – she knew 'how rare these young men' were – Nye nevertheless argued that America was failing in its democratic duties when it prevented COs from exercising their conscience at meaningful labour: 'our country of all countries... must respect' freedom of conscience.'<sup>67</sup>

Jaffe's and Nye's criticisms had potentially international implications. Elaine Freeman, a Brooklyn pacifist, compared 'arbitrary laws' against freedom of conscience and the imprisonment of COs, the 'highest in American manhood,' to the practices of 'the totalitarian governments which we are fighting today.' Until Selective Service instituted a 'democratic overhauling' of CPS so that 'real pacifists' could do meaningful 'social work,' the United States would signal to the oppressed of the world that they would not 'be better off under an Allied victory.'<sup>68</sup> Arthur Mekeel similarly argued that America's critics would be justified if the United States did not earn 'the right to support... a war against fascism' by ceasing its 'prosecution of men of such moral fiber.'<sup>69</sup> Jaffe, Nye, Freeman, and Mekeel reproduced the CPS walkouts' critique, signalling its advance beyond the walls of CPS: an international war for democracy was a hypocritical undertaking so long as the United States did not uphold its democratic promise to recognize conscience in the domestic sphere.

### Conclusion

Selective Service eventually relented: as the war progressed, CPS expanded into mental and public health, as well as medical experimentation and forest-firefighting, fields in which many COs were happy to work.<sup>70</sup> But Murphy and Taylor remained in

---

<sup>66</sup>Lena Jaffe to Lewis B. Hershey, March 23, 1943, RG147, Conscientious Objectors General File, Container 194, Danbury Prison Strike Materials, NARA 2.

<sup>67</sup>Helena Nye to Lewis B. Hershey, April 27, 1943, RG147, Conscientious Objectors General File, Container 194, Danbury Prison Strike Materials, NARA 2.

<sup>68</sup> Elaine Freeman to Lewis B. Hershey, April 2, 1943, RG147, Conscientious Objectors General File, Container 194, Danbury Prison Strike Materials, NARA 2.

<sup>69</sup>Arthur J. Mekeel to Lewis B. Hershey, April 24, 1943, RG147, Conscientious Objectors General File, Container 194, Danbury Prison Strike Materials, NARA 2.

<sup>70</sup>See, for instance Tucker, *The Great Starvation Experiment*; Matthews, *Smoke Jumping on the Western Fire Line*; and Taylor, *Acts of Conscience*.

prison long after their strike ceased. Hershey did not reply to letters clamouring for their release, and most of the country likely agreed with James Bennett's assessment that the pair were largely irrelevant to national democratic life, that they possessed 'serious personality problems,' and that their protest represented only a constitutional aversion to the kinds of authority to which other Americans were expected to adhere.<sup>71</sup> That assessment was not entirely inaccurate: the war did not hinge on the protests of CO walkouts or the Danbury hunger strike, and Murphy and Taylor were some of the most radical characters in the CPS story. Perhaps the strike represented a crisis of masculinity for these radicals, whose opposition to the war rendered them social and political outliers in a nation almost romantically obsessed with the heroism of the combat GI.<sup>72</sup>

On the other hand, the Murphy-Taylor strike hit a nerve for Americans from many walks of life and many corners of the national map. Murphy and Taylor took the arguments of other CPS walkouts to a physical extreme, spreading those ideas even further beyond the boundaries of the CPS and penal systems. According to Frank Olmstead, even 'reluctant prison officials' admitted they had never before seen men of such strength of character or such fine spirit.<sup>73</sup> Their protest shed light on a pervasive culture of anxiety that emerged among the CO population as they viewed what they interpreted as a democratic retreat in the United States. The petition campaign to secure their release, while unsuccessful, gave concerned citizens like John Butler the opportunity to remind their government that 'Democracy, like charity, begins at home.'<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, the walk-outs and the hunger strike demonstrated how COs and their allies transformed a targeted critique of the CPS labour regime into a broader warning about the dangers of preaching democracy internationally while practicing totalitarianism at home.

---

<sup>71</sup>Bennett, *Inquiry into Charges of Mistreatment of Inmates of the Medical Center for Federal Prisoners at Springfield, Missouri*.

<sup>72</sup>James Sparrow argues that the GIs sacrifices became the "master key to wartime political culture." See James Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), esp. pp. 160–77.

<sup>73</sup>Frank Olmstead, Report, March 1943, CCW-1A, Box 32, Correspondence, Etc. Organizations/Denominations/Peace Leaders: Frank Olmstead (War Resisters League), 1943-1944 (May), SCPC.

<sup>74</sup>John Butler to Lewis B. Hershey, May 2, 1943, RG147, Conscientious Objectors General File, Container 194, Danbury Prison Strike Materials, NARA 2.