

was the general verdict of the Tribunals. Asquith refused to receive a deputation from widowed mothers of only sons.

The safeguards against using the Act as an indirect method of industrial compulsion were valueless. On the contrary, it supplied the final links in the chain of compulsion already forged.

As time went on, promises, not always kept, were made that employers getting soldiers lent to them at Army rates of pay should hand the difference between such rates and the usual wage to the Government. Employers often found boys more profitable than soldiers and in the general relaxation of principle and practice, J. H. Thomas, the railwayman's M.P., was heard mildly complaining that "boys of tender age" were doing the arduous work of firemen on goods trains. On September 11th, 1916,¹ an accident took place on the Glasgow and Paisley Railway in which 28 persons were injured. The fireman, who is the driver's only assistant, was only 15 years of age.

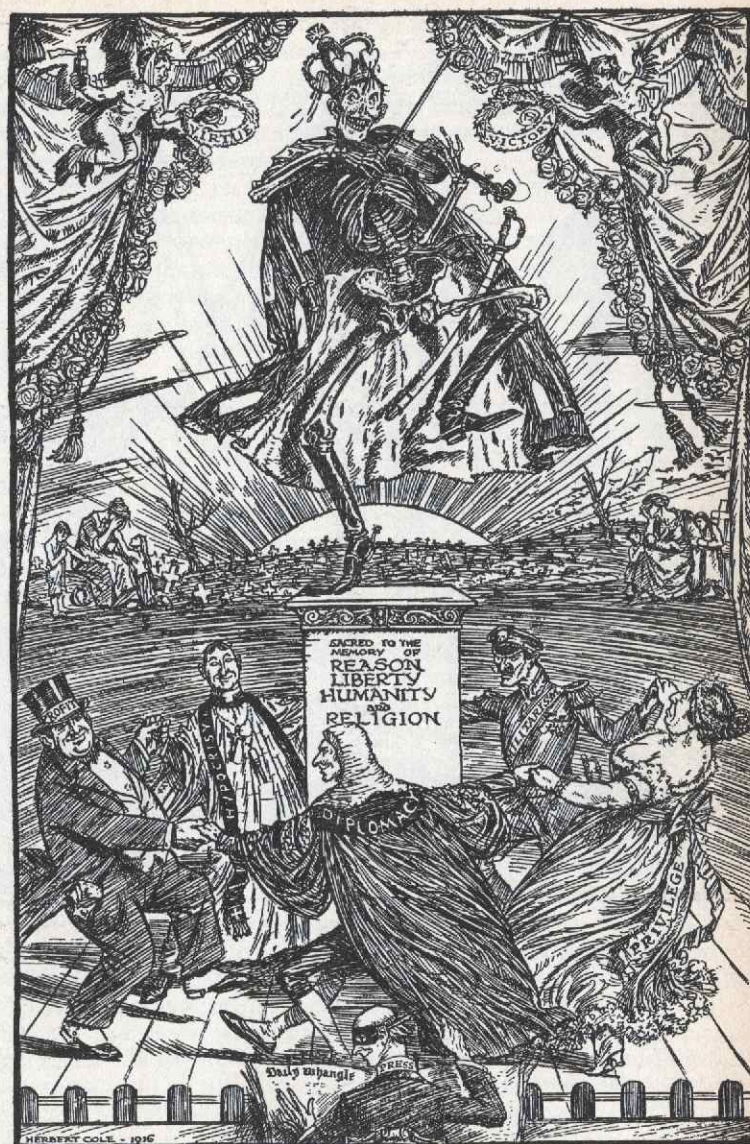
The desire to avoid serious agitation through the impassioned resistance of determined men, who might possibly receive a backing both widespread and influential, and the representations of influential Quakers and others opposed to compulsion, produced the semblance of a Conscience Clause, exempting from military service men whose convictions were opposed to the War. It would have been simpler, and more sincere, to decree that all men declaring a conscientious objection to military service should be imprisoned, or drafted to special service for the duration of the War; for this, with exceptions so rare as to be negligible, was in fact the final result of establishing a conscientious objection. Yet, as matters stood, a painful struggle, sometimes accompanied by most brutal torture, had first to be endured.

The Act left to the Military Service Tribunals the decision as to whether a man's objection to serve was in fact conscientious or not, no definition of the term being provided. Exemption on conscientious grounds might be absolute, conditional or temporary. In most cases the Tribunals refused any form of exemption, and handed the objector to the military authorities to be dealt with as they saw fit. The provision protecting the Conscientious Objector from the death penalty covered only "failure to obey an order calling him up from the Reserve for permanent service." Yet resistance to this order was but the opening of a long-drawn persecution, during which there loomed up before the objecting men and their relatives the dread probability of the death penalty.

Before the promise of exemption for conscientious objection had been put to the proof, it had helped to undermine agitation against the Bill. Immediately after Conscription became law, the Labour Party Conference met at Bristol, and whilst declaring its opposition to the Act, rejected a resolution to agitate for its repeal.

The falsity of the pretence that Conscription of the unmarried would permit the attested married men to remain at home, was exposed as soon as the Military Service Act passed into law. Four days later the first

¹ House of Commons Official Report, November 16th, 1916.



"HANDS OFF THE RING"
Principal Scene in the GRAND CHRISTMAS PANTOMIME ~ European Theatre
Continuous performance ~ Prices as usual

A drawing by the late Herbert Cole, reproduced from the *Workers' Dreadnought*.