

THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND FORMS OF PACIFISM IN GREAT BRITAIN

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Abstract: The First World War triggered a large number of pacifist or anti-war protests in Great Britain, more than any other military conflict before or after. This article focuses on two specific forms and media of such protests: on the one hand, the condemnation of war in poems written by soldier poets on the basis of their personal practical experience at the front, such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, and, on the other, the argumentative political statements against the war published in newspapers and pamphlets by the philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell, ultimately based on his enlightenment and humanist concepts. Examples of war-critical pronouncements – outstanding poems and selected argumentative passages – are analysed in detail against the background of the official propaganda and the widespread popular support for the war efforts, throughout the first war years, frequently likewise in the form of poetry. The analyses concentrate specifically on the aspects and reasons of the objection to war. These discussions are followed by a brief look at Russell's much later pacifist attempt to mediate between the opponents in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 and finally by a summary of the essential features of peace.