

As the build-up to the Great War gathered momentum, Quakers in the North of Britain felt the need for more concentrated efforts to be made towards peace. Looking for a lead to be given nearer their home than London, they set up the Northern Friends Peace Board (NFPB) in January 1913. In August of that year, Robert J Long, of York, was appointed its first Organising Secretary at the age of 31. He was to hold the post for 29 years. Writing in 1953 after Robert Long's death, a Friend in his Rawdon Meeting (1) describes him as 'a big man with a powerful voice whose ministry was impressive', a man who thought of meeting for worship as 'the power house of the Society'.

Robert Long's obituary in *The Friend* judged him to have had 'no great brilliance ... [but] what he had was an intense concern for the work and a never failing faithfulness even to the smallest detail.' (2) This view does not reflect the wide range of roles which he undertook for the Board and in which he excelled. He was a sensitive counsellor and supporter of Conscientious Objectors and an effective representative of the Board in national and international organisations.

He was the author of an NFPB pamphlet published on the outbreak of the Great War, entitled *What shall we do?* which – a century later – still retains the power to move us. From the depths of his grief that 'our efforts to prevent war have been in vain', Long saw with perfect clarity that the seeds of the Great War had been sown in the Crimean War, the Balkan troubles, and the militarisation of the Franco-German frontier. Writing in the context of patriotic fervour as men were enlisting in their thousands, he warned that 'this is not a people's war. It has its origins in the military bureaucracies of the Powers, in the mutual suspicions of diplomatists, in the cynical self aggrandisement of the war lords. The Russian peasant and the German artisan are pawns in the deadly game of their governors. The English business man and labourer alike are suffering because of movements in high quarters upon which they have never been consulted. What, then, must be our policy at the present moment? ... May it never be said that our peace principles are an excuse for shirking duty. England needs her Quaker sons and daughters at the present hour ... [to] do our share in conserving that civilisation which is threatened with destruction.'

Foreseeing the complexities of the post-war period with an almost prophetic eye, Long pleaded for 'a peace founded upon the basis of absolute justice, a settlement in which the rights of all men are regarded, and by which all nationalities will be entitled and urged to submit all future disputes to a strong

international court.'

Urging Friends to stay true to their pacifist principles, he recalled lines of the Australian poet Henry Lawson:

'Who'll wear the beaten colours, and cheer the beaten men?
Who'll wear the beaten colours till our time comes again?'

He concluded, 'Nineteen hundred years ago the Prince of Peace suffered on the cross forsaken by those who had followed Him in days of popularity. But there were men and women at that time ready and willing to wear the beaten colours and proclaim themselves followers of the beaten Man. Can we do less now?'

The Board was fortunate to have found such a man to act as their Organising Secretary. What do we know about him?

Organising Secretary

Robert Long and his wife Mary both worked for the Rowntrees, who were instrumental in his appointment to NFPB, 'as organising secretary, with a salary of two hundred pounds per year and expenses.' The Board's decision to employ a full-time worker, an innovation in Quaker circles at the time, was to prove of great advantage to the Board. The couple had two sons, John Wilfred and Robert Arthur. Robert Long was a strict teetotaler who had occasion to be angry with his doctor for prescribing him whisky. Their grand-daughter recalls that Mary refused to wear a wedding ring because she regarded it as a symbol of female servitude. During the war, however, her husband's status as a conscientious objector proved enough of a challenge to convention and she acquired one. After the war she left it off again and it was eventually lost.

From the beginning, NFPB's activities were decided by the Board in session. As Organising Secretary, Robert Long was responsible for implementing policy and he provided a detailed report of the activities he had undertaken between each Board Meeting. Initially, he travelled very widely on the Board's behalf for talks, conferences and meetings, but from early 1916, when conscription was introduced, he was required to be present at the Office much of the time, to advise and support Conscientious Objectors. He himself was granted exemption from military service, by virtue of being employed full-time by a recognised religious organisation. Details of his exemption and his work to assist Conscientious Ob-

