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'Conscientious Objectors: A Matter of Conscience or Freedom Expression?

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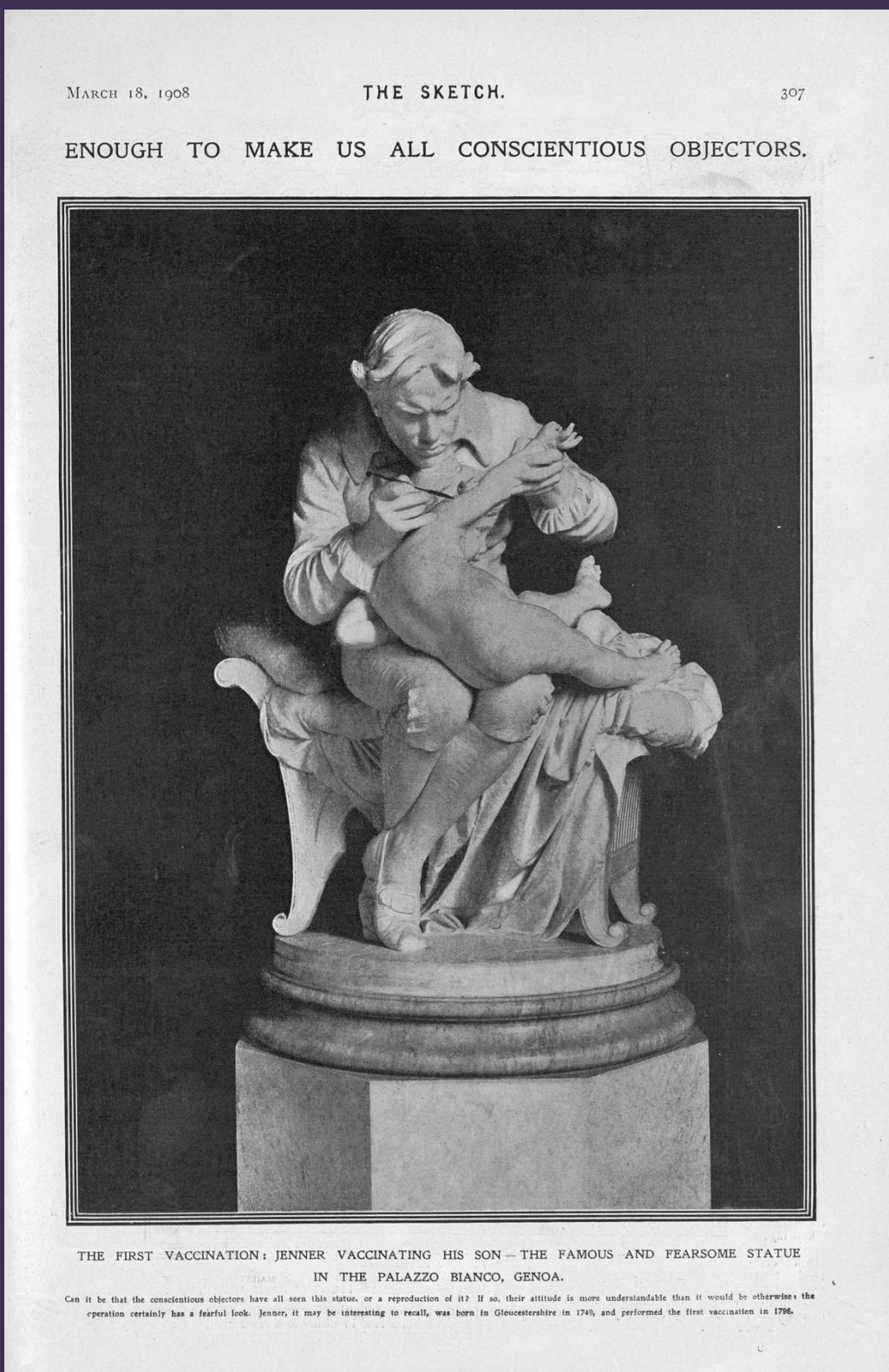
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‘CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS’: A Matter of Conscience or Freedom of Expression?

The term ‘Conscientious Objector’ originates from the Anti-Vaccination Movement but came to represent those during the First World War who declared their freedom of expression against state imposed military conscription.

Examples of attitudes to and perceptions of Conscientious Objectors are therefore highly dependent on the national context especially in times of conflict and war.



What makes a conscientious objector?

“Conscience” is a very elastic term... As a rule the objector is only scrupulous when the duty is irksome. When, however, conscience conflicts with patriotism, all kinds of side issues creep in. Conscientious objectors are ‘sham sentimentalists and humanitarians, cosmopolitan ‘pacifists’ or anarchists, political faddists and propagandists, the agitators of unrest ..’

Saturday Review, 4 August 1917

Might we all be conscientious objectors to some extent?

Letter to the *Saturday Review* 17 June 1916*:

‘Let the conscientious objector fight, or made to work exclusively among wire entanglements . Let every good citizen “loathe him”’.

20,000 men were conscientious objectors during WW1 of which:

34 were sentenced to death

73 died as a result of their imprisonment

31 were driven mad

Emrys Hughes MP, *Tribune*, 30 June 1967*

INTERNATIONAL CONSCIENTIOUS DAY 15 MAY

International Conscientious Objectors Day is marked around the world each year on 15 May.

In London each year a brief ceremony is held at the Commemorative Stone, during which the names of representative people who ‘maintained the right to refuse to kill’ are read out and white flowers are laid on the Stone for each of the people remembered.

Join us on 15 May 2017, 12 noon in Twaistock Sq London WC1 | [publicity flyer](#)



Did you know that 15 May is
International Conscientious Day?
Would you be a conscientious objector?

Taxes for Peace Bill

A Bill to give further effect to the international obligations of the United Kingdom in relation to freedom of thought, conscience and religion by enabling persons liable to income tax who object, out of personal conviction, to the expenditure of tax revenues on military activity to direct that the relevant portion of the income tax for which they are liable be spent instead on the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts; and for connected purposes.

In 1999, Labour MP, John McDonnell proposed a Private Members’ Bill that would give conscientious objectors the right to claim that a portion of their taxes be allocated to non-military spending rather than being automatically allocated to the Ministry of Defence. He reissued the proposal in 2015. Is this something you would consider?

By WW2 and the reintroduction of conscription in 1939 conscientious objectors were no longer ostracised or treated as criminals. Public opinion was more questioning of the reasons and legalities of engaging in war and more informed by the perspectives of liberal democratic pacifists, internationalists and humanitarians.

64 countries still maintain full
conscription and 8 selective
conscription

