

Four years hard labour for refusing to fight

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Will Foote campaigned against war. As a conscientious objector (CO), he spent most of World War II imprisoned by the New Zealand Government for refusing to fight.

Foote, a peace activist from his student days at Christchurch Teachers' College and University of Canterbury in the 1930s, died last week. He was 95.

Early in the war he became active in the Peace Pledge Union, speaking on street corners and distributing pamphlets. He refused his call-up for military service, in obedience to his conscience. He felt the then Labour Government was "backsliding" from its former pacifist stance to hold on to power.

The treatment Foote received from officialdom varied from sympathetic to abusive. He spent most of the time in defaulters'

camps in the North Island backblocks, cutting scrub and weeding flax clumps in swamps. He spent four years in prisons and camps with 800 other COs. He wasn't released until months after the war had finished, as the government decided no CO should go free until the last of the war veterans had returned home. Following release he was prohibited from teaching and had to work in manual jobs as directed by the government.

Worse than all though, he told *The Press* in 2006, were being judged insincere by the ("farcical") review panel which heard his case, seeing his mother suffer and his family split, having parents withdraw their children from his school and being dropped from his cricket team.

Foote declined non-combatant

role in the army, as even this would have compromised his principles.

"It was a difficult decision but I saw (the medical corps) as part of the war machine, repairing people to put them back into the slaughter," he said.

He volunteered to work in mental hospitals but was turned down. Some returned servicemen and the newspaper *Truth* pushed the view that COs were shirkers and cowards resting on couches, Foote said. The authorities needed to show that COs were being punished. The reality was hard labour, minimal food, cold huts, censorship and remoteness from families.

Foote was allowed to return to teaching in 1949. He spent the next 30 years in classroom and administrative positions, mostly in

rural schools. As principal he oversaw the conversion of Cheviot District High School to Cheviot Area School in the 1970s. He served three years as principal of Tonga High School in Nuku'alofa.

He was active in primary and secondary teachers' organisations. Through them he promoted the idea of a combined teachers' union. He strove for a better deal for rural education at secondary level.

He retired in Nelson in 1978 and was secretary of the Nelson Peace Group for 16 years. He represented Nelson-Marlborough on the Executive Working Group of Peace Movement Aotearoa for eight years. He later moved to Christchurch.

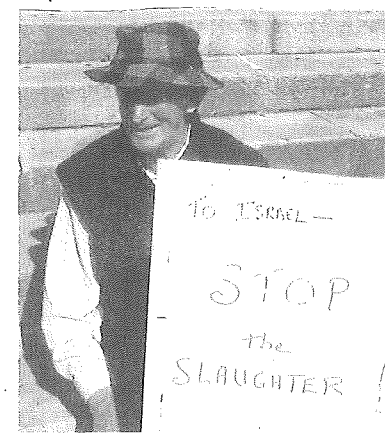
Foote wrote several books, mainly on peace topics. His last, *No More War*, was published this

year. It discusses in forthright terms the human cost of wars, in particular those involving New Zealanders. His theme was killing, violence and war were not the best way to confront tyranny. He said evil threats, such as Nazism, were best confronted by peaceful means. The process might take longer but was less costly in human life.

Foote wrote also about cricket. He loved the sport and had shown promise as a player.

Foote affirmed the power of collective non-violence to eliminate human poverty, the arms race and war. Not religious, he seemed to dice with religious belief in advocating love as the guiding principle in personal and public life. He lived this ethic all his life.

Friend and fellow peace worker Murray Horton says: "We met



Will Foote

through the campaign to close the Waihopai spy base (in Marlborough). He was attending Waihopai protests until well into his 80s. He was a member of the Anti-Bases Campaign (ABC) since 1993 and renewed his sub (with a donation) as recently as mid-August this year. In his day the Nelson Peace Group was an

extremely active group".

He was an active member of Campaign Against Foreign Control Aotearoa (Cafca), regularly helping with mailouts and making donations into his 90s. Horton remembers being amazed that even at 90 he could read without glasses.

Foote was "as sharp as a tack, always good fun and with a wonderful, dry sense of humour", Horton says. His wife, Anne, was "the absolute rock in his latter decades".

Anne says many people spoke of her husband's qualities of "patience, good-natured humour, delight in young people". He was never forceful. He was a man at peace with himself.

Wilfred John Foote, died Christchurch, September 5. Predeceased by first wife Doreen; survived by wife Anne, sons Ken and Trevor, daughters Margie and Jo, and his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

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