

## Emrys Hughes – Conscientious Objector

### Who was he, and what did he do for peace?

Emrys Hughes was born in Tonypany, South Wales in 1894. As World War I approached, he watched with alarm as he saw many people being caught up in an atmosphere of patriotic excitement, and it became very unpopular to speak out against the conflict. He was a Socialist, and his political beliefs led him to be convinced that war was wrong, and that ordinary people would suffer most – in Britain, Germany and elsewhere. So when Conscription came in in 1916, he refused to serve. He went before a tribunal and was imprisoned as a Conscientious Objector (CO).



WCIA Voices

Because Emrys was an Absolutist, meaning that he refused to have anything to do with the war, he received the harshest of treatment, enduring physical abuse, solitary confinement, and a bread and water diet for 'refusing to obey orders'. Cells were bitterly cold in winter and infested with rats and cockroaches. He was imprisoned six times during the war, serving sentences in a number of civil and military prisons, often in harsh conditions. In later life, Emrys Hughes became an MP for South Ayrshire in Scotland. He died in 1969. He hoped that lessons would be learnt from his experience.

In his *'Journal of a Coward'*, he wrote:

*'It is well that the next generation should understand things as they were in the Great War, it will learn to loathe the stupidities of its fathers and rectify their results.'*

Because of the stance of men like Emrys, COs were treated more humanely in WWII. Countries where COs are still punished or imprisoned today include Switzerland, Finland, Greece, Israel and South Korea.

### Questions to consider:

1. What do you think of Emrys' stand? Was he brave or a coward?
2. How hard is it to stand up for your principles if everyone else – family and friends included – are doing something different?
3. What do you do if you believe the actions of your government to be wrong?
4. Can one person make a difference? (Can you think of some examples?)
5. What would you do for your beliefs?

## Related actions / campaigns you can get involved in today.

**Conscience, Taxes for Peace not War** works for a world where taxes are used to nurture peace, not pay for war. They campaign for the legal right of those with a conscientious objection to war to have the entire military part of their taxes spent on peacebuilding.

**Cymdeithas y Cymod / Fellowship of Reconciliation** opposes militarism and works for a nonviolent society.