

THE CASE AGAINST CONSCRIPTION

(J. McArthur Conner.)

"They are not the most ominous signs of the times. No; by far the ugliest sign of the times is the fact that of late years two words which have for half a century been tabooed in British politics are now after some whisperings and stealthy hintings beginning to be spoken trippingly on the tongue. These words are Protection and Conscription. They are words of abomination and desolation—words that should be resented by the people as an insult to their understanding and a threat to their liberty. "Thus wrote Robert Blatchford in an article entitled 'The Wisdom of the Times,' in the Clarion, as far back as 1902, when he dealt with the opposition of the Tories to the social reform movement. This opinion was not only held by Blatchford that Conscription was a threat to the liberty of the British people. The Duke of Wellington, one of the generals in the last European war, opposed conscription on similar grounds. He said:—

"It is quite clear that the British regular army cannot be raised by conscription or ballot. The right of a country to the services of all its subjects for defence can well be understood. It is on the principle of defence that the seafaring man is liable to be impressed for service in the King's ships, and that all the inhabitants of the country are liable to be balloted for to serve in the militia. But the force called the regular army, which is liable to be sent to any part of the world, not for the defence of the land of England, but of a colony or settlement, or for the conquest of any foreign territory, cannot be considered in the same light. Men cannot with justice be taken from their families and from ordinary occupations and pursuits for such objects. The recruits for the regular British army must be volunteers. Accordingly, there is no instance in which the system of raising men for the army by voluntary enlistment has been departed from, whatever may have been from time to time the wants of the service for men."

"Terminological Inexactitudes" or Lies?

Since the war has commenced Great Britain has adopted Conscription, with the result that militarism has become supreme and parliament is gradually becoming only a debating society with no power. Trade unions have lost nearly all their hard won rights which it took nearly a hundred years of agitation to obtain, and laws passed by parliament regarding tribunals and conscientious objectors are ignored. In the introduction of the military service bill such men as Philip Snowden and J. Ramsey MacDonald protested and declared that such measures would lead to industrial conscription. This was denied by the rulers, but when the military service No. 2) bill was before the House Mr. Asquith and Lloyd George made themselves plain enough to be understood.

Mr. Asquith said: "The worker who might happen, for any reason, to be obnoxious to his employer—if for instance he had taken an active part, as a trade unionist, in movements for the rise of wages, or for the improvement of the conditions of labor—the employer may take advantage of this or that pretext to dismiss him. Therefore, he loses his exemption certificate; unless he can get reemployment at once at a similar trade, he becomes, ipso facto, a soldier and subject to military law. . . . I am glad to say that I hope and I believe, at a time like this, and in conditions such as those under which we live, cases of this kind would be rare.

David Lloyd George said: "What we want is not compulsion for the army but for the workshop."

The act provides for the exemption of men who can demonstrate or prove their conscientious objection to war, yet such men as A. Fenner Brockway, Clifford Allen, C. H. Norman, are languishing in prison because of their conscientious objection to war. Militarism snapping its fingers at the law, knowing that it is now supreme!

Under conscription in England men are no longer free to go from one factory to another, where they may get higher wages for their labor power. That is not all. Here is part of a letter I have just received from a Socialist councillor in a mining district in Britain. He says: "Committees have to be formed at all the collieries represented by managers and men to try men who have not been working and fine them from \$1.00 to \$5.00; so you see, that we have industrial conscription as well as military conscription."

Under the act the widow's only son and support was not to be called for service, but militarism defies the act and the widow's only son and support is conscripted and sent to the front. I have before me a letter which is dated December 14, 1916, from a widow's only son, who has been called to the colors. It is written on Y.M.C.A. paper and is as follows:—

An Objectors Mess of Pottage

"From the above address you would at once learn that I must be a soldier, and so I have been since the first day of May this year. I am in the Signal Service of the Royal Engineers. My training being now at an end, you see I am on draft for 'Somewhere.' So I am here awaiting final orders for a place called 'Mesopotamia.' It has been most trying to leave my dear mother all alone. More so, after the trying life she has had to come through. But mothers are indeed so wonderful and brave! She has stood the loneliness very bravely. But now when I am expected to leave the country at any moment, she must be coming through a most trying time.

But we are in God's keeping, and I shall hope to return when this struggle comes to an end, and find my dear mother waiting my return. I must not dwell on such thoughts, which only makes one feel miserable. So I do hope you will write my mother again. It is sure to cheer her up for a wee while. With all good wishes, I remain, Yours sincerely, Sapper W.H.B.S.

Under the military domination free speech is a thing of the past. Meetings called by Union of Democratic Control in Memorial Hall for discussions of after-war problems, have been completely overrun, the government forging admission tickets and supplying them to soldiers, who were admitted and broke up the meeting. In defending this method in the House of Commons, Mr. Tennent said, "I had to back up the military, whom I hope I shall never desert in any matter of this kind when any allegation is brought against them." For venting anti-war sentiments in conversation at a military hospital, a Socialist member of the Sheffield Board of Guardians was sentenced (August 6, 1915) to two months' imprisonment by the city bench.

This is the militarism that the jingo press of this country is trying to force upon the common people. Let us see to it that Prussianism shall not be enacted in this land.

Greece and oil—the perfidy of Greece and the oil of Roumania—are among the most important items in the war situation to-day.

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THE FUTURE OF WAR AND PEACE

V.—SOCIALISM—THE SOLUTION.

The nations face an impossible task. Peace conditions will be unbearable because of the pressing problems which develop under peace. Wars will not prove an alternative, because competition is so fierce and industrial progress so general that victory and defeat have little meaning. Necessity demands expansion, but the limits are definitely set. It is only when this situation is fully arrived at that permanent peace comes for the first time to be a possibility. It is a possibility, but nothing more, for while war is a futile expedient, peace is a barren condition. Peace becomes a fact only when the contradiction is removed, which makes both war and a peaceable condition powerless to solve the difficulties of society.

The contradictions which make an insoluble crisis for expanding capital have their roots in contradictions in present society. In existing relationships it is a paradox that a nation should be considered economically developed to the point where it looks for foreign markets while the mass of its population has no access to the surplus, and is often in direct want of necessities. Production tends to outrun demand, and the race is to sell an absolute excess of commodities. In modern times trade represents more and more not an exchange of products of different kinds, but a competitive struggle among producers of like commodities. The primary object of production is not to supply the human demand. The object is to gain by producing for the economic demand. Thus a nation which could consume its own products has nevertheless an excess on hand for export purposes. It is the workers who do without. Free expansion destroys the difficulties which rise to confront the capitalists, but expansion becomes impeded. The improper social arrangement which stands between the people and their products, meets its limits in the inability of the nations to dispose of the surplus products, of the surplus capital which cannot find new fields. International difficulties, and the difficulties of society generally, are due to this very surplus of wealth. The high cost of living, commercial crises and wars are among the results of capitalist exploitation of the working class. Society can advance out of its paradoxes only by giving up its distinctive capitalist form. Such an advance can be secured solely by those who are most interested through their sufferings in wars and their exploited condition during peace. Only the working class can produce the advance.

War is an effort to restore an economic balance to nations whose capitalist possibilities become circumscribed during peace conditions. As state efficiency pushes on toward greater national organization and international competition, the difficulties of establishing a balance by war increase. The problem of disposing of the vast result of home industry finds no solution on the basis of the old form of production, distribution and competition. The natural solution for a nation lies in establishing a social correspondence between its production and consumption of wealth. This Socialism proposes to accomplish through the common ownership of the agencies of production, and the consequent production for use instead of for profit. Such a solution will remove the bone of contention in national crises and international arrangements. Before this condition can be reached the nature of the collectivist form of state ownership must be completely changed by being extended. With the change in the basis of ownership the whole character of society changes. The aim of production becomes definitely social. And just as international politics rest on

home politics, so international difficulties vanish when the great home problems are solved.

The immediate tendency after the war will be to sustain and further militarism. But this is only the first part of the wider tendency to develop society in its contradictory relationships and forms until these fall, taking militarism with them. Peace will be won ultimately through the changes which industrial developments, wars, class conflicts and the proper distribution of wealth will produce. In so far as war is part of the forces making for a changed order it should receive a peculiar negative credit for the role it plays in bringing about its own disappearance.

But the allies cannot bring peace by destroying German militarism by a more powerful militarism. War will not kill war. Wars are not prevented by an enforced peace. The roots of militarism lie in capitalist society. When capitalism disappears militarism dies out.

MERVYN SMITH.

TRADE UNION NOTES

DEMANDS OF COAL MINERS PRESENTED AT CALGARY MEETING.

At a joint meeting of representatives of District 18, Western Federation of Miners, and their employers, opened at Calgary last Tuesday the miners presented their demands on a new working agreement.

These provide for an all-round advance of 25 per cent. in wages; an eight-hour day for all classes of work; extra pay for double and treble shifts as well as overtime rate for Sundays and holidays; wages to be computed on run-of-mine basis; differential to be paid where blasting is prohibited and alterations in the general clauses of the old agreement. The new agreement to expire August 31st 1918.

The employers met on Wednesday and refused to consider the miners' demands, saying that no negotiations would be entered into with the men until the latter had given evidence that the terms of any agreement which might be reached would be adhered to.

Los Angeles, Cal., Feb. 00.—When members of organized labor protest against undue laws, they are rebels against the government, in the opinion of the men who run the Farmers' and Merchants' National Bank of Los Angeles.

What's more, says the bank, labor is a commodity, and when it becomes more plentiful, the present high wages will have to be reduced!

The foregoing views are expressed in the "Financial Letter" of the bank, sent to its big business patrons. Under the heading "Labor Troubles," the bank says:

"No greater proof could be had of the fact that labor is a commodity and its price regulated by supply and conditions. Labor is scarce hence the price of it is high. In 1913 labor was abundant and the price of it was low.

"Legislation cannot alter fixed economic principles. As might have been expected, we are to-day reaping the full reward of the Adamson Bill in the renewed labor demands. Having forced Congressional action in favor of labor, Gompers, who probably stands closer to the Democratic Congress since the election than he did before, is demanding still further Congressional concession, not only in favor of the railroad brotherhoods, but for other groups of employees. Once the door is mistakenly opened to class legislation there is no limit to the danger that can be wrought to the nation thereby.

"Recognizing the scarcity of labor, the employers of millions of wage earners, who are not in any manner connected with the unions, and without

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