

The Case Against Conscription

(By J. McArthur Conner.)

Lieut. Gen. Sir Sam Hughes, in the House of Commons, recently came out strongly in favor of the "Militia Act" being put into force immediately. Is Sir Sam honest in his contention or is it an attempt to embarrass the present Administration, who, it is said, fears that a revolution might result in the putting of the act into force. At any rate, it is known that secret meetings have been held in Toronto, and to those who are in touch with them it is said that their object is to advocate the application of the "Militia Act," not from a patriotic motive, but to embarrass the Government, and finally get Sir Sam into office again. But while in office the General advocated universal military training on the democratic plan in Switzerland. Here is an account of how the military system is used to help the working people. This account appeared in the "British Socialist Magazine," and was printed in leaflet form and circulated in Australia by the laborites in their recent campaign against further extension of the conscription law:—

Switzerland is First in Employing the Army Against Strikers—The Soldiers have been Used against Strikers on Over Twenty Occasions.

In 1860 the Government of Vaud, learning that a strike had just been declared at Lausanne, recalled by telegraph a battalion that had left that morning for a repetition course at Moudon. Before re-entering Lausanne the soldiers loaded their rifles and fixed bayonets to re-establish the order which had not been disturbed.

In 1875, on July 17, a strike broke out at Goshenen, the 2,000 miners of the Gothard wishing to free themselves from the necessity of provisioning themselves in the depots of the manager (company stores) and demanding an increase of wages and better conditions and better ventilation of the work place. The manager, Favre, offered the Government of Uri 20,000 francs to get the troops placed at his disposal. Thirty soldiers were brought forward to prevent strikers posing themselves before the tunnel. The strikers not budging, a heavy fire, without warning (report of Federal Commissary Hold) was opened, killing three and wounding a dozen. A fourth miner, father of six children, soon died. Then Goshenen was placed in a state of siege. Thirteen prisoners were conveyed to Altorf; eighty miners were dismissed. The Lausanne Gazette chanted "the heroism of the brave soldiers of Uri," while the Patriotic Suisse praised the Government for having "with few men, little trouble, and little cost very promptly ended this affair." Little cost? Do these Swiss democrats mean the four dead or the 20,000 francs?

In 1901 there occurred a mobilization of two companies of infantry for the Simplon strike. "Soldiers, the country counts upon you," said their chief officer to the men; "here it is worse than in time of war. You are to use your rifles to defend those who wish to work against the strikers."

In 1902, at Geneva, a levy of 3,500 infantry and guides were made to dissolve peaceful demonstrations of strikers. Five thousand troops from other cantons were brought out to aid the masters. On the evening of October 9, there were cavalry charges, the next day bayonetting of strikers.

In 1904, at La Chaux-de-Fonds, we again find the citizen army against the striking masons. Some revolvers having been bought in the town—it turned out later that they were purchased by

heroic bourgeois—an excuse was found for the intervention of the army, for, as The Imperial admitted, all was calm before the arrival of the troops. The meeting together of two citizens was dissolved by force of arms. Strikers were arrested without discussion. The Tribune de Geneve was once interdicted for having said that the soldiers "had somewhat the aspect of caged animals." An officer, in a tramway, striking his loaded revolver on a bench, said: "That is what we are going to give the macaronies (Italian masons) to calm them." Then the army was used to forbid strikers singing in their own headquarters. And, finally, it was used, on Aug. 4, to expel workmen on strike as "people with no visible means of subsistence." That is what Ed. Droz, State Councillor of Neuchatel, honestly called "maintaining order and tranquility in the canton."

In 1906, brutalities were committed by the soldiery against the Zurich metal workers. On July 19 a whole regiment of infantry and squadron of cavalry were brought out, 85 officers, 2,533 soldiers, and 133 horses. There were charges upon the people the same evening, numbers of arrests, beating of strikers with fists and sabre sheaths, then their conveyance in motor cars to barracks, where ill-usage recommenced. The case is particularly quoted of two Italian workers who were stripped naked, bound, placed face downward upon a table, and then thrashed with whips for a long time by officers. All this in the name of Helvetic and democratic liberty, needless to say.

In 1907, patriotic repression at Hochdorf, in the canton of Lucerne.

In 1907, mobilization of a battalion for the tailors' strike at St. Moritz (Grisons).

In 1907, a hundred soldiers brought out against fifty striking cigar workers at Yverdon (VaVud).

In 1907, yet again at the end of March, battalions 1, 4, 7, 8, 9, 103 of Vaud infantry, a battalion of carabinieri, a battalion of recruits, squadrons 2 and 4 of cavalry, and a picket of landsturm, were levied against the strikers of Orbe, Vevey, Montreux, and Lausanne. At Orbe the soldiers were ordered to take the oath, of "firing upon the strikers in case of need." Some thirty refused; they were arrested. At Vevey every soldier was made to insert five cartridges in his rifle, so that, in case of alarm, there would be no time lost in massacring the demonstrators. It is, however, comforting to remember that in this working class town, out of 35,000 men mobilized, 564 did not turn out. These were the refractory ones, amongst them many peasants. At Lausanne there were cavalry charges, with intense brutality under the orders of the colonel, who was a file manufacturer. Elsewhere at Vevey, at the immense hotel of Montreux Palace, the employers, Nestle, offered wine and chocolate to the soldiers, the same as during the general strike at Geneva, in 1902, fair ladies came offering drinks, cigars, and delicacies to the brave defenders of "order." It is always prudent to be on good terms with the watch-dogs. In addition, at Kohler's, of Orbe—another colonel—at the Perret wooden shoe factory, and at Nestle's, the authorities placed soldiers in uniform at the disposal of the masters to do urgent work—compulsory and official black-legging.

Touching amiability, is it not? A fine understanding between capital and the army—the "democratic" army par excellence, let us not forget!

The United States Government has been investigating the military system

of Europe, and on January 16, 1917, they had Philip Schaefer, formerly of the Swiss National Army, testify before the Senate on military affairs concerning the working of compulsory service in Switzerland, declaring that it was impossible for a poor man to ever become an officer, he said:

"The payment of a recruit is about ten cents a day in the one period and sixteen cents a day in the other; it is clear that no working man can afford to be an officer. He finds it bad enough to pay for underclothing, shoes, socks and laundry out of his wages, and his family may have nothing from his earnings for their own support. Switzerland makes no provision for the maintenance of the destitute family of the soldier, except the ordinary recourse to charity.

"So the working class fills the ranks and the ruling class has the control of the army in 'democratic' Switzerland. Cavalry regiments, which are used in cases of strikes to put down the workers, are made up of those men who can afford to keep a horse for this purpose throughout the year. Last September a peaceful parade of the Young People's Socialist League was ridden down by such a force—men, women and children trampled upon as though they were dogs.

"When a mill strike was called, the troops from the farming district nearby were called out by their officer, who managed the mill, and the town wage-workers attempt to better their condition was brutally suppressed. The army of Switzerland has never been of any other use than that—the use by the rich to crush the labor movement. Swiss soldiers have no more democratic treatment at the hands of these middle-class and upper-class officers than have Prussian soldiers. If you protest at ill-treatment you go to the dungeon for three days. In 1902 a soldier committed suicide as the result of this punishment."

Such is the universal military training of Switzerland that Sir Sam supports with such enthusiasm.

1—Democratic Militarism by Aaron H. Smith, Weekly People, Feb. 3, 1917.

2—The Public, Feb. 2, 1917.

Note.—Sir Sam was Minister of Militia when soldiers were ordered out to the striking miners at Nanaimo, B.C.

Our Free-Country 'Cow-Children'

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kind that they have seen in shop window) fall victim to the iniquity of prostitution.

Now, I will go on to the mining industry. Mr. Willis, Secretary of the Coal and Shale Workers' Federation, stated in one of his speeches that boys fourteen years of age are working nine hours in the dark. I saw those boys in the alleged eight-hour procession, and I never saw a more stunted lot of children in all my life. The spectators looking on took it as a big joke, but what a tragedy! These boys descend into black holes called coal mines, and by their labor help to make possible the fireside of the world, while some of their own loved ones shiver in the cold. The conditions under which these "child slaves" toil and despair and perish are damnable. The owners of some of these mines think more of a racehorse than a multitude of child slaves.

Such conditions of childslavery are a disgrace to a land like Australia.

The only hope for the abolition of "Child Slavery" in Australia and all other countries in the world lies in the introduction of Socialism.

Socialism Will Remove the Evil.

The workers themselves are the saviours of society, and they, and they only, can usher in the new state—the state of "Socialism" where child slavery will be a thing of the past, and Freedom and Civilization will be known for the first time.—International Socialist, Sydney.

THE STRANGLE-HOLD OF PROSPERITY.

By Scott Nearing.

Prosperity has the American people by the stomach!

As the grip of prosperity tightens people cry out in anguish, lest they die. "Help!" they cry, "Help! we are starving."

That seems most extraordinary, that people in the grip of prosperity should imagine that they are starving! During the month of December, 1916, the United States exported—shipped out of the country—wheat, blankets, shoes and other things valued at half a billion dollars. During the same month the factories, mines, mills, railroads, warehouses and stores were busier than they had been in years. They were fairly rushing to get wheat, blankets, shoes and other things to a place where people might use them. They succeeded too. The total number of things turned out by the factories and carried by the railroads was unusually great in December, 1916.

When the wheat, blankets, shoes and other things were offered for sale an interesting thing happened. The salesmen placed them on a shelf far out of reach of many of the eager customers. That shelf is called high prices. It is a movable shelf, and just now it is moving up.

The Monthly Review for December, 1916, of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics notes that "each article for which prices are shown from 1912 to 1916 was higher on October 15, 1916, than on the same date of the four years preceding. For all articles combined the increase in price from October 15, 1912, to October 15, 1916, was 21 per cent.

"From October 15, 1915, to October 15, 1916, the price of tea and coffee was the same, and all other articles advanced from a fraction of 1 per cent. for rice to 75 per cent. for potatoes and 55 per cent. for beans. The increase in the price of all articles combined from October 15, 1915, to October 15, 1916, was 16 per cent."

"We cannot reach the high-price shelf?" protest the customers.

"And why not, ladies and gentlemen?" question the accommodating salesmen.

"We can reach only the length of our incomes," sigh the eager customers; "we are kept down from the high shelf by our small wages."

The customers are right. At least some of them are, and the story of their plight is very well told in Bulletin 76 of the United States Health Bureau, in which an estimate appears of the number of people in the United States who live in poverty—that is, who have less family income than will provide for physical health and social decency. There are, according to this estimate, some six million families—thirty million people—in the United States living in poverty. These are the people who cannot reach the shelf called high prices.

Prosperity—the stupid, blind, unintelligent, balance-sheet variety of prosperity—is throttling millions of people in the United States. They cannot buy butter, eggs, milk, flour, meat, because prices have advanced more rapidly than their wages. The necessities of life are on the high shelf and the would-be consumers are far below.

Some people contend that a nation is prosperous when prices are high. Such people usually have something to sell. They are in control now, and "on account of the war" they are gouging the American people as they have not been gouged for years. And the people, simple-minded and confiding, have been told that when the rush of business will permit the high shelf will be varnished and decorated with a border of filigree paper. They have faith in the efficiency of these remedies, and are waiting with the pathetic patience of the ignorant or the blind.