

WILL THE PEASANTS LEAD THE WAY?

(Being part of an interview with the General Secretary of the English Agricultural Laborers and Rural Workers' Union.)

Walker's Challenge to the Farmers.

When I mentioned the lament of the farmers over the "exorbitant demands" (to use the current phrase) of the land workers, Mr. Walker replied:

I am not concerned about the cry of the landlord and the farmer that "we can not pay." Far better that any industry that can not provide for the workers in it a living wage and proper conditions all round should go out of existence altogether. But agriculture can, must and will yield to the worker that to which he aspires.

If the industry has reached a point at which it can not do what we ask, then, we say, let us have an inquiry and get right down to the rock bottom and find out where we are."

The General Secretary of the Agricultural Laborers and Rural Workers made it quite clear that he thinks that what is good for the miners is good for the land workers.

A series of such exhaustive inquiries as the Coal Commission is engaged in throughout all the industries would certainly produce results of immense value, but especially in agriculture.

Mr. Walker proceeded:

The trouble may be want of organization. It may be the want of co-operation. It may be that the industry is carrying too many passengers. But let us find out where we are, and organize not in the interests of the few but as a premier industry, in the interests of all.

Mr. Walker would not have readers of the Labor Leader believe that the agricultural laborers are concerned only with a bread-and-butter struggle.

"There is no movement," he said, "that has greater and higher ideals than that of the agricultural workers. For instance, there is no class of worker who is watching with more astuteness and keenness the developing situation in Russia, and there was no question at the National Conference which created more enthusiasm than the reference to the Russian Revolution and the workers' duty to support it. Apart from all other matters, we have naturally a great interest in the policy of the Soviets in dealing with the land question itself."

"I am pleased also to think that it was the Agricultural Laborers' Union who first tabled a resolution, at the Trades Union Congress at Blackpool, demanding Pensions for Mothers.

"And on the question of sex, our rules specifically lay it down that there can be no distinction of sex."

The Soldiers and the Peace Demonstrations in Great Britain.

The authorities who are trying to work up an hysterical outburst of national rejoicing in their so-called "Victory" and "Peace" were not finding the returned soldiers too ready to assist them before last Monday night's ugly brush with their (the authorities') police. They will hardly find them readier now. The temper then displayed and the black rain of good paving blocks which answered the belated policemen's use of force may or not have been largely due to the foolish and inept "ministerialisms" of Mr. Wardle in his reception of the discharged soldiers' deputation; but there was no doubt of its seriousness. With 300,000 "unemployed" soldiers in the country and a Police Union determined to be recognized, the authorities are likely to be faced with processions and demonstrations of a very different order to the loyal and patriotic displays in which they are everywhere entreating the discharged soldiers to take part. The soldiers have not forgotten their million dead comrades, nor the million or more maimed survivors. Nor have their friends.

"We Shoot Them"

The Metropolitan Magazine is running in serial form the experiences of Col. Raymond Robins in Russia. William Hard is responsible for the form in which these are set down in the magazine. The June issue carries the first installment of Robins' experiences which commence prior to the Bolshevik Revolution.

We extract the following from the June issue as an example of the workings of the military mind and its attitude towards the peoples movements, British French or German, it is immaterial, the military mind runs true to type.

Col. Robins and Col. Thompson, heads of the American Red Cross mission, could see no way of keeping Russia in the war except that the Allies recognize the Soviets under the leadership of Kerensky. To test the feeling of the Allied Governments on this matter, they called a meeting of the Allied representatives in Petrograd; with what result the following will show:

Colonel Thompson decided to test the Allies out. He invited certain Allied representatives to meet him in his rooms at the Hotel Europe. They came, and they expressed the sentiments which were the final sentence of death in the Kerensky chapter in the history of Russia.

At that meeting, at half past two in the afternoon of Friday, November 2, 1917, there were present the following men:

General Knox, Military Attache to the British Embassy at Petrograd and Chief of the British Military Mission.

General Niselle, holding the same position at Petrograd for the French.

General Judson, holding the same position for the Americans.

General Neuslochowsky, for Kerensky.

Colonel Thompson, and, as his aide, Major (not yet Colonel) Robins.

News From Great Britain

LONDON, Eng., June 26.—During the parliamentary vacation there have been rebellions in several British dependencies—such as Malta—and repeated riots and mutinies in British and colonial military camps. Perhaps the most serious reported was at Camp Belmont, in Surrey, where 4000 men refused to obey orders and two battalions of regular army troops in fighting equipment were called in.

About 400 mutineers were put under military arrest and 1800 others were marched off under guard and shipped to other camps. At this camp the men had organized committees among the privates, and for eight or ten days these practically took command.

It is announced that half a million cotton mill workers in Lancashire are still on strike.

Carefully timed with the opening of parliament was the great meeting of radical trade unionists held on Sunday at Manchester. It was addressed by Robert Williams of the Transport Workers and Robert Smillie of the Coal Miners—two of the most influential leaders of the great alliance of labor, which includes also the railroad men.

Williams advocated the calling of a general strike and direct action to put an end to intervention in Russia and to conscription. Smillie was hailed as "the first president of the republic of England." The meeting broke up with a singing of "The Red Flag."

There remains the great question of national extravagance which was emphasized yesterday by Sir Auckland Geddes. He predicts that the food prices next winter will reach heights never before dreamed of. He blames wild extravagance which seems to prevade in every class of the British public. He comes near predicting national bankruptcy if reform is not achieved.

Colonel Thompson opened the meeting by making a brief statement of the crisis and of the instant need of action. Then General Knox took the floor.

General Knox was not interested in the Soviet. He wanted to talk about the Kerensky Government. He did so. He narrated the Kerensky Government's historic frailties and futilities, at length. Everybody present knew them but General Knox wished to remind everybody present. In particular he seemed to wish to remind General Neuslochowsky and Mr. Soskice. He left nothing out. At any rate, he seemed to Robins to leave nothing out.

But then General Niselle took the floor. He remembered several faults of the Kerensky Government which General Knox had forgotten. He mentioned them. With the Soviet knocking at the ramparts, General Niselle remembered all the troubles inside the ramparts. General Judson, the American general, was, as will appear in later installments of this narrative, an entirely different sort of person. General Niselle, bound by the chains of his environment, seemed to remain a perfect indoor person to the finish. He finished by reciting the Russian military disaster at Tarnopol, and by expressing the view that Russian soldiers were cowardly dogs.

Both Russians present, General Neuslochowsky and Mr. Soskice, left the room. They would listen no longer. They departed red, and also seeing red. They were through.

But General Knox was not through. He entered on a colloquy with Robins which I think I can exactly recite.

General Knox was thoroughly honest, thoroughly patriotic, thoroughly intelligent. He simply apparently had not informed himself. When Robins thinks of General Knox's opinions and statements on that day in the Hotel Europe, he is inclined to grasp at the thought that every diplomatic and military mission in the world ought to get a cable every morning saying: "Unless you go outdoors today, among the common people of the country to which you are accredited, you will be dismissed at nightfall."

General Knox said to Robins: "You are wasting Colonel Thompson's money."

"If I am, General," said Robins, he knows all about it."

"You should have been with Kornilov," said General Knox.

"You were with him," said Robins.

The General flushed. "Well," he said, "that effort may have been premature. But I am not interested in the Kerensky sort of government. Too weak. What's wanted is a military dictatorship. What's wanted is Cossacks. These people need a whip. A dictatorship's the thing."

Robins expressed the fear that they might get a dictatorship in Russia quite different from the kind of dictatorship General Knox was thinking of.

"What?" said the General. "You mean Lenin and Trotsky? Bolsheviks? That soap-box talk? Colonel Robins, you are not a military man. I'll tell you what we do with such people. We shoot them."

Robins was a bit roused probably by this time. "You do," said he, "if you catch them. But you will have to do some catching. You will have to catch several million. General, I am not a military man. But you are not up against a military situation. You are up against a folks' situation."

"We shoot them," he repeated.

That was Friday. On Monday, three days later, the Bolsheviks took the Fortress of Peter and Paul in Petrograd, and also the Arsenal. On Tuesday, Robins spoke for the war at the Orenbaum barracks and the Bolsheviks did better. They took the telegraph station and the telephone station and the principal railway station. On Wednesday, in the evening, Robins stood on a bridge across the Neva and watched Bolshevik sailors from Bolshevik ships firing shells in the air to explode over Kerensky's Winter Palace.