

Lord Derby announced¹ himself authorised by the Prime Minister to express surprise that the Prime Minister's remarks had been considered ambiguous; and to state that if young men, medically fit, and not indispensable to any business of national importance, did not come forward voluntarily before November 30th "other and compulsory means" would be taken to enlist them, before calling upon the married men who had attested to fulfil their promise to serve. No marriage contracted after Registration Day, August 15th, would secure a place in the married groups. Whether a man were indispensable or not would be decided by the competent authorities and tribunals. Asquith still evaded Parliamentary questions as to whether the single men would be conscribed before the attested married men were compelled to go. Meanwhile the net of compulsion tightened. The position of the attested men who had been scheduled as engaged in vital services and supplied with badges on that account was now reviewed. Few men could consider themselves safe.

The No Conscription Fellowship of men of military age with a conscientious objection to serving in the War had begun forming before the passing of the National Register Act. In the autumn of 1914 Fenner Brockway, the editor of the I.L.P.'s *Labour Leader*, proposed in a letter to that paper the enrolment of a fellowship of men who would refuse Conscription should it come. Names rolled up, and Mrs. Brockway acted as honorary secretary. From early in 1915 unostentatious little advertisements were inserted week by week in the *Labour Leader* by Mrs. Clara Cole, of the Dial, Kemsing, who had formed a "League Against War and Conscription," and appealed for names of persons who would join a "united protest in case Conscription is thrust upon us." When Conscription drew near Brockway's organisation was formally inaugurated in London as the "No Conscription Fellowship," for men of military age. Mrs. Cole added 500 names she had collected to those Mrs. Brockway had been enrolling. The fellowship decided to do no public propaganda against Conscription, but to resist it, if and when it came.

¹ Press Bureau, November 11th.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE RENT STRIKE VICTORY—JOHN MACLEAN

RENTS were rising. Evictions were rife despite the Emergency Courts Act.¹ Rent strikes developed. At Wellington, Somerset, a soldier's wife had notice to quit and could find no home for her children. The owner began to demolish the house. The woman ran out and threw herself into a stream, where she was found in a fit. At Godalming an ejectment order was granted against Mrs. Gunter, the wife of a soldier imprisoned in Germany. The soldiers at Whitley Camp raised a subscription for her.

There were rent strikes round us in the East End. Appeals from the strikers came to us daily. In all cases we succeeded in preventing evictions, and in getting the demands for increased rent withdrawn. In munition areas, where the drafting in of workers from other districts had created great shortage of housing, the strife was greatest. On Tyneside the *Daily Chronicle* reported that men were paying 18s. a week each for the half-share of a bed, which as soon as they rose from it, was occupied by two further tenants, employed on another shift.

From the wretched one- and two-roomed "houses" in the great jerry-built barracks of Partick and other Glasgow districts, 15,000 people marched to the City Hall with banners, demanding municipal housing and complaining of rent increases of 20 per cent. Glasgow's disgraceful housing conditions had long been notorious. The entire Labour Movement, Left, Right and Centre, supported the procession. Despite the protests of the Labour councillors, the majority of the City Fathers refused the processionists a hearing.

A few days later the landlords applied for twelve eviction warrants against the rent strikers. Three warrants were granted, but the remainder were adjourned for a week, on representations being made that rioting would ensue if soldiers' wives or munition workers were turned out.

Protests were made in Parliament. Dr. Addison, the assistant and constant apologist of Lloyd George, repeated his oft-made, oft-broken promise, that the Ministry of Munitions would ease the rent situation by giving financial aid to the municipal authorities to erect additional

¹ On June 16th, 1915, in the House of Commons, W. C. Anderson drew attention to the case of a soldier's wife, Mrs. McHugh of Shettleston, whose husband lay wounded in Rouen Hospital, whose son was home on sick leave, and two of whose five younger children were suffering from pneumonia. This woman had got into arrears with her rent owing to her husband's illness. A warrant for her ejectment within 48 hours had been granted.

housing accommodation for the munition workers drafted into overcrowded areas. The old adage "Soft words butter no parsnips" was never more clearly exemplified. Even whilst the debate was going forward at Westminster, an official communication from the Local Government Board was being read at the Glasgow City Council, stating that the Government had decided to introduce still further large numbers of munition workers into Glasgow, but the existing housing accommodation must suffice. Popular indignation flared up. 15,000 householders signed a declaration of refusal to pay increased rent, and intention to resist eviction. Indignant rent-strikers made a bonfire of ejectment notices in the road before the City Hall. Two Labour Councillors, George Smith and George Kerr, were among the rent strikers. In Glasgow, Govan, and surrounding districts, pickets were set, and great throngs of people gathered to prevent the threatened evictions. Numbers flocked into the Women's Housing Association, formed by the Socialists to focus agitation. Sustained by appeals to sisterly kindness and mutual aid, and by visions of a better future for working people, to be won by present effort and solidarity, women kept watch all night on the common stair of the barrack dwellings, their neighbours heartening them with tea in their cold vigil. The men who came to serve the ejectment orders were greeted with volleys of flour.

The organisers of the agitation telegraphed to Lloyd George urging his intervention. He declared himself powerless. Warning was sent to him that the workers from the munition factories and the shipyards would defy the Munitions Act, and march in their thousands to the Court where the rent-strike cases were being heard. At this threat to the execution of war contracts, his indifference was shed; he begged that all would continue at work, insisting that even the tenants concerned might safely refrain from attendance in Court, for he would "settle" the case in their interests.

His answer was received with suspicion, disgust and hatred, engendered by the prosecutions under the Munitions Act, and inflamed by his earlier refusals to intervene. Workers flocked in their thousands to the Court, and thronging the neighbouring thoroughfares, where impassioned speeches were delivered. In Hutcheson Street the police charged the crowd, and a sharp struggle ensued. Meanwhile within the Court the cases against the rent strikers were being withdrawn at the request of the Munitions Board.

To allay the agitation the Government promised legislation to protect Scottish tenants against rent increase; the appearance of similar agitations in other parts produced a Rent Act applicable to the British Isles. Originally the Act could only be specially extended to each district by Order in Council, which would only be issued as a result of agitation. It contained numerous other defects, many of which were gradually eradicated—but only by agitation.

A mass of prejudice opposed this measure of relief against a tragic evil. In reading the official Parliamentary reports—as I did without fail—I was amazed to read these words of Sir John Rolleston:

"I can only submit that the saving and the thrifty man or woman who has taken that increased rent has a right to do so. It would be wrong to leave that money in the pocket of the well-paid working man, to spend on his numerous and, in many cases, unwholesome pleasures."

During the height of the rent agitation in Glasgow, John MacLean, M.A., an elementary school teacher in the city, had been arrested and imprisoned for five days under the Defence of the Realm Act, for some of his fiery utterances during the campaign. At the same time a resolution for his dismissal was moved on the Govan School Board. MacLean was then widely regarded as the most revolutionary propagandist in Glasgow. Thick-set, and swarthy as a Neapolitan, he recalled to me irresistibly the thought of a great brown bear. His small eyes, dark and twinkling, his mouth, opening unusually wide, seemed to show, as he talked, his entire set of gleaming white teeth, like a dog, at times playfully opening his mouth in a game, at others drawing his lips back with a snarl. Both expressions were common in him. A kindly fellow, gentle and probably incapable of belligerent action, his mind leapt ever to theoretical extremes. His economics class, inaugurated ten years before, was spoken of as a dynamic focus of discontent in Glasgow, and he, with bated breath, as a "wild man." It was strange to hear him protesting against the police version of the remarks which had secured his imprisonment, and attempting to prove that his utterance had been entirely constitutional; for I had just listened to him uttering a direct incitement to armed rebellion. To make a grievance of imprisonment under such circumstances had been foreign to the Suffragettes; we had courted and expected it. Obviously earnest in devotion to his principles, he seemed, in this and many things, wholly lacking in the perception of realities, and almost devoid of executive capacity. Yet he had caused many young men to think and read for themselves, and many spoke of him with gratitude, almost with reverence. The iconoclast of iconoclasts, I have heard him in his hoarse voice, with delighted smiles, expounding to his class the Marxian theory of Labour values, and repeating the parable of the three coats, as though the very hearing of it were the universal cure-all, the true wine of life.

His dismissal from his school post took place in due course; he found himself expelled from the teaching profession, never to return. I remember him, after he had suffered further imprisonment, separated from his family by reason of their hardships, living alone and precariously on such poor stipend as collections from extremist Left Wing propaganda and its adherents might afford him. His meals were of "pease brose" of his own making; very good and sufficient for his need, he averred. Yet already he was a doomed man; privations carried to a sharp pass, and constant open-air speaking in all weathers, had set their irrevocable seal on him.

Elated by the success of the rent strike the Glasgow Left Wing was seething with triumph and enthusiasm. McGill, a fiery old Anarchist-Atheist, who sponsored the *Daily Herald* League, without any great

partiality for George Lansbury and his "Churchianity," had taken the City Hall for a meeting against Conscription and a welcome to MacLean on his release, and had invited the Free Speech Defence Committee to co-operate. Lansbury and I were asked to speak, and went up to Glasgow together, with Harford, the advertisement manager of the *Herald*. The paper was probably on the crest of its wave then; at any rate the two were buoyant with hope for it. Its posters were placarded lavishly along the Clyde, and its editor cheered by the Left Wing movement as their doughty protagonist. As soon as we reached Glasgow we learnt that the Lord Provost had cancelled the letting of the City Hall. McGill threatened an action for damages. Labour Councillors raised a protest at the Council meeting, but were informed that McGill's threat of legal proceedings precluded discussion. George Kerr and P. J. Dollan¹ continued protesting till expelled from the Council for the day. Lansbury and I were taken by Baillie Stewart to interview the Lord Provost; but he was not to be found at the municipal offices. We saw the Town Clerk, but he told us he had no power to revoke the Lord Provost's decision to refuse the Hall. On being informed that the munition workers were coming from the Clyde to attend the meeting, and since it was hinted by Lansbury and the others that they might prove riotous if flouted, the Town Clerk and the Chief Constable agreed that an open-air meeting might be held in Albion Street, a narrow thoroughfare near, but not too near, the City Hall. To hold the meeting in the big square in front of the Town Hall, they said, would seem like "defiance" of the Lord Provost's orders. The meeting in Albion Street was agreed to by Lansbury and the local men.² The night proved so wet that it was a marvel to get any audience at all. Yet in the almost pitch-darkness of war-time nights, thousands of men and women stood in the drenching downpour and puddles ankle-deep, to cheer defiant words.

Lansbury was elated. On the way home he talked of running a woman's paper in addition to his *Herald* and asked me to co-operate. I asked him: "Who would edit it?" He answered: "Of course *you* would edit it!" He was appealing then for a strike against Conscription. A little later when a strike broke out in the munition factories, he wrote in the *Herald* protesting that it was "murder" not to send guns to the trenches. The zealous Glasgow Herald League packed up and returned to him all the copies of that week's issue. Like many more, Lansbury was at the cross roads, his policy torn to tatters by inconsistencies.

¹ Afterwards M.P.

² Lansbury has since written (*My Life* by George Lansbury. Constable) that he spent the afternoon trying to persuade John MacLean and me not to lead a mob of munition workers to break down the doors of the Town Hall. As to what passed between himself and MacLean I do not know. I was not a party to any such discussion; actually I spent the afternoon with women members of our Federation, calling on some prospective members and discussing our future work. I left the local people to make such arrangements as they thought fit.

CHAPTER XXXIII

EDITH CAVELL—PROSECUTIONS UNDER D.O.R.A.—SNOWDEN AND THE CAPITAL LEVY

THE air raids recurred with increasing frequency, now in the North, now in the Midlands. London was often revisited by the scourge. Her brilliant shop lights dimmed, her gay night-life ended, she was a city of murk and gloom. Street lamps heavily smeared with black paint cast feeble rays.

When air raids threatened men rushed about the streets shouting "Zeps! Zeps! Put out your lights!" furiously banging at the doors of houses where even the faintest glimmer was discerned. People rushed into whatever door opened for shelter; others rushed out to scan the sky; 'buses were at a standstill, vehicles deserted, confusion everywhere. Gigantic searchlights swept the heavens. The dreaded Zeppelin, carrying a heavier cargo of ammunition than several mere aeroplanes, was seen, like a fish-shaped cloud, picked up by the searchlights. From its tail bright lights flashed down, followed by a succession of huge reports, and the dread roar of falling buildings. The angry glare of conflagration rose from the devastated scene where the bombs had fallen.

As time passed and the people murmured, warnings were given as soon as enemy craft were sighted. Then police and special constables went through the streets telling the people to hide all lights and betake themselves to the cellars. When the police gave the official warning, not otherwise, the underground railways and cellars were open to the people. Great crowds flocked thither, often half-dressed, carrying their children, and laden with rugs and pillows and things most precious to them. As the terror grew, families ceased to wait for the warning, and camped out nightly on the pavements outside the closed doors of the tubes, their little ones huddled on the damp, cold stones. A panic took place on one occasion, and people were killed by the press of others crowding behind them.

"Why have the Zeppelins come so often to London, though the Allied aircraft never reach Berlin?" the terror-stricken populace complained. In the shops, on the 'buses and by the roadside the rumour spread that London had no protecting aircraft until September 8th, 1915, when, after a raid more terrible than its predecessors, some fighting planes were withdrawn from France. When Parliament reassembled, six days later, Members asked why the defence of London had not yet been considered.

John MacLean, who had been held in custody since February, was brought to trial in April, 1916, and sentenced to three years' penal servitude for advising the soldiers to lay down their arms, and the workers to down tools against Conscription and the Munitions Acts. Gallacher, Muir, and Bell were tried, at last, for publishing the suppressed *Worker*, Gallacher and Muir getting twelve months' imprisonment, and Bell three.

The I.L.P. was meeting in Newcastle that Easter. Mrs. Boyce was organising there for our Federation. I went up with Smyth for a meeting Boyce had arranged, and to attend the conference. I had not been to an I.L.P. conference for many a year; but in those days there was a drawing together of all who worked for peace. The Union of Democratic Control and numbers of Pacifist societies, old and new, gathered round the I.L.P., with its long established branches, its touch with the masses these others desired to influence.

I had pleasure and sorrow in meeting old friends I had known in childhood. The absence of Keir Hardie loomed over us.

Katherine Bruce Glasier, Katherine O'Bruce, as she liked to call herself, spoke at our meeting, talking in her effusive way of the "noble and true work" of our Federation, which seemed to her to typify the "working woman's soul"; calling up images of "the good grey poet," Walt Whitman; of Keir Hardie, William Morris, Edward Carpenter; denouncing with fervour the "hideous blasphemy of war."

At the reunion before the conference the great attraction was the caustic Irish fiddler, Casey, striding the platform like a quizzical satyr, lean and fit for leaping as a goat; his hard legs tightly cased in knee breeches; his goat's face, handsome in its odd way, more than half covered by a short, stubbly black beard. All the wild things of the woods seemed to gambol round him when his fiddle sounded, and his sprite of an accompanist, Dolly, played like a creature enchanted by his spell. She had the gift of perennial childhood; for they had been travelling about the country together, playing to working-class audiences, more years than I cared to remember, and one might have taken her for a school-child still. It was Keir Hardie who had discovered and employed on the *Labour Leader* Casey's mordant irony. Subsequent editors of that paper had found his plebeian jests too inelegant for publication; Casey was driven back upon his fiddling, but he still yearned to express himself by the pen. He told me he had a notion that he ought to abandon music to write on the War, and "just satirise the whole thing."

"Dolly manages her harmonics very cleverly; what a child she looks!" Katherine O'Bruce cooed at my elbow.

R. C. Wallhead,¹ whom I first knew as a working decorator in Manchester, gave humorous improvisations in Lancashire dialect. He had grown to be a prominent man in the I.L.P. I wondered what had really drawn him into the movement. Was it the contact he had with the I.L.P. when Henry Cadness, the teacher of design at the Manchester

¹ Later M.P. for Merthyr Tydfil.

School of Art, introduced him to me as a manual assistant to aid in carrying out of the decorations for the Pankhurst Hall, Hightown, I had designed?

"That is a pathetic story on your front page," W. C. Anderson said to me. He was referring to the execution of the East London boy I had recounted in the *Dreadnought* that week. All the delegates were talking of it. Fenner Brockway reproduced it in the *Labour Leader*. A reader of that paper paid for the I.L.P. to reprint it as a free leaflet.

Snowden, with cold, keen eye, nut-cracker jaw and bulging forehead, hobbled in on his stick. His narrowness and acidity had long repelled me; but in those days he appeared to have shed the raucous uncouthness of his earlier period. True, he never seemed a Socialist in theory; but one fancied him mellowing and broadening to the type of an upright, incorruptible Quaker, frail of physique, sturdy of purpose, as though he were qualifying to wear the mantle of John Bright in his great attack on the Crimean War. Snowden never rose to that height, though the time was more hugely tragic than that which had inspired John Bright's lamentation: "The angel of death has been abroad through the land. You may almost hear the beating of his wings."¹

Ethel Snowden, who once had seemed like a caged bird in her marriage, chafing under her husband's infirmities and his brusquerie, now fair, plump and forty, had discovered his merit since the War. Wearing him, as it seemed, like a choice orchid, she declared herself "aided by a noble husband," and perorated: "I pray from the bottom of my heart that the War will soon be over." She came nearer to popularity with the rank and file Labour folk than she had ever been, though one of the zealous I.L.P.-ers grumbled: "When she is speaking in public she is like a cat walking on hot bricks—always afraid of offending the other class." She spoke to me affably: "You must have very able helpers, dear. Philip says your paper is about the best on our side."

I knew that the *Dreadnought* had one virtue: it was in touch with life—not made up in an office from Press cuttings, like most of the propaganda sheets.

MacDonald was there, erect and debonair, a drawing-room favourite rather than a Labour leader, he would seem to the passing observer; talking elegantly, with his Scots accent many people found charming; speaking so eloquently, as many considered, and at such length. He was really in the heyday of his popularity, had he but known it; for never again would comrades so zealously cheer him. Yet, even now, his temporising struck a chill to the heart of their warmth. I was anxious to think well of him. Despite his political gyrations and very obvious weakness, I appreciated the stand against the War he had taken, however imperfectly; I desired very heartily to unite in solidarity and comradeship in those ranks so hardly pressed; yet I could never overcome my distrust of him; he woke it within me perpetually by his tortuous strategy. To go by the straight road to a clear-cut objective seemed impossible to him. He must always be travelling roundabout, with so much concession to the

¹ House of Commons, 23rd February, 1855.

opposite pole, that unless rudely thrust on by a strong force behind him, he was apt to end to the rear of the point from which he started. The Conference began on the morrow, very tense, very earnest. MacDonald was temporising as ever. He said that the men who were responsible for the recruiting campaign were responsible for the imposition of Conscription, for the recruiting campaign had encouraged the Government to undertake policies which could not be carried through except by Conscription. The delegates knew that he himself had sent a letter to the Mayor of Leicester to be read in furtherance of the recruiting campaign.

Many of the delegates were Conscientious Objectors, at large for a brief space pending their appeals for exemption. James Maxton and others sent greetings from prison, others from barracks.

The much talked-of Bermondsey resolution, sponsored by Dr. Salter, that Socialists should refuse support to every war, had been shelved by a majority of one vote the year before. It was now adopted with but three dissentients. Henceforth it represented the policy of the I.L.P.¹ Yet C. H. Norman was induced to withdraw a proposal to give immediate practical application to it, by instructing I.L.P. Members of Parliament to vote against any further increase in the British Army.

Margaret Bondfield's suggestion that the Munitions Act should be amended rather than repealed, was swept aside.

A rift displayed itself in relation to Conscription and the Conscientious Objectors. Clement Bundock and Morgan Jones complained that the members of the I.L.P. executive had flinched from their original position. Before Conscription was enacted they had pledged themselves to resist it, and had called on the members of the party to do likewise. They had also expressed the hope that the I.L.P. might provide financial support for Objectors and their families. Later they had decided it would be inadvisable to establish a fund for this purpose, and when the Military Service Act became law, they had warned members and branches that any expressions or acts on their part which could be construed as an incitement to disobey the order for military service, might render those concerned, and the Party itself, liable under the Military Service Act and the D.O.R.A.

Such divisions and failings notwithstanding, the spirit of the gathering was that of a band of comrades facing great odds. "One half the manhood of the I.L.P. will be in prison before we meet again. We shall require to stand very near one another," Bruce Glasier said, in closing the conference.

¹ At Leeds, a year later, Dr. Salter moved a similar resolution in the form of a proposition to be laid before the Socialist International. Though Ramsay MacDonald opposed it with all his strategy, it was carried by 226 votes. Again practical application was rejected, by the shelving, by 178 votes to 62, of a resolution of the City of London branch that the I.L.P. members should henceforth vote against the war credits, as had been done by the German Minority Socialists. I had moved this resolution in the City of London branch of the I.L.P., which I had rejoined that year, having drifted away from it in the Suffragette struggles.

CHAPTER XL

EASTER WEEK, 1916

WHILST still we were in Newcastle we opened the newspapers, and learnt that the Irish rebellion had taken place. The hopeless bravery of it, the coercion and the executions which followed, to me were a grief cutting deep as a personal sorrow. Connolly on the Albert Hall platform, in the days of the Dublin lock-out of 1913, quiet-mannered and serious, came back to my eyes; his voice, restrained and deep, with its undercurrent of strong emotion, rang in my ears. I mourned him as one who had lived laborious days in the service of human welfare; a man of pity and tenderness, driven to violent means, from belief that they alone would serve to win through to a better life for the people.

Tied up in my mind with Eva Gore Booth, her pacifist sister, strove thoughts of Constance Markiewicz, the brilliant dilettante; dabbling in art with her Polish count; driving a four-in-hand at Winston Churchill's Manchester bye-election in defence of the barmaids' right to serve behind the bar; ladling out soup to the starving poor in the Dublin lock-out; drilling her company of Boy Scouts.

Day by day came news of amazing doings: the little Republic of a week, established by a tiny majority, with promises of "equal rights and opportunities" for all citizens; the suppression of the rebels, with their "job lot" of old arms, by machine-guns, bombs, bayonets, and poison gas, massacres, imprisonments, executions.

Amid the destruction and the carnage shone the pure fire of idealism and bravery; Connolly, mortally wounded, carried out on a stretcher and strapped in position to be shot; the young lovers, beautiful Grace Gifford, art student, painted by Orpen as "Young Ireland," married in the prison to her poet, Joseph Plunkett,¹ on the morning of his execution.

Grave P. H. Pearse, the scholar and teacher of St. Enda's, Thomas MacDonagh, Tom Clark, Con Colbert,—fifteen of the company of young poets, glorious and radiant in their fervour for the renaissance of their national literature, of the old lovers of Ireland and the lads who burned to die for her were executed. Save Constance Markiewicz, all the signatories to the Republican Proclamation were gone to the death they had chosen, embracing her as a bride.

Their flame of romance extinguished, the world seemed darker, more sordidly ruthless in materialism and the rule of might. I felt it as a wound in the great comity of life, a dishonouring blot on our human escutcheon

¹ Son of Count George Plunkett.