

the pressure imposed by the Munitions Act, notably in the refusal to permit workers to change their employment for legitimate reasons. The main outcome of the enquiry was that Munitions Tribunals were deprived of the power to impose imprisonment, but given authority to make orders for fines to be deducted by instalments from wages. To counteract any easement of compulsion which this might effect, came an announcement by the Law Officers of the Crown threatening legal proceedings by the Attorney-General against the trustees of any Trade Union issuing strike pay to workers controlled by the Munitions Act. The Government Committee on Production issued to certain Trade Unions a statement enjoining them not to press for further advances in wages.

Government Commissioners were appointed for further enquiry into the unrest on the Clyde and Tyne; for strikes were unpleasantly frequent, and the inflow of new workers, the dilution of labour, as it was termed, was not proceeding at the pace which the Ministry desired. The shop stewards of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers now mutually agreed to insist that the basis of any arrangement for dilution must be the payment of the old rates to all new-comers to the work, whether men or women. Further strikes were called in support of this principle. Again David Kirkwood came to the front, leading the men and women at Beardmore's Parkhead Forge so successfully, that this principle was accepted for that factory by the Government officials and by Sir William Beardmore. Whilst this agreement was operating at Parkhead 150 skilled men earning 8d. per hour were dismissed from another Clyde area factory and replaced by women paid from 12s. to 14s. a week.

CHAPTER XXXVI

CONSCRIPTION—CLYDE WORKERS ARRESTED—MILITARY SERVICE TRIBUNALS

CONSCRIPTION was swiftly advancing. The Lords were forcing the Government to the plunge, by threatening to reject the Bill for staving off a General Election. In the Commons the Liberal, Labour and Irish Members who had declared for the maintenance of the Voluntary System still held the majority, but little reliance could be placed on the stability of their convictions.

In the last week of the old year it was announced that the Cabinet had decided on the immediate redemption of Asquith's so-called "pledge to the married men," that before they were called on to fulfil their undertaking to serve, compulsion should be applied to the unmarried.

A special Conference was hastily convened by the Labour Party and Trade Union Congress, for January 6th. It was a great gathering; it seemed that everyone was there who cared for Labour. The delegates rejected the official resolution to leave the Labour Members free to vote as they thought fit; and by a huge majority of 1,998,000 to 873,000, declared against Conscription, urging the Labour Members to vote against the measure at every stage.

A Liberal, Sir John Simon, left the Cabinet, but Henderson and his Labour colleagues held to their posts, through those days of thunderous suspense, when all awaited the next event, wondering if any power or influence in the country could impede the introduction of a Conscription Bill.

Actually a meeting of the Labour Party Executive and the Labour Members of Parliament had instructed Henderson, Brace, and Roberts to withdraw from the Government. Their resignations were therefore tendered; but a meeting took place between Asquith, the Parliamentary Labour Party, and the Labour Party Executive. The resignations were withdrawn, pending the Labour Party Conference, which was to meet at the end of January. Conscription would be established before that date, if the Government had its way.

A little conference¹ was called in the Fabian Rooms in Tothill Street, by the No Conscription Fellowship, the Society of Friends, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a pacifist group of war-time growth. From this conference emerged a deputation to the House of Commons, and a body called the National Council against Conscription. I was elected to both. We passed, a little irregular stream of us, along the pavement to the House; mainly bourgeois, middle-aged, and elderly, black lace mantles and black

¹ January 10th, 1916.

silk skirts trailing and rustling: Arnold Lupton, emaciated, ascetic; Theodora Wilson Wilson, calmly ecstatic, mainly known for her children's tales from the Bible; A. J. Hobson, another spare intellectual; F. W. Pethick Lawrence, Margaret Bondfield, Catharine Marshall, old Lady Courtney of Penwith, and many more. I went with the rest through the familiar portals of St. Stephen's, expecting every policeman we encountered to turn me back; for still I was on the Speaker's black list for the stone I had hurled at the picture of Speaker Finch in the Suffragette days,¹ but I passed in with the throng unmolested.

We pleaded to no avail.

Robert Smillie was made president of the new Council against Conscription, F. W. Pethick Lawrence, hon. treasurer, Langdon Davies, whom I saw then for the first time, secretary. We met in a bare little office in Bride Lane. Catharine Marshall, as usual, had been to the House of Commons, and could report the rumours flying about the lobbies, and in particular the opinion of Sir John Simon, whose recent resignation from the Government had invested him with a romantic halo. Someone suggested Lobbying. "Oh, Lobbying at this stage would do harm!" Margaret Bondfield deprecated severely. "I thought Mr. Hobson," interposed Catharine Marshall, smiling. "Oh, that of course would be different; if Mr. Hobson would, that would be excellent," Margaret Bondfield rejoined. Impatience flamed within me. If only all Britain might have rushed to the Lobby! Our Federation members were there each day pleading with the Labour men to stand to their pledges. If only they might have been joined in their effort by all who cared!

The No Conscription Fellowship issued an appeal:

"Freedom of conscience must not be sacrificed to military necessity. . . . Men's deepest religious and moral convictions must not be swept aside.

We believe in human brotherhood. We will not kill. We will accept no military duties. While the soul of Britain lives, our witness cannot be in vain! . . ."

In vain! In vain! Events raced on. When the Council against Conscription met again, the Bill had been introduced. Pethick Lawrence resigned the treasureship; we could not prevent conscription and he had agreed to be treasurer of another society (the U.D.C.). The Council decided to meet at ten o'clock each morning for the melancholy edification of receiving a *réchauffé* of the news as the Bill went through. I resigned when I heard it. I felt myself in an atmosphere stifling to me. In the East End one could act and help.

The Opposition crumbled and fell away. The Parliamentary Committee, formed the previous October to oppose Conscription, with three Liberals, C. E. Hobhouse, Percy Alden, and J. Howard Whitehouse, as its officers, had decided—so Outhwaite later revealed—to offer "as little opposition as possible, because they were afraid of stimulating opposition to the coming law in the country"—to my way of thinking a strange

¹ See *The Suffragette Movement*, by E. Sylvia Pankhurst. (Longmans Green.) This picture has been removed from its old place.

manner of fulfilling their trust. The Irish withdrew their objection after the first reading of the Bill, having secured the exclusion of Ireland. "We must be careful that in Ireland we do not force the pace," the Chief Secretary warned. R. L. Outhwaite declared that the exclusion of Ireland conveyed a message to British workers: "Resist! Show that we shall have to send the military to your district; then you will be excluded!"

The Labour representatives now openly refused to leave their Government posts; they remained to support Conscription. They had obtained assurances that the Trade Union and Labour Party officials would obtain exemption from military service. Their work would be declared of national importance; their persons and the machinery of their movement would remain above the battle. They would face neither persecution nor the trenches. It was a wise precaution from their own standpoint. Henderson defended their refusal to obey the congress mandate, saying that Lord Kitchener had personally assured him that Conscription was essential to win the war: "I do not see how any man can set his opinion on a military question against the conclusion of Lord Kitchener and the General Staff."

About half the Labour Members voted for the Military Service Bill at every stage. Only 39 votes were recorded against its second reading; only 33 against its most cruel clause, to include young lads of eighteen years—mere children still. Asquith gave a definite pledge not to conscribe the widow's only son: "When there is a single unmarried son left behind it would of course be a monstrous thing if the State were to call for military service from a man in that position." He quoted the instruction of Shakespeare's Henry V to the then Lord Derby in the French wars:

"Go 'cruit me Cheshire and Lancashire
And Derby hills that are so free.
No married man or widow's son,
No widow's curse shall go with me."

Asquith ignored the fact that the essence of the Shakespearean eulogy of martial chivalry and courage was free service:

"We few, we happy few . . .
He which hath no stomach for this fight
Let him depart; his passport shall be made
And crowns for convoy put into his purse."

The married men were soon conscribed like the rest. The Military Service Tribunals gave no quarter to the widow's only son.¹ Amongst the earliest to be denied was a clerk, the only son of a mother in ill-health. He said it would kill her if he were taken. The chairman of the Tribunal replied: "We are at war and cannot take such cases into account." This

¹ W. C. Anderson, M.P., complained that at Bermondsey Tribunal the military representative opposed the exemption of a man who held three medical certificates of unfitness, who had four brothers in the Army, and was the support of his widowed mother and his wife and children. The Mayor had protested that the Tribunal was powerless and had better disband.