

War. In spite of this Act, numbers of women came to me displaying notices to quit from their landlords. These were exceedingly interesting documents, for they contained printed reports of Police Court cases which had taken place before the passage of the new Act, and in which magistrates had expressly stated that it was "wholly unnecessary" for landlords to go to the trouble and expense of obtaining ejectment orders from the Police Court before thrusting their tenants into the street. The obvious intention of these notices, an intention undoubtedly successful in many cases, was to make the tenants believe that the law had not been changed.

Unhappily the Emergency Courts Act did not induce all magistrates to refuse ejectment orders,¹ even against unfortunate people whose breadwinners were at the War. A poor woman from Wyke Road came to me overwhelmed by misfortune. Her three married sons, and a young single one who gave her 12s. a week, had all gone to the War, and neither she nor her daughters-in-law had received a farthing on their account. Her blind husband, "always unlucky," had had no work since the previous February. For a time she herself had also been unemployed. Then, agonised by the tears of her two little sons of nine and eleven, who were crying for food, she had accepted a small job in a button factory for her daughter who would not be fourteen till October. For this breach of the law her husband had been summoned to the Police Court and fined 13s. They could not pay; indeed, they were almost starving; for though she had now got work again, she was earning only from 7s. to 10s. a week, from which must be deducted 1s. 6d. a week for the hire of her sewing-machine, 8d. for cotton, and the cost of gas for her flat-iron. The police had now taken her husband to prison. The rent was in arrears, and the landlord had informed her that he was sending a bailiff with a warrant for distraint. The Education Authorities had informed her that she would be made to pay for the dinners her children had been given at school. To make matters worse, she had spent so much time queueing up in the hitherto fruitless effort to get separation allowances for herself and her daughters-in-law, that up to Wednesday evening of that week she had only earned 2s. 3d. at her sewing-machine. I succeeded in getting her husband released and the warrant for distraint refused.

¹ On October 8th, 1914, at Thames Police Court, Clark Hall, the magistrate, granted an ejectment order against an unemployed man with six children, although the landlord had already defied the Courts Emergency Act by selling up the tenants' goods without applying for an order of the Court.

CHAPTER V

WITH RUNCIMAN AT THE BOARD OF TRADE

I HAD written for deputations from our Federation to all the Government departments and committees concerned with the well-being of the people. Runciman, who was then President of the Board of Trade, consented to receive us on September 2nd.

I went with half a dozen of our most active members. I had aroused them from the voiceless millions of the submerged poor; they were to me, in Gladstone's phrase, *vox populi, vox dei*, the touchstone of eternal verities; my mothers, my sisters, my daughters. I had need of no other kin than they. Of our party that day were Charlotte Drake, a fair Saxon type, bleached by the hardships of an East End mother, clear-eyed in serene tenderness for her children, with a unique bluntness of racy utterance, always decisive; Melvina Walker, a native of Jersey, steeped in the bohemianism of the London poor, with the nose and jaw of a famine victim, and elusive, Celtic black eyes, feline in their mysterious aloofness and uncertainty, blazing at times with a swift and sudden fire; frail Mrs. Parsons, flushed and consumptive-looking, showing in every line of her the evidence of an ill-nourished childhood; pretty Mrs. Farrell, with her loveliness of red-gold hair and roseate skin even the drabness of poor, East End clothing could not obliterate, retained by her easy-going Irish temperament, despite the toil of a woman who bears, and suckles, and works, as wage earner, and as home maker.

These, with the rest of my brood, wore an air of hostility to the sumptuous offices in Whitehall. The ire of mutual contempt flashed between them and the "flunkeys," as Melvina Walker scornfully dubbed the attendants who guided us to the spacious audience chamber. Here Runciman, with his pale countenance, received us stiffly, seated at an imposing table, flanked by an array of departmental officials. I was interested to observe how seriously Cabinet Ministers treated our little band in those days, how anxious they were to conciliate our storm centre in the East End. National unity was a necessity of war time.

Our case was a two-fold attack. We complained of the sweating and evil conditions of women engaged on Army contracts, already looming up as an important factor of war-time economics, and of the exorbitant food prices. We asked that the Government should take over the food supply, either—as we preferred—by nationalising it, and engaging the shopkeepers as managers at a definite salary, or at least by establishing fixed rates, at which the farmer, importer and manufacturer must sell

commodities, the Government making up the deficit, should the profit fall below a certain fixed standard, and recouping itself from other sources. Our women showered protests and budgets on Runciman. Mrs. Farrell declared that every week she was more in debt to the shopkeepers, Mrs. Parsons that she and her children were short of food. Sugar, which used to cost her 1½d. per lb., was now 3½d., beans which had been 2½d. were 4d. One of the big multiple shop companies was allowing women who bought margarine to get their sugar for 2½d. per lb.; but if they bought butter they must pay 3½d. "Why should they force poor people to give margarine to their children; miserable stuff which would not nourish them?" she asked, indignant, protesting that her children were delicate children; they needed good feeding!

Mrs. Drake produced the weekly budget of a mother who had eleven children to cater for. Before the War she had purchased weekly 8 lbs. of sugar and 2½ lbs. of margarine in lieu of butter. She was now obliged to content her family with but 3½ lbs. of sugar and 1¼ lbs. of margarine. "Many people are considering raids on the warehouses," she bluntly concluded, and Runciman winced perceptibly.

Melvina Walker, her hat awry, her hands, in their old black gloves, folded genteelly, eyed him with the mocking nonchalance of one who has been a lady's-maid, and knows the foibles and peccadilloes of the highly placed. With the practised aplomb of a street corner orator, she expatiated on the cost of her every-Sunday knuckle bone of imported mutton, which had risen since the War from 4½d. to 8½d. per lb. It was useless to talk of a scarcity of sugar or of flour, she insisted sharply. "There are tons and tons of them stacked in the docks! Our men go in and see them, and they know!"

Again Runciman and his companions looked uncomfortable.

"Something must be done for us, or we shall have to take the food!" she blazed at him, striking the table.

Mrs. Payne turned on him her gaze of sorrowing humility, pleading with him that if he could see the people with their pinched faces coming to our door at Old Ford, he must feel with her the necessity of our case.

He answered with expressions of sympathy for our demands and our arguments; yet happily, he congratulated himself, the food had not yet reached "panic prices."

"Not at your salary, Mr. Runciman!" Melvina Walker snapped at him, fierce as a tigress; "but to people with 25s. a week, and four or five children to bring up, they *are* panic prices!"

"It is not a question of salary," he retorted. She insisted: "It is a question of salary!"

The Government could not nationalise every shop; but it was doing, and would do, all it could, he urged, striving to be encouraging and conciliatory, assuring me that I would do the Board of Trade a service by notifying every case of sweating which came to my knowledge, protesting his own determination to provide redress.

CHAPTER VI

QUEEN MARY'S WORKROOMS—WITH JOHN BURNS AND THE CABINET COMMITTEE—MARY MACARTHUR

ON August 10th Queen Mary's Needlework Guild, to "organise a collection of garments" for war sufferers, was announced; a great unpaid volunteer garment-making was anticipated. The officials of the Women's Trade Union League and others raised a protest, on behalf of the masses of workless women ordinarily employed in the garment working trades. The protest was not ignored. Ten days later "The Queen's Work for Women Fund" was set up to provide employment for women thrown out of employment by the War. The Fund was to be administered by a Central Committee for the Employment of Women, controlled by the very officials of the Women's Trade Union League who had criticised the needlework scheme. Mary Macarthur was made the Hon. Secretary, Susan Lawrence, Margaret Bondfield, Dr. Marion Phillips of the Women's Labour League, and Mrs. Gasson of the Co-operative Union were members of the Committee. Their appointment received a wide and cordial welcome, in which I heartily joined. We hoped that these women would take the lead in protecting the status of women's labour. The first four had proved useless, if not hostile, to the Women's Suffrage cause; but it was believed they were staunch on the industrial side. Mary Macarthur had a great reputation as a pioneer organiser of trade unionism for women, and as a propagandist against sweating. Alas, the Committee speedily covered itself with ignominy by setting up the sweated wage of 10s. per week for adult women, to be paid in the workrooms established under its auspices. Local committees receiving grants from the fund might pay adult women less than 10s. a week—and in many cases did—but in no case would the committee sanction more. The wage was to be nominally 3d. an hour, but the hours must be limited, to prevent more than 10s. weekly being earned. Girls between 16 and 18 years were to get 2d. per hour, making a wage of 5s. a week, or 1s. per six hour day. These miserable rates were on no account to be exceeded, but they might be reduced at will. A circular of the Central Committee issued in November, stated "in some cases it may be desirable to keep the weekly wage below 10s." Clearly no risk must be run of producing a scarcity of women willing to work at a sweated wage for the ordinary employer. Many of the Queen Mary Workrooms paid as little as 6s. a week. A woman came to me from the

A tiny proportion of the workless men were thus employed. The Army got more of them. That the boasted Volunteer Army was recruited by hunger was a fact it was bad form to mention.

The Queen's Fund, amounting to a mere £60,000, was assumed to be the only source available for relieving unemployed women, though their numbers were officially estimated at 60,000, and may have been much larger.¹ Their numbers could not then be ascertained by the unemployment registers, for few were thus insured.

The Local Representative Committees were now invited to form sub-committees, representing local organisations of women, to administer Queen Mary Workrooms. Our Poplar Mayor formed the sub-committee on his own initiative, selecting its members according to his own fancy. He included all the women members of the main committee excepting me—because all the others were warranted to make no protest against the beggarly 10s. rate—a sad proof of their subservience. Our Federation, though the only considerable organisation of women in the borough, was ignored for the same reason. The Labour movement had no women's organisation there then.

Some of the other Local Representative Committees, less habit-hardened to destitution than that of Poplar, were now protesting against the inactivity of the Cabinet Committee, which issued to them neither funds nor instructions. The Fulham Committee had published its intention to relieve distressed persons at the rate of 12s. 6d. in food tickets—always food tickets—for one adult, 7s. 6d. each for additional adults, with children's allowances of 3s. to 4s. up to a maximum of 25s. per family.

On September 28th the Poplar Committee was called for the third time. Two days before I had learnt that "a stout man in a motor car" had driven round doling out a few shilling food tickets, telling the distressed people, in the words of one poor woman, that "he was doing it out of his own pocket and I mustn't say nothing to no one." Actually the "stout man" was the Mayor who, having secured a preliminary grant from the National Relief Fund, had distributed such meagre assistance as he thought fit.

When the Committee met, it brushed aside the Mayor's irregularities, despite my protests, and decided to adopt for itself the Fulham scale, though according to the Mayor, there was not a penny in hand to disburse.

¹ The Central Committee for Women's Employment published a table indicating the proportion of unemployment and short time amongst women and girls in London as ascertained by the Committee's investigations. It was here shown that out of 66,000 women employed in dressmaking only 34 per cent. of those employed by large firms were working full time, only 31 per cent. of those working for small firms. In boot and shoe making only 13 per cent. of the women employed by large firms were working full time. In printing and books 26 per cent., in jams 39 per cent., in furnishing and upholstering 18½ per cent., amongst furriers and skinnners 33 per cent.

At the beginning of October 36,000 unemployed women were on the Labour Exchange registers, estimated as less than half the number unemployed, and the Queen Mary Fund amounted to £68,000.

The Vacant Lots Society, a creation of Joseph Fels, the American soap boiler and Henry-Georgite, had sent through Lansbury an offer to supply land and the materials for cultivating it, if the Mayor's Committee would provide wages to set men to work. Fels was an old friend of Lansbury and well known in the borough for his charitable "back to the land" efforts. Without argument it was agreed that his offer be accepted; but nothing more was ever heard of the decision and even Lansbury never referred to it again.

As the Committee broke up and came together in greetings and conversation, Julia Scurr, a member of our Federation executive, though never an active one, came to me timidly, telling me that the Queen Mary Workroom in the Borough was very comfortable and the dinners very nice. I saw that her conscience pained her. "Sylvia does us good; she keeps us young," she said to Lansbury wistfully. I knew she regretted many a compromise, but could not stand out against the others. I wished I had by me on the committee women on the economic level of the poor employees in Queen Mary's Workrooms, to prick this bubble of complacency.

Already I had written to the Queen, challenging her not to permit the 10s. wage to be established in the workrooms associated with her name. At her instance, Mary Macarthur received us at the magnificent residence placed at the disposal of her Central Committee for Women's Employment.

We waited long beyond the appointed time in a spacious, ornate chamber, with gilded chairs upholstered in crimson silk and deep-piled, crimson carpets; our women in their dark poor clothes eyeing this pomp indignantly.

At last a large lady entered elegantly arrayed in old gold silk, with a rustle of petticoats, and plump white forearms, advantageously displayed. A Botticelli Madonna, Dr. Mills of Kensington once called her, from her paleness and her slimness. The simile was poor; she had always the small, narrowly-set Scotch eyes, and the heavy, long, upper lip. To-day, portly as she was, he must rather have called her a Rubens matron! Despite her plain face and mouth-breathing voice, her energy and assurance lent her, at moments, the charm which often makes an ugly woman more attractive than a beautiful one.

She was cordial and pleasant with us. My companions accepted her proffered hand with reluctance. One and all they regarded her sternly.

Her friendliness smote me unpleasantly, for I could not respond to it. I warned her, as obviously was the case, that the standard set by her committee would react on the wages of women throughout the country. Had the standard been good, it would have helped women to refuse sweated conditions.

Charlotte Drake, white-faced and earnest, had brought with her the budget of a single woman actually existing on 10s. a week; revealing the meagre bareness of it; challenging Macarthur to explain how it

could suffice further to meet the needs of a woman with children ; passionately urging her to concede that mothers with little children dependent on them should be treated as men in the same position.

Melvina Walker flashed out, with angry eyes : " We have no need to tell *you*, Miss Macarthur, how working women live in the East End ; no one knows better than *you*, with all *your* experience ! You *know* that 10s. is not enough to live on ! "

Walker also had budgets to confound her, showing what it costs " when mother has to go to work and have her children minded."

Mrs. Pascoe, cook at our E.L.F.S. restaurant in the Old Ford Road, fiercely independent, protested, as breadwinner, in place of an invalid husband, that she could not exist on the miserable pay at Queen Mary's Rooms.

Mrs. Parsons reminded her that a magistrate had just refused permission for a Russian girl to enter this country till her prospective employer would pledge himself to pay her not less than 17s. 6d. a week.

When they were done Macarthur turned to me, expostulating :

" Miss Pankhurst, you know the average wage of women is only about 7s. 6d. a week,¹ and we are paying 10s. ! How can you expect us to pay more ? "

She ran to a table, snatched up and held out to the women dramatically some babies' woollies, crying :

" See, they are making these lovely things in the workrooms ! Some of them will find their way to the East End ! "

" I would rather take poison than them ! " Charlotte Drake exclaimed, with a gesture of anger. Even her lips had blanched.

Out we strode, with but stiff acknowledgment of Macarthur's leave-taking.

We followed up our visit by a memorial to the Queen, demanding a minimum wage of 5d. an hour or £1 a week for the women employed in her workrooms. Some suffrage societies and their leaders, and such notable people as Olive Schreiner, Margaret Macmillan, Hertha Ayrton, Lillah McCarthy, Beatrice Harraden, Laurence Housman and Henry Nevinson joined us in signing the memorial ; but the brunt of the battle was left to us. Many rank and file women Trade Unionists and some who were organising under the very officials who had fixed the 10s. standard sent us their blessing. The Manchester and Salford Women's Trades Council, under the leadership of those active, devoted people, Eva Gore Booth, Sarah Dickinson and Esther Roper, placed on record its view that the wretched 10s. maximum of the Central Committee for Women's Employment was " an industrial disaster for women . . . bound to have its effect on the rates given by private employers."

I could not flag in determination to struggle for a higher standard. Poor little missives containing such budgets as this, of a widow

¹ It had been stated so, but sufficient statistical information to declare an average was not then available.

supporting two children by her sewing-machine, kept the hard facts of great poverty always before me :

| | | | | | |
|---|----|----|----|----|----------|
| Wage weekly | .. | .. | .. | .. | 14s. 0d. |
| Rent one room | .. | .. | .. | .. | 3s. 6d. |
| Payment for having little girl minded | .. | .. | .. | .. | 2s. 6d. |
| " " " baby " | .. | .. | .. | .. | 2s. 0d. |
| Nestle's milk for baby | .. | .. | .. | .. | 1s. 4d. |
| Gas for boiling water for baby's bath and morning | .. | .. | .. | .. | 3d. |
| cup of tea | .. | .. | .. | .. | 1d. |
| Errands at work | .. | .. | .. | .. | 3d. |
| Insurance | .. | .. | .. | .. | 2d. |
| Cooking at work | .. | .. | .. | .. | 10s. 1d. |

Only 3s. 11d. left for food, fuel, clothes, etc !

She was up at six each morning to feed and dress her children and take them to be minded, before hurrying to the factory. On Saturday afternoons and Sundays she washed, cleaned, mended and cooked. The children had influenza. To pay for the doctor she cleaned door-steps in the evenings. All night she was kept awake tending her sick children. How would she exist were she to lose her work and be compelled to fall back on Queen Mary's Rooms ?

Eventually, under gradually marshalled public opinion, children's allowances were grudgingly sanctioned, and actually paid in the few districts where women war sufferers, who did no work for their dole, were getting from the National Relief Fund 10s., plus children's allowances. In April 1915 when the cost of living had greatly risen and many workrooms were closing down, the Central Committee for Women's Employment issued a belated permission for the maximum rate of 3d. per hour in the workrooms to be raised by not more than 10 per cent., and for the working hours to be increased to 46 per week. Girls between 16 and 18 years getting 1s. a day might now be paid 1s. 3d., and girls between 14 and 16 years getting 4s. a week might have 5s. !

Their evening meal was a slice of bread, and again the rancid butter, with a can of tea. Some jobbery doubtless accounted for this poor fare. He and three others had run home to get clean. Twenty men had decamped ten days before. On Monday he returned to camp with a heavy cold and looking, his wife said, very ill. She had heard nothing for many days since, and came to me, fearing he was in prison and that her own separation allowance would be stopped.

I was clamouring for an interview at the War Office. On October 2nd Lord Kitchener deputed Harold Baker to see us. I took with me Charlotte Drake, Edith Jones and nine soldiers' wives and mothers, sorrowful, anxious, their faces a very epitome of all the miseries women suffered in those dark days. At the sight of their poverty Baker, immaculately tailored, arrogant with class prejudice, was taken aback. He turned to me sharply:

"I only want to hear the officials; I do not want to listen to the actual cases!"

The "cases." Oh, wounding, misused term! The poor beings thus designated quivered in dumb distress.

We jarred and jangled, I indignant:

"But surely you want to understand their point of view and to know what their actual experience is!"

He, imperious: "This is not a Court of Enquiry . . . it is no use listening to them."

I, insistent: "This deputation is to represent the opinions and experiences of the women concerned."

He weakened a little, but, as I considered, with insolent unreason declared he would not allow more than five women at a time into the room. "This room is too small!" he glared round the spacious chamber.

I complained of the terrible delays in paying separation allowance. Sir Charles Harris, a ruddy, bellicose man at Baker's elbow, who conducted the business for his stiff chief, denounced the ignorance of women: the cause, he was confident, of every trouble. Mrs. Drake tersely enquired whether particulars as to their families could not be obtained from recruits on enlistment, in order that their wives should not be left to discover the Army procedure for themselves. He replied that men sometimes "forgot" they had families and were "glad to bolt!"

We pleaded that no woman could keep going the smallest home in any degree of decency, with less than £1 a week; and that, given this nucleus, no child could be kept, even sparely, for less than 5s. a week. On leaving the elementary schools the children whose fathers had been killed should either be sent to secondary schools and supported by maintenance grants, or apprenticed to trades, as was done for orphans in pre-War Hungary. Harris eyed us satirically, convinced that some of us were fools and the others knaves. He refused to admit the inadequacy of the miserly pension, of 5s. a week for the wife, and

1s. 6d. per child, fixed in the Boer War, and still obtaining. "It all depends who has to live on it!" he smiled scornfully.

Dumb thus far, the soldiers' wives spoke out their resentment. A mother of six had pawned, and sold, and gone days without food, whilst waiting her allowance. A mother of five had been told by the ladies of the S.S.F.A. that she ought to show her patriotism by selling her furniture and moving into a single room before coming to them for aid, when her allowance failed to appear. A poor woman, left with two infants by an absconding husband, had lived six years with a Reservist and borne him children. She complained of her destitution, the harsh denial of all allowance, and urged the claim of the soldier's unmarried wife to the pay her man had earned.

Baker interrupted her brusquely. "I will hear no more of the cases. I am going to make my reply."

He did so woodenly, without a gleam of understanding, conceding nothing, giving no hope of improvement. No trace of sympathy for these sore-tried women did I myself perceive.

In my correspondence, just then, came a fitting reply to Sir Charles Harris. A Welsh soldier's wife sent me a letter from her husband:

"Dear, I hope this war won't last long, for I am quite sick of it. They don't do right by wives at all. It is the same with everyone up here. Dear, it is not my fault that your money is stopped, I can tell you, but I have wrote away about it for you, and the Sergeant Major is writing again to-night, so you see I am doing my very best about it, for it must be hard on you without any money, love, and I shall see you get it too, my love."

This woman had been left five weeks without separation allowance. The relief committee had suggested her husband was to blame.

The original separation allowance of 1s. 1d. a day for soldiers' wives and 2d. a day for their children had by this time been raised to 11s. 1d. a week for the wife, and 1s. 9d. for each of the first three children, 1s. 2d. for the fourth, a maximum of 17s. 6d., with no further increase, however large the family might be. These sums included a compulsory allotment of 3s. 6d. per week for the wife and 7d. per child up to a maximum of 5s. 3d. a week deducted from the soldier's pay.

In response to the stream of horrified protests against the grievous poverty of the soldiers' wives, Asquith announced another small increase, bringing the scale up to 12s. 6d. a week for the wife, 2s. 6d. for each of the first four children, and 2s. each for the rest. Great and general satisfaction welcomed the promise that henceforth the allowances should be paid through the Post Office, without the intervention of the impudent, charity-mongering S.S.F.A., upon which the popular mind heaped, not only its own shortcomings, but all those of the Government and the Army administration.

many a poor mother pleaded. One of them wrote to me from Edinburgh :

" I have a son in the 9th Royal Scots. My boy signed a paper allowing me 6d. a day, being told the Government would allow his mother up to 10s. . . . a Pension officer came down. I will not say what I suffered from that man ; but I was insulted by our generous Government by the offer of fivepence a week for my son ! It is a disgrace ! My boy gave me 10s. a week ; in a month or two he would have been getting 12s. and in the course of a year he would have been out of his time and getting 18s. to £1. The Pension officer said I was not any the loser, but suppose my son does not come back ! Many a mother has had a hard struggle to bring her son up to be a man, and just as he has got to be a fine help he goes. My boy went away the very week the War broke out and offered to fight for his country—and I had taken rooms at a higher rent last May, because I thought his pay would be always increasing. I had to buy all his kit in the Territorials, and I did not get the £5 they speak of. Now I am unable to pay my rent next week, and I will be compelled to leave this house ; I cannot keep it up on my husband's small pay. I have five other children, the oldest is 12 years of age. The one that is in the Army is the only boy I had working. It is very hard, and I will have to go and get work of some kind to do at home. I have a young infant I cannot leave, and my husband is not strong now. . . . When I had my boy giving me 10s. a week I put 8s. 7d. of it away for the rent, as it took all his father's pay, which is not big, to keep us in food and everything is so dear since the War."

Another wrote to me :

" My son says the 5s. 10d. a week I am getting is all from him. Is it a good principle to let a boy pay 10d. a day out of 1s. 2½d. to me and for the Government to pay nothing ? Now I know I am taking nearly all my son's money it hurts me, and although I cannot make two ends meet with his 5s. 10d. I will save him some."

Jack Sutton, one of the Manchester Labour Members of Parliament whom I knew well, complained that in the Lancashire coalfields mothers with several sons, who had each given her £1 a week, were only able to get from the War Office a few shillings in respect of one of them. Thomas Richardson protested that the War Office and its investigators disregarded the recommendations of Pensions committees in respect of parents' allowances.

A poor old father appeared at Bow County Court to answer his landlord's application to evict him for non-payment of rent. In eight weeks he had had but 2½ days' work. His wife was ill and he had to support five grandchildren, whose father was in Australia, and of whom nothing had been heard since the outbreak of war. He had three sons at the War, and a fourth had been killed in action. He had received not a penny of separation allowance on account of any of them.

Eight soldiers wrote to the *Daily Citizen* :

" When we enlisted we little thought how those at home were going to fare ! We were given to understand that if we allotted a small portion of our pay the . . . Government would add to it. This we did, but . . . our people have failed to draw even our own allotments."

A soldier's mother brought me a letter from her son :

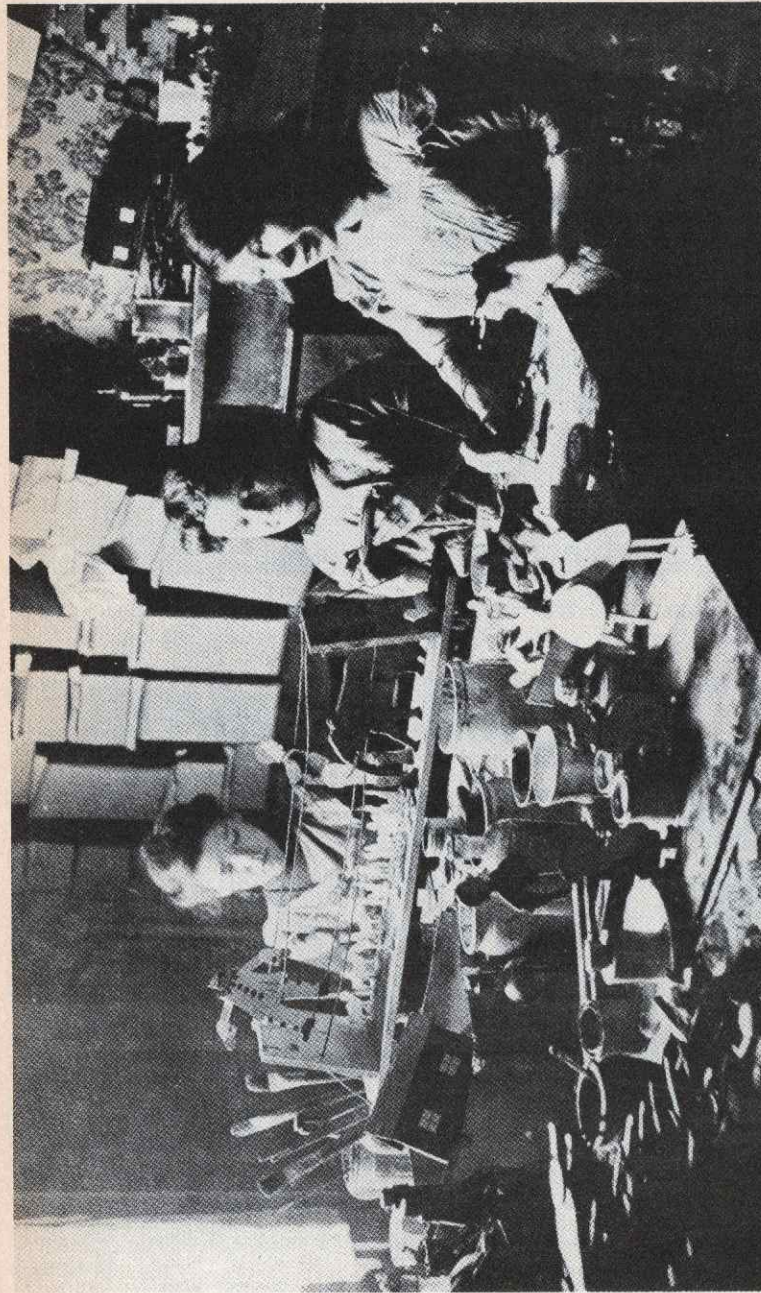
" . . . I was sorry to hear Dad is not doing much work. You ask me to send you 3s. through the paymaster. I am afraid you don't know how quick they work in the Pay Office. I applied for a form two weeks ago, and yesterday the Pay Sergeant sent for me and told me to go down the line as far as — and find out how many men wanted forms. We had 70 in our company and I sent the numbers on to our Paymaster at —. They have to wait now till all the companies send in their numbers and they will send off the forms. By the time they are filled in, and sent back, I expect it will take a month, and then they will be sent to the War Office for their examination. . . . In the meantime I will send you the 3s. because I know you will have to wait a long time before the War Office moves. The town is placarded in every street with the forms showing what you get¹ if you allow the Pay Sergeant to stop so much. Our boys are so disgusted continually asking for forms that they have thrown mud at the notices. . . ."

For some time we were alone in our demand for £1 a week for the soldiers' wives and dependent mothers, and 5s. a week for each child—little enough, and tolerable only because wage standards were so low. In November the Labour organ, the *Daily Citizen*, adopted the same cry, the Labour War Emergency Committee also took it up.

Crowds of women flocked to me in their troubles, clutching their sheaves of documents. Spurred by their need, I attacked the work with unrelenting energy, learning new ropes every day and dragging a band of willing helpers with me in the quest. I impressed on them that it was our mission to be the advocates of the people ; to get for them the highest possible terms we could ; they could never be too high ; nay, in this welter of meagre standards always immeasurably too low ! I had four shorthand-typists busy on the work and a number of voluntary aids.

Difficult cases, refused by all the authorities, began to reach to me from all parts of the country. Mrs. Drake and our other organisers and secretaries were dealing with similar problems. I dictated letters each day from 10 a.m. till 2 p.m., and often later, to demolish the piles of correspondence which rose about me, then turned to other work. Public meetings, branch meetings, committees, the *Dreadnought* to edit and largely to write, the newspapers and the Parliamentary reports—I read the whole of them—kept me at it from waking to sleeping. I was always up working two nights a week and went on next day without a

¹ As explained above, in most cases dependants did not get what the form appeared to indicate.



Workers' Dreadnought

OUR TOY FACTORY

Later in the War, when darkened streets lent colour to sombre stories, propaganda for the State Regulation of Vice became noisy. The Press gave place and space to professional sensationalists like Conan Doyle, who substituted detective romances by lurid appeals for the protection of young soldiers "preyed upon and ruined by harpies." The Waterloo Road was written of as the scene of scandalous misdoings unchecked by the police. On the other hand it was more quietly contended that police constables were so much harrassed by charges of alleged laxity in apprehending prostitutes that respectable women were in danger of arrest should they venture down that infamous road.

Conceiving it my duty to see for myself, I determined to investigate the road one Saturday night. Mrs. Drake pleaded to join me. It was a dreary night, biting cold, a light haze from the river hung upon the air. The chill pierced to one's very bones. The dingy obscurity of brick and pavement, scarce pierced by the glimmer of paint-smudged lamps, oppressed the soul. I turned to the river, craning on tip-toe to see it over the high, dark wall of the bridge as it flowed on, wonderful in its gleaming and its shadows, bearing what histories and what mysteries in its depths, lovely in its craft, with the tang of enchantment hanging about all which pertains to waterfaring, mournful with the poignancy of supreme beauty.

The spell of the river could not fall on the crowd passing over it, shut off as it was by the black high wall. Its loveliness lost to my gaze, the dreariness of the place closed down on me.

At the corner of the bridge a policeman stood watching. When women appeared through the haze he swayed towards them, alert in menace. They seemed to swerve from him with hurried gait.

In one of the alcoves of the bridge sat a merry party—two sailors and two women—opening packets of sandwiches and cake, with quip and joke. In another a man and woman were together silent, hand clasping hand, in the moveless throes of sorrow.

Over the bridge the people were denser; policeman and special constables met one almost at every step. Sometimes a woman stood by the curb, or hung back close to the wall. Just as one chose, one could deem her a "harpy," or merely a respectable woman waiting for a 'bus or a friend. Two soldiers went by us together, and behind them two girls, giggling noisily—to attract the attention of the men, one might judge if one pleased, or just with the jolly unconsciousness of youth, enjoying its night out.

A poor, battered creature, of sixty years or more, drunk or demented, railed dismally to the unheeding void: "You, you, you'll be getting me locked up! You'll be getting me locked up!"

A crowd had gathered, helmeted policemen in the centre, special constables on the outskirts, urging the people to move on. "Get away from me! Get away from me!" a man's voice shouted. "I've lost a leg at the Front, where *you* ought to be!" Women and girls were wringing their hands with cries of protest: "They are treading on him! He has got eight wounds and only one leg! Oh! Oh! They are

contained not a single woman member, but the Committee long led a shadowy existence and when eventually it began to function the duties assigned it were rather to assist in imposing discipline than to protect the interests of the workers.

The Conference of Women's Organisations called by Runciman at the Board of Trade on April 13th, was crowded with well-to-do people: barely half a dozen of those present had the least claim to represent the working women who formed the majority of those it was intended to recruit.¹ Mary Macarthur complained that neither the women of the Labour Party nor the registered Trade Unions of Women had been invited with the sole exception of the Federation of Women's Trade Unions she represented.

Runciman told us that 33,000 women had already registered for war service, 6,000 of them for munitions. He hurried nervously over the wage question; it had been decided, he said, that on Government contracts the same piece rates should be given to women as to men but in regard to time rates "no special conditions had been laid down." I saw that, as I had feared, there was to be no real safeguard for equal pay. As everyone knew, all the work was to be reorganised. Only if it were decided that all the men and women, once trained, must have the same pay, would the sweating of women be checked.

Having surmounted the thorny question of wages, Runciman grew more urbane. He urged that the ladies before him could assist the good work by finding lodgings for the new women workers, and by keeping an eye on them to see that they came to no moral harm. "We know that this can be better done by your organisations than by any Government department." Smiles greeted his words. He passed on to the question of training: the Board of Agriculture had arranged to give women a fortnight's instruction in farm work: if they were active and intelligent they could learn enough in that time to make themselves useful. He ceased abruptly.

"Can anyone speak? Can I speak?" A clear voice cut the air; Mrs. Charlotte Drake from the East End, with her humble black clothes and her anxious face, was the questioner. She urged in her blunt, brief way that the men's Trade Unions should be asked to take in women members and the women be paid just as if they were men, whether on piece rates or time rates. Then there would be no reason to talk of the undercutting of men by "women blacklegs." The phrase

¹ The increase in the number of women employed in industry during the War, though large, was not so great as Press propaganda might have led one to suppose, as is indicated by the following table taken from the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

Average Figures for men and women in industrial employment (Manufacturing):

| | July, 1913 | July 1918 | July 1924 |
|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| Men ... | 6,301,000 | 5,058,000 | 6,016,000 |
| Women ... | 2,178,600 | 2,970,600 | 1,987,990 |

angered her hearers, women cast indignant looks at her. Runciman shifted uncomfortably. Following her, I insisted on the uselessness of the promise he and Lloyd George had given. When I reminded him that the women whose service the Government required were still disfranchised Runciman interrupted. He would not have that question mentioned, he said irascibly. I was surprised to observe that not one woman infringed his prohibition.

Lady Aberconway, the doyen of an old Liberal Women's Suffragist family, spoke as representative of the Women's Liberal Federation:

"It is our earnest desire to co-operate with the Government." But was the Government employing as many women clerks and typists as it might? Runciman said the substitution of women for men was proceeding rapidly; but the lady was not satisfied; she wanted the economic screw pressed harder to assist recruiting, and to prove, since she was a Suffragist and ardent for the War, that women could serve it well. Mrs. Rackham, of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, took up the tale, gruesome indeed to the few who could see in the War a gigantic slaughter. Margaret Llewellyn Davies, that notable builder of the Women's Co-operative Guild, tender in her broad humanity, protested against the cruelly long hours women and girls, the potential mothers of the race, were working in the munition factories. It was surprising that the Government should sanction this economic waste, she said, for it had long been proved that the greatest production was secured by shifts of workers employed for not more than seven hours a day. Mary Macarthur had just returned from Elswick, where women munitioners were working 84 hours a week, though crowds of other women were clamouring there for work. The employers preferred to occupy their machines on two shifts of twelve hours than on three shifts of eight hours, therefore this cruel absurdity continued. Mrs. Reed and Lady Samuels, representing Liberal and Conservative women, attempted to combat her protests, till Runciman interposed to check the wrangle. The anti-Suffragist representative declared: "We hope to co-operate with the Government without imposing any terms." The Girls' Friendly Society, the Y.W.C.A. and others pledged enthusiastic aid. Then Eleanor Rathbone of Liverpool (afterwards M.P.), plump, ruddy and complacent, intervened. She had been "disgusted," she said, by the poor response of women to the appeal for war service; but she thought it had not been sufficiently striking and direct. It was too refined; it should be more like the appeals for the Army. There should be recruiting posters and recruiting stations. To get middle-class women there should be "comrades brigades." The middle-class woman would not migrate for war work alone, or if she did, she would not stick to her job. To get her to persevere she must go with her own class and her own set. Women should be put through military drill and given a retaining fee "of even a shilling a week," and when they had "taken the King's shilling" they should be subject to penalties "if they backed out." If the Government wanted to get women to replace men on really skilled and hard work, she declared, they must get

must follow the example of Prussia, by levying income tax on all workers earning more than £45 a year, and by having the tax deducted from their wages by the employer, and paid for in stamps.

The speakers were in a ferment of enthusiasm, the audience tense and earnest. Lansbury was more excited than any. He averred that Conscription would mean soldiers at $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a day, no allotments, no separation allowances, no pensions. The compulsionists wanted to cheapen the cost of the War, he declared, and to have the workers shot or imprisoned if they demanded higher wages. He (Lansbury) insisted that the Government, Parliament, the judges, and all the possessing classes were feathering their own nests. A deputation was elected to lay the resolutions before McKenna: Mrs. Despard, Evelyn Sharp, Lansbury, John Scurr, then prominent amongst Poplar dockers though out of the docks already, E. C. Fairchild of the B.S.P., Robert Williams, then the big noise of the Transport Workers' Federation, T. E. Naylor of the Compositors' Union, myself and half a dozen more. McKenna refused to receive the deputation; but after some parleying volunteered to see Lansbury and me. I took Mrs. Drake with me, in order that the voice of an East End mother might make itself heard.

When we were ushered into his room at the Treasury McKenna, in his black frock-coat, came striding towards us cordially, and gripped Lansbury by the hand. Mrs. Drake and I swept past him icily; but Lansbury, who at the meeting had been so combative, was entirely disarmed. He radiated geniality and confidence. "We think if you could—we don't know if you could—" couched his mild appeal that the Government should take control of flour and coal, as it had taken control of sugar. Almost apologetically, he urged that the rising industrial unrest was due to the high price of food. Even in his own home great economy had to be practised. He had never seen so many children in the streets without shoes and stockings as now. McKenna expressed his sympathy; he knew, he knew; but this was war! Lansbury sadly assented, as though he felt he was bothering a busy man unduly by coming here at all.

I resented this friendly confabulation with a member of the Government. I followed Lansbury brusquely, holding to the full terms of the mandate given us by the meeting, expressing with a singleness of conviction—which doubtless seemed Utopian to the two men—my detestation of the social inequalities which the War daily accentuated. With a bitterness, which I saw went home to McKenna, I described the miserable privations I daily witnessed. He assented to my reminder that only a small minority of workers had received either wage increases or war bonus, and that in no case were these equivalent to the increase in the cost of living. He assented, too, when I urged that though in some trades overtime was being worked, those who were toiling for long hours needed more nourishment to keep them going, and that wives and mothers reported as much, or more, than the increase derived from overtime, had often to be spent upon extra food. He winced a little when I gave him the budget of a widowed mother with ten children,



DURING A DAYLIGHT AIR RAID

Some people spent considerable sums on such shelters.

McKenna protested the impossibility of my demands, the public opinion, the powerful interests which constrained him. I answered coldly, unmollified. Lansbury supported him gently against my truculence. "They can't, all at once—in a war, you know, Sylvia!"

McKenna proceeded urbanely: "Rich people have their commitments; they would be miserable if their incomes were greatly reduced."

"Is it better that the poorer people should starve?" I persisted.

"I haven't so much faith in the power of governments as some people," McKenna evaded. "I don't know how people could be forced to give up their money."

"You have managed to get the people registered."

"That is only putting names on paper."

"You have found it easy to punish the poor mothers of soldiers who, to get a shilling or two more on their allowances, have pretended they had a shilling or two more from their sons than was actually the case!"¹

He shielded himself behind a mask of sternness: "Do you approve of their making false representations?"

The acid retort was obvious: "Their excuse is that the Government promised if a son would allot his mother 3s. 6d. a week, the Government would make it up to 12s. 6d.; the Government has not kept its promise."

Mrs. Drake intervened in her quiet, blunt way; but McKenna was growing restive. He suggested, with a trace of sarcasm, that perhaps the deputation would like to hear *him* talk for a little while. He summed up the position with the air of the Strong Man brushing aside sentiment; imports must be paid for by exports. As productive work was now reduced by the urgency of war "the Chancellor of the Exchequer, by taxation, must make it impossible for the mass of people to buy clothes, or even some kinds of food."

"Under-nourished workers are not productive; it is a short-sighted policy to starve the people!" I answered, surprised that he should express himself with this brutal cynicism.

"I will not tax milk and bread," he conceded.

"The price of milk and bread has been raised!"

War profits, he declared, were as nothing to the millions daily spent on the War.

"If a man made more than a certain amount of profit I would have him hung!" cried Mrs. Drake; her voice had the sound of tears in it. As keenly as I, she felt we were come to voice the claims of the exploited poor against the representative of the possessing classes who were profiting by the War.

¹ In one case W. G. Edrupt, a driver in the City of London R.F.A., was bound over to come up for judgment if called upon and his stepmother fined £2 and £2 10s. costs because they had represented that before enlistment he earned £1 a week and gave his stepmother 15/-, whereas he had earned 15/- and given her 10/-. On one day 14 summonses for separation allowance frauds were heard at Woolwich Police Court; fines up to £5 were imposed.

Our visit was fruitless—obviously and entirely. Had the workers of Britain, solidly organised to enforce our mandate, been behind us, it had been otherwise.

We rose to leave. McKenna, exuberant, approached me. "I must shake hands with you. You are the pluckiest girl I ever knew."¹

Impetuously I rejected him; never would I surmount the barrier between the people and the governing classes whilst the masses starved on the other side!

¹ McKenna was Home Secretary when, after a month's hunger and thirst strike and forcible feeding, I tramped up and down my cell for 28 hours to secure release. It was to this he referred, I thought. (See *The Suffragette Movement*, Longmans Green.)

its Registration Bill. Crewe obligingly furnished the promise, but added, with a view to pleasing everyone, that the Government desired representative people to be considering how to get "a real representative Parliament" after the War. Lord Salisbury replied that nothing of that sort could be considered in war time; but votes for soldiers and sailors was a very different matter, and he was going to table a Bill next day to give votes to them forthwith. Lord Curzon, a member of the Government, addressed a circular to Members of Parliament declaring that the reasons against votes for women were as strong as before the War.

The next stage in this comedy of errors was opened by a question of Sir John Simon whether it would be in order to move women's franchise Amendments to the Government's proposed Registration Bill. Speaker Lowther replied that neither women, nor soldiers and sailors could be brought in by Amendment, unless included in the original Bill—a farcical declaration which reduced Parliamentary debate to absurdity. This was the ruling Lowther had given in 1913, to extricate Asquith from his inconvenient promise to allow a free vote on women's suffrage under the then Reform Bill. Undoubtedly Lowther had followed the Government's behest on that occasion. In order to avoid for the Government a passage at arms with the Tory militarists he now indicated a loophole of escape from his ruling: if an "Instruction" to the House to include such classes of voters were carried, then the amendments would be in order after all! What a happy expedient! How strange that it had not occurred to him in 1913.

By the time the Registration Bill reached Committee, on November 11th, no fewer than ten Instructions had been placed on the Order Paper: to enfranchise soldiers and sailors, to disfranchise Conscientious Objectors, to give votes to all men over twenty-one years, to hold all elections on one day, and so on and so forth. Strange to relate, not a hint of Votes for Women appeared in any one of them!

How came it that the "Parliamentary friends," in whom Mrs. Fawcett and her colleagues placed so much faith, had been thus remiss? How came it that the omission had not been repaired by the recently formed Parliamentary Adult Suffrage Committee, under Sir John Simon, of which Miss Marshall and Mrs. Swanwick, those accomplished Lobbyists, were so confident? How was it that Sir John Simon had made no move to implement the resolution he had tabled for a "wide and simple franchise exercised by both men and women," which had roused my ire by the words "after the War"? Indignantly I read the ten Instructions; indignantly I scanned every line of the Official Report of the debate—not a word about women appeared, from start to finish.

It mattered not—all the Instructions were swept away—not one of them could be moved! Speaker Lowther again reversed his ruling. "On further consideration" he had discovered that, Instruction or no Instruction, no classes of voters other than those originally included by the Government, could be introduced into the Bill!

All this reads like the veriest gibberish to-day, but so the Parliamentary machine revolved in the days of Asquithian rule!

It has been stated elsewhere that following Asquith's famous declaration of inability to deny the women's claim, on August 14th, 1916, a conference of women's suffrage friends met in the House of Commons, under the auspices of Mrs. Fawcett, and devised Votes for Women Amendments to the Registration Bill, which Amendments were "moved the next day in the House and accepted by the Government." This is history as it might have been! Alas for the faith of "Parliamentary friends"! As recorded above, nothing of the sort happened.

The Government had meanwhile secured the Act it needed to avoid a General Election. The Service Franchise agitation abated. The Special Register Bill was withdrawn. A new franchise project was now gradually gaining prominence. When heavily beset by the Service Franchise protagonists, the Government had announced a "Conference," under the chairmanship of the Speaker, to consider the franchise. The scheme had hung fire until after the withdrawal of the Registration Bill; Carson had jeeringly enquired whether the Conference would report before the end of the War, and Asquith had replied, in his old slippery fashion: "The question should be addressed to Mr. Speaker." But now the Speaker's Conference was beginning to assume a new importance. It was announced that the Government would make no further franchise or registration proposals until after the Speaker's Conference had reported. All suffrage attention therefore centred on that Conference. We memorialised it, other societies memorialised it. The anti-suffragists, including Lords Curzon and Cromer, and Rudyard Kipling, and Mrs. Humphrey Ward of course, announced their intention to offer "strenuous opposition" to the extension of electoral rights to women. Rumour followed rumour: women would be included in the recommendations of the Conference; women would not be included. Again and again the Press published professedly authentic information to the latter effect.¹ All was uncertainty; we could only work on.

Robert Cecil was often named as the most reliable supporter of Votes for Women in the Cabinet. A narrow upholder of caste, as it flourishes in this country, I knew he had been an opponent of Adult Suffrage and judged it important to interview him. He agreed to see a deputation from our Federation; but, to my annoyance, stipulated that the proceedings must be private. After this space of time one may disclose that he thought women might get some sort of vote when the next Reform Bill came along, but expressed a rooted objection to Adult Suffrage, and favoured enfranchising merely the million or so women who possessed a separate household, or property qualification of their own. He spoke gently to Mrs. Drake, as though he were touched by her tense earnestness, her innate

¹ So late as mid-January, 1917, the *Daily Chronicle* stated explicitly that the Conference had decided to make no recommendation whatsoever respecting women. On January 13th, 1917, Arthur Henderson, questioned by a naval officer at a Croydon meeting, replied that after Peace was declared, when the Government would be less fully occupied, it would consider the question of votes for women.

fine photographic artist, Hoppé, to be the judge, and to take my photograph without charge, to be raffled for the funds.

As before, old Mrs. Savoy gathered from the East End a little group of women engaged in sweated industries. Charlotte Drake prepared a food prices exhibit, demonstrating in actual commodities that the food procured for a typical working-class household before the War for 16s. 10½d. now cost 32s. 4½d. Official estimates of the rise in the cost of living always fell short of hard experience. Emily Dyce Sharp had made charts showing that for 1s. now one got less fish than one got before the War for 4¾d., little more egg than for a pre-War 5d., less potato and chilled breast of mutton than used to be procured for 5½d. and little more flank of beef than before the War for 6d. Of sugar one could get less for a shilling than used to be had for 4½d., and we in the East End usually had to content ourselves with black Manilla sugar which cost as much as they paid in the West End for white loaf sugar.

These and the Montessori demonstrations were the essentials of the show. The last was a veritable *tour de force*. Of the seven children who had been initiated at the Mothers' Arms five weeks before, five had succumbed to some childish illness. Their places were filled by newcomers, two of them twin girls aged barely three. Muriel Matters declared that her class ought not to be on exhibition for at least another six months, but she cheerfully persevered, and the children rewarded her by calmly working away at their apparatus, and when tea time came, laying and eating their meal, waiting upon each other, and sweeping up the crumbs when they had finished, without heed to the visitors crowding in to watch them.

Among the speakers were George Lansbury, R. L. Outhwaite, Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, J. M. Hogge, chairman of the House of Commons Pensions Committee, and Susan Lawrence. No one anticipated then that she would hold Government office in less than eight years' time. She was never a suffragist, but she was one of the first to receive the fruits of the struggle when women received the Parliamentary vote.

Humphreys of the Proportional Representation Society organised a mock Parliamentary election on P.R. lines. There were men and women candidates, and every visitor to the exhibition might nominate a candidate and cast a vote. It was natural enough, since our organisation had arranged the show, that I should head the poll. George Lansbury and Philip Snowden followed. Who could imagine Viscount Snowden then!

The hall looked charming; everything draped in soft grey, a foil to the brilliant bunting of the Suffrage and Women's Labour organisations which had accepted our invitation to take stalls. There was a crowd which presaged success. I saw Olive Schreiner, Nevins, and Annie Cobden Sanderson in the throng. Evelyn Sharp was at the United Suffragists' stall, Miss Halford at the exhibit of the National Association for Infant Welfare, Mrs. Lamartine Yates at the Suffragettes of the W.S.P.U. formed as a protest against the jingo policy of the original Union. I heard for the first time the silvery singing of the boys of the Westminster

Choristers Dr. Harry Schütze had procured for us. My thoughts were transported by their enchantment to the golden age of eternal youth.

Zangwill was the opener. His snaky locks grown grey and sober, he was worn and saddened by the War, as though his soul had striven with its tempests. He spoke genially, yet on the whole mournfully, and though he made many quips they had not the magic gaiety of the past. I remembered in pre-War days, which seemed so far off now, wandering into a sparsely-peopled theatre to see his peace play put on for a brief run of *matinées*. Its theme appeared unreal, even fantastic then. I had discounted its value because it ignored economic motives. Seen now in the heat of the world conflict it would grip the heart. . . .

He spoke of us kindly, too kindly:

"In the Workers' Suffrage Federation and its manifold activities there is fortunately more organising ability, a more humane ideal than is likely to be discovered in the most up-to-date Cabinet. What the country wants is not so much man power as brain power and soul power. It is because Miss Sylvia Pankhurst in the East End is a greater centre of sweetness and light than anything or anybody in Whitehall that I feel it such a privilege to support her. When she founded a paper with the clumsy title of the *Women's Dreadnought* I must say my literary sense shuddered; but now it has so lived up to its name that my only anxiety is lest it be torpedoed by the submarine censorship. . . . The hope of the world lies in changing the 'Gunmakers' Arms' into the 'Mothers' Arms'! I trust that our Sylvia's action will be symbolic of the whole future course of history; for we will not pretend here that we are saving these babies merely that they may grow up to be food for cannon."

They were generous compliments, pointed for propaganda; but compliments, after all, rip people and their doings from their environment, exposing them to a glamour of unreality; the task so huge, the need so great, and we, with all our eagerness, so few.

CHAPTER LVII

THE GERMAN PEACE NOTE—PRESIDENT WILSON'S APPEAL

BEFORE Wilson's re-election to the Presidency in October the Germans had urged him to initiate peace negotiations, warning him that unless negotiations were opened they would revert to unrestricted submarine warfare. Bethmann Hollweg, the Chancellor, was opposed to it, but the extremer militarists demanded it, for Germany was suffering seriously by the blockade, and must eventually be conquered by it should the War continue at stalemate.

House, whose chosen mission had been to stir the President to this rôle, now strove to deter him, declaring Germany unwilling to accede to any terms the United States could propose, and the Entente Powers averse to peace of any sort because they were just beginning to gain substantial successes—as he mistakenly believed—after two years of War.

On December 12th, 1916, long-gathering rumour received sudden justification: the Central Powers proposed peace negotiations.

"Being at the same time inspired by a desire to prevent further bloodshed and to put an end to the cruelties of war, the four Allied Powers have proposed to enter forthwith into peace negotiations."

A peace offer at last! The news brought a thrill of hope to thousands, though the Press, in the act of announcing it, repudiated the overture, howled it out of court with a roar of hatred and ridicule, insisting there must be war ruthlessly to the bitter end, no negotiations, no compromise, no question of a draw, that Germany and her confederates must be utterly beaten, totally disarmed.

In the pause before the Allied Governments gave their official answer, House cabled from America, urging the British Foreign Office to postpone its reply until he had ascertained, through confidential sources, the nature of Germany's intended terms. His plea was swept aside, the German proposal rejected without parley. The Entente Governments knew well enough the terms were not those of a vanquished suppliant; and none other would they consider in their present temper. Balfour, the mild-mannered elegant, Grey and Asquith who so often had discussed with House a negotiated Peace of general concord, even though now they were freed of the inhibitions of office, uttered no welcome to this first showing of the olive branch.

"Will John Burns speak? Will John Morley speak?" I wrote the question. Their knowledge of the inner history of foreign affairs had led them to quit the Government on the eve of war; if they came forward

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now with a big appeal for settlement there would be a great rallying to them from many quarters. They still were dumb.

In the evil illusion, war, it is the huge apparent unanimity of its support which stays the agonised protest burning for utterance in the breast of the silent multitude. What one could do to break the spell of that unanimity I did, demanding that the offer to negotiate be accepted, and the terms demanded by our Government and its Allies be published, in order that the peoples on both sides might know them. If the Government would not take the initiative in action towards peace—then let it submit the question to a referendum vote of the people.

I endeavoured to secure a joint demonstration for Peace at the Dock Gates the following Sunday, refusing to feel the chill which greeted me, the aloof indifference even of those who spoke on platforms for a negotiated peace. Lansbury had engagements in the provinces. The Poplar Trades and Labour Council refused to co-operate; like the official Labour movement as a whole, it was unready for such a step.

Time admitted of no delay. We rushed our posters on to the walls, announcing simply a peace meeting at the East India Dock Gates, without waiting for the names of organisations and speakers who might join us. On Saturday fell a dense black fog. Our posters could not be seen. On Sunday the fog was only a little less. A fairly large crowd gathered nevertheless; though not the multitude I had hoped. All the East London Socialist organisations had been communicated with, but they were slow to move, and the fear of violence from the jingoes was still a substantial deterrent; indeed many people thought it folly to offer oneself to their onslaughts. Only the Poplar I.L.P. had responded by sending a speaker, T. S. Attlee, whose brother became Under-Secretary for War in the Labour Government of 1924. Old Miss Bennett mounted the chair to call the crowd together, in words simple as a child's, yet voicing clearly and poignantly the facts of war most obvious to the poor. The "Poplar girls," the mothers who had been with us on deputations, Mrs. Crabbe, panting for breath, Mrs. Nuess, whose home had been wrecked in the anti-German raids, gathered nearest. Edgar and Minnie Lansbury were in the crowd, she with her black sparkling eyes, and jaunty smile which always pleased me, hanging to his arm, her Puck-like glance seeming to convey to me, as she caught my eye, that she was here at his side to stir up, in kindly affectionate spirit, her big, good-natured lazy-bones. I loved her for her forthright gaiety and clear brain, her staunch faithfulness in regarding herself always as the advocate of the distressed applicant.

A bare half-dozen elderly well-dressed men had come to make mischief. With vindictive faces, reddened by exertion, they yelled at us, backed by a gang of irresponsible lads barely above school age. A Canadian soldier demanded a hearing for us, hotly declaring that only those who had never been to the trenches and believed themselves absolutely safe from the danger of being sent there, were opposed to peace negotiations. Others in the crowd reinforced him, taking our part so vigorously that the hubbub was immense. Mrs. Drake and Mrs. Walker in turn subdued the turmoil,

In the highways and byways we rang a loud muffin bell to call the people to the Peace meetings ; we gave out handbills announcing a Victoria Park demonstration on the last Sunday of the year to call for immediate peace negotiations. Poorly-clad women, with pinched white faces and backs bent by excessive toil, their eyes flashing and fists clenched, rushed out from their hovels screaming : " No peace without victory ! We want peace on *our* terms ! " They roused in me profound pity and sorrow. No longer I flinched from opening their eyes to the sordid ugliness of the War. I pleaded with them for their sons ; I wrestled for the mastery of their hearts, trying to reveal to them the ultimate meaning, to such as them, of war " to a knock out," of the long struggle of attrition, for markets and spheres of influence, for coal and oil and rubber, for wealth and power. I recalled to them the Boer War, which I so vividly remembered, the development of the gold-fields, the exploitation of the natives, the importation of Chinese indentured labourers which followed in South Africa, the unemployment and depression here. I warned them of the enormously greater unemployment and depression which must follow this immense War, with its load of debt which the producers of wealth must ultimately pay.

Some left me shouting : " We want our sons to have their revenge ! " but the many stood on, cleaving together with upturned faces. I strove to reveal to them that they and theirs were the poor unregarded pawns in the great Capitalist struggle. I spoke of the huge aggregate of soldiers of all the warring countries already dead ; of the hapless fate of the poor fellows discharged to drag out their broken lives in direst need ; of the young lads still under military age, whose turn would come for the slaughter, if War dragged on. The faces of many changed as I spoke. I saw waves of emotion passing over them, eyes brightening with the tension of interest, dimmed and softening to tears.

Yet some turned away in despair. " Our sons are dead ; your talk of peace can never bring them back ! " Alas, poor mothers, my heart cried to them : what shall it profit your dear dead that other sons shall die ?

Saddest of all were the degraded, the starved and shabby, who rushed intoxicated from the public-houses, shrieking with hideous epithets : " Fight on to victory ! " demanding that the entire German population should be " wiped out " ! Sometimes they would attempt a tipsy war dance in the midst of our crowd, till the sober elements thrust them out. Always the sober and thoughtful rallied to us.

On the Saturday before the demonstration I spoke with Mrs. Drake at a corner in Chrisp Street, Poplar, thronged with its market stalls. The audience shifted ; occupied with their marketing, folk could not stay long to listen. The opposition was noisier than hitherto ; we were both too tired, after a strenuous week, to cope with it well. A crowd of lads from ten to fifteen years of age, incited by a little knot of men from one of the public-houses, took to throwing paper soaked in the gutter, orange peel, bits of bone, and other refuse from the stalls. A man with a huge stentorian voice poured forth a stream of lurid oratory. Our voices already were failing before he came ; we could not compete with his huge

roars. I closed the meeting. As we left the pitch the crowd of children followed us shouting and laughing, their numbers growing fast. We had worked so long and amicably in the East End, that we had no other thought than to go directly to our Poplar headquarters at 20 Railway Street, an ex-public-house, deprived of its license, which we rented from a clergyman. Old Suffragette experience would have warned me against going there with that rabble of unruly children had it been anywhere than the East End. In any other district I should have boarded a 'bus to shake off their pursuit. We entered by the swing doors. Bang ! Bang ! Huge reports, and some startled screams.

As luck would have it, the road-menders had left a heap of stones in the road just by. A few of the youngsters had hurled stones through every one of the great windows.

I went out to an awestruck silence. " I am sorry you have done it, children. How can we afford to go on buying babies' milk when you put us to such unnecessary expense ? " They departed quietly, and very shamefaced.

Victoria Park was thronged next day as it had not been since the War. The mass of the crowd was friendly, but there were some noisy opponents; and approving comments were punctuated by hostile retorts. A man in the front kept gnashing great yellow teeth at me as I spoke, declaring that he would like to bite off a German's nose. Several police reporters were present and many Pressmen. One of the latter, a new hand perhaps, commended us with enthusiasm. "They are women of ability! Remarkable! What courage!" As I stepped from the platform he rushed forward to take my hand, profuse in congratulations. . . .

In the pause whilst a speaker descended from our little rostrum, a mere step with a high front of lightly-erected match-boarding, and another took her place, the opponents made a rush at us. It was successfully resisted. Melvina Walker silenced the crowd with her poignant tales of woe. . . . A man with a Union Jack made a sudden dash for the platform. An organised gang behind him, thrusting forward unitedly in a compact wedge. The rostrum was overturned and smashed to pieces. A park-keeper, Mrs. Drake, and Mrs. Cressall were thrown to the ground. . . .

They were helped to their feet. The disturbance was over. People were standing about discussing the brief affray.

The disturbers had achieved their object. The report could now go out that the Peace meeting was broken up.

The vast crowd remained. Mrs. Boyce, not to be baulked from getting her say, began to speak from the ground a dozen yards away. The people were attentive, but the park-keepers, fearing another disturbance, ordered her to desist. People clamoured about me for another speech. Our women hoisted me. I spoke but briefly—I would not long burden my kind upholders. Clara Cole, Mrs. Bouvier, and others followed. I left them speaking and went home alone, tired out, and a little pensive, that after all these years, we should have our platform broken in Victoria Park.

Mrs. Payne was on the doorstep waiting for me; two anxious women beside her. They had come over unexpectedly from West Ham and found their sister in sore straits. Her husband was discharged from the War, unable to work, and without pension, and she had given birth to twins fourteen days before. A new-comer to the street, she knew no one here to help her. They had found her in this plight and having done what they could—not much, for they had brought with them only a few pence—they must hasten away now and begged that I would aid. It was a sad sequel to a broken up Peace meeting!

I went immediately to the address they had given. The mother lay pallid as parchment, almost unconscious; the babies, blue and flaccid, wellnigh moribund. Their father, with bowed head, ill and dejected, sat by a fireless grate; five little children crouched in a corner.

I ran back to Old Ford and got a bucket of coal and some sticks to make a fire and called to Mrs. Payne to send her Jim for Nurse Hebbes and a doctor, and to parcel up food to keep the family for some days.

Later the man told me his story. He was a Royal Marine, a "Gallipoli hero," as the men sent out on the hapless Dardanelles expedition were termed then. Having contracted enteritis in Egypt, after leaving the

Dardanelles, he had been discharged with a certificate of good character and £1 gratuity in February. In April he was granted a pension of 11s. 3d. a week. Many months later he was notified, first by his approved society, then by the Panel Committee for the County of London, that he was entitled to medical benefit. There had evidently been a muddle, for the panel committee had written that they were "endeavouring to establish the claim to medical benefit of some of the cases of Dr. Paynton," his panel doctor. Nevertheless, up to the day when I found the family in this plight, neither sickness nor unemployment benefit had been received. Weak and suffering as he was, sheer necessity drove him to seek employment. In July he was engaged for shell boring at the National Projectile Factory, Hackney Marshes. A Government pledge had now been given that pensions should be based on the disability of the soldier, not on the wages he might happen to be earning at the time. Nevertheless his pension was cut off altogether as soon as the authorities became aware that he was employed. Soon after his pension had been stopped, his work at the factory was changed. He was set to feed six machines with 95-lb. shells. Strain as he might, he could not maintain this exertion. He explained that the work was too hard for him, and was told that he must go. He received his discharge certificate on November 4th. He was now too ill to work at all, and he and his family wholly without income, save what they could raise by pawning their furniture and clothing. His wife was in poor health and expecting shortly to be confined. On December 14th she gave birth to twins, after a difficult labour, in which the midwife was obliged to summon medical aid. The maternity benefit fortunately came through before Christmas; but little of it remained when doctor and midwife had been paid. The midwife ceased her visits at the end of the prescribed ten days, though the mother was still too ill to do anything for herself. The midwife had induced the organisation for providing invalid dinners, recently started in our district, to send in a daily meal for the mother; but after she had partaken of it four days, this boon was discontinued "for the holidays"—of those who superintended the service! Alas, the needs of the human body are not conveniently suspended at such times!

The poor "hero," one of those for whom Lloyd George averred he would make Britain a "land worth fighting for," applied to the Local War Pensions Committee in his desperate situation. In response to his appeal the S.S.F.A. official had called. (That lady official again! Would she ever grow less callous, I wondered.) She had seen the poor mother lying there with her puny babies, the fireless grate, the hungry children; she asked only to see the rent book. When the sick woman murmured that there was no use in looking at it, for no rent was owing, the lady enquired the address of the landlord and went away.

For four days the mother had been too ill to wash the babies, the father too ill to attempt the unaccustomed task. Her sisters had found them thus, with no food or fuel in the penniless home. They washed the babes and put the room in order. With the few pence in their pockets they procured such nourishment as they could to sustain their sister.