

## CHAPTER XLI

### CONSCRIPTION OF MARRIED MEN—N.C.F. PROSECUTED—BODKIN— PEACE PILGRIMS

PEACE talk was growing. The Pope had appealed to the warring nations to end the War. The speeches of Karl Liebknecht, widely published by our jingo Press for their denunciations of the German Government, encouraged in our Pacifists the hopeful belief that the peace movement was strong in Germany. A Peace Negotiations Committee was formed, on the initiative of Herbert Dunnico of the Peace Society. The I.L.P., the Society of Friends, the Union of Democratic Control, our Workers Suffrage Federation, the Women's International League, and other societies were represented. A Peace Memorial was circulated:

"We, the undersigned, urge H.M. Government to seek the earliest opportunity of promoting negotiations with the object of securing a just and lasting peace."

763,000 signatures were obtained to this memorial, not without some attempts at intimidation. My old friend Mrs. Brimley and Ethel Tollemache, both ex-members of the W.S.P.U. who had joined our Federation because of their opposition to the War, pluckily started out in Leytonstone on a house-to-house canvass for signatures. They were soon placed under arrest and taken to the police station, where after six hours' detention, they were released, with a warning that the powers of the D.O.R.A. would be used against them should they continue.

Secret Sessions of both Lords and Commons were held, that the Government might advance more pointed arguments for extending Conscription than it was considered politic to publish abroad. On May 2nd Asquith announced that compulsion would be extended to the married men, to rope in 200,000 more of them than could be obtained by voluntary means.

The committeemen of the No Conscription Fellowship, most of whom have since been elected to Parliament, were arrested, and tried at the Mansion House for a leaflet urging the repeal of Conscription. Bodkin, the unconscious comedian, who had become notorious for his absurdities in suffragette trials, declared in prosecuting them that "war would be impossible if the view that war is wrong, and that it is wrong to support the carrying on of war, were generally held." Edward Fuller, a young journalist, who often spoke at our meetings, printed Bodkin's *bon mot* in poster form, as an argument against war. He gave an order for its display

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to a Stratford billposter, who prudently dispatched a copy to the War Office to ascertain if its publication would be permitted. Fuller was thereupon charged with doing "an act preparatory to the commission of an act" prohibited by the D.O.R.A. He was fined £100 and £25 costs, or 91 days' imprisonment, but owing to Parliamentary protests on his behalf, he was released before the sentence was fully served.

Fines totalling £800 were ordered against eight members of the N.C.F. committee. It was agreed that five of them should refuse to pay the fine and suffer imprisonment. They were Fenner Brockway, W. J. Chamberlain, Walter Ayles, a Bristol Town Councillor and afterwards Labour M.P., A. Barratt Brown, afterwards Vice-Principal of Ruskin College, Oxford, and John P. Fletcher.

Conscription was being used as a means of industrial compulsion, to an extent which would have raised an outcry in peace time. When the Dundee jute workers struck work, men who had been exempted from military service, as essential to the industry, were called to the Army at the instance of their employers, as soon as they went on strike.

When the Military Service Act was extended to married men the Lords inserted, and the Government accepted, an amendment permitting the military authorities to claim exempted men a fortnight after ceasing to be employed as munitioners, though six weeks must elapse before they could obtain new employment unless the late employer would grant a leaving certificate. Philip Snowden complained to Parliament, on May 18th, that 300 men of the Labour Company Reserve Battalion Border Regiment were replacing navvies at Morecambe and getting only Army pay for their work. There were many such cases.

From the introduction of compulsory military service, there was a growing demand for the conscription of wealth. George Wardle, a Labour Member of Parliament, declared that the income tax ought to have been raised to at least 7s. 6d. or 10s. in the £; he would cheerfully have paid it, he said, to secure the equality of sacrifice of which so much had been said.

The Press declared that Germany was offering peace terms. In due course the British Press reproduced, from the *Chicago Daily News*, a reply from Sir Edward Grey: "The Allies can tolerate no peace which leaves the wrongs of this war unredressed." So public opinion fed on rumour and rhetoric.

Clara Cole and Rosa Hobhouse set out on a peace pilgrimage, walking through the country to distribute literature against war, including the Pope's appeal for peace. After five days they were arrested at Kettering and sent to prison for five months. Great rage was manifested by her accusers when there was found in Clara's pocket an "Anathema." She had written: "Is there no strength in your cold madhouse to cry halt, cowards, cowards, and again grey-bearded cowards!" Even Rosa was struck with consternation at the production of this denunciation!

Rosa Hobhouse was a Quaker with the mystic's temperament. She



ened than those of Britain, France, Italy, and Russia? All, in fact, were animated by the same spirit. Thus it was not surprising that the German terms<sup>1</sup> conveyed by Bernstorff to Wilson, indicated clearly enough, though with diplomatic reserve, a desire to extend Germany's boundaries as far as possible—both east and west, to add to her colonies, to secure improved trading agreements, and any war indemnities she might be able to obtain from her adversaries. Nevertheless the terms contained phrases which indicated that the Germans were prepared to be reasonable, if necessary, and to treat with their adversaries at the Peace Conference, if not as brother-angels, at least as fellow-plunderers. Despite decided hints of aggression contained in the terms, had they been countered by opposing claims from Powers of not inferior strength, as would have been the case had negotiations then been opened, a settlement could have been arrived at less heavily fraught with suffering to both sides than has been brought about by the treaties the victors ultimately imposed.

In conveying their terms, the Germans thanked Wilson for his peace effort and begged him to continue it, announcing at the same time that they were recommencing their ruthless submarine blockade.

The answer of the Entente Powers could be inferred from their Press. The Russian Prime Minister was the first of their official spokesmen to utter a public reply. He delivered a brusque rebuff. The War must continue until a decisive victory had been won. To Wilson's assumption that all nations now deprecated sectional alliances and desired a League of

<sup>1</sup> Restitution of German Upper Alsace occupied by the French.

Gaining of a frontier protecting Germany and Poland economically and strategically against Russia—a polite method of inferring a piece of Russia should be sliced off.

Restitution of German Colonies in form of agreement giving Germany colonies "adequate to her population and economic interest"—a delicate manner of saying that these should be added to.

Restitution of the parts of France occupied by Germany under reservation of strategic frontiers and financial compensation—annexation and indemnity is suggested here if Germany can compass it.

Restitution of Belgium under special guarantee for safety of Germany which would have to be decided on by negotiations with Belgium—a proposal which suggests negotiation between the lion and the lamb.

Economic and financial compensation on the basis of exchange of territories conquered and to be restituted at conclusion of peace. This shows Germany in reasonable mien. As realists her statesmen see that they are not dealing with conquered foes or defenceless small nations; they will give and take in the effort to get the best terms they can without further sacrifice.

Compensation for German business concerns and private persons who suffered by the War—an effort to get as much as possible and off-set claims coming from the other side.

Adjustment of economic agreements and measures which would form an obstacle to normal commerce and intercourse after the conclusion of peace and instead reasonable treaties of commerce—All this, whether for good or evil, would depend on the negotiators; were they far-sighted and reasonable, and the power equally matched on either side, the situation might be bettered considerably.

The Freedom of the Seas.

Agreement to enter a second international congress after the Peace Conference on the basis of Wilson's proposals for a League of Peace.

Nations, he replied, that so far from this being the case, the military alliance between Britain, France, and Russia would be cemented after the War and reinforced by a close economic union. The joint reply of the Entente was a definite refusal to entertain peace negotiations, and an indication that the War must continue till the whole of Europe had been "reorganised." Reorganisation by the tank and the machine-gun in the interests of big business! Alas, how great a mockery!

So died the Wilson peace effort. Capitalist civilisation was too deeply impregnated by its never-ceasing contest for wealth and power to find emergence from the strife through an appeal to reason and righteousness. Till crowns were overthrown and empires disintegrated, it persisted in the ignoble contest. Wilson himself, in the high arc of his oratory, was uttering ideals of international righteousness he would fail to implement when his professions were put to the test. Indeed, they were only half real to him.

Its ill-reception by the Allied Governments notwithstanding, the Peace Talk had stimulated and emboldened the pacifist movement. On Christmas Eve the Peace Negotiations Committee held a service of prayer in Trafalgar Square for the coming peace. It was a strange, sad scene. Men and women pacifists fervently sang the hymns. A crowd of colonial soldiers, marshalled and prompted by those same middle-aged civilians we had recognised for years at such work, broke in with strident yells and ribald songs. Dr. Orchard, a slight figure in black cassock, led the prayers, his low voice reaching surprisingly through the din. After the service people lingered for hours in the Square, discussing the hope of peace. The story that the event was paid for by Germany had been industriously circulated amongst the soldiers, but many of them came to the literature sellers to express their longing that the peace talk might bear fruit.

"I think you are going to make me sad, girlic," an Australian soldier said to me when I offered him a paper. "I came ten thousand miles to do my bit. I'd rather not be discouraged; but I'll read it."