

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ Later M.P. for Merthyr Tydfil.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ House of Commons, 23rd February, 1855.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER XL

EASTER WEEK, 1916

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ Son of Count George Plunkett.

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 Tolle-mache, 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 Leyton-stone 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

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