

"In time of war one would have thought the rich classes would grovel on their knees before the working classes who are doing so much to pile up their wealth. Instead, the men who are working eighty-four hours a week are being libelled, maligned and insulted; and on the authority of their employers, the lying word, accepted without inquiry by Lloyd George, went round the world that the working-class were a set of drunken hooligans. That is the reward they got. The truth is that the shifts could be arranged to overtake all the work. Mr. John Hill of the boilermakers, has shown that if the shipbuilders would reduce their contracts 10 per cent., the Government would get all their work done, but the shipbuilders will not do it because their ships are being sold at two and three times their pre-War value."

Lloyd George squirmed at the attack and protested by telegram that he was misrepresented. Keir Hardie replied doggedly:

"I pointed out that the employers, when before you, had put the whole blame on the drinking habits of the workers, and you, by accepting their statement without challenge, had given world currency to the fiction that the workers were drunken wasters."

Lloyd George continued protesting: "Wild accusations . . . mischievous statements . . . excited prejudice," explaining that his own strictures had only intended to apply to a "small section" of the workers. The matter did not end there; a Government White Paper was issued to drive home the charges of intemperance and absenteeism. James O'Grady, M.P., and other officials of approved societies under the National Insurance Act vainly replied that their books were flooded with cases of men who were ill from over-work.

Attacks were launched against Trade Unionism. Its practices were denounced as limiting the output per man and preventing the influx of new workers into the munition factories, although the men then employed, and all the members of the Unions concerned, were insufficient to supply the overwhelming stream of Government orders.

It is true that the Trade Unions were holding tenaciously to the system of demarkation between the processes allocated to various classes of workers. Above all, they clung to the sharp line drawn between the occupations of the skilled workmen who had served an apprenticeship to the trade, and the tasks which might be performed by the workers outside this relatively fortunate class. Yet such self-protective measures by no means justified or explained the excessive overtime employers were exacting in all classes of war work, whilst hundreds of unemployed people were clamouring at their gates.

That the employers were slow in adapting themselves to the vastness of war output need not be accounted to them as malice. Undoubtedly profits were the primary concern with the average of them, and the exhaustion of the workers counted little against the cost of additional plant or any difficulties and expenses of management which working three shifts might entail.

In March the Board of Trade issued an appeal to women to register at the Labour Exchanges for war service in industry, agriculture and munition making. 57,000 women who had hitherto been wage earners were still workless, according to official estimates, and there was no definite plan for the employment of the new recruits: but the enrolment of the women would help to keep patriotic fervour at boiling point: it would maintain a pool of surplus labour and the volunteers would be needed later on. Registration forms were sent out broadcast to the plethora of women's organisations which had grown up in pre-War years: Liberal, Conservative, Temperance, Religious, Philanthropic, and, above all, Suffragist, the most active by far.

It was grimly humorous that this appeal should come to us from the very Government which had so long and stubbornly opposed itself to our struggle for the vote, as those of us who had maintained our demand during the War were not slow to observe. Our Federation, the Women's Freedom League, the United Suffragists and the Irish Women's Franchise League immediately issued manifestoes demanding the vote, and insisting that a woman who did a man's work should get a man's pay. Even Mrs. Fawcett's N.U.W.S.S., though it kept silence as to the vote, rose to the point of asking "equal pay for equal work."

I at once issued an appeal to women's organisations to unite in demanding for women equal pay and representation on the tribunals which were being set up to deal with wages and conditions. I urged the calling of a joint conference of women's organisations and Labour organisations. I made it my business to ensure that the conference should be held and that the Labour organisations should be its conveners. I wanted the women pledged to demand equal pay, and to get them into the Trade Unions, as well as to ensure that the woman who needed her wage for sustenance should not be crushed out by the well-to-do volunteer working for patriotism and pocket money. I wanted the Labour organisations to take the lead in working-class interests, and also to commit them to the demand for equal pay, towards which they were apathetic. I called at the Labour Party office, then so small and sparsely staffed, despite its large membership. J. S. Middleton, the model official, with his air of being bled by too much desk work, met me with earnest agreement. I saw Mary Macarthur, and urged her that the Women's Trade Unions should not abandon the lead to non-representative bodies, formed in other than working-class interests. It was essential for their welfare that the wage earners—men and women—should be kept together as a united force, and that the Trade Unions should shoulder practical responsibility towards the women. Surprised, perhaps, that I should come to her thus after our acute differences over underpayment of women in the Queen's Workrooms, Mary Macarthur was genial enough. "What do you want us to do?" she asked me, and with a good deal of cordiality agreed to my suggestions.

A preliminary conference of women's organisations was accordingly summoned, and at its request, the Workers' War Emergency Committee

called a National Conference for April 16th. Before even the preliminary conference had met Lloyd George had entered into an agreement with the leaders of the Men's Trade Unions at the Treasury, and Runciman had met representatives of the women's organisations at the Board of Trade.

The Treasury Agreement had a manifold purpose. Its first aim was to prevent the workers taking advantage of the law of supply and demand to force up wages when war conditions produced a shortage of labour. In the Food Prices Debate in February Runciman had said that rising prices could best be met by increased wages,¹ but within a week the Government had issued a statement, through the Press Bureau, that strikes for higher wages must be prevented, and disputes referred to compulsory arbitration by a tribunal composed of three Government officials.

On March 4th, Lloyd George had introduced a third Defence of the Realm Act to give the Government greater power to regulate the manufacture of war material. The Treasury Agreement was designed to secure the assent of the Trade Union leaders to this and still more drastic measures, which would sweep away the entire fabric of Trade Union conditions, make strikes illegal and secure a discipline over the industrial workers as strict as that applied to soldiers in the trenches. Compulsory arbitration, disciplinary tribunals, and the waiving of Trade Union rules and customs were agreed to without demur. A promise to limit the profits of munition manufacturers was given as a sop to Labour opinion. It proved largely a sham and even the form of it was withdrawn within a year. To induce the Labour world to accept compulsion, it had even been suggested that industrious workpeople would be given a share in the profits of munition work. Before the Treasury Agreement Lord Kitchener had said: "We hope that workmen who work regularly by keeping good time, shall reap some of the benefits that war automatically confers on these great companies." When Runciman was questioned on this statement two months later he declared that Lord Kitchener had given no promise of profit-sharing. On the contrary, his words were "not unconnected" with the war medals it was intended to issue on the successful termination of the War!

The profits of the munition firms were immense. There was much talk of the munition workers' big shilling, and the high wages of war workers, but even according to official estimates, which consistently underrated the increase in prices, as was proved by comparison with house-keepers' budgets, wages, throughout the War, lagged far behind

¹ When the Post Office employees retorted with demands for a War Bonus, Hobhouse, the Postmaster-General, refused their plea, though 59,000 of the postal employees were actually getting less than £1 a week. When a strike was threatened, he agreed to submit the dispute to arbitration, but declared the Government would sustain before the arbiters that the increased cost of living did not justify a demand for increased wages, and that if concessions were made to postal employees, they would be demanded in other Departments.

the cost of living.¹ Prices were already excessively high when war broke out. For ten years they had been rising, and under their pressure industrial unrest had been rife. The elimination of unemployment and short time added more to the income of the workers than increases in actual wages. Large families living together, with everyone working, earned fairly substantially in the aggregate, but often at the expense of health. The old hands in the munition shops, irreplaceable by new dilutees at lower rates, by dint of working at high pressure for excessively long hours, in some cases took home money which would have surprised them before the War; but their gains were hugely exaggerated; the have-nots remained the have-nots as before.

A memorandum embodying the Treasury Agreement was issued on March 15th, 1915, in which it was promised that the men who were coming in to replace the original skilled workers should get "the usual rate of the district for that class of work." The position of women was not made clear.

I wrote immediately to the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, and the President of the Board of Trade, asking an explanation, and urging that a woman should get the pay for the job given to the man who preceded her, with any increase or war bonus which might accrue. Lloyd George replied:

" March 26th, 1916.

" DEAR MISS PANKHURST,

" The words which you quote would guarantee that women undertaking the work of men would get the same piece rates as men were receiving before the date of this agreement. That of course means that if the women turn out the same quantity of work as men employed on the same job they will receive exactly the same pay.

" Yours sincerely,

" D. LLOYD GEORGE."

I answered that he had not dealt with my point respecting increases and war bonus, and that unless the rate of the men they replaced were assured to women for time rates, as well as for piece rates, the employers would simply resort to paying women by time.

A National Labour Advisory Committee was appointed to assist in carrying out the Treasury Agreement. We were indignant that it

¹ The general average of wages in the United Kingdom amongst bricklayers, printers (compositors), railwaymen, dock labourers, cotton operatives, woollen and worsted operatives, engineering artisans and labourers, coal mining, agriculture (England and Wales) and cost of living as given by the Ministry of Labour in July of each year.

	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918
Wages index number :	100	105 to 110	115 to 120	135	175
Cost of living index					
number :	...	100	125	180	205
Food prices index					
number :	...	100	132	204	210

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 them 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

women of the upper classes. Working women were "too worn out, poorly nourished, starved and sweated." She spoke this, wholly oblivious, it appeared, of the tragic significance for woman, and for the race, if her words were true in literal fact.

Runciman promised that some of the suggestions, "notably those of Miss Rathbone," should be carried out.

"Will the Government stop the sweating of women?" asked Charlotte Drake. There was no reply. Hers was the voice of the woman who toils: the others held aloof from her scornfully.

It was obvious now that the crux of the equal pay question lay in the Government's quite definite refusal to lay down any conditions for the wages of women employed at time rates. It was not desired to affront the great women's organisations by permitting it to be said that women who had volunteered to replace men were to get less money than the men had had for precisely the same job, but by his evasion the way was left open to pay women any wage the employer might choose. Despite this obvious fact it proved impossible to induce the conference called by the Workers' War Emergency Committee to demand equal pay for women and men, "whether employed by time or by piece." Our amendments to that effect were resisted by Mary Macarthur, Margaret Bondfield and their colleagues on the platform and defeated. It was a fact that not merely the Government and the employers, but also the leaders of Trade Unionism for women, regarded equal pay as an impossible demand. To many it seemed an outrageously extravagant demand, above all during the War, that single women should be paid the wage that a man with a family might exact. Our hard, vain efforts for equal pay brought home to me, as so often before, the supreme difficulty of securing under the wage system a decent subsistence for the woman who is the bread-winner of a family. In the great average she is crushed down to the wage level on which the single woman finds it just possible to subsist.

John Turner, of the Shop Assistants' Union, came to me on the floor of the conference, and openly said his Union could not claim a man's pay for its women members: there was no possibility of getting it. We succeeded in carrying a stipulation that maintenance allowances to women war workers in training should in no case be less than £1 a week. This, in effect, was a vote of censure against the officials on the platform who had adopted the miserable 10s. dole of the Queen Mary Workrooms.

Events soon proved, as I had predicted, that women were generally employed on time rates to evade demands for the piece rates of the men they replaced. A bonus was used to supply the spur which piece rates provide. Their wage averaged from 8s. to 16s. a week, and even with overtime and bonus, did not amount to half the wage of the men. Councillor Barton of the Sheffield Trades Council complained that the great firm of Vickers had opened munition shops at Hillsborough, where women were paid 8s. a week. The same firm at Holm Lane, Sheffield,

was paying women who filled shells and worked lathes 8s. to 14s. per week, and 1s. a week war bonus if full time were kept. The working day was from 6.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. The munition factories were no exception: in every sort of work women were engaged to replace men at a lower wage. The Trade Board for the sugar confectionery and preserving industries followed the usual custom, just then, in fixing minimum rates of 13s. a week for women, 26s. a week for men. Many patriotic people congratulated the women who took their fares on the buses and trams. The wages of 14s. a week they got in South End, and 16s. in Sheffield were typical.

In face of a pitiless sweating of women stubbornly continued, Press stories soon began to appear about the affluence of the women munition workers, and in particular of the fur coats they were said to be buying. If dependent on their own earnings, the vast majority of them had a miserable struggle to keep body and soul together. If they lived at home with their parents, and gave, as is customary, but a meagre pittance to their worried mother to pay for their keep, and if they fed cheaply and sparsely at the canteen, they could save a surplus. Working seven days a week, they had no leisure to spend it, and by saving, or buying through clubs or otherwise on the hire system they might acquire some few articles of clothing or furniture, which might on occasion be rejected as too costly by the poorer middle class housewife, living up to her income in a degree of comfort and elegance unknown to the factory girl. Alas for the notorious fur coats of the munition girls: most of them never existed; those which had tangible form in munition girls' wardrobes were mostly the wretchedest imitation palmed off by war-time profiteers and not worth a quarter of the money saved to pay for them, not good enough even to pawn when the long day of adversity followed the War.

Excessive hours and the new discipline imposed under the D.O.R.A. were no less serious than underpayment. At Greenwood and Batley's armament factory in Leeds, a girl, only sixteen years of age, was injured at her machine. She had been kept at work for twenty-five and a half hours. She had started at 6 a.m. Friday, and with intervals totalling two hours for meals on Friday, and half an hour for breakfast on Saturday, she had kept on till the accident occurred at 7.30 a.m. The women beside her worked on for 31 hours. On the firm being prosecuted, the manager stated, by way of defence, that women subjected to this tremendous strain would earn from £1 to £2 per week. The magistrate, Horace Marshall, dismissed the case, with the observation that "the most important thing in the world to-day is that ammunition shall be made." The senseless folly of this overwork was revealed when, on May 21st, it was announced that 65,700 women had registered for war service, but only 1,250 of them had received employment.

Meanwhile the Clyde Armaments Committee of Employers' and Trade Union representatives established under the Treasury Agreement, had decided that workpeople keeping bad time should be fined £1 for the first offence, £2 for the second, £3 with immediate dismissal

for the third. These conditions promoted the growth of the Workshop Committee Movement which presently was to make itself felt. Two men employed at the shipbuilding works, Cammell Laird's, after working sixteen hours a day for seven days, got drunk, and were charged under the Defence of the Realm Act :

"With unlawfully doing an act of such a nature as to be calculated to be prejudicial to the defence of the Realm, with the intention, or the purpose of assisting the enemy."

True, indeed, the rulers of the people lose their sense of proportion in war time ! Clyde workers were fined 5s. for the loss of War Service badges valued at sixpence. The penalties for this offence were soon greatly increased. The new discipline prohibited women employed on night shift from leaving the machine room, even for meals, and made compulsory any overtime, however excessive, the employer might direct.

I was up in Jarrow-on-Tyne for a meeting, and asked my way of a middle-aged woman in the street. She offered to accompany me, and in a moment she was telling me her great loneliness. Her husband was working in the Government Dockyard at Devonport ; one son was in the Royal Flying Corps, the other had been killed. She had nothing to do alone here in Jarrow, and would like to get a job in a munition factory to help the poor men who were forced to toil so hard there. "I see them almost falling as they go home from work !" she said ; but other women were pleading in vain for employment. There were crowds of them struggling at the gates, to get a word with the manager. Her husband's wages were good ; it would be unfair for her to take the work from others who sorely needed it. Her brow was puzzled ; the thought stirred in her strongly that some were fainting from too much work, whilst others starved for lack of it.

An inquest was held at Brotherhood's Munition Works at Peterborough on a man who died of heart failure at his machine. He had complained of pain in his side during the past weeks, and had been paid for 109 hours the week before his death. A woman wrote to me then to tell me that her husband had been employed at the same factory, and had died from overwork. When leaving his home one morning, he had asked his fourteen-year-old son to meet him that night at the top of the street and bring a truck. The boy met him as he had asked. The father got into the truck ; his son wheeled him home. "I am dead-beat !" he said to his wife as he staggered in. Next morning he was too weak even to wash himself as he lay in bed. He died two days later. The boy went to Brotherhood's in his father's stead, and worked from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. His mother trembled with grief and fear when she saw him falling asleep over his evening meal.

Munition work was rapidly extending in certain areas, into which masses of workers were being herded. Charles Duncan in the House of Commons revealed that the very beds in which they slept were often serving double shifts ; as one set of workers arose from their sleep, they had to clear out of the bedrooms, that they might be put in order for the next shift.

To show how soldiers' clothes were made, our Federation held a Sweated Industries Exhibition in the Caxton Hall in May. For their fares and the few pence they estimated they could have made at home, the khaki workers were glad, nay eager, to work in the Exhibition, hoping, as the simple and unsophisticated do so readily, that the manifestation of their hardship would speedily bring reform. Poor jaded women, they had been toiling at war work, of necessity, before the high-flown calls to womanly patriotism had been sounded. One of them had a puny two months' baby in a box at her side; four other little ones had been left in a neighbour's care. Her eyes were red and sore. She thought the "funny" colours of the khaki were the cause of it; but her mother told her the trouble was due to working too soon after her confinement and with her baby to suckle.

A widow had a little boy going to school to support, two married sons in the Navy, and an unmarried son in the Army, on whose account she got a tiny pittance. She was "finishing" soldiers' trousers at 2s. per dozen pairs. After deducting the cost of the soap, cotton and thread she had to provide for the work, she was able, by rising at 5 a.m. and working far into the night, to make about 7s. 6d. a week. Her little son did the shopping, helped with the housework and prepared the meals when he came home from school, that his mother's needle might not pause.

The mother of seven children, with a husband earning a poor wage, was working from 5.30 a.m. to 10 p.m. to add 6s. to her weekly income. The mother of six children, with a face of martyrdom, worked from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. to earn 10s. or 11s. a week on sailors' trousers, being better paid than the khaki workers.

A young married woman sewing buttons on soldiers' bandoliers at the rate of 2½d. for sixty buttons gave up work when her baby was born, but when her husband's employer took 2s. a week off his wage her husband said she must share the loss with him and docked 1s. a week from her housekeeping money. With rising prices she could not make ends meet, so she got her mother to mind the baby, and took in khaki work to sew.

Stout old Mrs. Savoy, the brushmaker, everybody's friend, who had been on many a deputation with us, had helped to gather these poor workers. She went about amongst the others in her homely, motherly style, getting them tea and introducing them to all and sundry: "This is our Sylvia! This is Miss Smyth, she's a good 'un! This is Nurse Hebbes; she'll look after you!"

Margaretta Hicks of the British Socialist Party had arranged a food prices exhibition, which showed in actual commodities the dwindling value of the wages earned by these exploited beings. All the Suffrage Societies which had maintained their Suffrage work sent speakers, glad to find a haven where all interests were not subordinated to the great slaughter.

CHAPTER XXI

LOSS OF THE "LUSITANIA"—ANTI-GERMAN RIOTS

DIMLY through the smoke screen of the Censorship we knew that the blockade was tightening. Since the outbreak of war there had been outcries that supplies were reaching Germany through neutral countries, that food was getting in to relieve her hunger, and above all gun cotton! Our Government's adhesion to the Declaration of London—another "scrap of paper"—was hotly denounced; its alleged subservience to American Big Business, execrated. "If cotton—let America say what she would—had been made contraband, not a shot could have been fired from a German gun!" amateur war strategists shrieked from Press and platform. That the Declaration of London was being steadily nullified, by modification, after modification, till it was finally swept away in July 1916; that the North Sea had been closed to commerce by the order of the British Navy escaped the notice of these patriots. That the European neutral countries were suffering hunger from the blockade was indifferent to them: to be neutral was to be ignoble in their opinion.

Britain and Germany were torpedoing each other's battleships; but the British public could think of the submarine only as an instrument of "German frightfulness." That it was the invention of an Englishman, and had been used so long ago as the American Civil War was unthinkable in those days. Still more was it incredible that Britain had begun the Great War with fifty-six of these death-dealing engines, whilst Germany had only twenty-eight, but nine of them capable of voyaging to the British Isles! The British Navy could employ both its submarines and its battleships to destroy its enemies; its battleships were able to hold up neutral merchantmen suspected of carrying goods for German use. The Germans, with their smaller navy largely bottled up in port by its big adversary, resorted to the submarine, which could creep out to sea unobserved.

Hitherto the submarine had been officially used on both sides against warships, military works and vessels conveying troops and military stores. The ruthless school in Germany was urging its use against British merchantmen as the only means of applying to her the hunger blockade she had cast about Germany. On January 30th, 1915, a warning was issued that merchantmen approaching France would be torpedoed if they appeared British regardless of their flag, on the ground that British merchantmen had adopted the ruse of flying neutral ensigns. When three ships had been sunk the British Foreign Office retorted with the