

## 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



State was no comic figment, but a reality, it is no longer true that the mass of the people are at the mercy of Capitalism." The question was amazingly put :

"Will Great Britain in 1936 be a finer country to live in than it would have been had not the sharp prick of war aroused us from our slothful acquiescence in the social iniquities that persist around us?"

This read as a grim joke to those of us who toiled amongst the miseries of the people ground in the mills of warfare.

Conferences on industrial organisation and the demands the workers should make, both during and after the War, were held by numerous organisations in the hope of influencing the Trade Unions. Our W.S.F. probably started this fashion in London.

Arriving early for one such conference, organised by the Fabian Research Department, in Tothill Street, I found Bernard Shaw in lively discussion with a group of his Fabian colleagues, declaring, in his challenging, jaunty way : "I have not the slightest objection to the servile State, provided I can get my oar in."

Beatrice Webb took the chair, black-gowned and circumscribed, a carefully reared indoor nineteenth-century product who had missed the enlargement of motherhood. She defended the unequal payment of men and women on the trivial ground that women were more costly than men to their employers, who must provide separate lavatories and other amenities for them. It was with difficulty I compelled her to permit my entry into the discussion to put the opposing view. I was not the desired Trade Union official, with mind open for indoctrination by Fabian argument, but a competing theorist, eager to convert him to other policies. I should probably have failed to overcome her determination to wave me into silence, save that a cue was given which enabled me to strike in with : "When Lloyd George wrote me the letter on women's wages which Mr. Cole has mentioned . . ."

Miles Malleson, who had been invalided out of the Army in January 1915, now published, through Henderson's at the "Bomb Shop" in Charing Cross Road, two anti-war plays entitled "D Company" and "Black 'Ell." These plays were banned and Malleson obtained on this account a popularity which remained with him after the War. He came down to us at Old Ford with his mother to rehearse his children's play, "Paddy Pools," which Patricia Lynch was teaching some of our children.

With the official admission that food prices had risen 65 per cent. and the total cost of living 45 per cent.,<sup>1</sup> the Government agreed to grant a war bonus to all its full-time employees, except those who had already received war increases, or had been newly engaged during the War. This tardily granted privilege amounted to 4s. a week for those whose wages were less than 40s. a week, 3s. for those paid 40s. to 60s. a week. Women and persons under eighteen years were to get half the bonus.

<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Report, October 10th, 1916.

The old-age pensioners still vainly awaited the 2s. 6d. a week increase promised for those who suffered exceptional hardship.

Stanton, the victor of Merthyr, cried out in Parliament : "Why do you not choke these Pacifists down?"<sup>1</sup> Colonel Norton Griffiths demanded African labour for this country, declaring that France was already importing thousands of Kaffirs and Chinese, to make good the shortage of "white labour," and that the "fight to a finish" would demand more of this. Black troops had long been used at the Front. Outhwaite replied that those who supported the "fight to a finish" should carry it out, as they declared they would, "to the last shilling," but not by lending it to the Government at 6 per cent. interest. Prophetically he declared that after the War the forces of revolution would sweep over Europe to determine who should pay for "this wild debauch of blood." No one in this country believed him, but in Russia the Conservative Party was already asking for peace with Germany, because the continuance of warfare would mean the collapse of the monarchical systems of Europe.

<sup>1</sup> Official Report, October 12th.



Our East End speakers were received with a running fire of disparaging gibes and interruptions.

Mrs. Pascoe, for all her poverty, a matron of sternest virtue, of iron self-respect, was shouted down by the crowd of well-dressed women. Indignantly she faced them, her little black bonnet gone awry in her distress, her worn hands tightly clasped. "I cannot go on," she protested, "till the *ladies* will let me speak!"

The W.S.P.U. members led the fray against us, declaring that any talk of a wider franchise would be disastrous to the votes for women cause. I was sore-hearted for our East End mothers and young factory girls, assailed thus rudely. I was bruised in spirit by this littleness and myopia of view. I had not expected this hostility, above all not this bitterness. In the *Dreadnought* that week I had published reports of their work, contributed by themselves from most of the suffrage societies; all had been thus invited and I had given the addresses of those which had not sent reports. Our members took the strife at once more philosophically and more furiously than I. Our "Poplar girls," the Lagsdings and the Watts's, who worked at Morton's biscuit factory in Millwall, surveyed the interrupters with curling lips and scornful eyes, jeering: "It is a pity we are not well educated like them!"

When the resolution was put only Emmeline Pethick Lawrence and the Women's International League voted with us. Our proposal was hopelessly defeated. Yet the time-spirit was with our demand, the old proposals to enfranchise a million or so of widows and spinsters would never carry. We had stirred the other societies to feel some need for combined action. It was decided to elect a committee, call another conference, send a deputation to the Government. I resigned the secretaryship, and got our Federation to appoint another delegate, feeling it wise to let the representatives of the other societies go their way without me for a while. Our organisation had a work to do in the country no other would undertake: Manhood Suffrage must and would come; opinion must be prepared to accept Womanhood Suffrage. We must get as broad a measure as we could.

We had a woman workers' petition going the round of the munition factories, declaring that if a woman could cast a shell she could cast a vote. Katie Manicom, organising for the Workers' Union in the Southern Counties, whom we had trained as an organiser in our Federation, Alice MacLennan<sup>1</sup> in the Manchester district, Mrs. Leigh Rothwell, organising for the National Union of Women Workers, the Labour Councillors, Taylor and Dollan in Glasgow, and numbers of others up and down the country, as well as our own W.S.F. branches in Scotland, the North of

<sup>1</sup> Alice MacLennan was the first woman in the Manchester area to be a party to an agreement in the engineering trade between employers and employed. Her great activities were suddenly cut short by a terrible accident. A fire broke out in the Lime Street Hotel, where she was staying. In attempting to escape, she fell through a glass roof, and was terribly hurt. With one leg gone, and other serious disabilities, she bravely returned to her work when she emerged from the hospital.

England, the Midlands, and the South, were getting these forms into the factories. We had a resolution calling on the Government to enfranchise every adult woman and man steadily circulating amongst the Trade Unions. It was passed by hundreds of branches each week, and sent to the Government.

In the spring of 1916 rumours that the Government would shortly deal with the franchise became more insistent. Mrs. Fawcett emerged from her war silence, with a letter to Asquith, suggesting that women might be included in any forthcoming Franchise Bill. Asquith replied that "if and when" it might be necessary to undertake franchise legislation, the considerations in support of women's enfranchisement would be "fully and impartially weighed without any prejudgment from the controversies of the past." Those words were vague; but they might indicate an advance. One could not be sure of it, yet I had regarded our old opponent, Asquith, as preparing to capitulate since our East End deputation had interviewed him in the weeks before the War.

*The Times* predicted the introduction of a measure to enfranchise the soldiers and sailors after Whitsuntide. I got W. C. Anderson to ask whether women would be included. Bonar Law, on the Government's behalf, refused to answer. I wrote to all the suffrage societies and many prominent suffragists appealing to them to concentrate their energy and attention on the situation. In the Federation we redoubled our activities, in meetings and demonstrations, in inducing the Labour organisations to demand, not a mere Registration Bill, but a Franchise Bill to include the whole people. The United Suffragists and others joined in the pressure for women, if not specifically for all women.

I felt that the moment had come for new action. One morning I woke with the thought: "Call another conference, and invite industrial and co-operative organisations, as well as the suffrage societies to counterbalance the stubborn Old Guard." It was clear to my mind that another effort must be made to create a representative Adult Suffrage Council, and that it could be done with success if the basis of representation were enlarged. I broached the matter to Smyth. To my surprise she opposed me: "Why should we always have the labour and expense of every new move which is made? See how we are burdened: Peace, anti-Conscription, Tribunals, Wages, Suffrage—distress work, political work—always something new—we have scarcely finished with one conference, demonstration, exhibition before another is on our hands; often we are preparing for several big functions at once! Get one of the other societies to call it! We can't afford it!"

I could have overcome her objections; but my heart smote me in regard to finance. She was often coming to the rescue, paying this debt or that for the Federation, making a loan to round the week's expense, and then writing it off, as something which never could be repaid. We were raising at headquarters about £7,000 a year apart from donations in kind, which were substantial, and the incomes of the branches; but the sum was too small for our numerous activities. I reflected that there might be wisdom in getting another society to move. I was on the executive of the Women's