

Nothing Doing!

By George Bernard Shaw

The following article from the London "Herald," a left wing Socialist organ, is an interesting analysis of the forces in England. George Bernard Shaw has maintained an attitude all his own during the last five years and although he has supported the prosecution of the war has never surrendered his right to continually criticise the government.

IN finishing itself suddenly and unexpectedly as it did, the war has shown no consideration for the politicians. They calculated that the history of the South African War would repeat itself: that is, that they would secure a khaki election before the end of the war, and that this would enable them to do as they pleased until the inevitable repetition of the 1906 reaction, during which interval they would have time to guide our half-socialized industries safely back into the hands of private Capitalism. That is the Capitalist notion of successful demobilisation. But the war, instead of volplaning to a gentle landing in the spring of 1919, suddenly crashed; and the possibility of a khaki election crashed with it. There was nothing for it then but to rush the election at once, so as to catch what was left, if not of the war peril, which was hopelessly over, at least of the terror that peril had inspired, and to cke out that remnant with the gratitude of the people to the Prime Minister in his character of "the pilot who weathered the storm."

And now the exciting question is, how fast is that terror and that gratitude evaporating? Is the election going to be a khaki one or is it going to repeat 1906, as far as our own limited preparation admits, with a staggering reaction against the tyranny that was a necessary condition of war? We shall not be able to guess until we know; but what we can say confidently is that, though neither Labour nor Liberalism, nor even the two combined, can now oust the Coalition, yet the chances of spoiling the complete walk-over demanded by Mr. Lloyd-George are so good that no sincere Labour politician in his senses would dream of giving the Prime Minister any other answer than that which heads this article.

The Coalition is disconcerted not only by the collapse of the war, but by the equally unexpected and far less welcome thoroughness with which it has achieved the aim which all the Allied Governments had to profess: the overthrow of Autocracy and Oligarchy in Central Europe. Our oligarchs blazed away at Oligarchy with their tongues, just as they might have blazed away at De Brialmont fortifications with field artillery, feeling quite sure that the fortifications would stand. Well, they have not stood. The Oligarchs and Dynasts had been living in a fools' paradise, serenely unconscious of the fact that Socialism had been undermining those fortifications for fifty years and gradually bringing them to a condition in which the explosion of a champagne cork would be dangerous to them. Even those of us who have spent our lives at the undermining had come to feel so hopeless before the apparent strength and depth of the foundations, that we were as much taken aback as anyone when the walls came thundering down in Russia, and, more amazing still, when, before we could discern anything clearly, through the dust cloud that followed, a still more appalling crash was heard in Germany, and Potsdam went down to Potsdam-ation in the twinkling of an eye, at what some of us hope may prove to have been the last war trumpet.

As to that, I am not sanguine. The oligarchs and the democrats differ on that subject; and it is pretty certain that both of them will have trouble with the anarchists. And there is a sort of civil war like the late skirmish between the Electricians and the Albert Hall manager,¹ which may develop finally into a very sharp struggle between the Socialists and the Syndicalists. But we need not be in a hurry to bid the devil good morning. If we have a reactionary Government, as at present, then public sympathy will be with any insurgent force that sets itself against the State. If we have a popular Government, insurgency will have a worse time than any autocratic or oligarchic Government dare give it. Moral, for those who do not wish a tiny minority of the nation to have the power of leaving all the rest where Moses was when he put out the candle, strengthen Labour in Parliament.

I had better, perhaps, explain that I have not the

¹The Albert Hall, the largest hall in London, refused to let a meeting, demanding the withdrawal of troops from Russia, be held. The Electricians' Union threatened to plunge the city in darkness if the management persisted in its refusal. The hall was given for the meeting.

smallest objection to a Trade Union literally extinguishing a man in charge of a public hall when he attempts to extinguish a political movement which he does not happen to fancy. I admit that in the absence of any authority that really represents the whole community, social questions must be fought out between sections in this crude way. But it is obvious that when the conquest of the Government by the people is complete, the censorship of public meetings will not be exercised by the Electricians, nor the censorship of travelling by the Seamen and Firemen. It is for that reason that I have not suggested that the Electricians should plunge Lord Sandhurst and Colonel Sir Douglas Dawson into darkness until they consent to license my play, "Mrs. Warren's Professions."

For the moment, however, we are all Pacifists. We do not seem to realize it yet: for instance, none of the electors of Hitchin have yet interrupted Lord Robert Cecil's meetings with shouts of "What Price the Peace Offensive now?" But if any candidate were to raise the cry of "Get on with the War" at present he would run ten times the risk of lynching that ever any conscientious objector ran. I was very strongly in favour of getting on with the war myself; but now that we have got off with it I do not dwell on that side of my recent activities. As Mr. Lloyd George said the other day, after bragging gloriously of the great victory for fifteen minutes on end, "This is not a time for boasting." We are fed up; and we are no longer afraid that if we say so the Kaiser may win.

Yet the war is not over. Are we at war with the Russian Revolution or no? Are we going to wait until a British expedition perishes in the snow to provide a Christmas sensation for us before we pay any attention to this question? I see everywhere the most alarming signs of a hazy belief that because "the war is over," foreign policy no longer matters, even if it exists. People—actually Socialists—ask me why I have such a ridiculous prejudice against poor dear Viscount Grey. I have no personal prejudice against Viscount Grey: I think he is a very nice man for a small tea party, as they say in my native Dublin. I do not even press the point that though he asks to be called Grey of Falodon, history will call him Grey of Denshawai. But I do press the point, and press it hard, that his foreign policy was the cultivation of that alliance with the Russian Tsardom which was the blackest disgrace, and, is proved, the worst peril of the war. In pursuit of this abominable crime against democracy Sir Edward Grey swallowed every infamy it involved; and he turned his back pointedly on the obvious democratic alternative—now proved to be the right alternative—of an alliance with the United States of America. In this Mr. Asquith was his accomplice; and they both, to avoid stampeding their Liberal non-interventionist majority, deliberately and repeatedly deceived the country as to our moral obligation to throw ourselves into the war on the side of Russia and France when "der Tag" dawned at last. It was not until Russia revolted and overthrew her villainous despotism that our Imperialists suddenly cooled in their devotion to Russia and began to feel their way towards war on the Russian Revolution. And yet people ask good-humouredly, "What's wrong with Grey? What's wrong with Asquith? Why are you so down on them?" Those who, after what has happened, can put such questions, must be simply unconscious of the existence of Europe. They use the word as a geographical expression denoting a place to spend a holiday in occasionally; but it can mean nothing to them politically. They are the same infatuated people who say that the King has no power nowadays, and that the Balance of Power is quite

obsolete. The truth is that the Balance of Power, now that it has to be struck between Democracy and Oligarchy, is a million times more important than when it was only a balance between Willy and Nicky, Charles and Peter, William and Louis, Frederick and Marie Therese and Catharine. President Wilson is the greatest power balancer that ever lived; and whoever is Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs under the first Labour Government here will have to balance heavier weights on his little finger than Viscount Grey had on his two shoulders.

One would have thought that at least we should see the importance of the nationalization of the Air Service. That the home service should be left to the speculations of private adventurers is shallow enough in all conscience; but that irresponsible private persons should be equipped to cross frontiers on such little smuggling and invading raids as might be amusing or profitable to them, without the sort of national control which is the first condition of international control, could only occur to those people, just mentioned, who really believe that all the world is England, though her Continental playgrounds may be kept by foreigners in quaint dresses, speaking queer dialects. Imagine what a couple of big firms, one controlling the aeroplane industry and the other the high explosive industry, could do with the assistance of a hundred young bloods of the Junker class as "aces," and with cunning enough to take good care that their other employees were well enough off to have neither discontents of their own nor any sympathy with the discontents of others!

And yet the opening of the air service between London and Paris by a private firm is announced without protest or misgiving. Actually with delight at the prospect of getting back the old holidays in gay Parree!

What a funny lot we are!

According to press reports England is going to use force to suppress the Sinn Feiners which is merely another instance of the delights of democracy.

However, seventy-five per cent. of the people of any country will require quite a lot of forcing and the seven per cent. of the British electorate that didn't vote for Lloyd-George may require some force also before they agree to a war on Ireland. Force is a very bad weapon when it doesn't work quite smoothly.

It is computed by statisticians that there are up to the present 40 plans for a League of Nations and writers, politicians and preachers still going strong. Why not every man his own League of Nations?

Much of the surprise and annoyance of the Liberals the sessions of the Peace Conference are going to be held behind closed doors. "Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at," has gone the way of all the fine phrases. But, after all, when we sit still for a moment or two and think of some of the things that will be "put over" at the Peace Conference we are filled with a feeling of thankfulness that at least the European diplomats have retained a sense of shame.

"The Revolutionary Age Red Week Conference"

meets every Friday evening at 8 P. M., Room 1, Dudley Street Opera House, 113 Dudley Street, Roxbury, Mass. All S. P. organizations of Boston and vicinity are invited to join the Conference by sending two delegates to the earliest meeting.

ROBERT ZELMS,
Secretary of the Conference.