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Socialists

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL

Workers of the
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You have
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OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE SOCIALIST PROPAGANDA LEAGUE

Vol. I. No. 5

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, JUNE 16, 1917

5 cents a Copy

The Conscientious Objector

By S. J. RUTGERS

THE Socialist is a conscientious objector because it is against our conscience and principles to betray the Working Class.

Knowing that armies in civilized capitalist countries are used in the interest of the ruling class against the working class, it is our conscientious duty to oppose the strengthening of such armies.

It makes little difference whether the army is to be used at home to shoot down workers in their struggles against capitalism, or whether it is used in so-called national wars to strengthen and increase the world-power of the ruling class and the further enslavement of the world proletariat under the iron heel of modern industrial and financial feudalism. Being an Internationalist, the sufferings of foreign workers appeal as strongly to my conscience as those of my fellow-citizens or fellow-residents. And being convinced that the ruling classes will not give up their firm grip upon present society unless realizing that they have to yield before an overwhelming power, the strengthening of the ruling class is about as disastrous as the weakening of the proletariat. This is all the more true in the period of modern imperialism, in which the development of productive capitalist organization of society, and the only hope of avoiding a reversion to barbarism lies in the rising into power of the proletariat.

In Germany only a growing general mass-movement could have any success against the formidable and well-organized military machinery, and even Liebknecht, convinced that his martyrdom at present could not lead to such a mass-movement including the soldiers, submitted and accepted the fight inside of the army. In Russia, revolutionary workers enter the army in order to keep up and develop the revolutionary spirit from the inside, and this no doubt is under these circumstances most effective in preventing soldiers from being used as cannon-fodder in the interest of Russian and British imperialism.

In the United States those who wish to stick to the interests of the Working Class must do all in their power to prevent the creation of a military system, necessary for the ruling class to destroy whatever rights were left at home, to protect their war profits and to secure future world power and world exploitation. That is why the conscientious objector works for the repeal of the conscription law socially, and individually claims exemption from military service.

To prevent the building up of militarism now that all ordinary means of protest and demonstration have failed and since a general mass-movement with strikes to bear pressure upon the government did not develop, the conscientious objector refuses as an individual to be conscripted. This is no purely individual action, however, since thousands upon thousands of American citizens have registered as conscientious objectors.

In what measure this will be effective, depends largely upon the numbers involved, but even as a powerful protest it will weaken the imperialistic forces and strengthen the tendencies toward a proletarian revolution. This is the more important, since a revolutionary period is developing in Russia and since the greatest danger to this revolution comes from the American money-kings.

This feeling, although social and political in its origin, has become so deeply rooted in our conscience, is such an integral part of our thoughts and feelings, that to betray these principles is against our conscience and our self-respect.

THE MENACE OF CONSCRIPTION

By LOUIS C. FRAINA

THE menace of conscription is immediate, and it is ultimate. It marks the beginning of an aggressive militarism in this country, and it is the sign and symbol of a new era of aggressive activity in the annals of American capitalism.

The fundamental fact that should be borne in mind is that conscription is not a temporary measure—that it has been imposed upon the people not alone for purposes of this war, but as a preliminary means of imposing universal military service during times of peace. The servile minions of capitalism have admitted that conscription was not at all indispensable for purposes of this war, but that it was necessary to accustom the people to the idea of universal military service. Even before the declaration of war against Germany there was a violent newspaper campaign for universal military service, that found its fruition in the Chamberlain bill for the military training of 400,000 men a year for a period of six months during peace. And even this was denounced in influential circles as a miserable compromise!

Militarism, and whatever they say universal service means militarism, is absolutely necessary to the ruling class under the conditions of imperialistic capitalism. Imperialism means the armed struggle of

imperialism in the world, for the control of the investment markets of undeveloped countries wherein to invest a nation's surplus of accumulated capital. The driving force behind this struggle is military power, actual and potential. The history of recent years is replete with events in which the armed power of a nation was used to secure its capitalist concessions and the right to exploit undeveloped countries, in preference to a competing national rival. But in the diplomatic struggles to promote financial interests, circumstances arise where the threat of armed power fails in its purpose, and an actual struggle occurs—war. This is precisely the series of events that led up to the European war. At one moment, the German threat succeeded; at another moment, the French and British threat succeeded; and then came the moment when the vast economic and financial interests involved were put to the arbitrament of the sword.

War to-day is such a colossal proposition, that it cannot be waged on the volunteer system. Unlike the wars of the past, war to-day is a war of peoples, involving and depending upon the conscription of the whole national life for purposes of war. The will of the people, their activity and industrial capacity, their enthusiasm and idealism, must all be conscripted, organized and drilled to back up the soldiers in the field. Not alone are men conscripted for actual military service—the men, women and children behind the firing line must be conscripted for various tasks, which, while apparently non-military, are yet indispensable to maintain large armies at the front.

It is this circumstance that makes war to-day much more intensive, much more destructive, and much more reactionary than in the past.

Conscription is equally a military and an economic measure. Military, to compel men to fight in a cause to which they may be indifferent or actually hostile, to secure the necessary material promptly and without much trouble to make good the "wastage" of soldiers at the front—vital factors where huge armies are concerned. Economic, to organize the industrial life of the nation to meet the vast industrial requirements of modern warfare, in guns, munitions and food, and to offset the withdrawal of millions

of men from productive pursuits by organizing the remainder thoroughly and automatically.

But the military and economic factors are not alone determinant. There is a social, or political, factor of equal importance: the suppression of democracy and the coercion of the Working Class.

Conscription, un-democratic in itself, is even more menacing in that it strikes directly at democracy generally; it is used, and is intended to be used, to crush democracy and the Working Class.

Imperialism, out of which wars to-day arise, is inimical to democracy and crushes democracy wherever and whenever it can. The autocracy generated by imperialism is the determining political factor of the times. This new autocracy is transforming government, re-organizing industry, and re-aligning the social-economic classes in society. It marks a new era, and imposes new methods of struggle for the overthrow of capitalism. It means, in short, the end of laissez-faire democracy, and its substitution by a pseudo-liberal benevolent despotism of the state.

This being the tendency and the need, imperialism uses war to establish this autocracy firmly and permanently. The war against the remnants of democracy is waged as implacably and ferociously as the war against the remnants of socialism. Moreover, when war is introduced under these circumstances, the fight against conscription is not simply a fight of the individual and his conscience; it is a great social issue requiring great action.

The fight against conscription is futile less backed up by an appreciation of the social and economic conditions that brought it forth. And the lack of appreciation of this fact is responsible for much of the absurdity in the no-conscription agitation.

In the category of absurdity is the argument that conscription is against the ideals and traditions of the American people. The absurdity lies in the fact that the conditions which produced these ideals and traditions exist no longer; that new era and new conditions are here, which produce new ideals and traditions.

The day when America—and this means the dominant interests of capitalism—could boast of its democracy, is gone forever. The conditions of internal expansion ceased when the frontier reached the Pacific coast. And when these conditions ceased, America began to acquire a larger economic vision, to spread out its economic interests throughout the world, and to participate in the struggles of imperialism. The acquisition of the Philippines was followed by the imposition of an economic and political yoke upon the peoples of Central America and the Caribbeans. Along with this came the end of that period of splendid isolation, when America was considered sufficient unto itself. The concentration of industry, the rise of plutocracy, the financial expansion abroad, the decay of the militant middle-class and independent farmer—all these facts produced a decay of the democratic ideal and tradition; gradually, subtly, but dominant none the less. And to-day, the introduction of conscription blazes to all the world the fact that American capitalism has come-of-age, discarded its democratic traditions, and is prepared with all its economic and military power, and its autocracy, to dispute supremacy in the world with any rival.

Imperialism is dominant in America to-day; and imperialism means the end of all democratic traditions and of democracy, except what may be given the people as a concession. It is this development that answers the claims of the advocates of conscription

for their country for filthy lucre. Compulsory service might not produce loyalty, but it would produce a sense of duty and discipline that would prevent such disgraceful and damaging incidents." A British weekly, *John Bull*, with a circulation of more than one million copies, said: "The miners who refuse to work must be conscripted—put under military control and made to work at soldiers' pay. That is the way they do things in Germany, and that is the way we must do them here."

Colonel Sir Augustus Fitzgeorge declared that "compulsory service was necessary at this time when the people are getting out of hand." And Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. Maxwell was brutally frank in his appreciation of conscription as a means of crushing the unions: "The abuse of personal freedom has reached its climax in this country. Trade unionism—that shelter for slinking shirkers—is imperilling our existence, and by its action a rot of our national soul has set in. One remedy and one alone can indicate this state of rot—martial law will cure it."

They have not been as brutally frank all that in the United States, but the same has been there and the tendency is the same. As for Australia, that country was introduced under these circumstances, the fight against conscription is not simply a fight of the individual and his conscience; it is a great social issue requiring great action.

Major-General Sir Alfred E. Turner laid stress on compulsory military service as a means of breaking strikes: "The strikers gained their ends, and with them an everlasting stain on their reputation, which not all the rain of heaven can wash out, the stain of showing themselves perfectly ready to betray

and universal military service that militarism cannot and will not develop in this country. Militarism is not a matter of the will, but of necessity. Imperialism requires militarism to fight its rivals and to crush its Working Class.

In an article in *Scribner's Magazine* recently, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt denied that universal military service would develop militarism: "Few of us honestly fear that this nation will ever become militaristic—the trend of our civilization is all the other way. Switzerland and Australia are examples of progressive democracy successfully armed against attack."

The "trend of our civilization" may have been "all the other way" in the past, but it is no longer so to-day. The assumption that there is some inherent superiority of virtue in America that will prevent the duplication of the evils of universal service is childish or insincere. The needs of imperialism are the same everywhere, its evils universal. The citation of Switzerland and Australia is stupid. Switzerland is not an imperialistic nation, and cannot harbor dreams of conquest; and even the "democratic citizen army" of Switzerland has been used repeatedly against the Working Class and against strikes. As for Australia, that

United States fifty years ago. The comparisons are no comparisons at all. Whether conscription may develop militarism can be determined only by a consideration of the fundamental facts of economic and political development in this country. The United States is economically and financially the most powerful nation in the world. Its potential forces of aggression are tremendous, and when loosed in all their fury will precipitate an unprecedented catastrophe. American capitalism is inherently and infinitely brutal—its actions in Central and South America are a violation of all law and all decency. Moreover, strange as it may seem, this country is one of the least democratic, insofar as the rights of the Working Class are concerned. Nowhere else than in the Russia of the Czar was a Ludlow massacre perpetrated; nowhere else is the new machine-proletariat more harassed and oppressed. And lynchings are another manifestation of the utter disregard of law and the rights of people.

The government is more autocratically organized, the president has more power, than any other government or ruler elsewhere. All this, considered in relation to the new conditions of imperialism, are a menacing indication of what is to come. The declaration of war against Germany unloosed all these potential forces of reaction and autocracy. Freedom of speech and assemblage was suppressed. Conscription was imposed upon the people brutally and without their consent, the president virtually bludgeoning Congress into passing the law. And the reign of terror grows instead of abating.

Under these circumstances, the development of militarism is inevitable. The president's program calls for "incomparably the largest navy in the world"; the program of the imperialists calls for incomparably the largest army in the world. Militarism is rampant and will become supreme—unless the people of this country fight, and fight aggressively.

And a successful fight means a fight waged along revolutionary socialist lines. The old America is dead—a new America is being born. The alternative is imperialism and militarism, or Socialism and proletarian democracy. Our fight against conscription is a fight against capitalism, with the Social Revolution as our ultimate objective.

Suppose they did not want to endorse the party as the political expression of the Working Class as a whole; but why couldn't they endorse our stand on militarism and war? Did our leaders ask them to do this, or did they think it would be considered as bad taste on their part, if they did? The probability is that they wanted to be as respectable as the remainder of this nondescript crowd, and thought that anything of this kind is below their "dignity" and "reputation"—"preposterous nonsense," as they probably would put it.

The Socialist Party had here a splendid opportunity to make itself popular with

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Confusion and Compromise

By J. C. ROVITCH

"On the ground of the class struggle we are invincible; if we leave it we are lost, because we are no longer Socialists." —Liebknecht.

WE call on the rank and file of the Socialist Party to look around and find out where their recognized spokesmen and leaders stand on this fundamental and most vital principle of the class struggle. You have now an excellent opportunity to learn what is their conception of fighting militarism and conscription by scrutinizing the minutes and speeches at the Conference on Democracy and Peace recently held in New York City. The "leaders" of our party were among the organizers of this new expression of indignation on the recent manifestations of capitalist class rule—militarism and conscription, and they had ample opportunity to show their mettle. They spoke vociferously and expressed their convictions verbosely in this gathering. Their speeches can be compared now with those made by other radical democrats who for years conscientiously have been voting for "good men"—Roosevelt, Wilson and others. Do you find any significant differences? Do they proclaim any principles for which they

to state—why not? Have you not a good ground to suspect that they may not have any principles at all, as the representatives of the most thoroughgoing opportunists of the modern school? The Conference on Democracy and Peace lasted two days, and was wound up by a gigantic mass meeting with an audience of about 20,000 persons. Messrs. Hilquit, Lee, Berger, all of them signers of the revolutionary majority report of the Emergency Convention of the Socialist Party at St. Louis, were the most conspicuous and active ones in the bunch, and one could expect of them to promulgate at this conference the principles set forth in their own report. Nothing of the kind happened. The conference worked out a new platform which was endorsed by our "shining lights." Is the majority declaration of the convention in their view not good enough to be proposed to any assembly of radical men and women as the expression of the stand of all class conscious workers in America? In all their speeches not a word about the aims and ideals of our class, not a word about the principle of class struggle. Our old friend, "the people," was on the stage again, and our "leaders" evidently think it will accomplish wonders—will save us from imperialism and conscription.

A Council of the People was organized which is expected to conduct an unrelenting fight with "the people" and for the rights of "the people." The mission of the Socialist Party—even its existence—was completely ignored; the activities of the delegates and their utterances show that our party is of no consequence in this fight at all, in their view.

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(Continued on page 2, col. 1)