

## Current Affairs

### CONSCRIPTION

In the name of our war for democracy, freedom, and the national honor of America we have plucked the first fruit from the tree of American militarism: selective conscription. And so, whatever the outcome of this war for culture and liberty and for the other lying pretenses that seek to cover up the imperialistic power-hunger of our national-capitalist groups may be—the American people may take home with them this proud assurance, that military conscription has been forced upon them not only for this war, but—if the capitalists of the United States succeed in carrying out their design—for all times.

For it is the contemptible practice of our ruling classes, to say one thing and mean another. They insist that our self-respect demands intervention, and therefore forces us to arm, when, as a matter of fact, we have entered upon this war in order to force the people into arms, for the purpose of militarizing the nation, for the opportunity of creating an army, a million strong, and the "biggest navy in the world." They are using this war to be prepared for coming difficulties with Mexico and Japan, to secure for "Uncle Sam" a part of the booty that will be divided up among the "civilized nations" after the end of the war, with its "lasting peace."

No less dishonest are the arguments that are presented in favor of general military service.

They tell us the conscription represents the fulfillment of a democratic ideal, but neglect to show that Germany as well as Austria-Hungary, where the whole national life is built upon the cornerstone of general military service, have felt but little of its democratic influence; that compulsory military service not only destroys the freedom of the individual, but that it creates in the whole nation a habit of unquestioning obedience that kills every feeling of personal independence and independent judgment.

But neither do they tell us that the system of selective conscription that has been foisted upon the United States by our ruling class, is the worst conceivable, the most unjust, the most autocratic military system in the world, that a handful of bureaucrats and military authorities are given the right to decide over the life and death of our people, and that practically the whole burden of military duty will rest upon the shoulders of the laboring masses. For conscription is not synonymous with compulsory general military service, but means, in fact, the exact opposite. It means military duty for certain men, not for all. It gives to our rulers the right to draft their victims according to their usefulness. Those who are necessary for the organization of the nation's resources are to remain at home. But freedom from compulsory service in the uniform, among the tools of capital at the front will mean only slavery at home, compulsory service in production, for the good of the country. In other words, these workers who are spared the necessity of shooting upon their "enemies," are delivered bound hand and foot into the power of their exploiters, to "do their bit" in the production of war materials, to produce, for these exploiters, incredible war-profits.

The President, in a letter made public for the purpose of influencing the public mind in favor of conscription, proclaimed the right of one man, or a group of men to determine more or less autocratically out of their superior wisdom, the fate of their fellow men. Neither Nicolai Romanow, nor even Willy Hohenzollern could or can rule their "subjects" more autocratically, notwithstanding the fact that the latter is about to be democratically chloroformed by Uncle Sam and his allies.

Selective conscription means military duty for the sons of the proletariat, in favor of capitalism. It means that the parasitic class will fill the ranks of officers, while the men and women of labor must supply the cannon fodder. Selective conscription means—even if we do not consider for a moment how great an influence Mr. Graft will bring to bear in this "just" selection—compulsory military service for one, and compulsory labor for another part of the working class. It means further, mental slavery for the American proletariat, and the sacrifice of its most